# An Analysis of Comparison on Observation Permission Letters in Selected Departments at USU: A Critical Genre Analysis

*Desna Uli Matanari[1], Tengku Silvana Sinar[2], Yulia Pradinda[3*], Abigail Putri Chrissantha Tarigan[4], Hani Firlyali Hasan[5]*

[1]Universitas Sumatera Utara
*yuliapradinda@students.usu.ac.id[*]*

## ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the comparative observation permit letters from five study programs at the Faculty of Cultural Sciences, University of North Sumatra: English Literature, Indonesian Literature, Mandarin Language, History Sciences, and Ethnomusicology. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, this study utilizes primary data in the form of five observation permit letters and secondary data from interviews with the parties who drafted the letters. The analysis includes internal factors of the text, namely rhetorical structure (move and step) and experiential function, as well as external factors involving professional culture and administrative practices. The results of the study show variations in letter structure, language function, and administrative approach that reflect the academic needs of each study program. The observation permit letter from the Ethnomusicology study program has the most complex structure with 7 moves and 17 steps. External factors, such as organizational hierarchy and professional culture, also influence the design of the letter structure. This study provides insight into how academic institutions compile administrative documents that function as formal communication media between students and external parties. This study also highlights the importance of considering internal and external aspects in the preparation of administrative documents to ensure appropriateness to academic and professional contexts.

## INTRODUCTION

University communication plays a fundamental role in managing the complexity of organizational structures and networks in academic environments. The intensity of communication within universities is influenced by the hierarchical structure, with information flows decreasing as the distance between organizational levels increases (Mathiesen et al., 2010). Effective communication also has a positive impact on organizational performance, as it can foster clarity, reduce conflict, and support strategic alignment (Musheke & Phiri, 2021). In this context, the genre of letters within universities plays an important role in facilitating structured and efficient communication.. Communication in academic contexts, like university, often relies on

the use of written genres that reflect institutional norms, practices, and organizational structures. A common genre in academic administration is the observation permission letter, which serves as a formal document that addresses the needs of students conducting observations and research in external environments. The letter not only serves as a management tool, but also reflects the social values, culture, and hierarchy of the organization in which it is written.

At the Faculty of Cultural Sciences (FIB) of the Universitas Sumatera Utara (USU), the diversity of study programs such as English Literature, Indonesian Literature, and Japanese Literature, provides the possibility of variation in the construction and content of the observation permission letters they issue. This is interesting to study further because it can provide insight into how each study program translates institutional norms into written administrative practices. This opens up space for a more in-depth analysis using the Critical Genre Analysis (CGA) approach. However, although administrative genres such as observation permits have an important role in supporting academic activities, research that specifically examines documents in this scope, especially using CGA, is still very limited.

Although these studies have enriched the discourse on genre analysis, there has been no study that specifically applies CGA to administrative documents such as observation permit letters. This study aims to fill this gap by analyzing and comparing the genre of observation permit letters from various study programs at FIB USU. Therefore, researchers want to analyze how the comparison of observation permission letters in several departments such as the English literature study program, the History Science study program, the Indonesian literature study program, the Mandarin language study program, and the Ethnomusicology study program. This study tries to answer the question "how the observation permission letter was made at the departments of FIB USU. Thus, this study will provide new contributions in understanding how academic institutions construct administrative documents that mediate interactions between students and external parties.

**REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Comparison is the act or process of comparing. It means that comparison is the act of comparing two or more people or things, such as the representing of one thing or person as similar to or like another. A comparison aims to measure the similarities of two or more things. In this research, the researcher wants to compare the observation permission letter from 5 study programs at Faculty of Cultural Sciences (FIB) of the Universitas Sumatera Utara (USU), that are the English literature study program, the History Science study program, the Indonesian literature study program, the Mandarin language study program, and the Ethnomusicology study program.

An Observation Permission Letter is a letter or document that requests permission to observe a person, event, or place. It means that, an observation letter is a letter that used to ask a permission to observe a person, place, or event. In this research, the data was taken from 5 observation permission letter from 5 study programs, that are the English literature study program, the History Science study program, the Indonesian literature study program, the Mandarin language study program, and the Ethnomusicology study program. This research wants to know how these observation permission letters was made.

Critical Genre Analysis (CGA) is an analytical approach that combines textual and contextual analysis to understand how particular genres are constructed, used, and influenced by social and institutional practices. Motta-Roth (2008) defines CGA as a method that views genres not only as linguistic devices but also as social phenomena shaped by communicative activity in specific contexts. CGA utilizes theoretical frameworks such as Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), social rhetorical analysis, and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to examine the relationship between textual form, communicative function, and socio-cultural context (Motta-Roth & Heberle, 2015)

Rhetorical move-step analysis is a text analytical approach for examining the organizational and rhetorical structures of specific textual genres within particular communities (Casal &

Kessler, 2024). A move serves a specific purpose, representing the semantic and functional elements within a text. The analysis provides insights into how authors organize texts to achieve specific communicative objectives, making it a vital tool for understanding the conventions and expectations of a given genre.

Move analysis plays a crucial role in examining the schematic structures of texts and their alignment with the writer's intent. Each move reflects a strategic choice aimed at fulfilling the purpose of the text, often delineated further into "steps" that provide finer granularity in understanding the text's rhetorical organization. This approach is particularly useful in analyzing institutional documents, such as observation permission letters, to uncover how textual conventions vary across different contexts or departments.

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) was primarily developed by M.A.K. Halliday and his followers, drawing on the foundational contributions of earlier linguists (Damanik, 2017). SFL emphasizes the practical use of language, viewing it as a tool for creating meaning within specific contexts. It is categorized into three main functions: ideational, interpersonal, and textual. This article focuses on the experiential function, which is a part of the ideational metafunction.

Experiential function can be defined as a way of representing patterns of experience (Damanik, 2017). Halliday categorizes a clause into three elements: process, participants, and circumstances. Processes are further classified into six types: material, mental, relational, behavioral, verbal, and existential processes. Circumstances, on the other hand, encompass categories such as extent, location, manner, cause, accompaniment, matter, and role. These elements work together to structure clauses in ways that reflect real-world experiences, making the experiential metafunction a critical tool in analyzing how language conveys meaning within various texts, including institutional documents like observation permission letters.

Several previous studies have been conducted to analyze various genres in academic and professional contexts. These studies provide valuable insights into the relationship between text structure, social context, and the communicative purpose of a genre.

Marcuzzo and Radünz (2015) applied Critical Genre Analysis (CGA) to examine English exam questions in the Brazilian National High School Exam (EL-ENEM). The study found that the questions provide context to the examinees through reference texts, most of which ask the examinees to identify different types of information. The study reveals how the exam reflects the language concepts underlying its construction.

Ng (2021) utilized CGA to analyze the genre of Principal's Remarks speeches at the anniversary and annual speech day events in a Christian secondary school in Hong Kong. This study analyzed the genre at four levels: text, genre, professional practice, and social practice. This study highlights how CGA can be used to understand lesser-known genres in a multi-perspective manner.

Hadavi et al. (2015) used Bhatia's (2016) applied genre analysis model to analyze formal letters. This study identified five categories of formal letters, namely informative, prescriptive, appointment, thank-you, and invitation. By analyzing these letters in three layers—textual, contextual, and social—this study found that social characteristics have a direct influence on the contextual domain, which in turn influences textual features. This study highlights the importance of social identity in influencing genre conventions and textual characteristics of formal letters.

Hyatt (2005) used a corpus-based approach to analyze feedback comments on Master's level assignments in education. Her study identified functional categories that emerged from the comments and highlighted transparency in the delivery of feedback. This study makes an important contribution to understanding the power dynamics between feedback providers and assignment writers, by offering suggestions to reduce power imbalances and position writers as the center of academic discourse.

**METHOD**

This research employs a qualitative descriptive method, aligning with Creswell's (2014)

perspective that qualitative research seeks to understand the meanings individuals or groups assign to their experiences through written or oral data. This approach was chosen to meet the research objectives, which involve analyzing observation permission letters within the framework of critical genre analysis. The primary data sources are five observation permission letters issued by study programs in the Faculty of Cultural Sciences, Universitas Sumatera Utara. These programs—English Literature, Indonesian Literature, Chinese Language, History Science, and Ethnomusicology—were selected to represent the faculty's diverse disciplines, including humanities, literature, history, and art. This diversity offers a comprehensive overview of the variations in the drafting of observation permission letters. Additionally, these programs were chosen for their accessibility, enabling an in-depth and detailed investigation.

Data collection involved two main techniques: documentation and interviews. Documentation focused on obtaining the five observation permission letters, while interviews were conducted with informants involved in drafting the letters. The interviews, guided by prepared questions aligned with the research objectives, provided more nuanced and detailed insights. The data analysis process utilized content analysis and was carried out in several stages. First, data collection involved gathering relevant documents and conducting interviews. Second, data reduction categorized information relevant to the study's focus, filtering essential details to facilitate conclusion-making. Third, reduced data was organized into structured narratives, supplemented with graphs or tables where necessary to enhance understanding. Finally, conclusions were drawn and verified through triangulation, which compared data from the letters and interviews to ensure validity. These steps aimed to produce credible findings that contribute to critical genre analysis of observation permission letters at Universitas Sumatera Utara.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

To answer this research question, the researcher will explain how the observation permit letters from the English Literature, Indonesian Literature, Chinese Language, Ethnomusicology and History study programs through text-internal and text-external factors that influence how the letters are made.

### Text-Internal Factors

Text-internal factors are text-internal factors that influence how the research observation permission letters of the 5 study programs are made from within the text, where the internal factors of the language are analyzed using the move and step approach (rhetorical structures) and experiential functions.

### Move and Step (Rhetorical Structures)

**Table 1. Move and Step Analysis Result on 5 Observation Permission Letter**

| Study Program | Moves | Steps |
|---|---|---|
| Mandarin Language | 6 | 16 |
| Ethnomusicology | 7 | 17 |
| English Literature | 5 | 12 |
| History Science | 6 | 14 |
| Indonesian Literature | 7 | 13 |

Based on the analysis of the structure of research permission letters from five study programs at the Faculty of Cultural Sciences, Universitas Sumatera Utara, there are variations in

the number of "moves" and "steps" in each letter. The Chinese Language Study Program has 6 "moves" and 16 "steps", while the Ethnomusicology Study Program records the highest number with 7 "moves" and 17 "steps". The English Literature Study Program has the simplest structure with 5 "moves" and 12 "steps". The History Science Study Program uses 6 "moves" and 14 "steps", while Indonesian Literature has 7 "moves" and 13 "steps".

This variation in the number of "moves" and "steps" shows the level of specification of research needs in each study program. The Ethnomusicology Study Program, with the most complex structure (7 "moves" and 17 "steps"), reflects the need for in-depth communication with local communities. This is due to the nature of research that often requires direct interaction with indigenous communities or local cultures, so the permit arrangement requires a high level of detail, such as a more in-depth statement of purpose and additional administrative steps.

In contrast, the English Literature Study Program has the simplest structure (5 "moves" and 12 "steps"), reflecting a more academic research approach centered on text analysis, without requiring much interaction with external parties. This approach allows for a more concise and direct letter structure.

The Chinese Language Studies program features a focus on formality, as seen from the steps that include a clear statement of purpose and details of student identity. This structure is relevant to research needs that often involve formal institutions such as religious institutions. The Indonesian Literature Study Program adds specific elements such as a schedule of activities, reflecting the need for more detailed coordination with relevant parties. Meanwhile, the History Study Program combines administrative elements and structured narratives to reflect exploratory research needs.

The findings show that variations in the number of "moves" and "steps" reflect the different administrative and academic needs of each study program. The complexity of the letter structure in the Ethnomusicology Study Program highlights the need to ensure clarity and completeness of information in communication with local communities. In contrast, the simple structure in the English Literature Study Program demonstrates efficiency in handling administrative needs for research that focuses on basic data collection. Other Study Programs, such as Chinese Language, Indonesian Literature, and History Science, show flexibility in adjusting the letter structure to meet specific administrative needs according to their research context.

**Experiential Function**

Table 2. Experiential Function Results on 5 Observation Permission Letter

| Types of Process | English Literature | Indonesian Literature | Mandarin Language | Ethnomusicology | History Science |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Material | 1 | 3 | 1 | 3 | 3 |
| Mental | 1 | 1 | 1 | 4 | 1 |
| Verbal | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| Relational | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |

Based on the table above, we can see that the observation permit letters from English Literature and Chinese Language have one material process while Indonesian Literature, Ethnomusicology, and History have 3 material processes. This shows that the observation permit letters from English Literature and Chinese are very few in showing real or visible actions so that these letters do not emphasize physical actions. The practice of letter writing in this study program tends to be more abstract, providing less details of activities or procedures to be carried out. The impact on professional practice is that it leads to a lack of clarity for the party receiving the letter about the concrete actions to be taken by the observer. These letters are better suited to contexts

where operational details are less necessary.

Meanwhile, Indonesian Literature, Ethnomusicology, and History have many material processes, which means that they show a lot of physical actions or physical activities carried out by certain people. Letter writing in this study program is more detail-oriented, with an emphasis on concrete steps to be taken. The impact on professional practice is professionalism in providing clarity and commitment to planned activities, which can increase the trust of those who grant permission.

The observation permit from English Literature, Indonesian Literature, Chinese Language, and History Science only has one mental process while Ethnomusicology has 4 mental processes. This shows that English Literature, Indonesian Literature, Chinese Language, and History Science use very little activity of thoughts, feelings, and actions that cannot be seen physically. This practice shows that letters in this course are more formal and objective, with less effort to create an emotional connection with the reader. The impact on professional practice is that it reduces the impression of personalization, but can increase the impression of professionalism and assertiveness. Whereas Ethnomusicolgy has 4 mental processes that show that the research permit letter uses a lot of feelings, opinions, points of view that seem more subjective and personal so that it can build an emotional connection with the reader. Letter writing in this course tends to be more empathic and personal, seeking to build a better relationship with the recipient. The impact on professional practice is that it can increase the likelihood of approval, especially in contexts that require understanding and empathy (Halliday, 1978).

Observation permission letters from Indonesian Literature, Chinese Language, and Ethnomusicology have 1 verbal process while English Literature and History have 2 verbal processes. This shows that the observation permission letters in English Literature and History Science convey more information, statements, and information actions. The letter in this study program is more communicative and explicit in conveying the purpose and need for observation. The impact on professional practice is that it strengthens clarity and transparency in communication, which is crucial in ensuring good understanding between the sender and receiver of the letter. Meanwhile Indonesian Literature, Chinese Language, and Ethnomusicology has less information to convey. Letters in this course are more concise and less communicative, which can lead to confusion in professional practice if not matched with sufficient written explanation. This practice may be more suitable in contexts that require high formality with little verbal interaction.

Observation permission letters from English Literature, Indonesian Literature, and Chinese Language have no relational process while Ethnomusicology and History Science have one relational process. This shows that the observation permission letters in English Literature, Indonesian Literature, and Chinese do not show any relationship or characteristics described in the letter. This practice results in letters that focus more on actions and outcomes, with less emphasis on the relationships or attributes of the parties involved. The impact on professional practice is that it may speed up the approval process but may not strengthen the relationship between the sender and recipient. While those in Ethnomusicology and History show an identity relationship or describe the identity, status, or nature of something. The letter writing in this study program is more inclusive and descriptive, which can have an impact on professional practice by helping to build better relationships and strengthen institutional identity. This can be an advantage in gaining trust and support from the recipient (Ode et al., 2017).

**Text-External Factors**
Text-external factors are external text factors that influence how the research permit letters of the 5 study programs are made from outside the text itself. This text-external factor is the supporting factor of each informant of the 5 study programs who made the letter. This is an important reference for researchers to see how the research permit letters of the 5 study programs are made outside the internal text factors. Factors from outside the text that influence how the research

permit letters from the 5 study programs are made are analyzed through interviews, where researchers interviewed each informant from the 5 study programs who made the research permit letters.

**Interview**

The following are the results of the researcher's interviews with 5 study program informants who made the observation permit letters, namely Chinese Language, Ethnomusicology, English Literature, History, and Indonesian Literature. The most important question the researcher asked the 5 informants was why the observation permit from the study program was made like that so that the researcher would determine the professional culture and professional practice of each research permit. Professional culture refers to the values, norms, and patterns of interaction that are typical in certain professional communities while professional practice refers to the practices applied by certain professional communities in preparing documents in accordance with the rules, norms, and practical needs. The following are the professional culture and professional practice of the 5 study programs.

**Mandarin Language Study Program**

Professional Culture: The study program complies with all policies given by the faculty. This reflects a strong organizational hierarchy where decisions from the faculty level become the main guideline in the operation of the study program.

Professional Practises: Indonesian remains the main language in professional communication within the study program. On some occasions, letters are converted into Chinese, reflecting the need to adapt to the international context or the specific needs of the recipients of the letters, such as Chinese-speaking educational institutions or overseas partners.

**Ethnomusicology Study Program**

Professional Culture: The Ethnomusicology study program adheres to the conventional university format for letterhead placement, reflecting alignment with the identity of the parent institution and ensuring consistency in official correspondence.

Professional Practice: No only specific professional practices have been implemented within the university's standard guidelines.

**English Literature Study Program**

Professional Culture: The study program's adherence to all policies issued by the faculty reflects a culture of strict hierarchical organization. This indicates that decision-making and authority are centralized at the faculty level, leaving little room for autonomy at the study program level.

Professional Practice: Indonesian is predominantly used in correspondence, which aligns with its role as the official national language and the medium for formal communication in most organizational setting. The shift to English is likely driven by practical needs, such as engaging with international partners, adhering to global academic standards, or positioning the program within an international framework.

**History Science Study Program**

Professional Culture: The History Science Department upholds consistency in institutional identity by incorporating its logo design after official letters.

Professional Practice:
- The History Science Department has transitioned to electronic signatures for administrative purposes, moving away from the manual signatures it previously used.
- To enhance personalization and adhere to professional communication standards, the formal greeting "*Kepada*" in official documents now includes the name of the lecturer or

institution being addressed.
- Several numbering codes within official documents have been modified to reflect changes in policy or current administrative requirements.

**Indonesia Literature Study Program**
Professional Culture: Indonesian Literature Study Program carries out its administrative and operational functions in accordance with the directions given by the faculty or university. Professional Practice: No changes were made independently by the study program.

**CONCLUSIONS**

This study uncovers notable variations in the rhetorical structure and experiential function of observation permission letters across five study programs at the Faculty of Cultural Sciences (FIB) at Universitas Sumatera Utara (USU). These differences reflect varying levels of administrative complexity and distinct communication needs within each program. The Ethnomusicology program, for instance, demonstrates the most intricate structure, comprising seven moves and seventeen steps, which suggests more detailed communication requirements. Furthermore, differences in the use of experiential functions emphasize the unique administrative priorities of each program. External factors, such as organizational hierarchy and the degree of international collaboration, also significantly influence the design and structure of these documents.

The findings indicate that academic institutions can enhance the effectiveness of administrative correspondence by implementing several strategies. These include adopting flexible and context-specific templates for drafting letters, providing training for staff on rhetorical structure and experiential function, and aligning letter composition practices with professional standards. By doing so, institutions can improve the clarity, efficiency, and professionalism of their academic communication. These improvements not only streamline internal processes but also bolster external perceptions of the institution's administrative and academic rigor.

**REFERENCES**
Bhatia, V. K. (2016). *Critical genre analysis: Investigating interdiscursive performance in professional communication*. Routledge.
Casal, J. E., & Kessler, M. (2024). Rhetorical structure, sequence, and variation: A step-driven move analysis of applied linguistics conference abstracts. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics. 30*(3). 82-104. Routledge.
Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches.* (4th ed.). Los Angeles, CA: Sage.
Damanik, E. S. (2018). *an Analysis of Experiential Meaning in Poety "William Wordsworth". Loquen: English Studies Journal, 10*(2), 81. https://doi.org/10.32678/loquen.v10i2.695
Halliday, M. A. K. (1978). *Language as social semiotic: The social interpretation of language and meaning*. Edward Arnold.
Hadavi, M., Marzban, B., & Morady Moghaddam, M. (2015). Analysis of official letters based on applied genre analytical model. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research, 6*(3), 588–594. https://doi.org/10.17507/jltr.0603.15
Hyatt, D. F. (2005). *"Yes, a very good point!": A critical genre analysis of a corpus of feedback commentaries on Master of Education assignments*. In *Teaching in Higher Education* (Vol. 10, Issue 3, pp. 339–353). https://doi.org/10.1080/13562510500122222
Mathiesen, J., Jamtveit, B., & Sneppen, K. (2010). *Organizational structure and communication networks in a university environment*. https://doi.org/10.1103/PhysRevE.82.016104
Marcuzzo, P., & Radünz, A. P. (2021). *Analisando um teste como gênero: Análise Crítica de Gênero do ENEM de língua inglesa. DELTA Documentacao de Estudos Em Linguistica Teorica e Aplicada, 37*(2), 1–25. https://doi.org/10.1590/1678-460X202148640

Motta-Roth, Désirée. (2008). *Análise Crítica de Gêneros: contribuições para o ensino de linguagem*. *DELTA Documentacao de Estudos Em Linguistica Teorica e Aplicada*, 24(2), pp. 341-383. https://doi.org/10.1590/S0102-44502008000200007

Motta-Roth, Désirée, & Heberle, Viviane Maria. (2015). *A short cartography of genre studies in Brazil. Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, pp. 1-10. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jeap.2015.05.006

Musheke, M. M., & Phiri, J. (2021). *The Effects of Effective Communication on Organizational Performance Based on the Systems Theory. Open Journal of Business and Management*, *09*(02), 659–671. https://doi.org/10.4236/ojbm.2021.92034

Ng, C. W. (2021). *Critical genre analysis of principal's remarks. Linguistica Silesiana*, *42*, 281–305. https://doi.org/10.24425/linsi.2021.137241

Ode Muh Idrus Hamid, L. B., & Ode Nur Maulid, W. (2017). *The Moves and Steps in the Literature Review and Discussion Sections in the Four Master's Degree Theses. Journal of English Education*, *2*(1), 51–58. https://usnsj.com/index.php/JEE/article/view/249