

Mapping Verbal Ability: A Descriptive Comparison of Global Standards for Professional Report and Proposal Writing

Aiswani Chakraborty

Assistant Professor, Department of Learning and Development, Karnavati University

Abstract

This research aims to address the structural incongruence between academic writing instruction taught in the higher educational institutes (HEIs) and the evolving demands of the global professional ecosystem. While the universities prioritized Verbal Ability, the definition of communication skills remain fragmented across international jurisdictions. This research deploys a descriptive study to evaluate and compare the four seminal frameworks in this field: the AAC&U VALUE Rubrics (USA), the CEFR (Europe), the Washington Accord (Technical/Engineering), and the IELTS Professional descriptors. By analyzing these major frameworks through thematic lens—focusing on flexibility of rhetoric, structural logic, and information design—the research identifies a noticeable difference between language-centered and utility-centered standards in pedagogy.

The research findings of this study highlight that the contemporary pedagogical models often elevate grammatical accuracy instead of strategic, audience-centric demands of professional reports and proposals and provides an evidence-based global taxonomy which offers a strategic blueprint for the Learning and Development professionals to align national curricula with international employability benchmark. The outcome of the research suggests that a hybrid, genre specific approach is imperative to equip graduates and post-graduates with the cross-cultural communication skills required in the 21st-century workforce.

Keywords: Verbal ability, learning and development, communication, reports, proposals.

1. Introduction

Within the modern knowledge economy paradigm, the skill transition from academic literacy skills to professional communicative aptitude is seen as a pivotal interface for any modern-day university graduate. With the integration of various sectors across the global industry ecosystem on the increase, the skill of distilling intricate information points toward becoming a fundamental aspect of "Verbal Ability." Thus, University Learning and Development (L&D) departments across the globe face acute pressure to make their curriculums converge with the standards of employability on the global stage (Knight & Yorke). The teaching conundrum has its roots in the absence of a standardized definition on the interpretation of "proficiency levels" globally within professional writing.

Although "Verbal Ability" is regularly gauged by linguistic standards, professional writing as a situated practice requires something greater than grammatical correctness. It warrants "genre pedagogy" expertise—sophistication in logical constructs that are subject-related and context-bound (Hyland). A business report prepared for a European investor, for example, may receive greater scrutiny if compared

against standards applied to a North American enterprise. This calls for examination of the particular "rhetorical moves" that single out professional writing from typical academia (Swales).

Despite the widespread adoption of institutional frameworks, a conspicuous phenomenon described as the 'fragmentation of standards' is observed in the global higher education system. While frameworks such as the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe), VALUE Rubrics (Association of American Colleges and Universities), and the Washington Accord (International Engineering Alliance) have varying standards for assessing the quality of people's writing skills, they generate a 'gap in skills' as one might be competent in linguistic, yet lack rhetorical flexibility as per the required professional format.

The present paper is a descriptive comparison of such dominant global frameworks. Through an analysis of the "verbal ability" constructs contained within these documents, this study will seek to map the points of intersection and contradiction that exist between linguistic precision and professional utility. The ultimate goal is a strategic framework through which L&D practitioners can modernize report and proposal writing instruction in order to ensure that university graduates are globally communicatively competent.

2. Literature Review

Traditionally, "verbal ability" was understood in educational psychology circles as a discrete cognitive trait. Nevertheless, recent thinking has migrated towards a social constructivist paradigm. Genre Analysis was a paradigm shift introduced by Swales, who indicated that professional writing can be characterized in terms of "discourse communities" in which standard documents for particular purposes exist (Swales 1990). Moreover, Hyland asserts that professional discourse, such as reports and proposals, represents "socially recognized ways of using language" (Hyland 42). As L&F practitioners, it means that training in verbal ability is incomplete without Genre Awareness, which would be "the ability to traverse rhetorical protocols for a professional setting."

Although communication has been stressed in the curriculum for higher education, there is a "rhetorical gap," according to industry executives (Knight and Yorke). This is regarded by Knight and Yorke as "assessment misalignment," where higher education focuses on "display writing," whereas in industry, there has to be "utilitarian writing" (Knight and Yorke 112). World Economic Forum considers "analytical writing" as one of their skills for 2027 (World Economic Forum, 2023), whereas according to Harvard Business Review, managers must spend considerable time editing "entry-level writers' drafts" (Harvard Business Review, 2022). This, in fact, isn't a literacy problem; it's a Structural Logic problem, which pertains to arranging information for decision-making.

One key, but largely unappreciated, aspect of communication has to do with Contrastive Rhetoric. Kaplan originally noted that each culture has a different structure of reasoning in persuasive and reportorial communication (Kaplan 1966). In the modern world, "standardizing communication," rather than forcing a single approach, requires developing "multicultural rhetorical flexibility."

While North American situations would likely support linear, "bottom line up front" (BLUF) designs, where the proposal's return on investment is given right away, Asian cultures might stress hierarchical deference and "indirect" persuasion, where the group's interest and technical information come first, followed by the ending decision. As has been pointed out by writers for international business, "The verbal skill of a graduate is now judged by his/her ability to vary his/her style—from the 'directness' needed for

success in North American companies to ‘precision and analytical depth’ necessary for the ‘European regulatory scene.’”

The difficulty of developing such skills is further aggravated by the "Standardization Paradox." These days, the L&Ds face the situation of competing global standards that emphasize different elements of speaking ability:

- 1. Linguistic Precision:** The CEFR is a language skills taxonomy that is also “genre-neutral,” in that it is more concerned with a student’s expression in a language proficiency test, as opposed to a student’s composition skills in writing a document (Council of Europe 2020).
- 2. Rhetorical Knowledge:** The VALUE rubrics by AAC&U place a significant emphasis on the writing criterion of “Context and Purpose.” They regard writing as a means of effective critical thinking (Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2009).
- 3. Technical Utility:** In addition, the Washington Accord emphasizes the idea of “Utility,” in which communication shall remain valid if and only if such communication enables intricate decision-making (International Engineering Alliance, 2021). Finally, the advent of Large Language Models (LLMs) has introduced a new variable into the equation. It has been made abundantly clear in the sources such as LinkedIn Learning that the new frontiers of verbal skill are now “prompt engineering” and “AI critique” (LinkedIn Learning 2024). Today’s professional not only has to be an accomplished writer but also an editor of automatically written text. This paper adds to the growing body of debate on this subject by highlighting the stress now being placed on the previous models because of the transition from human writing to the use of AI support.

3. Methodology

Research Method:

This research has used Qualitative Document Analysis (QDA), a formal way of assessing and analyzing paper or soft documents (Bowen 27). This is because as a descriptive and comparative research design, it doesn’t make use of human participants but makes use of ‘institutional artifacts’ as data sources. This fits perfectly in the area of Learning and Development (L&D) research since it enables the development of ‘standardized gaps’ between the education rubric and industry standards. This is in contrast to traditional content analysis since in document analysis, the researcher is required to structure data in terms of “categories related to the central questions of the research” (Bowen 28).

Data Selection:

The research corpus comprises four key global frameworks that are highly influential on university programs and professional accreditation and have therefore been selected:

- **The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR):** Recognized as the prominent paradigm in the linguistic benchmarks category (Council of Europe).
- **The AAC&U VALUE Rubrics:** Selected as the representative North American standard for “Written Communication” (Association of American Colleges and Universities).
- **Washington Accord:** Selected to illustrate standards of technical verbal skills and 'utilitarian' verbal skills in the field of engineering and technology. (International Engineering Alliance)
- **IELTS Professional Descriptors:** Designated for global high-stakes assessment criteria for task-based writing abilities (International English Language Testing System).

Analytic Procedure:

Following Bowen’s (2009) three-step process, the documents were analyzed through:

- Skimming (Superficial Examination): Finding relevant information about "Reports," "Proposals," and "Professional Communication."
- Reading (Thorough Examination): Substantive reading aimed at extracting frequent "competency words" including brevity, persuasion, and logic.
- Interpretation: Connecting the text to the themes of the study, namely rhetorical flexibility, structural logic, and technical utility.

Ethical Consideration:

Because the study uses only publicly available, published documents, it does not require Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval. The study does uphold a measure of "analytic integrity," as the framework descriptors are always quoted in context and cited to MLA 9 standards to prevent misrepresentation of institutional policy.

4. Analysis and Findings:

Analysis of the documentary data of the four major frameworks highlights that "Verbal Ability" is not a global notion. Where the primary framework underlying the language is necessary for linguistic fluency and accuracy, the professional context within which one operates aspires to the rhetorical delivery of communication, determining how reports and proposals should be formed for decision-making. The evidence also establishes radical gaps between linguistic-syllabus-based standards that remain focused upon grammar and cohesion and utility standards that remain committed to the demands of functionality and audience engagement.

Framework	Primary Success Metric	Writing Focus	Alignment Source
CEFR	Grammatical Accuracy & Range	Genre-neutral fluency	(Council of Europe)
AAC&U	Context, Purpose, & Audience	Critical thinking & Reflection	(AAC&U)
Washington Accord	Impact on Problem Solving	Actionability & Risk Mitigation	(Intl. Engineering Alliance)
IELTS Professional	Task Achievement	Cohesion & Lexical Resource	(IELTS)

Table 1: Definition of Writing Success across Global Frameworks

This first layer of analysis explores how major international competency frameworks define "success" in professional writing, focusing on the ways in which these frameworks delineate standards or measures for competence. It teases out the ways in which success is framed—most centrally, whether through linguistic

precision, rhetorical awareness, or practical utility-and how different those framings are across global competency frameworks.

From the analysis of Table 1, it can be observed that CEFR & IELTS place more value on the “mechanics” of the writer, looking more into the aspects of grammar, vocabulary, and cohesive detail as a measure of competence. On the other hand, the Washington Accord & AAC&U place more value on the “impact” on the reader, where the communication skill can be determined by the capability to inform, persuade, and enable decision-making. It can be a daunting issue for L&D professionals, where the student may be labeled as “proficient” according to European linguistic competency but “ineffective” according to North American technical competency.

The above analysis reveals that each context brings forth varying levels of variation within Verbal Ability itself, and as per the institutional setting, it is either language-sponsored or language-enhanced, while in a profession-related setting, it is expertise-oriented or result-oriented.

Table 2: Regional Nuance and Cultural Rhetoric

Region/Context	Reports: Key Features	Proposals: Key Features	Verbal Ability Emphasis
North America	Action-oriented, structured, concise	Persuasive, ROI-focused, direct	Clarity & Persuasion
Europe	Analytical depth, formal tone	Detailed justification, regulatory focus	Coherence & Precision
Asia	Hierarchical respect, technical detail	Collective benefit, respectful tone	Nuance & Harmony
International Orgs	Standardized templates, multilingual	Inclusive, globally persuasive	Clarity & Inclusivity

To have a better understanding of how these standards apply in the workforce, this research mapped the framework's regional professional demands.

Table 2 presents an outline of best practices for writing for different regions around the world based on various culture and organizational factors. In North America, business writing revolves around directness and focus on ROI return. The writing style of Europe is famous for its analysis and precision of regulation rules and guidelines related to proposals and business writing. In Asia, social respect and well-being relate to all writing styles related to proposals and business writing. International bodies and institutions prefer globalized proposals with an aim of making them more universal and global. These points of divergence and similarity illustrate that language abilities have a context and generally vary in accordance with geographical rather than language abilities.

Thematic Synthesis: The "Standardization Paradox"

The cross-reference of Table-1 and Table-2 highlights three major pedagogical gaps:

- 1. The Utility Gap:** The preference of the North American community for "Action-oriented" reporting (Table 2) matches exactly the emphasis of the Washington Accord on "Actionability" (Table 1), although it violates the incentive of the CEFR regarding "Linguistic Range," which favors complicated, multi-clausal sentence structures.
- 2. The Hierarchical Gap:** While the Asian sets much store by "Respectful Tone" (Table 2), this dimension is remarkably absent within the westernized frameworks, such as AAC&U, which place far more emphasis upon "Critical Thinking" and "Voice" at the individual rather than the social-relational levels.
- 3. The Analytical Gap:** European criteria encourage "Analytical Depth" (see Table 2), which also emphasizes "Precision," like CEFR. Here, a report is a documenting record. It could be a "superficial" task for a student of the "Direct" tradition of North American education. This study will attempt to point out these gaps.

5. Discussion:

Rhetorical Code-Switching as Core Competency: "Professional genres are socially recognized ways of using language," states Hyland (Genre 42). From the synthesis of the data comes the conclusion that "Verbal Ability" has to be renamed Rhetorical Code-Switching for a University L&D department.

A graduate needs to have the ability to think in terms that can shift from Linear Logic, which is followed by North American companies, to the logic of Recursively/Analyst Logic, which can be followed by European or Asian companies. The value for "Nuance and Harmony" (Table 2) indicates that the ability to handle words in terms of social markers, rather than merely grammatical correctness, will assess the writing skills of the graduates.

The "Editor" Paradigm in the Age of AI: Lastly, however, is the impact of Large Language Models on the 'skills gap' shift towards Strategic Editing, now known as "Most In-Demand." As of 2025, it can be said that 'verbal skills' consist increasingly of Strategic Editing of inputted 'machine data' to match 'the markers' listed under Table 2. Although AAC&U 'skills' today lack the ability to measure Strategic Editing 'skills' by virtue of 'assessing credibility' by AACU's 2009 'frameworks' – now inadequate for evaluating current 'Logical Auditing' 'skills.'

6. Conclusion and Strategic Recommendations

What has been established in this research is the dynamic, culturally embedded nature of "Verbal Ability," rather than a fixed linguistic quality. "Standardization Paradox" observed in Section 4 argues that the over-reliance on a single paradigm, CEFR in language and the AAC&U paradigm in academic writing, results in a "rhetorical myopia" that obstructs graduate employability. Here, the superimposition of the global norms with the regional professional demand offers the evidence needed for a Multimodal Pedagogical Paradigm. In the case of the university L&D department, the rationale for a paradigm shift is no longer based on theory but on the imperative need, given that the new set of industry standards favors "Technical Utility" (International Engineering Alliance) and "Strategic Editing" (LinkedIn Learning), stressing the obsolescence of the current format of verbal assessment based on the essay.

Recommended actions for L&D Departments:

In light of the emergent "Rhetorical Gap," L&D university departments should be directed toward adopting an approach comprising three pillars:

1. **Provide "Genre-Switching" Simulations:** Curricula need to get past providing only one "standard" of the report and proposal writing. Instead, assignments at assessment should ask students to rewrite one set of data for three different "Discourse Communities":
The Utility-Focus: A brief, action-oriented proposal for a North American firm.
The Analytical-Focus: A detailed justification-heavy report for a European regulatory body.
The Harmony-Focus: A respectful, relationship-centered proposal for an Asian stakeholder.
2. **Inseminate "Logical Auditing" into AI Policy:** As LLMs become ubiquitous, the "Verbal Ability" of 2025 is defined by Strategic Editing. L&D departments must now move away from "writing from scratch" towards "critiquing the machine." Students should be assessed on their ability to audit AI drafts for the "Regional Nuances" identified in Table 2, ensuring machine-generated prose is calibrated for cultural hierarchy and technical risk.
3. **Apply Hybrid Assessment Rubrics:** University rubrics need to be revised to encompass "Utility" markers sourced from the Washington Accord itself. A document should not be marked on its "Linguistic Range" only, according to CEFR, but on its Actionability. For instance, does the report enable a stakeholder to make a decision? If not, the verbal performance of the student-functional for the global market-is inadequate, whatever their grammatical perfection may be.

The future of professional writing instruction exists at the crossroads of linguistic precision and rhetorical empathy. If university L&D departments adopt the "Rhetorical Code-Switching" model proposed here, they can confidently say their graduating students aren't just "literate" in the academic sense of the word but also "competent" in the global professional sense.

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