



Development and Preliminary Validation of a CEFR-Aligned Evaluation Checklist for Job Application Writing

Wee Chun Tan

weechun@usm.my, School of Educational Studies, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Malaysia

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Received 07/01/2026	ABSTRACT This study presents the development and preliminary validation of the Job Application Writing Evaluation Checklist (JAWEC), a CEFR-aligned instrument designed to assess job application letters produced by graduating university students in an English for Professional Purposes (EPP) course. Although the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) has been extensively applied to academic writing assessment, its application to professional writing genres, such as job application letters, remains underexplored. To address this gap, the JAWEC was developed through the integration of CEFR B2+ descriptors, established genre frameworks for job application writing, and established principles of checklist-based assessment design. The instrument was refined through expert consultation to ensure content relevance, clarity, and applicability. To provide preliminary empirical support, the JAWEC was piloted with 25 student-produced job application letters independently assessed by two experienced EPP instructors. Inter-rater reliability analysis revealed good agreement, suggesting that the instrument can be applied with reasonable consistency across raters in this pilot context. The results suggest that the JAWEC
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	provides a theoretically grounded and pedagogically practical instrument for formative and summative assessment of job application writing, with the potential to enhance feedback practices and support students' workplace communication readiness. Keywords: English for professional purposes, job application writing, evaluation checklist, CEFR, employability
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Introduction

In today's competitive job market, effective written communication remains essential to employability, with the job application letter serving as a crucial gateway to professional opportunities (Bhatia, 1993). As the initial point of contact, a well-crafted application letter both demonstrates suitability and differentiates candidates in competitive job markets. For the purposes of this study, job application writing refers specifically to the job application letter (also known as the cover letter), a professional genre distinct from other employability-related documents such as résumés/CVs or personal statements.

In Malaysia, leading platforms such as JobStreet continue to emphasise the importance of cover letters, noting that numerous organisations require them alongside résumés/CVs or during the interview stage (JobStreet, 2022). Beyond meeting formal requirements, a compelling job application letter enables candidates to tailor their skills and experiences to specific job descriptions, which may help them bypass automated screening systems and improve their chances of securing an interview (De Mello et al., 2021).

Despite their significance, research and classroom observations indicate that graduating university students frequently struggle with the job application genre. Common challenges include limited awareness of professional writing conventions, difficulties in articulating transferable skills, and insufficient familiarity with industry expectations, all of which can significantly constrain graduate employability (Aziz et al., 2023; Ting et al., 2017). These gaps highlight an urgent need for pedagogical tools that not only address linguistic proficiency but also enhance students' capacity to produce contextually appropriate and professionally credible application letters.

Although extensive research has examined the rhetorical structure of job application letters and increasing attention has been directed towards employability-oriented writing instruction, comparatively little research has examined the development and validation of CEFR-aligned assessment instruments for professional writing genres. In particular, there are few

systematically developed evaluation criteria that align instructional goals with assessment practices in English for Professional Purposes (EPP) contexts. While genre-based studies have yielded valuable insights into the communicative moves and linguistic features of job application letters, fewer studies have operationalised CEFR descriptors into practical evaluation tools that support consistent assessment and targeted feedback in classroom contexts.

To address this gap, the present study presents the development and preliminary validation of the Job Application Writing Evaluation Checklist (JAWEC), a CEFR-aligned instrument designed to evaluate job application letters written by graduating university students in an EPP course. The target proficiency level for this study is CEFR B2+, situated between B2 and C1, which corresponds to the level typically expected of university graduates entering the workplace. At this level, learners can “compose formal correspondence such as letters of enquiry, request, application and complaint using appropriate register, structure and conventions” (Council of Europe, 2020, p. 82), thereby aligning directly with the communicative and rhetorical demands of job application writing targeted in this study.

In this study, the checklist serves as a structured set of explicit evaluative criteria employed to assess key features of job application letters, supporting both assessment and formative feedback. Drawing on CEFR B2+ descriptors, established genre frameworks, and principles of checklist-based assessment, the study details the systematic development of the instrument and provides initial pilot-stage evidence of its reliability through a small-scale validation study. By integrating theoretical grounding with preliminary validation, this study offers a pedagogically grounded yet methodologically informed assessment tool for professional writing instruction.

The present study is guided by the following research question:
How can a CEFR-aligned evaluation checklist for job application writing be developed and preliminarily validated for use with graduating university students?

The remainder of this paper is organised as follows. The next section reviews the relevant literature on job application writing, CEFR-aligned assessment, and checklist-based approaches to writing evaluation. This is followed by a description of the methodology used to develop and refine the Job Application Writing Evaluation Checklist (JAWEC), as well as the pilot validation procedures. The results and discussion sections then present and interpret the results, before the paper concludes with implications, limitations, and avenues for future research.

Literature Review

Frameworks for analysing and teaching job application letters

The job application letter (JAL) has long been recognised as a distinct professional genre warranting systematic analysis. Bhatia's (1993) move-based framework remains foundational, identifying a series of rhetorical moves that collectively serve the persuasive and informational purposes of the genre. These moves include establishing credentials, introducing the applicant, offering incentives, enclosing documents, soliciting responses, applying pressure tactics, and closing politely. Subsequent studies across diverse cultural and educational contexts have consistently confirmed the relevance of these rhetorical components, although variations in move frequency and realisation have been observed (De Mello et al., 2021; Paramasivam & Rahim, 2016; Tongpoon-Patanasorn & Thumnong, 2020). Notably, such variations do not undermine the communicative purpose of the genre but rather reflect contextual adaptation.

Complementing genre-based move analysis, Upton and Connor (2001) proposed a text-linguistic framework integrating discourse moves with politeness strategies, drawing on corpus-based analyses of job application letters written in different cultural settings. Their research highlights how professional writing is shaped not only by generic conventions but also by sociocultural norms governing formality, persuasion, and interpersonal stance. Subsequent investigations have reinforced these findings, showing that while the macro-structure of job application letters is relatively stable, novice writers, particularly university students, frequently struggle to deploy rhetorical moves strategically and coherently (Cadio, 2022; Khan & Tin, 2012; Rohayati, 2018). These difficulties frequently result in letters that are structurally complete but rhetorically weak, highlighting the need for pedagogical tools that render genre expectations explicit and assessable.

Across these studies, there is broad consensus that job application letters follow a recognisable rhetorical structure, despite variations in the realisation and ordering of specific moves across contexts. In the present study, these insights inform the design of the checklist, which evaluates not only the presence of key rhetorical elements but also how effectively they are realised, how coherently they are organised, and how appropriately they address the intended audience and purpose.

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) as a guide

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) has become a key reference point for English language education in Malaysia and beyond (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2015; Read, 2019). The CEFR conceptualises language proficiency across six levels (A1–C2) and conceptualises language use in terms of communicative competences, including linguistic, sociolinguistic, and pragmatic dimensions (Council of Europe, 2020). While initially developed for general language education, the CEFR has increasingly been applied to specialised domains, including academic and professional communication.

In the Malaysian higher education context, graduates from non-English majors are typically expected to demonstrate language proficiency at the B2–C1 levels upon entering the workforce (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2015). The B2+ level, which underpins the present study, represents performance that extends beyond baseline B2 expectations while not fully aligning with C1 descriptors. At this level, learners are expected to produce formal correspondence across professional genres using appropriate register, organisation, and conventions (Council of Europe, 2020), positioning B2+ as a threshold level particularly relevant to job application writing, which requires writers to manage extended discourse, demonstrate persuasive intent, and maintain an appropriate professional register. Accordingly, aligning assessment criteria with CEFR B2+ descriptors ensures coherence with national policy expectations while capturing the linguistic and pragmatic demands of workplace communication.

Recent scholarship has demonstrated that the CEFR can be meaningfully adapted to specialised genres when its descriptors are interpreted through a task-specific lens (North & Piccardo, 2016). Job application letters, for instance, require writers to anticipate employer expectations, mediate personal experience into professionally credible claims, and demonstrate sociolinguistic appropriateness. These competencies correspond closely to CEFR descriptors related to discourse management, flexibility, and register control, supporting the framework's relevance for professional writing assessment. The operationalisation of these descriptors into genre-specific, observable checklist criteria is described in detail in the Methodology section.

Although the CEFR provides a valuable general framework for language proficiency, it does not fully account for the particular demands of professional genres. Its descriptors therefore require contextual interpretation when applied to employability-related writing. The integration of the CEFR

with genre-based frameworks in this study enables a more context-sensitive approach to evaluating job application writing.

Checklists as pedagogical tools for writing instruction

Checklists have long been employed in writing pedagogy to provide structured guidance, clarify expectations, and foster learner autonomy (Ferris, 2003). Research on self- and peer-assessment has consistently demonstrated that explicit criteria help learners monitor their progress, engage metacognitively with their writing, and internalise standards of quality. When tailored to specific genres, checklists are particularly effective in enabling learners to recognise rhetorical patterns and apply them appropriately (Vasileiadou, 2021).

In assessment contexts, checklists serve both formative and summative functions. Formatively, they provide targeted feedback that supports revision and learning-oriented assessment practices (Panadero & Jonsson, 2013). Summatively, they offer a transparent framework that enhances consistency and minimises subjectivity in scoring, contributing to a shared understanding of quality between instructors and students (Boud & Soler, 2016). In professional writing instruction, where clarity of expectations and alignment with real-world demands are critical, checklists can serve as both instructional scaffolds and assessment instruments.

A checklist format is appropriate, as it provides clear and accessible criteria that students can readily use to guide their writing. Unlike analytic rubrics, which often require interpretation across multiple performance bands, checklists present more targeted criteria that render expectations explicit. This supports their use not only for assessment but also as a formative tool, enabling students to self-evaluate and revise their work in alignment with course and CEFRL-informed expectations.

Nevertheless, the literature cautions against the uncritical application of checklists. Research has shown that overly prescriptive criteria can encourage surface-level compliance, prompting students to focus on completing checklist items rather than developing rhetorical sophistication (Jonsson & Svingby, 2007). These concerns highlight the importance of designing assessment tools that not only reflect authentic communicative purposes but are also integrated within broader pedagogical frameworks and designed to promote quality-oriented judgement rather than mere completion of checklist items.

In response to such critiques, recent scholarship has emphasised the need for genre-specific and theoretically grounded checklists that balance clarity with rhetorical depth. For job application writing, effective tools must foreground persuasion, audience awareness, and professional credibility

rather than surface-level features alone. The Job Application Writing Evaluation Checklist (JAWEC) embodies these principles by integrating CEFR-aligned language descriptors with established genre frameworks, thereby addressing both linguistic competence and communicative effectiveness within the genre.

To address concerns regarding overly prescriptive use, the JAWEC is designed to assess not only the presence of features but also their realisation. The criteria necessitate evaluative judgement in relation to effectiveness, coherence, and appropriateness to audience and purpose, thereby avoiding a purely compliance-based approach and encouraging more reflective use by students.

From an assessment perspective, the design of the checklist also incorporates key quality principles, including content validity, transparency, and reliability. Content validity is ensured through alignment with CEFR descriptors and genre-based frameworks, as well as through expert consultation during development. The explicit criteria structure enhances transparency and supports consistent interpretation, while the pilot validation study offers preliminary evidence of reliability. These considerations strengthen the use of the checklist as both an assessment and a learning support tool.

Methodology

The development of the Job Application Writing Evaluation Checklist (JAWEC) was grounded in the CEFR and informed by two complementary strands of scholarship: research on the rhetorical organisation of job application letters and studies on checklist-based assessment in writing pedagogy. The methodological approach aimed to balance linguistic accuracy with genre awareness, while responding to longstanding concerns that checklists may promote surface-level compliance if not theoretically grounded and carefully operationalised (Jonsson & Svingby, 2007).

The instrument development followed established principles in language assessment, wherein clearly defining the construct and ensuring content alignment precede large-scale empirical testing. Accordingly, the initial phase centred on articulating the construct of effective job application writing at the CEFR B2+ level.

In this study, effective job application writing is conceptualised as the ability to produce a rhetorically organised, audience-aware, and linguistically appropriate text that aligns the applicant's qualifications with job requirements while maintaining a professional tone and coherence. This construct was defined through a synthesis of CEFR descriptors, genre-

analytic research on job application letters, and pedagogical considerations specific to English for Professional Purposes (EPP).

Rather than depending solely on statistical procedures, this phase prioritised construct clarity, content representativeness, and theoretical coherence as foundations for subsequent validation. This process contributes to content validity, as the checklist criteria were systematically derived from established theoretical frameworks (CEFR and genre analysis) and refined through expert consultation to ensure representativeness of the construct.

A key methodological challenge involved operationalising the CEFR descriptors, which are intentionally broad, into observable and assessable checklist criteria suitable for professional writing tasks. To address this, the CEFR Companion Volume (Council of Europe, 2020) was systematically analysed and mapped against rhetorical features of job application letters identified in genre studies. Each descriptor was assessed for relevance, specificity, and applicability to workplace-oriented discourse. This process resulted in criteria that captured not only linguistic competence but also sociolinguistic appropriateness and pragmatic effectiveness, which are essential for professional correspondence. A detailed mapping of CEFR descriptors to checklist items is provided in Appendix A.

The decision to adopt a checklist format rather than an analytic rubric was purposeful. While rubrics can offer detailed performance descriptions, they may also introduce interpretive variability across proficiency bands, particularly in classroom-based assessment contexts. Checklists, by focusing on the presence and clarity of key genre features, can enhance transparency, consistency, and ease of use. Given the communicative demands of job application writing, where clarity, persuasion, and professional tone are paramount, the checklist format was considered more suitable for both formative and summative assessment purposes.

Job application writing framework

Upton and Connor's (2001) framework of rhetorical moves was adopted as the organising framework for the Content and Organisation category of the JAWEC. This framework identifies seven core moves that collectively realise the communicative purposes of job application letters, distinguishing the genre from other forms of professional correspondence. Its extensive use in genre-based research supports its validity and applicability across contexts.

The framework includes the following moves: identifying the source of information, applying for the position, providing arguments to support the application, indicating a desire for further contact, expressing politeness, offering additional information, and referencing an attached résumé. These

moves provided a principled basis for evaluating how effectively writers construct persuasive and audience-oriented job application letters.

Alignment with the CEFR

To ensure alignment with internationally recognised language proficiency standards, the JAWEC descriptors were mapped to the CEFR at the B2+ level. This level reflects the linguistic and pragmatic competence anticipated of Malaysian university graduates entering professional contexts (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2015). The CEFR Companion Volume (Council of Europe, 2020) was examined to identify descriptors relevant to written interaction specifically on formal correspondence, with particular attention to the following communicative language competences:

- i. Linguistic competence (vocabulary range, grammatical accuracy, vocabulary control);
- ii. Sociolinguistic competence (appropriateness);
- iii. Pragmatic competence (coherence and cohesion, thematic development, flexibility).

The descriptors were operationalised into concrete checklist items. For example, the CEFR descriptor for pragmatic competence (thematic development) “Can develop an argument systematically with appropriate highlighting of significant points, and relevant supporting detail” informed criteria requiring writers to provide specific, relevant examples to substantiate claims of skills and experience. This ensured a transparent and principled connection between CEFR expectations and observable writing performance.

Where no direct B2+ descriptors were available, selected B2 descriptors, such as vocabulary range and vocabulary control, were adopted. This decision was informed by the need to maintain contextual relevance and practical applicability, as C1 descriptors were frequently too general for direct operationalisation in job application writing tasks.

Steps in developing the checklist

The checklist development process adapted McGrath’s (2016) four-step framework for materials evaluation to the context of professional writing assessment. Although McGrath’s model was originally intended for textbook evaluation, its emphasis on systematic criteria development and pedagogical relevance rendered it suitable for adaptation. The four steps included: identifying evaluation categories, formulating specific criteria, determining the sequence of categories, and deciding on response formats.

Four main categories were established: Content and Organisation, Language, Format, and Areas for Improvement. These categories captured both macro-level rhetorical considerations and micro-level linguistic features. The Areas for Improvement category was intentionally unscored to encourage reflective practice and revision-oriented feedback.

The criteria within each category were derived directly from CEFR descriptors and genre frameworks. The initial version of the JAWEC comprised seven main items and 27 sub-items. Following pilot use and theoretical review, the sequence of categories was reordered to prioritise rhetorical effectiveness over surface features, resulting in the final order: Content and Organisation, Language, Format, and Areas for Improvement.

The checklist prompts were phrased as clear evaluative statements, and a four-point Likert scale (1 = Not Evident to 4 = Clearly Evident) was adopted to balance interpretability with evaluative nuance. This scale reduced the tendency towards central ratings and facilitated more differentiated feedback.

Refinement of the checklist

The refinement of the Job Application Writing Evaluation Checklist (JAWEC) followed an iterative process centred on expert consultation, a practice widely recognised as a key element of early-stage instrument development. This process was undertaken to ensure that the checklist demonstrated content relevance, criterion clarity, and alignment with professional writing conventions prior to empirical validation.

Two experienced English for Professional Purposes (EPP) instructors with expertise in teaching and assessing job application writing were invited to review the initial version of the checklist, each having over ten years of teaching experience. These reviewers were selected based on their expertise in teaching and assessing professional writing and their familiarity with job application genres.

The experts evaluated the instrument in relation to three key aspects: (a) clarity and interpretability of the criteria, (b) representativeness of key rhetorical and linguistic features of job application letters, and (c) suitability for classroom-based assessment. Their feedback centred primarily on refining descriptor wording to reduce ambiguity and to enhance alignment with professional and workplace-oriented writing practices.

Based on the expert feedback, several modifications were made. General descriptors were reworded to improve specificity and task relevance. For example, phrases such as “uses appropriate vocabulary” were refined to “uses vocabulary relevant to the target job and industry, including technical terms where applicable.” These modifications strengthened the

operationalisation of the underlying construct by linking linguistic performance directly to contextualised professional demands.

In addition, the rating scale was revised to improve evaluative sensitivity. The initial three-point scale was replaced with a four-point Likert scale (1 = Not Evident, 2 = Minimally Evident, 3 = Moderately Evident, 4 = Clearly Evident). This revision was introduced to enable raters to distinguish more clearly between emerging, developing, and well-established performance, thereby reducing central tendency effects and supporting more consistent interpretation of criteria.

The resulting version of the JAWEC comprised four categories and 18 items (Appendix B), achieving a balance between analytic coverage and pedagogical usability. The streamlined structure was intended to minimise cognitive load for users while maintaining sufficient detail to support meaningful formative and summative assessment in EPP contexts.

Pilot validation study

To provide preliminary empirical support for the JAWEC, a small-scale pilot validation study was conducted, focusing on inter-rater reliability and descriptive performance patterns.

The pilot study involved 25 undergraduate students enrolled in an English for Professional Purposes course at a public university in Malaysia. All participants were in their final year of study and were completing job application writing as part of their course assessment. They were required to produce a job application letter in response to an authentic job advertisement. The task specified a word length of approximately 250–350 words and instructed students to tailor their letters to the advertised position, addressing relevant qualifications, skills, and organisational expectations.

Participants were informed of the purpose of the study and gave consent for use of their job application letters. All data were anonymised, and confidentiality was maintained throughout the research process. As the study involved anonymised student coursework and presented minimal risk, formal ethical approval was not required under institutional policy.

Two experienced EPP instructors served as raters. Both possessed more than five years of experience in teaching and assessing professional writing. Prior to rating, the raters participated in a calibration session to acquaint themselves with the JAWEC criteria and rating scale, followed by practice rating of sample letters. Differences in interpretation were discussed to establish a shared understanding of the criteria. Each letter was then independently evaluated using the final version of the checklist.

Inter-rater reliability was examined using a two-way random-effects intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC) with good agreement at the level of

total checklist scores. This model was selected, as it accounts for variability across both raters and letters. Confidence intervals were also examined to provide an estimate of reliability precision. Descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations, were calculated to summarise student performance across checklist criteria. No inferential statistical tests were conducted, as the purpose of the pilot was to establish preliminary reliability rather than to test hypotheses.

Results

This section presents the results of a pilot validation study conducted to examine the inter-rater reliability and descriptive performance patterns associated with the Job Application Writing Evaluation Checklist (JAWEC).

Inter-rater reliability analysis yielded an intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC) of .82, indicating good agreement between the two independent raters. The ICC was calculated based on total checklist scores, indicating acceptable consistency at the overall score level. The overall mean checklist score across the 25 job application letters was 3.12 (SD = 0.38) on a four-point scale. This mean score suggests that students generally demonstrated performance within the “moderately to clearly evident” range, indicating partial alignment with CEFR B2+ expectations, with variability across criteria.

A descriptive examination at the category level suggested that students performed relatively more strongly in format and language-related features, and comparatively less strongly in content and organisation. For instance, items related to formatting and layout were generally rated at the upper end of the scale, whereas items requiring alignment of skills with job requirements and provision of supporting evidence showed greater variability and lower ratings. Observations from the rating process suggest that students were generally able to demonstrate appropriate formatting and sustain a professional tone, but they encountered greater difficulty in articulating alignment between their skills and job requirements and in providing specific supporting evidence. Lower performance in content and organisation may reflect challenges in realising higher-level pragmatic and rhetorical competences associated with CEFR B2+, particularly in aligning skills with job requirements and providing supporting evidence.

Collectively, these results provide preliminary empirical evidence that the JAWEC can be applied consistently by different raters in classroom-based assessment contexts.

Discussion

The present study developed and preliminarily validated the JAWEC, a CEFR-aligned instrument for assessing job application writing in English for Professional Purposes contexts. Given the pilot nature of this study, these results should be interpreted as indicative rather than confirmatory, providing an initial basis for further validation. Pilot validation results demonstrated good inter-rater reliability, suggesting that the instrument descriptors were sufficiently clear and interpretable to allow consistent application by different evaluators. This level of agreement is especially important in classroom-based and formative assessment contexts, where consistency across raters underpins the fairness and credibility of evaluation.

High inter-rater agreement also suggests that the operationalisation of CEFR descriptors into observable criteria was sufficiently clear to support consistent rating in this pilot context, enabling raters to identify key features of effective job application writing. This analysis also provides support for content validity, as the descriptors reflect theoretically grounded dimensions of professional writing competence.

Beyond reliability, the observed variation in checklist scores across student letters provides preliminary evidence that the instrument is sensitive to individual differences in writing proficiency. Students varied in their ability to realise key rhetorical moves, maintain professional tone, and demonstrate coherent organisation, indicating that the instrument can discriminate among levels of performance while capturing the complexity inherent in professional writing tasks. This variability may also reflect the fact that not all students fully meet B2+ proficiency expectations, highlighting the usefulness of the checklist in capturing performance across a range of proficiency levels.

This finding is particularly significant in light of previous research showing that professional writing assessment often struggles to balance clarity and construct sensitivity. By integrating CEFR-aligned language descriptors with genre-specific criteria, the JAWEC appears to facilitate more structured assessment and to capture meaningful differences in students' writing, while also addressing concerns that checklists may promote superficial compliance.

The study also positions the checklist within broader theoretical and pedagogical contexts. While the CEFR was originally designed for general language proficiency, recent scholarship supports its adaptation to specialised domains when interpreted through task- and context-sensitive lenses (North & Piccardo, 2016). By aligning the JAWEC with CEFR B2+ descriptors, this study illustrates how general proficiency frameworks can be operationalised for professional, workplace-oriented writing tasks.

Moreover, integrating genre theory ensures that assessment criteria reflect authentic communicative purposes, foregrounding the relevance of

rhetorical effectiveness, audience awareness, and persuasive strategies alongside linguistic accuracy. This approach contributes to a growing body of research on professional writing assessment, positioning the JAWEC alongside other emerging tools that operationalise professional genres in higher education contexts, such as CV evaluation rubrics and cover letter scoring frameworks.

From a pedagogical perspective, the JAWEC provides a practical and theoretically informed framework that can support multiple modes of classroom use, including instructor assessment, peer review, and self-assessment. For example, categories such as Content and Organisation can guide revision by highlighting how effectively students align their skills with job requirements, while Language and Format criteria can offer more immediate feedback on clarity and professional presentation. The checklist's structured criteria promote consistency, enhance learner autonomy, and support reflective engagement with writing. By foregrounding rhetorical effectiveness alongside language control, the checklist aligns assessment practices with the communicative demands of workplace writing.

Furthermore, the JAWEC has the potential for integration into digital platforms or AI-enhanced feedback systems, where the structured checklist criteria could be operationalised to generate targeted, criterion-referenced feedback for learners. Such integration could enable scalable and timely feedback while ensuring consistency in evaluation, particularly in large classroom settings. At the same time, the explicit alignment of criteria with rhetorical and linguistic features helps preserve pedagogical integrity by ensuring that automated or semi-automated feedback remains grounded in established principles of professional writing. In this sense, the JAWEC may contribute not only to the field of writing assessment but also to the development of employability-focused skills, by supporting learners in producing contextually appropriate, audience-aware, and professionally credible texts. It thus addresses an important need in higher education for assessment tools that are both theoretically grounded and practically transferable across instructional and technological contexts.

The pilot study also establishes important methodological parameters. As an early-stage validation, it focused primarily on inter-rater reliability and descriptive performance patterns, rather than on comprehensive construct validity, scale dimensionality, or predictive relationships with other measures of writing proficiency. These limitations highlight the need for subsequent research involving larger and more diverse samples, additional raters, examination of category-level internal consistency, and exploration of relationships between JAWEC scores and external criteria such as course assessments. Nevertheless, even at this stage, the findings provide a principled basis for iterative refinement of the checklist, ensuring that

subsequent validation phases remain grounded in both theoretical coherence and practical usability.

Conclusion

The JAWEC represents a systematically developed and preliminarily validated instrument for assessing job application writing in an English for Professional Purposes course. By translating CEFR B2+ descriptors into observable, genre-specific criteria, it provides instructors and learners with a clear framework for assessing professional writing performance, thereby addressing a gap in workplace-oriented writing assessment.

Pilot validation findings provide initial evidence supporting content alignment and inter-rater reliability of the checklist, demonstrating that it can be applied consistently across raters in classroom-based settings. The structured design also supports multiple modes of use, including instructor assessment, peer review, and self-assessment, thereby promoting transparency, learner autonomy, and reflective engagement with writing.

Although this study was limited to a small-scale pilot, it establishes a foundation for further validation, including exploration of construct validity, rating-scale functioning, and predictive relationships with broader measures of professional writing proficiency. Future research should extend these validation efforts by quantifying content validity (e.g., through content validity indices), examining reliability at the category level, and evaluating relationships between JAWEC scores and external criteria such as course outcomes or existing assessment rubrics. It would also be valuable to include HR managers and industry recruiters as evaluators, as their criteria may differ from those of writing instructors, particularly in relation to employability, professional tone, and candidate positioning.

In addition, future research could examine the longitudinal use of the checklist to track students' development over time, as well as its applicability across different institutional and disciplinary contexts. It would also be worthwhile to explore how the structured nature of the JAWEC can be integrated into digital and AI-enhanced feedback systems to provide scalable support for professional writing pedagogy.

Overall, the JAWEC illustrates how the CEFR and genre theory can be integrated into a coherent and practically applicable instrument. It is not a finalised instrument but rather an instrument designed for ongoing refinement and iterative improvement. By bridging theory, language proficiency framework, and classroom practice, it contributes to advancing knowledge in professional writing assessment, supports employability-oriented education, and offers a model for structured, reliable, and pedagogically meaningful evaluation in workplace-oriented writing contexts.

The JAWEC instrument is provided in Appendix B to support classroom use and further refinement and research. Ultimately, it suggests the potential to support both student learning and professional readiness.

About the Author

Wee Chun Tan: A senior lecturer at the School of Educational Studies, Universiti Sains Malaysia. His research interests include English for Specific Purposes (ESP), TESOL teacher education, and technology/AI-enhanced teaching and learning.

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Appendix A

CEFR-Based Mapping of JAWEC with Genre Moves

CEFR Level	CEFR Communicative Language Competence	Genre Move	CEFR-aligned, Genre-informed Descriptors	JAWEC Item
B2+	Pragmatic (Coherence and cohesion)	Move 1: Identifying the source	Can state the source of job information clearly	1.1
B2+	Pragmatic (Thematic development)	Move 2: Applying for the position	Can state the position applied for explicitly	1.2
B2+	Pragmatic (Thematic development)	Move 3: Supporting the application	Can present relevant skills and experience clearly and concisely	1.3
B2+	Pragmatic (Thematic development)	Move 3: Supporting the application	Can support claims with specific and relevant evidence	1.4
B2+	Pragmatic (Flexibility)	Move 3: Supporting the application	Can align personal skills and goals with the organisation's values and context	1.5
B2+	Pragmatic (Flexibility)	Move 3: Supporting the application	Can connect skills and experience to job requirements effectively	1.6

B2+	Pragmatic (Flexibility)	Move 4: Indicating desire for further contact /Move 6: Offer to provide additional information	Can express a request for further contact appropriately and/or offer additional information	1.7
B2+	Sociolinguistic (Appropriateness)	Move 5: Expressing politeness	Can conclude with appropriate politeness in a professional context	1.8
B2	Linguistic (Vocabulary range)	-	Can use vocabulary appropriate to the target job and professional context	2.1
B2+	Linguistic (Grammatical accuracy)	-	Can produce grammatically accurate sentences with minimal errors	2.2
B2	Linguistic (Vocabulary control)	-	Can use accurate spelling, punctuation, and word choice	2.3
B2+	Sociolinguistic (Appropriateness)	Move 5: Expressing politeness	Can maintain a professional and polite tone appropriate to the audience	2.4
B2+	Pragmatic (Coherence and cohesion)	-	Can apply standard business letter conventions appropriately	3.1
B2+	Pragmatic (Coherence and cohesion)	-	Can present text using appropriate formatting and layout	3.2
B2+	Pragmatic (Coherence and cohesion)	-	Can control text length appropriately for the communicative purpose	3.3
B2+	Pragmatic (Coherence and cohesion)	-	Can provide clear and accurate contact information	3.4
B2+	Pragmatic (Coherence and cohesion)	Move 7: Referencing résumé	Can refer to an attached résumé appropriately	3.5

Note. Descriptors were developed through adaptation of relevant CEFR communicative language competences (Council of Europe, 2020) and the genre move framework for job application letters (Upton & Connor, 2001).

Appendix B

Job Application Writing Evaluation Checklist (JAWEC)

Instructions:

This checklist is designed to evaluate the effectiveness of a job application writing (letter or email). Please read each criterion carefully and consider how well the writing meets the stated expectations. Use the following rating scale to indicate your assessment:

4 Clearly Evident	Fully meets the criterion and demonstrates a strong command of the skill or element being assessed.
3 Moderately Evident	Meets most aspects of the criterion, with minor improvements needed.
2 Minimally Evident	Partially meets the criterion, but significant improvements are needed.
1 Not Evident	Does not meet the criterion.

1. CONTENT & ORGANISATION				
1.1	States the source of information about the job opening clearly (<i>e.g., website, advertisement, referral</i>).	1	2	3 4
1.2	States the position being applied for explicitly.	1	2	3 4
1.3	Presents the applicant's relevant skills and experience clearly and concisely, providing sufficient detail to demonstrate their qualifications.	1	2	3 4
1.4	Provides specific examples and quantifiable results to support claims about skills and experience, demonstrating how these qualifications directly meet the job requirements outlined in the job description.	1	2	3 4
1.5	Demonstrates a clear understanding of the company's culture, values, and mission, and explicitly explains how the applicant's career goals and skills align with these aspects.	1	2	3 4
1.6	Connects the applicant's skills and experience to the specific needs and expectations of the target role and company effectively.	1	2	3 4
1.7	Requests a further opportunity to discuss the applicant's candidacy explicitly (<i>e.g., interview</i>) and/or indicates willingness to provide additional information.	1	2	3 4
1.8	Provides an appropriate professional closing (<i>e.g., thanking the reader</i>).	1	2	3 4
2. LANGUAGE				
2.1	Demonstrates appropriate use of vocabulary related to the target job and industry, including relevant technical terms where applicable, without being overly technical or using jargon inappropriately.	1	2	3 4
2.2	Demonstrates a high level of grammatical accuracy, with minimal errors in sentence structure, tense, and agreement.	1	2	3 4

2.3	Demonstrates accurate word choice, spelling, and punctuation and avoids significant errors that impede understanding.	1	2	3	4
2.4	Maintains a professional and polite tone throughout, demonstrating respect for the recipient and the company.	1	2	3	4
3. FORMAT					
3.1	Adheres to standard business letter format and conventions (<i>e.g., appropriate salutation, closing, layout</i>).	1	2	3	4
3.2	Uses a suitable font and font size (<i>e.g., Times New Roman, 12 points or Arial, 11 points</i>).	1	2	3	4
3.3	Has an appropriate length (<i>e.g., ideally one to two pages for a letter or concise for an email</i>).	1	2	3	4
3.4	Provides clear and accurate contact information (<i>e.g., email address and phone number</i>).	1	2	3	4
3.5	Mentions the attached résumé and refers the reader to it for further details explicitly.	1	2	3	4
4. AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT					
4.1	Requires the following amendments: • • •				