

Unit of Study Teaching Report

Executive summary

The unit of study outlined below is tailored to teach a targeted group of Language for Specific Purposes (LSP) students how to write the genre of Letter of Recommendation (LOR) following Systematic Functional Linguistics (SFL) genre-based approach (GBA) (Martin & Rose, 2008). The discourse community for this teaching unit comprises high-level professionals in the justice system, specifically, the heads of Regional Justice Departments in the Ministry of Justice in Uzbekistan. These professionals are frequently tasked with writing formal letters of recommendation for their lawyer employees. The learners' primary role involves facilitating their employees' academic and professional development by endorsing their qualifications and potential in these letters. The learners are typically over the age of 30, with established careers in the legal field. They have limited exposure to regular English usage with language proficiency at a B1-B2 level on the CEFR scale aligned with the requirement for the career position. Their motivation stems from the opportunity and inquiry to support their employees' professional growth and contribute to the broader goals of the justice system, as well as a desire to foster stronger connections between their institution and foreign academic entities. Thanks to the government policy and recent educational reforms, like many other professionals, young lawyers aim to pursue their further education, particularly master degree in the world top universities, or international professional exchange programs, or frequently, for global conferences. That's why these lawyers ask high professionals to support them through letter of recommendations. Writing a LOR seems a daunting task, especially for the legal professionals who are unfamiliar with the expected structure and content in English (Devon et al., 2021), though they have prior experience in writing LORs in L1. Because of their relatively infrequent use of English, especially in written

forms such as formal letters, the course aims to provide practical, context-specific language instruction to meet these needs.

The LOR is a familiar and commonly practiced genre in Uzbek professional and academic settings, typically characterized by general endorsements written in a formal but culturally implicit style. However, in English-speaking academic and institutional contexts, this genre is more explicit, evaluative, and purpose-driven, requiring a clear articulation of the candidate's qualifications, achievements, and potential in relation to the specific opportunity (Swales & Feak, 2004). As Uzbek legal professionals are unaccustomed to English-language academic writing, for this discourse community the shift demands an understanding of genre-specific conventions, such as clearly structured arguments, persuasive language, and audience awareness (Hyland, 2007). Unlike Uzbek versions, which often prioritize hierarchical tone and vague praise, English recommendation letters rely on evidence-based claims and specific, aiming to support fair evaluation practices (Feeley et al., 2025) tailored to the expectations of international institutions. Thus, this unit bridges the gap between culturally familiar practices and globally recognized genre conventions.

This unit views the LOR as a context dependant genre shaped by its evaluative purpose, institutional context, and target audience (Swales & Feak, 2004). Adopting GBA in SFL, the unit introduces the LOR as both persuasive and evidential, requiring strategic language choices. Learners will analyse model LORs during the deconstruction stage, co-write drafts in joint construction, and ultimately produce context-appropriate LORs in independent construction (Derewianka & Jones, 2012). Through this scaffolded cycle, learners will master the structural and linguistic conventions needed for effective LORs in international academic and professional contexts.

Unit of Study

This instructional guide, similar to a lesson plan, is followed three stages including deconstruction, joint construction and independent construction stages.

1. Deconstruction Stage

The purpose of this stage is to help learners identify the generic structure, purpose, and key language features of an English Letter of Recommendation by contrasting it with a familiar L1 version and unpacking an authentic English model.

Step 1: Activating Prior Knowledge

The objective here is to make learners aware of the *structure* and *style* they already know, and raise their meta-awareness about genre features in their own language.

- 1) Distribute a real sample LOR in L1 and ask the students:
 - “*What is the purpose of this letter?*”
 - “*What are the typical parts or stages in this kind of letter?*”
 - “*What kind of language is used?*”
 - “*Is it formal or informal? Direct or indirect?*”

Step 2: Introducing an Authentic English LOR

The objective is to familiarize learners with the *format and structural expectations* of an English LOR.

- 1) Distribute an authentic sample LOR in English. It is preferable to hand in legal-related LOR.
- 2) Ask guiding questions to draw attention to *layout and visual structure*:
 - “*Where does the sender’s information appear?*”

- *“Is there a salutation? How is the person addressed?”*
- *“Are there paragraphs? How many?”*
- *“How is the letter signed off?”*

Step 3: Guided Reading for Purpose and Identifying Genre Stages

The main objective is to identify the communicative purpose, participants, and context, and help learners map the stages of the genre and understand how meaning is built over the course of the letter.

1) Ask learners to read the sample LOR and answer:

- *Who wrote the letter?*
- *To whom is it addressed?*
- *What is the purpose of this letter?*
- *What kind of institution might receive this letter (university, foundation, employer)?*
- *How formal is the tone?*

2) Work with students to break the English LOR into clear rhetorical stages. Ask them

- *“Where does the writer introduce themselves and their relationship to the applicant?”*
- *“Where does the writer describe the applicant’s work or skills?”*
- *“Where is the judgment or evaluation made?”*
- *“How does the writer end the letter?”*

Now elicit their answer and suggest the stages below:

1. Writer’s Identification and Relationship to Applicant
2. Candidate background and achievements
3. Specific evaluation (strengths, qualities)

4. Final endorsement and recommendation

Step 4: Highlighting Key Linguistic Features

The objective of this step is to take explicit the language resources used to evaluate, persuade, and build credibility, as outlined in SFL.

1) Guide learners in identifying key lexicogrammatical features in each stage using SFL terminology:

- Appraisal language: "excellent," "outstanding potential," "consistently reliable"
- Modality: "I strongly recommend," "I am confident that..."
- Nominalisation and formal style: "leadership," "professionalism," "legal acumen"
- Tense and person: Present simple for facts, past tense for achievements, third person for candidate

2) Ask learners to highlight all appraisal words and phrases in one paragraph.

- What kind of impression do these words create about the candidate?
- How formal is the tone?
- Is the language direct or indirect?

2. Joint Construction Stage

The purpose of this stage is to collaboratively compose a full LOR based on a shared candidate profile, applying genre knowledge and linguistic features learned in the Deconstruction Stage.

This stage supports learners through guided practice and scaffolding, helping them build confidence in writing a culturally appropriate LOR.

Step 1: Introducing the Candidate Profile

The objective is to build a shared understanding of the content to include in the jointly constructed LOR and activate relevant vocabulary.

1) Present a real professional profile of a lawyer employee so as to they easily describe. (e.g., Mr. Otabek Karimov, 34, legal officer with 8 years of experience in civil law). Include:

- Current job and responsibilities
- Years of service and institutional loyalty
- Professional achievements and qualifications
- Reason for applying (e.g., master's degree at Macquarie University / scholarship holder of El-Yurt Umidi Foundation)
- Personal and professional strengths

Ask the learners the questions

- “What makes this candidate strong?”
- “What qualities should be highlighted in a letter to a foreign university?”

Step 2: Planning the Structure Using Genre Stages

The objective is to ensure learners have a clear roadmap and understand the purpose of each genre stage before writing.

1) On the board or a shared slide, revisit the four identified genre stages from the Deconstruction Stage:

- Writer's Identification and Relationship to Applicant
- Candidate's Background and Achievements
- Specific Evaluation of Strengths and Qualities
- Final Endorsement and Closing

Ask them some questions and then work with peers to build a rough outline or notes under each stage.

- “What information should go into each part?”
- “Which sentences should go first?”
- “What tone and style do we need?”

Step 3: Sentence Co-Construction

The objective is to enable learners to collaboratively build an LOR while practicing genre-appropriate structure, register, and persuasive language.

1) Work through each stage by eliciting ideas and collaboratively writing full sentences with learners. You may model part of the paragraph and ask learners to complete it or suggest edits.

Stage 1 – Writer’s Role and Relationship:

E.g., “As Head of the Department of Justice in Tashkent, I have worked closely with Mr. Otabek Karimov for the past eight years.”

- “What title or position should the recommender include?”
- “What is the professional relationship?”

Stage 2 – Background and Achievements:

E.g., “During his working time, Mr. Karimov has consistently demonstrated exceptional competence in civil litigation and regulatory law.”

Prompt learners to recall verbs (e.g., “demonstrated,” “led,” “contributed to”) and nouns (e.g., “expertise,” “case management”).

Stage 3 – Closing:

E.g., “I highly recommend Mr. Karimov for admission to your program. Please do not hesitate to contact me for further details.”

Step 4: Discussing Language Choices

The objective is to make learners aware of how language choices convey evaluation, credibility, and formality.

1) After drafting each paragraph, pause to highlight key lexicogrammatical features using SFL terms:

- Appraisal: “outstanding,” “dedicated,” “forward-thinking”
- Modality: “I am confident,” “I strongly support”
- Nominalisation: “commitment,” “collaboration,” “problem-solving ability”
- Tense and person: 3rd person for applicant, 1st person for writer

2) Ask them questions to check their comprehension

- “Does this sentence sound persuasive and formal?”
- “Is this too general or is it specific enough?”
- “Is the structure clear and logical?”
- “Is anything missing or repetitive?”
- “Does the tone sound formal and respectful?”

3. Independent Construction Stage

The purpose of this stage is to provide learners with the opportunity to independently draft a full Letter of Recommendation (LOR) in English using the genre knowledge, structure, and linguistic resources developed in the previous stages. This phase consolidates their learning and prepares them to write professionally for real-world institutional contexts.

Step 1: Briefing the Task

The objective is to ensure learners understand the task, audience, purpose, and register of their writing.

- 1) Clearly present the writing task: "You will write a full LOR in English for a lawyer from your department who is applying to a top international university. Use the four-stage structure and appropriate formal language we have studied."
 - Provide a written task prompt, including:
 - The purpose: e.g., admission to a Master of Law program at a foreign university
 - The target audience: foreign university admissions or foundation assessors
 - The recommender's role: e.g., head of a department
 - The recommended employee's profile: learners can choose a real or fictional person

Step 2: Planning the Letter

The objective here is to help learners brainstorm before drafting to check cohesion and completeness.

- 1) Distribute a planning template or graphic organiser with headings for each genre stage:
 - Writer's Identification and Relationship to Applicant
 - Candidate's Background and Achievements
 - Specific Evaluation (Strengths, Qualities)
 - Final Endorsement and Recommendation

Optional Prompting Questions:

- What was their role and how long have they worked under your supervision?
- What makes them a good candidate for postgraduate study abroad?
- What key skills or values do they demonstrate?
- What endorsement do you want to give?

Step 3: Independent Writing

The objective is to enable learners to apply their learning in producing a genre-authentic and audience-appropriate LOR.

1) Ask learners to write their full letter on paper or using a digital tool using formal tone and following the structure.

Remind them to:

- Use clear paragraphing
- Avoid vague or overly general statements
- Support their evaluation with specific examples
- Use formal, professional, and persuasive language
- Avoid culturally inappropriate expressions or vague euphemisms

Step 4: Teacher Feedback and Reflection

The objective is to support learners in understanding their progress and encourage ongoing development of genre awareness.

Provide targeted teacher feedback highlighting:

- Genre mastery (structure, audience awareness, purpose)
- Lexicogrammatical choices (formality, evaluation, precision)
- Areas for development (e.g., clarity, tone, coherence)

This unit equips justice sector professionals with the genre knowledge and language skills to write effective, formal LORs in English for international academic and institutional contexts.

Sample Reference Letter:
Graduate School Reference

13 January 2006

Admissions Committee
Division of Applied Psychology
Alberta University
Edmonton, AB T2T 1T1

Re: Reference for Bradley Calumba

I am writing in support of Bradley (Brad) Calumba's application for the Masters program in Applied Psychology. Brad worked with Community Services part-time as a Life/Skills Coach from September 2006 to April 2007. I was his direct supervisor. Brad's key responsibilities included planning and facilitating workshops and working one-on-one with clients.

Brad came to Community Services with minimal experience in the life/skills education field. He demonstrated a strong ability to learn quickly the information and skills he required to be effective in the performance of his duties. In my experience I have found that working part-time and studying full-time is something that not all students do well. Brad was able to manage his academic, work and other commitments effectively.

Brad's performance of his responsibilities was excellent. The feedback he received from students who attended his workshops and from those he worked with one-on-one was consistently very positive and provides evidence of his strong teaching and interpersonal communication skills.

Brad worked very well with his peers and supervisors. Many of the workshops are co-facilitated. Brad's peers could always count on him to meet his commitments, and work in a co-operative and professional manner. Personally, I have always found Brad very mature, personable and conscientious, and to have a very positive attitude about work. I would not hesitate to hire him if he applied with Community Services in the future.

If you would like further information about Brad's employment with Community Services, I may be contacted at (780) 444-4444.

Sincerely,

Ara Ban
Client Services Manager

- Writer's Identification and Relationship to Applicant
- Candidate's Background and Achievements
- Specific Evaluation (Strengths, Qualities)
- Final Endorsement and Recommendation

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