

## The Mechanics Accuracy of Students' Writing

Lilik Yuliawati

Department of Business Administration, Bina Sarana Informatika University

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### ABSTRACT

In writing courses, the students tend to be more aware of technical errors in writing including the mechanics. Conversely, they tend to focus more on the idea or content of their writing when they produce papers to fulfill the assignment of non-writing courses. Whereas, the punctuation errors and misspelled words will make the meaning of the sentence ambiguous. This study aims to find out the degree of mechanics accuracy of students' writings and what kind of mechanics mistakes mostly produced. The mechanics that were analyzed include punctuation, capitalization, spelling, italicization, and numbering of 65 writing assignments of three non-writing courses. The method used in this study was content analysis. The result of this study revealed that there were number of mechanics mistakes in students writing assignments, but those mistakes did not greatly affect readers' understanding. The punctuation using of students' writing assignments was 41% accurate; the capitalization using was 82% accurate; the spelling using was 83% accurate; the italicization using was 96% accurate; and the numbering using was 98% accurate.

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#### Corresponding Author:

Lilik Yuliawati,

Departement of Business Administration,

Bina Sarana Informatika University,

Jl. Kramat Raya No.98 Senen Jakarta Pusat 10450

Email: [lilik.lyw@bsi.ac.id](mailto:lilik.lyw@bsi.ac.id)

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

Writing is an important part of life because it is a tool of communication—to communicate the writer's ideas to the readers. A study conducted by Checkett & Feng-Checkett (2004) suggest a good writing is needed to deliver information to someone in a clear and concise manner. Thus, when a writer writes he must ensure that the readers understand what he intends to communicate in a fairly simple way. Moreover, Checkett & Feng-Checkett (2004) also state that there are two obvious problems arising from a poor piece of writing. The first problem is the reader's understanding. The meaning of a sentence can be confused and unclear because of poor writing. For example, the sentence "*The truck hit the wall, and it was damaged.*" is ambiguous. The reader cannot know which of the two was damaged since the word "it" does not refer clearly to either truck or wall. The second problem arising from poor writing is the reader's perception. People think less of the writer when they read writing that is difficult to understand or containing punctuation errors, poorly constructed sentences, and misspelled words.

Mastering writing skill is necessary for success in every aspect of life. Especially in colleges and universities most academic courses use essays or other written tasks to assess students' work. It takes time and practice to develop and master this skill. Besides, it also takes a certain amount of commitment, practice, and hard work since there are some components of writing that have to be considered in writing paragraphs. It was also stated by Nalliveetil & Mahasneh (2017) mention that EFL learners have to take efforts to learn the spellings, word structures, and higher-order skills to deliver the intended message in various situations a

nd contexts. Jacob et.al (1981) as cited in (Anamaryanti, Syarif, & Rozimela, 2014) stated that writing has five components, among others content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics. According to Kane (2000) in (Abbas & Asy'ari, 2019), mechanics in writing refers to the appearance of words, to how they are spelt or arranged on paper which includes spelling, capitalization, and punctuation.

In writing courses, the students tend to be more aware of technical errors in writing including the mechanics which is sometimes neglected. The students try to minimize the errors of mechanics, such as the punctuation, capitalization, spelling, italicization, and numbering in their essays or papers because they worry that each error they make will decrease the mark. Conversely, they tend to focus more on the idea or content of their writing when they produce papers to fulfill the assignment of non-writing courses. They tend to be less aware of the punctuation and spelling use, whereas the punctuation errors and misspelled words will make the meaning of the sentence ambiguous. Besides, other errors of mechanics can make bad impression of readers. Therefore, whatever the students write for, they always need to pay attention in using the accurate mechanics in order to produce a good writing and to make the reader understand what they want to say through their writing.

Previous study revealed that there were various problems in students' writing that might be caused by some factors like lack practice, low motivation, and time allocation. The problems were grammatical, word choice, and mechanical problems (Maysuroh, Maryadi, & Supiani, 2017). (Yuliah, Widiastuti, & Meida, 2019) held a study and found that the most grammatical error occurred in students' writing was the use of conjunction as much as 20.6% and the most mechanical error was punctuation as much as 21.6%. In his study, (Crossley, Kyle, Allen, & Mcnamara, 2014) found that mechanics yield stronger correlation with writing quality than grammatical aspects. Therefore, teachers need to highlight the importance of mechanics in writing to the students.

The above condition triggers the researcher to conduct this study in order to know the degree of mechanics accuracy of students' writings and what kind of mechanics mistakes mostly produced. The researcher took the samples of students' writing assignments from non-writing courses in order to get the accurate data when the students write naturally with the above consideration about how the students write for the writing and non-writing courses. This study showed to what extent the students implement their knowledge of correct mechanics using in their writings.

## 2. RESEARCH METHOD

The researcher used content analysis to investigate more specific information about the mechanics accuracy of students' writing assignments through the analysis of mechanics mistakes which mostly appear in their writing.

The researcher took writing assignments of English Education students of Jakarta State University. The data collected were the mistakes of mechanics of writing, including punctuation, capitalization, spelling, italicization, and numbering. The source of the data consists of 11 writing assignments of ELT Management course, 27 writing assignments of Micro-Teaching course, and 27 writing assignments of Research Proposal & Seminar course; thus, the total numbers of writing assignments analyzed were 65 papers.

The researcher chose ELT Management, Micro-Teaching, and Research Proposal & Seminar course because there are a lot of tasks in the form of writing assignments in those courses. Thus, the researcher can see and analyze the use of mechanics there.

The writer used the rubric below in order to answer the research question, which is "How is the mechanics accuracy of ELESP students' writing assignments?"

Table 1. Rubric of Accuracy Level

No.	Level of Accuracy	Description
1	Low	The writing is unclear or difficult to understand because of numerous errors in punctuation, capitalization, spelling, italicization, and numbering.
2	Insufficient	The writing has numerous errors in punctuation, capitalization, spelling, italicization, and numbering that interfere the reader's understanding of the message.
3	Sufficient	There are some errors in punctuation, capitalization, spelling, italicization, and numbering; however, they do not greatly affect the reader's understanding.
4	Good	The writing is generally free from errors in punctuation, capitalization, spelling, italicization, and numbering.

The rubric was used to describe the level of mechanics accuracy of students' writing assignments. The accuracy level depends on the numbers of mechanics mistakes and the effect of the mistakes to the readers' understanding of the writing messages.

### 3. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

#### A. Result

After categorizing and analyzing the mechanics mistakes in ELESP students' writing assignments, the writer found that the aspect of mechanics which is the most inaccurate is punctuation. The punctuation mistakes have the highest numbers in all the three courses as shown in the table below.

Table 2. Total Number of Mechanics Mistakes in 65 Papers

No.	Categories of Mechanics Mistakes	Numbers of Mistakes			
		ELT Management	Micro - Teaching	Research Proposal & Seminar	Total
1	Punctuation	30	61	142	233
2	Capitalization	18	14	39	71
3	Spelling	13	17	37	67
4	Italicization	4	-	12	16
5	Numbering	7	-	1	8
	<b>Total</b>	72	92	231	395

The total number of mechanics mistakes from the three courses are 395, and the highest number is punctuation aspect which is up to 233 mistakes. The second is capitalization which is up to 71 mistakes; the third is spelling with 67 mistakes; the fourth is italicization with 16 mistakes; and the last is numbering with 8 mistakes. The percentage of the numbers of mechanics mistakes in each course can be seen in the pie charts below.

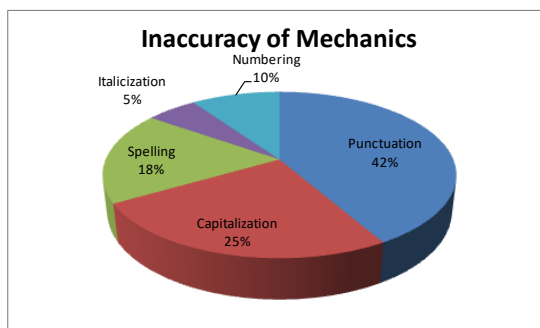


Figure 1. Inaccuracy of Mechanics in ELT Management Course

In ELT Management course, the highest number of inaccurate mechanics is punctuation with 42% of the total mistakes. Second is capitalization with 25%; third is spelling with 18%; fourth is numbering with 10%; and the last is italicization with only 5%.

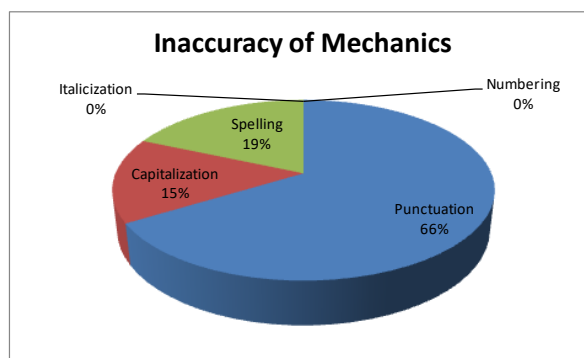


Figure 2. Inaccuracy of Mechanics in Micro-Teaching Course

Same with ELT Management course, the highest number of inaccurate mechanics in Micro-Teaching course is also punctuation with up to 66%; second is spelling with 19%; and third is capitalization with 15%. While, there is no italicization and numbering mistake in this course.

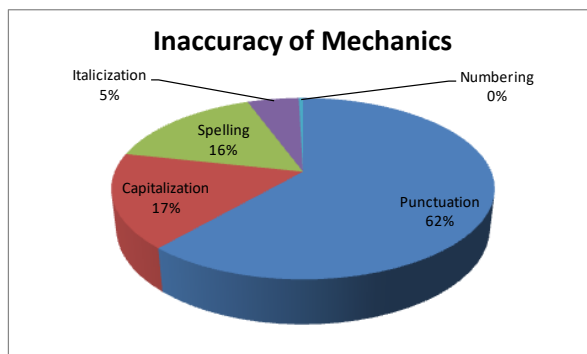


Figure 3. Inaccuracy of Mechanics in Research Proposal &amp; Seminar Course

In Research Proposal and Seminar course, the highest number of inaccurate mechanics is punctuation with 62%; second is capitalization with 17%; third is spelling with 16%; and fourth is italicization with 5%. While, there is not numbering mistake in this course.

The percentage of the total number of inaccurate mechanics in ELESP students' writing assignments from all the three courses can be seen clearly in the pie chart below.

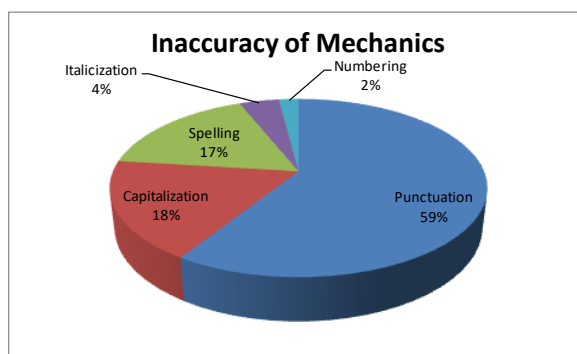


Figure 4. Inaccuracy of Mechanics of ELESP Students' Writing Assignments

The pie chart shows that the inaccurate using of punctuation appear up to 59%; the inaccurate using of capitalization occur until 18%; the inaccurate using of spelling occur until 17%; the inaccurate using of italicization occur until 4%; and inaccurate using of the numbering occur until 2%.

Briefly, the inaccurate using of mechanics appear in all courses tend to have the same quantity. In all the three courses, the punctuation mistakes have the highest number. Then, it is followed by capitalization and spelling mistakes. However, there are not many mistakes in italicization and numbering aspects.

## B. Analysis

According to the research question, which is "How is the mechanics accuracy of ELESP students' writing assignments?", the researcher tried to discuss deeply about what kind of mechanics mistakes which occurs in the students' writing assignments and whether those mistakes affect the readers' understanding of the messages.

### 1. Punctuation

The highest number of punctuation mistakes is the use of comma. There are many mistakes of the use of comma in compound, complex, or compound-complex sentences. There are also many run-on sentences and comma splices. For example:

*The culture of this institution is every children or teenager who enter this institution who is on school year, will be grouped appropriate with their school grade, for*

*example year 4, 5 and 6 students is positioned as the basic 1, 2 and 3 class, year 10, 11 and 12 students as the advance 1, 2 and 3 class.*

*Because, language development is described as the acquisition of a set of habits it is assumed that a person learning a second language starts off with the habits associated with the first language.*

*Our instructors in Kids love English are dependable, they always available at all times to aid kids in anything they may need.*

*Two friends and I observed the class, another observed the school.*

The misused of commas above do not significantly interfere the readers' understanding of the messages, but if the misused of commas occur in a long sentence with many clauses, it will distract the readers' understanding like in these sentences below.

*The culture of this institution is every children or teenager who enter this institution who is on school year, will be grouped appropriate with their school grade, for example year 4, 5 and 6 students is positioned as the basic 1, 2 and 3 class, year 10, 11 and 12 students as the advance 1, 2 and 3 class.*

*Then, we as a teacher should close to the students, so students will enjoy learn with us, we can joking in class and they will understand our joke, because we know they a lot, joking can change a boring situation become more flexible and relax.*

*That kind of learning process will have a lot of contribution in learners' development to be autonomous, independent, and responsible learners, but the writer can't avoid the fact that how silent way works, the teacher's silence, often intimidates the learners and decrease their motivations.*

The high number of misused of commas, especially in a long sentence with many clauses, raised an assumption that students do not understand the concept of the use of commas.

Unfortunately, the misused of comma even occurs in such a basic concept; the comma was used at the end of the sentence instead of a period. For example:

*The course director led the organization and people surrounded the course director who have intimates and influences,*

*Academic which deals with schedule of the study, materials for the lesson, and teachers consists of teachers itself,*

The mistakes which are very basic also occur in the use of parentheses. There are some sentences which use single parentheses like in these three sentences below.

*Shareholders (parents, investors, in the chart is connected with strip line, since they are the investors who have an indirect involvement and participation.*

*improving students' language skills (reading, listening, speaking and writing*

*A test is designed to measure students' achievement within a course (Achievement Test.*

Another mistake of a basic concept that frequently occurs is the absence of period at the end of the sentence, like the examples below.

*... hopefully teacher can select and implement the authentic materials carefully to provide their students with suitable inputs in order to create effective language learning for them*

*In this chapter, background of the study, purpose of the study, and problems of the study are discussed*

*Yule (1996: 75) said that there are two kinds of morphemes; they are free and bound morpheme*

Although the messages of those sentences still can be understood, the mistakes of such a basic concept above should not exist in ELESF students' writing because basically the concept was learned when students were still in elementary, junior high, and senior high school.

## 2. Capitalization

The second highest number of mechanics mistakes is capitalization. The misused of capital letter frequently appear in terms of trade names. Many students used capital letters for things that do not refer to a trade name, and vice versa. For example:

1. *The name of the course is Super English course.*
2. *... by students of English Department Unj..*
3. *I observed Elementary and Vocational School.*
4. *... after functional grammar 1 and functional grammar 2.*

Moreover, misused of capital letters also appear when the writers wrote terms which should be in italics, like in the examples below.

1. *One of the criteria for a good assessment tool is Reliable.*
2. *... there are twelve (12) types of Communication Strategies....*
3. *...their comprehension to apply Discourse Analysis concept...*

That kind of mistakes occurs up to 43.59% from the total number of capitalization mistakes in Research Seminar & Proposal Course.

Even, some capital letters were used after a comma. This should not be happened because this kind of mistake is very basic. Generally, students have learned and known that there should not be a capital letter after comma. For example:

1. *Moreover as a teacher, Assessment becomes ...*
2. *Based on Rolf Donald (2003), When writing...*
3. *...so that, It is very important for people...*
4. *Based on Heidi Byrnes (1998), Reading research shows...*

From the analysis of capitalization mistakes, the researcher found that there are many mistakes occur but those mistakes do not interfere the readers' understanding. In other word, the sentences still can be understood well.

## 3. Spelling

In third highest number of mistakes, which is spelling aspect, there are some misspelled words used many times. There is a student who spelled *message* into *massage* for three times, like in these sentences below.

*...the communication will be done easily without involving many hierarchical positions to get through the massage.*

*... minutes will be needed to prevent the distorted of the massage.*

*The majority of notice boards get across massages...*

The students went on making the same mistake for many times. Because those mistakes happened repeatedly, the researcher assumes that this belongs to an error. The researcher used two ways in distinguishing an error to mistake. First, the researcher checked the consistency of students' performance. If they sometimes use the correct form and sometimes the wrong one, it is considered a mistake. However, if they always use it incorrectly, it is then an error. In short, errors tend to be produced by a person continually, while mistakes only happen one time.

Beside that, many misspelled words appear because of the use of hyphen in compound words, like in the examples below.

*Most of the facilities in both schools are well-equipped.*

*The teacher taught in one-way-communication...*

*... my group observed pre elementary school and senior high school...*

*School observation is one of assignments in microteaching subject.*

*... I learned from the teachers about classroom-management.*

Many of the misspelled words also appear because the writer did not put the space between two or more words. For example:

1. *Bygiving the reinforcementsimultaneously ...*
2. *... responds or comments totheir student...*
3. *... my friendand I also observed...*
4. *...that I rememberis the teachers used tambourine ...*

Even, there are some misspelled words because the writer used shorts for some words. For example:

1. *Would u mind re-explaning this?*
2. *Do u mind...?*
3. *... to know the time n the way to have a conversation...*

#### **4. Italicization**

One of the functions of using italics is for introduction of a new, technical, or key term or label (after a term has been used once, do not italicize it). In this aspect, the mistakes occur when the students used italics for terms that has already mentioned before. For example:

The techniques include *positive feedback* and *reformulation*... *Positive feedback* is when learners... *Reformulation* is the process...

In the example above, the term *positive feedback* and *reformulation* should not be in italics when they have been used once.

Some mistakes also appear when the students italicized words that are not new terms. For example:

1. *The vision* of Express English Course (EEC) is ...
2. *The mission* of EEC is ...

Another mistake which occurs is the use of italics for *and* in a series of terms. For example: ... such as *up, down, lateral, and to public*.

The word *and* in the sentence above should not be italicized because it does not belong to a term.

#### **5. Numbering**

The last is numbering mistakes which rarely appear in students' writing assignments analyzed. Therefore, there are only eight numbering mistakes found. All the mistakes occur because the writer used numerals to express numbers below 10, instead of using words. For example:

1. *Students will get 1 course book, 1 cassette, and 1 exercise book for each level.*
2. *Levels of error are divided into 4 errors...*

Those numbering mistakes do not affect the readers' understanding. The sentences can be understood well whether the writers used numerals or words in expressing numbers.

This study only focuses on the accuracy of mechanics in ELESP students' writing assignments. The researcher does not differentiate mistakes and errors. Thus, from the discussion the researcher came to the conclusion that the accuracy of ELESP students' writing assignments is sufficient referring to the level of accuracy. There are numbers of mechanics mistakes in the writing assignments, but those mistakes do not greatly affect the readers' understanding. There are only a few numbers of punctuation mistakes which distract the readers' understanding, but overall the sentences in ELESP students' writing assignments still can be understood well. However, those mechanics mistakes decrease the quality of their writing; even there are some mistakes in basic concept which generally was learned in elementary, junior high, and senior high school.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The result of this study showed that the punctuation using of English Education students' writing assignments is 41% accurate; the capitalization using is 82% accurate; the spelling using is 83% accurate; the italicization using is 96% accurate; and the numbering using is 98% accurate. Furthermore, after analyzing the writing assignments, the researcher came to the conclusion that the mechanics accuracy of English Education students' writing assignments is sufficient referring to the level of accuracy since the mistakes do not greatly affect the reader's understanding.

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