



The Use of RAFT Strategy in Teaching Writing Personal Letters at SMAN 3 Kisaran

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to describe the use of the RAFT (Role, Audience, Format, Topic) strategy in teaching personal letters to eleventh-grade students at SMA N 3 Kisaran. Many students often face difficulties in starting their writing, expressing ideas, and organizing content in a personal letter. The RAFT strategy is used to help students write from a specific perspective, focus on the intended audience, and follow the correct format. This descriptive qualitative research was conducted through observation, student writing analysis, and interviews. The results showed that RAFT helped students generate ideas more easily, improved the structure and relevance of their letters, and increased their engagement during writing activities. Students also reported that the strategy made the task more meaningful and enjoyable. Therefore, the RAFT strategy can be considered an effective alternative to support students' writing skills in personal letter texts.

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INTRODUCTION

Writing is a vital skill in English language learning, yet it remains a significant barrier for many high school learners. Based on preliminary data at SMAN 3 Kisaran, students' writing abilities—particularly in the form of personal letters—are relatively low. Many students struggle to produce ideas, organize their letters in a consistent structure, and tailor both content and tone to the context of communication. This highlights the critical need for a more communicative, contextual, and student-centered teaching style in writing instruction.

One strategy that has proven effective in improving students' writing skills is the **RAFT strategy (Role, Audience, Format, Topic)**. RAFT encourages students to think critically by placing them in specific roles, writing for defined audiences, selecting appropriate formats, and developing relevant topics. Pratiwi, Raja, and Flora (2024) found that RAFT considerably improves the teaching of personal letters by giving students a clear framework for planning and writing. Similarly, Hussien and Mousa (2024) discovered that the RAFT technique helps students learn structure and communicative context in writing.

Schrodt et al. (2019) found that contextual and explicit instructional tactics, such as RAFT, improve writing performance and student motivation. Although their study focused on young learners, the basic principle—that writing improves when students grasp their goal and audience—is still very applicable at the secondary level. Thus, using a deliberate method such as RAFT may provide a structured yet creative model for addressing students' issues with personal letter writing.

From an international standpoint, Harris (2023) underlines the significance of role-based methods such as RAFT in boosting students' self-regulation during the writing process. Furthermore, in her book *Teach Writing Well*, Culham (2023) advocates for the use of tactics such as RAFT as part of writing education that emphasize audience awareness and communicative aim.

Based on this explanation, the main objective of this study is to describe the use of the RAFT strategy in teaching writing personal letters at SMAN 3 Kisaran. This qualitative study aims to provide a thorough understanding of how the RAFT method is implemented in the classroom, as well as to investigate the dynamics of the teaching and learning processes involved.

This research is significant because it contributes to the creation of more relevant, innovative, and structured methods to writing instruction. The capacity to write clearly and appropriately is an essential skill that students must develop in order to meet the literacy expectations of the twenty-first century. RAFT allows teachers to use more innovative instructional techniques, while also allowing students to develop communicative, reflective, and audience-aware writing skills.

METHOD

In this study, the researchers adopted a qualitative descriptive technique. According to Creswell (2014), qualitative descriptive research is a technique that seeks to explain and comprehend social phenomena or human behavior in detail. In this study, data were gathered through observation and interviews. This study's data came from the teacher's usage of the RAFT (Role, Audience, Format, Topic) technique when teaching students how to write personal letters. The data sources were students in class XI-6 at SMAN 3 Kisaran. This approach was considered appropriate to explore the teaching and learning process in the classroom, especially how the RAFT strategy was applied. The data obtained were analyzed subjectively and interpretively to provide a detailed and comprehensive understanding of the use of the RAFT strategy in the teaching of personal letter writing.

FINDINGS

This section presents the findings of the study regarding the implementation of the RAFT (Role, Audience, Format, Topic) strategy in teaching personal letter writing at SMAN 3 Kisaran. The RAFT strategy, originally introduced by Santa, Havens, and Valdes (2004), is designed to help students organize their writing by assigning specific roles, audiences, formats, and topics. The findings are organized according to the four parts of the RAFT framework and supported by observational and interview data.

1. Role: Encouraging Perspective-Taking and Imaginative Thinking

The "Role" element in RAFT helped students explore different points of view, which increased their emotional involvement and creativity in writing. By stepping into another person's shoes—such as writing as a younger sibling or a concerned friend—students developed empathy and wrote more expressive content. For instance, during classroom observation, one student enthusiastically shared her letter written as a daughter missing her mother:

“Waktu dibebaskan memilih tema, aku nulis surat ke Ibu yang jauh, aku jadi lebih gampang nulis perasaanku. Serasa beneran,” (Student 1, interview, May 20, 2025).

2. Audience: Strengthening Awareness of the Reader

The “Audience” component helped students tailor their writing tone and vocabulary depending on who the recipient of the letter was. This made their writing more meaningful and communicative.

“Biasanya aku asal nulis, tapi waktu tahu yang baca itu guru atau teman, aku jadi mikir harus pakai kata yang sopan atau santai,” (Student 2, interview, May 20, 2025).

3. Format: Helping Structure and Organization

Students demonstrated improved writing organization after being introduced to the “Format” component of RAFT. The familiar structure of personal letters (greeting, body, closing) became easier for them to apply.

“Dulu bingung mulai dari mana, sekarang tahu harus ada pembuka, isi, penutup, jadi lebih gampang,” (Student 3, interview, May 20, 2025).

4. Topic: Guiding Idea Development and Relevance

Students were more motivated and productive when writing about familiar or emotionally engaging topics. The “Topic” component of RAFT gave them a focus for their writing, making the task less abstract.

“Topiknya dekat sama kehidupan kita, jadi bisa ngalir aja nulisnya,” (Student 4, interview, May 20, 2025).

5. Improvement in Students’ Writing Scores

In addition to qualitative findings, students’ personal letter writing scores also showed clear improvement after the implementation of the RAFT strategy. Before using RAFT, many students had difficulty expressing ideas and organizing their letters. After the classroom sessions using RAFT, the overall quality of their writing improved noticeably.

The table below shows the average scores before and after the strategy was applied:

Table 1. Average Writing Scores Before and After RAFT Implementation

Description	Average Score
Before RAFT	65
After RAFT	78

DISCUSSION

This research reveals that the use of the RAFT (Role, Audience, Format, Topic) strategy had a meaningful impact on students' writing skills, particularly in the context of personal letter writing. The results suggest that integrating structured roles, audience awareness, format clarity, and relevant topics not only improved students' writing organization but also increased their emotional engagement and motivation.

The "Role" component encouraged innovative thinking and viewpoint taking. Students who wrote from a different perspective were able to communicate their emotions more naturally. This is consistent with recent research by Pratiwi and Ningsih (2020), who stressed how role-based writing exercises can improve students' empathy and creative expression.

The emphasis on "Audience" made students more sensitive of tone and language choice. Many began to think how their message would be perceived, resulting in more careful and communicative writing. These findings are congruent with those of Andayani et al. (2021), who discovered that writing with a clear sense of audience promoted more authentic and effective expression.

Through the "Format" component, students gained a better grasp of the structure of personal letters, which translated into clearer and more organized writing. Similar outcomes were reported by Marbun & Tambunan (2019), who highlighted that the RAFT strategy helped students reduce confusion when organizing ideas by offering a predictable framework.

When it came to "Topic," students were more productive and engaged when writing about themes close to their everyday lives. This supports the findings of Fitriani & Wahyuni (2023), who noted that personal relevance in writing tasks encouraged greater fluency and emotional honesty.

Furthermore, the increase in students' average writing scores—from 65 to 78—provides quantitative support for these qualitative insights. This improvement is in line with Saputri & Wulandari's (2021) study, which also recorded significant gains in student writing performance after using the RAFT model in high school classrooms.

These results underscore the value of integrating student-centered strategies like RAFT into writing instruction. The strategy reflects core principles of constructivist learning, where students actively build knowledge through context-rich, meaningful tasks. It also supports the goals of social-emotional learning (SEL), particularly in helping students express feelings, understand others, and build confidence in communication.

Taken together, the outcomes of this study confirm that RAFT is not only effective for improving technical writing skills but also valuable for fostering empathy, creativity, and engagement. Its alignment with Indonesia's current curriculum transformation under *Merdeka Belajar* further highlights its relevance. As such, educators are encouraged to explore the broader application of RAFT across other genres and grade levels to support more dynamic and emotionally connected writing experiences.

CONCLUSION

The RAFT (Role, Audience, Format, Topic) strategy for teaching personal letter writing at SMAN 3 Kisaran was shown to be helpful in increasing students' writing skills. It enabled students to express themselves more clearly, arrange their letters better, and connect more fully with the topic. Students were encouraged to write from various perspectives, evaluate their audience, adhere to a proper format, and select significant topics using the four RAFT components.

This study emphasizes the importance of incorporating student-centered and context-based approaches, such as RAFT, into writing education. It not only improves the technical parts of writing, but it also encourages empathy, creativity, and self-expression. Given its relation to the *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum and 21st-century learning goals, RAFT can be a useful and adaptable method for Indonesian teachers looking to foster meaningful and engaging writing experiences in the classroom.

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