

# App Review

## Using Tech Tools for Academic Writing: *Grammarly* as a Pedagogical Tool<sup>1</sup>

**Darren Rey Javier<sup>2</sup>, Baras-Pinugay Integrated High School and Philippine Normal University, Manila, Philippines**

### Abstract

In academic writing, Second Language (L2) writing teachers play an active and vital role in the success of L2 writing students' academic writing journey. With the advances of technology, digital writing tools increase their acceptance and usability as a language learning tool. One of this emergent digital software is *Grammarly*. Research has suggested that *Grammarly* is a useful learning tool. Likewise, it has grown its application in the classroom and professional development beyond its use as a writing assistant. However, this digital software has not been investigated as a teaching tool in writing. Therefore, this technology review focuses mainly on *Grammarly* as a pedagogical tool in the L2 writing.

### Resumen

En la escritura académica, los maestros de escritura de segunda lengua (L2) juegan un papel activo y vital en el aprendizaje de escritura académica de sus estudiantes. Con los avances de la tecnología, las herramientas de escritura digital aumentan su aceptación y usabilidad como herramienta de aprendizaje de idiomas. Uno de estos software digitales emergentes es Grammarly. La investigación ha sugerido que Grammarly es una herramienta de aprendizaje útil. Asimismo, ha crecido su aplicación en el aula y el desarrollo profesional más allá de su uso como asistente de redacción. Sin embargo, este software digital no ha sido investigado como una herramienta de enseñanza por escrito. Por lo tanto, esta revisión de tecnología se enfoca principalmente en Grammarly como una herramienta pedagógica en la escritura L2.

### Introduction

Second Language (L2) writing teachers have often been concerned about how to improve their classroom instruction, considering the unique challenges of teaching academic writing to English as a second language (ESL) and English as a foreign language (EFL) students. With the rise of technology, L2 writing teachers may opt to use digital tools to help them improve the quality of their teaching. However, they need to choose the most appropriate and helpful digital tools depending on affordability and accessibility. *Grammarly* is one of the most well-known emerging digital tools. This tech review presents how teachers can incorporate *Grammarly* as a teaching tool in the classroom.

### *Grammarly* for Teaching L2 Writing

*Grammarly* can check the following: (1) correctness (i.e., grammar, spelling, and punctuation; consistency in spelling and punctuation; and fluency); (2) clarity (i.e., conciseness, clarity-focused sentence rewrites, and formatting); (3) engagement (compelling vocabulary and lively sentence variety); (4) delivery (tone detection, confident writing, politeness, formality level, and inclusive language); and (5) plagiarism (it ensures that the work is fresh and original by checking in against 16 billion web pages).

Teachers may use these functions in the teaching of academic writing, especially focusing on the micro-level revisions (i.e., tense, agreement, pluralization, patterns, and rules). *Grammarly* can correct all basic errors and teachers can then focus primarily on checking macro-level issues (i.e., content, flow of arguments, and others). Since *Grammarly* is best used during the editing and revision processes (Barrot, 2020), students may run their papers through the program before submitting them to their teachers, thus minimizing micro-level mistakes. Most studies (Barrot, 2021; Nova, 2018; Qassemzadeh & Soleimani, 2016) have focused on *Grammarly* as a language learning tool using the functions of the free version.

In Barrot's (2021) quantitative study, the treatment group outperformed the control group with a large effect size when their posttest scores were compared. Likewise, qualitatively, it was reported that students had learned grammar rules through metalinguistic explanations provided. *Grammarly* feedback was more effective than teacher input as regards to students' retention on rules related to the passive voice (Qassemzadeh & Soleimani, 2016).

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<sup>2</sup> [darrenrey.javier@deped.gov.ph](mailto:darrenrey.javier@deped.gov.ph), 0000-0002-0602-2441

Likewise, O'Neill and Russell (2019) found that students have positive perceptions towards *Grammarly* due to its usefulness and convenience. Furthermore, Karyuatry et al. (2018) reported that *Grammarly* was an effective program that can help to check grammar errors and potential stylistic mistakes. These findings encourage teachers to use *Grammarly* as a pedagogical tool for teaching academic writing.

However, there are limitations. These researchers used its free version, and it is suggested that in future studies its premium version should be used to utilize its full functions. For example, the free version only has a very few functions, while the premium version has a lot of additional features. These features can be seen in Table 1:

Free Version	Premium Version
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Spelling</li> <li>• Grammar</li> <li>• Punctuation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Everything in free</li> <li>• Clarity-focused sentence rewrites</li> <li>• Tone adjustments</li> <li>• Plagiarism detection</li> <li>• Word choice</li> <li>• Formality level</li> <li>• Fluency</li> <li>• Additional advanced suggestions</li> </ul>

Note: The information in this table was adopted from the website of *Grammarly* (2021).

Table 1: Grammarly's Free and Premium Versions

Teaching academic writing is now becoming increasingly technology driven. With recent advances in technology, *Grammarly* developers need to further develop the digital software to upgrade and address its limitations related to its capability to enhance the L2 writing quality (Perdana & Farida, 2019). Notably, (1) *Grammarly* is less effective to improve the content and organization of writing (Ghufron, 2019; Huang, 2020), and (2) it could not identify some proper nouns (Vo & Nguyen, 2021).

For instance, it cannot suggest recommendations with incoherent academic writing, as it only focuses on surface-level errors (Bailey & Lee, 2020) in L2 writing. It is evident in Figure 1 that *Grammarly* does not detect the issue of the coherence of the sample paragraph from Thornbury (2020).

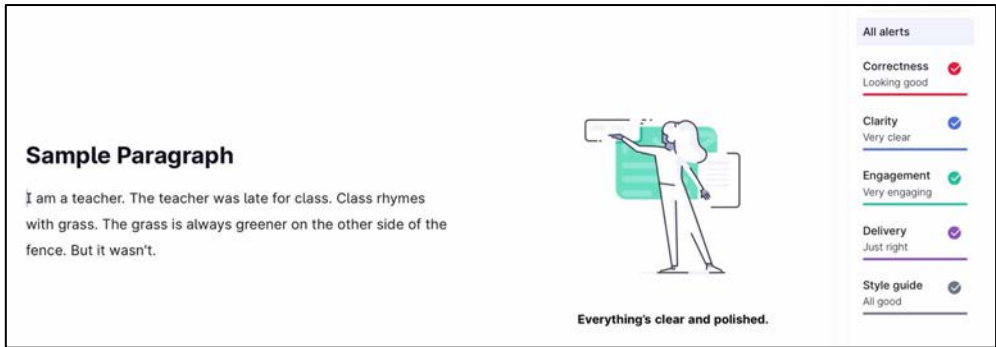


Figure 1: A snapshot of *Grammarly* premium result

Another specific example of the *Grammarly*'s limitations is that some proper nouns are hard to identify, making it hard to suggest accurate capitalization. Since *Grammarly* is an American-based digital tool, some words that are proper nouns in different contexts may be difficult for it to find. For instance, in this sample sentence, "We'll be vacationing in manila next year." *Manila* is the capital of the Philippines making it a proper noun, but *Grammarly* does not detect its incorrect capitalization. The tool only suggests inconsistent punctuation for *We'll* in the given sentence. Another example, "I ordered my laptop from shopee." *Shopee* is a popular online shopping platform in Southeast Asia. The example functions as a proper noun, but *Grammarly* detects *Shopee* as an incorrect spelling, but not capitalization. As evidenced from the sample sentences, *Grammarly*'s inability to see context-based (Kiel, 2020) proper nouns is one of its weaknesses.

Considering these limitations, it is recommended that teachers develop an evaluation rubric that will assess the unnecessary corrections provided by *Grammarly*. This will make the digital software even more reliable and valuable in the classroom. Studies on *Grammarly* are still in their explorative stages (Barrot, 2021; Nova, 2018; Qassemzadeh & Soleimani, 2016). Further studies are still needed to study its application in the classroom and professional development beyond its basic use as a writing assistant.

## Grammarly's Trajectory as a Pedagogical Tool

Developers of *Grammarly* continuously upgrade the software based on the needs of its users. In the future, they may also add features that will check the macro-level issues in academic papers. More studies on the use of *Grammarly*, especially concerning the use of premium and business versions, must be done to further investigate its affordances as a learning and teaching tool. It is further suggested that other studies be conducted on *Grammarly* must investigate its pedagogical value in the writing classroom. In order to do this, teachers must subscribe to its premium version and explore its advanced features. This way, they will understand how this tool works and will be able to apply it in their L2 writing classrooms. Specific ways on how to apply this in the L2 writing classroom will vary depending on the learners' contexts. Teachers need to know all of its functions before using *Grammarly* in the L2 writing classroom. With this, it will have a bigger impact on the field of L2 writing instruction.

In the meantime, L2 writing students and teachers may continue using *Grammarly* given that it has shown positive results based in the abovementioned studies. As a result of its relatively strong presence in the field, this tech review hopes to bring new perspectives to classroom teachers, education practitioners, and even researchers in teaching academic writing at both basic education and tertiary levels. Pedagogically, this paper hopes to provide implications in the teaching of academic writing that *Grammarly* has the potential as a teaching tool rather than focusing only on its functions as tool to check grammatical errors. Teachers may use it as a teaching tool to explicitly teach grammar to the students.

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