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# RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF STATEMENTS OF PURPOSE (SPs) FOR ADMISSION TO GRADUATE SCHOOL: A SHARED-UNDERSTANDING PERSPECTIVE OF THE SP GENRE

by

PRIYANKA GANGULY

A THESIS

Presented to the Graduate Faculty of the

MISSOURI UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF SCIENCE IN TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION

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Approved by:

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# ABSTRACT

In this study, I analyzed twenty-four statements of purpose (SPs) submitted to the Department of English and Technical Communication at Missouri University of Science and Technology (Missouri S&T) by current and former students. My goal was to determine the applicants' shared understanding of the SP genre. I analyzed the SPs from three dimensions: rhetorical moves, rhetorical appeals (*pisteis*), and rhetorical style (*elocutio*).

To understand the rhetorical moves used by the applicants, I analyzed the content of their SPs according to the categories (moves) and codes (steps) validated in my pilot study. To understand the arguments used by the applicants, I analyzed the content of their SPs by using the basic Aristotelian framework of *pisteis*: *logos, pathos,* and *ethos*. I further developed subcodes—or special topics of invention—under each *pistis*. To understand the role of style in the SPs, I looked for a limited set of stylistic markers as I analyzed each SP sentence by sentence.

The results of my study showed that the applicants integrated narratives with almost every move and constructed different selves through those narratives. *Ethos* was more prevalent than *logos* and *pathos* in my sample of SPs. The applicants used personal pronouns and active voice heavily but contractions sparingly, and they created both long and short sentences and coherent and substantive paragraphs. The qualitative nature of my study prevented generalization to the overall SP genre, but similarity in the applicants' choices of rhetorical moves, appeals, and style revealed their shared understanding of this genre as social action.

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

The statement of purpose (SP), a student writing genre and an academic promotional genre (Bhatia, 1993), plays an important role in establishing a preliminary relationship with a particular unknown audience or discourse community (for example, an admission committee). An SP is also known as a *personal statement* or PS (Barton, Ariail, & Smith, 2004; Bekins, Huckin, & Kijak, 2004; Ding, 2007) in the United States and a *motivation letter* (Lopez-Ferrero & Bach, 2016) in some places. The SP serves as the most important tool in applying to graduate schools because the actual personal self of an applicant cannot be revealed through other application materials (GRE scores, transcripts, etc.) (Bekins et al., 2004). However, the rhetorical paradox (Brown, 2004), which encourages applicants to write SPs in personal terms even though they will be judged in terms of professional or "institutional ability," makes it difficult for any given applicant to write an SP that will serve the needs of the unknown audience, particularly the admission committee. Also, a vacuum always exists in understanding the audience of the SP genre because applicants are given few details about their audience's expectations.

Several researchers, including Samraj and Monk (2008), have argued that there is a need for detailed studies of SPs because the information available about the SP genre is abstract and subjective. Prospective graduate students need concrete, objective information about the core characteristics of the SP genre and the expectations of this genre's discourse communities. The writing of SPs is not usually taught in university courses, and examples of successful SPs are hard to come by (Brown, 2004). Some websites offer advice on writing SPs—not on the pragmatic or discursive level, but on the

structural level (format, parts of an SP) or informational level (Newman, 2004). Yet there is no systematic instruction given on any site to assist applicants in making appropriate rhetorical moves to persuade an admission committee.

Very little scholarly attention has been given to the SP genre. A few studies of the SP genre have focused on the rhetorical moves and steps used by applicants to achieve their goals: to gain admission and secure financial support (Barton et al., 2004; Bekins et al., 2004; Brown, 2004; Ding, 2007; Lopez-Ferrero & Bach, 2016; Samraj & Monk, 2008). There have been no studies of the SP genre in which researchers have tried to understand applicants' arguments through an analysis of *pisteis* (particularly, the artistic *pisteis*) or their style through an analysis of *elocutio*.

Moreover, most studies have focused on SPs submitted to psychology programs, medical schools, and medical residency programs. A very few studies (Lopez-Ferrero & Bach, 2016; Samraj & Monk, 2008; Vossler, 2007) have focused on SPs submitted to humanities and social science programs offering professional degrees. Detailed studies of SPs submitted to arts and humanities departments are required because the goals and communicative purposes are different from those of SPs submitted to science, engineering, and medical departments. In a science department, an applicant's goal can be to establish a research persona through the SP (Brown, 2004), whereas in a medical school the goal can be to construct a medical apprentice profile in the SP (Barton et al., 2004; Bekins et al., 2004). On the other hand, in an arts or humanities department, subjectivity matters more than objectivity; partisanship is welcomed. When it comes to a professional degree like technical communication, usually housed in a humanities department, the goal of writing an SP changes in the sense that an applicant, more than

representing his or her research persona, focuses on highlighting professional skills and expertise. Researchers have yet to explore how an applicant can establish his or her credibility in an SP submitted to a professional degree program like technical communication.

In response to this gap in the research, I decided to analyze the SPs submitted to the Master of Science (MS) program in the Department of English and Technical Communication at Missouri University of Science and Technology (Missouri S&T) by current and former graduate students. I chose these SPs as my sample for two reasons: first, those SPs were close to hand and easy to gather (convenience sample); second, the department gave applicants almost no instructions or guidance for writing their SPs (purposive sample). Therefore, these SPs helped me achieve the purpose of my research: to determine the writers' shared understanding of the SP genre. I explored the rhetorical moves, rhetorical appeals, and rhetorical style used by the writers in my sample of SPs. I define these rhetorical terms in the following way:

- **Move:** A move is a textual part, such as a passage, a paragraph, or a section, that helps in achieving the communicative purpose both in the immediate context and the overall context (Swales, 1990).
- **Step:** A smaller unit within a move, a step is an instrument for enacting the communicative purposes of and strategies within a written communication.
- **Appeal:** An appeal, or a *pistis*, is a mode or means of persuading an audience. The three Aristotelian *pisteis* are *logos*, *pathos*, and *ethos*.

- **Rhetorical Style:** Rhetorical style is the way of expressing an idea or a thought through words in order to persuade the audience.

The SPs in my sample were written by the applicants to gain admission to Missouri S&T's MS program in technical communication. I conducted both empirical and interpretivist research to explore the SP genre from a rhetorical perspective. Empirical research involves the testing of hypotheses formulated from the theoretical background of previous research (Hughes & Hayhoe, 2012). For the first part of my study, i.e., the analysis of rhetorical moves, I conducted empirical research on the SPs in my sample to understand the applicants' use of rhetorical moves and steps. Interpretivist research is focused mainly on understanding rather than testing (Hughes and Hayhoe, 2012) and allows the researcher to take a more open-ended approach that leads to the discovery of unexpected knowledge. For the second and third parts of my study, I conducted interpretivist research on the SPs in my sample to understand the applicants' use of rhetorical appeals or *pisteis* and rhetorical style. To study the rhetorical appeals and style, I employed traditional rhetorical analysis based on the Aristotelian triad (*logos*, *pathos*, and *ethos*) and a limited set of stylistic markers, respectively. In this study, I took a mixed-method (quantitative and qualitative) approach to investigate the rhetorical moves, appeals, and style.

I suspected that a detailed analysis of the structure (moves and steps), arguments (artistic proofs), and style (diction, sentences—length and type, and paragraphing) of the SPs in my sample would reveal the applicants' shared understanding of the SP genre and elucidate the social action that the applicants were performing through their SPs.

## 1.1. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE STATEMENT OF PURPOSE (SP) GENRE

Because it is an occluded or semi-occluded (Samraj and Monk, 2008) written academic genre, the SP is "difficult to categorize and describe" (Lopez-Ferrero and Bach, 2016, p. 287). Swales (1996) defined occluded genres as follows:

> "On the one hand, they are typically formal documents which remain on file; on the other, they are rarely part of the public record. They are written for specific individual or small-group audiences, yet may also be seriously invested with demonstrated scholarship and seriously concerned with representing their authors in a favorable professional light. More importantly, however, exemplars of this genres are typically hidden, 'out of sight' or 'occluded' from the public gaze by a veil of confidentiality. One consequence of these characteristics is that newcomers to a field, such as graduate students or junior staff, may have particular difficulties in matching the expectations of their targeted audience." (p. 46)

Swales' (1996) list of occluded genres never included SPs; however, Samraj and Monk (2008) included SPs in the "semi-occluded" category (p. 194) because SPs are not easily available to the potential writers (applicants) of this genre and the audience's expectations are largely unknown resulting in the inconvenience to the writers. Previous researchers ascribed the following characteristics to the SPs:

- In the SP genre, the applicants are not under any obligation to follow any stringent rule, structure, and format, like other self-promotional genres, for example, cover letters and job application letters (Ding, 2007). In most

cases, the applicants are not given any substantive instruction to write their SPs.

- An SP needs more time to be evaluated by the audience unlike the other similar kinds of writing (Ding, 2007), when the SPs are long (may be two to three pages). For example, a resume can be scanned in 10-30 seconds and a cover letter (job application letter), which is one-page long in most cases, can be scanned in 10-20 seconds (Donlin, 2000).
- The SP genre belongs to more of a "persuasive" genre than an "informative" one (Ding, 2007).
- The SP genre is used to promote or advertise a candidate's profile (Henry & Roseberry, 2001).
- The SP genre is used to achieve the following purposes:
    - Establishing educational and professional expertise;
    - Demonstrating unique experience;
    - Discussing personal motivations;
    - Establishing research persona;
    - Establishing oneself as a future expert in the discourse community;
    - Aligning an applicant's interests with the goals of the program or research community present within that program;
    - Emphasizing the ability to make significant contribution to the field; and
    - Explaining future plans of action (Asher, 2000; Barton et al., 2004; Bekins et al., 2004; Brown, 2004; Curry, 1991; Henry &

Roseberry, 2001; Lopez-Ferrero & Bach, 2016; Mumby, 1997; Samraj & Monk, 2008; Stewart, 1996; Vossler, 2007).

## 1.2. GENRE: A SHARED UNDERSTANDING OF A SOCIAL ACTION

Previous scholars defined genre in many ways, but in my study, I used Miller's (1984) definition of genre to determine my subjects' shared understanding of the SP genre. Some of the definitions of genre and genre analysis are given below.

Genre can be defined as "a class of communicative events that share some set of communicative purposes" (Swales, 1990). Swales (1990) further elaborated on this concept by saying that genre is the shared "structure, style, content, and intended audience" within a particular type of discourse community through which communicative purposes are achieved through "socio-rhetorical" activities of writing (pp. 8–10). Bhatia (1993) also emphasized the importance of communicative purposes while describing the characteristics of a genre. Communicative purposes can be understood by focusing on the content, form, and functionality (Shaw, 2014). In other words, genre is a combination of audience, purpose, organization, and presentation, in which audience is the principal factor (Swales & Feak, 1994).

Bhatia (1993) stated that genre analysis is a multidisciplinary activity to examine the characteristics of any text both externally and internally and the way those texts are produced by selecting proper lexicon and grammar. Casañ-Pitarch (2016) connected genre analysis to "multidisciplinary activity involving different areas in the study of languages such as linguistics, discourse analysis, sociolinguistics, translation, and advertising, among many others" (p. 42).

All these definitions of genre and genre analysis tend to include that genre is a combination of substance and form. Miller (1984) stated that a genre cannot be restricted to just form or substance, but a genre tries to accomplish a social action considering the social and historical context of rhetoric (p. 151). Therefore, Miller's genre analysis is from the perspective of the shared social action which occurs in recurrent rhetorical situations in a specific discourse community. This concept is distinctive from Swales' (1990) genre analysis from the perspective of shared communicative purposes, Martin's (1997) genre analysis from the perspective of shared social processes, Bhatia's (1993) genre analysis from the perspective of understanding linguistical, sociological, and psychological aspect of genre, and Casañ-Pitarch's (2016) genre analysis from the perspective of understanding diverse areas, such as language use and promotional strategy.

In my study, Miller's (1984) definition of genre is the most fitting in analyzing the SP genre. In the SP genre, the recurrent or typified rhetorical situation is caused by an exigency—each applicant decides to go to graduate school—in this case, to pursue an MS in technical communication at Missouri S&T—and has to write an SP as part of the application package. The goal of each applicant is to convince an audience (the admission committee) to accept him or her for admission and financial support. The genre in most cases is named as "SP" for the applicants, but a very few instructions are given to the applicants. In this scenario, each applicant has to figure out the formal features and characteristic content of the SP genre and the social action that it performs—it performs the social action for the applicant as well as the audience. As Miller stated, although a genre can be defined by the formal features and characteristic content, genre is better to

define by the social action it performs. For the applicants, the social action of an SP is centered on gaining admission and funding—the applicant wants and probably needs them. For the audience, the social action is centered on giving admission and funding to the qualified and best people because openings and money are limited mostly. Therefore, it is worth studying whether this SP genre is the product of the applicants' shared understanding of accomplishing this social action.

The next three sections will focus on rhetorical moves, rhetorical appeals, and rhetorical style, respectively. Each section is a separate study as well as a part of the larger study of my thesis. For each subordinate study, I will explain the reason for my analysis, present a literature review, explain my research methods (or research study design), and present and discuss my results. I chose to organize my thesis in this way in order to facilitate my readers' comprehension and retention of information. If I had organized my thesis differently (for example, with a single section about all methods employed in the thesis), my audience would have had trouble understanding and remembering and might have faced difficulty in connecting ideas. In the last section, I will use the findings from the three subordinate studies to draw conclusions about my subjects' shared understanding of the SP genre as social action.

## 2. RHETORICAL MOVE

Most of the previous researchers analyzed the SP genre by investigating rhetorical moves and steps. As Ding (2007) mentioned, move analysis is one of the important tools in understanding a genre because "moves are semantic and functional units of texts, which can be identified because of their communicative purposes and linguistic boundaries" (p. 370). Swales (1990) emphasized that a move is a part of the text that helps in communicating a specific idea and therefore ultimately contributes to the overall purpose of the writing. On one hand, some scholars, including Connor and Mauranen (1999), argue that moves can be just one sentence or a paragraph or an entire text, but a move must have at least one proposition (p. 51). On the other hand, some scholars, including Muangsamai (2018), argue that moves are those "small semantic units"—certainly not a paragraph or section or entire text— that show the relationship between a text and its context (p. 237).

Steps refer to those smaller units within a move that help the writers achieve the communicative purpose of a move (Bhatia, 1993). In other words, if moves aid the readers in understanding the goal of any writing, then steps aid them in clarifying a specific move (Casañ-Pitarch, 2017). Casañ-Pitarch (2017) suggested that move analysis could only be possible manually, not automatically by using software, and move analysis reveals the building blocks of a written text. Therefore, move analysis helps explore the structural patterns of a genre: those patterns are used to communicate the purpose of writing to the audience. In that sense, move analysis is somewhat similar to rhetorical analysis of *dispositio*—one of the classical rhetorical canons, in which a writer or speaker

arranges a written or spoken text by considering the audience and context to create persuasion. In my study, my goal was to investigate the ways in which my subjects organized their SPs to convince the admission committee.

Until 2004, very little scholarly attention was given to the SP genre. After that, there was extensive research on moves in SPs submitted mostly to the medical schools, medical residency programs, and psychology programs (Barton et al., 2004; Bekins et al., 2004; Brown, 2004; Ding, 2007; Henry & Roseberry, 1996; Samraj & Monk, 2008). Vossler (2007) wrote a thesis in which he analyzed SPs submitted to the School of Information and Library Science of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Samraj and Monk (2008) did a move analysis of SPs submitted to the electrical engineering, business administration, and linguistics programs at one US university.

## 2.1. LITERATURE REVIEW

In this Subsection, I will discuss the previous studies that analyzed the common rhetorical moves in the genre of SP. To understand the rhetorical moves, steps, and lexical features, Ding (2007) conducted a genre analysis on SPs (n=30) submitted to medical or dental schools. Her corpus of SPs included both the edited and unedited versions. Her goal was to understand the underlying patterns, the relationship between audience and text, and the communicative purposes along with the move structure in the SP genre by analyzing and comparing those edited and unedited SPs. Ding mentioned that the applicants always face challenges in writing SPs because of "their unfamiliarity with the conventions of the genre, its discourse community, and its audience

expectations" (p. 368). She recognized moves based on linguistic means such as marked themes, tense/modal change, new lexical references, and paragraph divisions.

Ding (2007) used t-units as her unit of analysis—t-units refer to the "shortest grammatically allowable sentences into which writing can be split or minimally terminable unit" (Hunt, 1965, p. 20). Hunt says a t-unit refers to a main clause in addition to any subordinate clauses attached to it. T-units are intended to analyze small groups of words that are considered grammatical sentences irrespective of the use of punctuation. In my study, I followed her approach to identify moves and steps; however, my unit of analysis was not t-units, but full sentences. A sentence is the largest independent unit of grammar that begins with a capital letter and ends with a period, question mark, or exclamation point (Nordquist, 2019c). I chose sentence-level analysis because a sentence expresses a complete idea in a better way than a t-unit. In her study, Ding identified the following five recurrent moves and six associated steps in the SPs (she called SPs as personal statements in her study):

1. Move 1: *Explaining the reason to pursue the proposed study*
    a. Step 1. *Explaining academic or intellectual interest in medicine/dentistry*
    b. Step 2. *Stating one's understanding of medicine/dentistry*
    c. Step 3. *Describing the motivation to become a doctor/dentist due to personal/family experiences*
2. Move 2: *Establishing credentials related to the fields of medicine/dentistry*
    a. Step 1. *Listing academic achievements*
    b. Step 2. *Reviewing research experiences related to medicine*

c. Step 3. *Discussing professional experiences (volunteer and exposure) in clinical settings*

3. Move 3: *Discussing relevant life experiences*
4. Move 4: *Stating future career goal*
5. Move 5: *Describing personality* (pp. 376–378)

Ding (2007) found that the first four moves were compulsorily present in her sample of edited SPs and Move 5 was the elective one. According to her, the first four moves were important to meet the convention and the rhetorical expectations of the genre and to achieve the communicative purposes. An interesting finding of her research was that none of the applicants explicitly showed their alignment of goals and motivations to the intended program or department.

Barton et al. (2004) conducted a genre analysis on 169 SPs submitted to the Medical University of South Carolina as part of the applications for residency in the specialties of surgery, internal medicine, and family medicine. Those SPs were submitted during 1998 to 1999 and written by those candidates who were not rejected based on the grades in their exams and the ranks in the class. This study is different from other studies discussed in this "Literature Review" section in a way that the applicants were already parts of the discourse community (in this case, medical community): they were either third- or fourth-year medical students seeking for four to eight weeks rotating residency programs. On the other hand, in other studies, the applicants wrote their SPs in order to become a part of the discourse community. In order to understand the rhetorical strategies taken by the applicants in their SPs, Barton et al. constructed two questions:

- How do the applicants organize their texts in their SPs considering the rhetorical situation—audience, purpose, context, writer, and media (for example, the expectations of the audiences of internal medicine differ from the audiences of family medicine)?
- How do the audiences make their decisions to choose the most ideal candidate for the residency program?

Barton et al. (2004) resorted to a close reading protocol to understand the moves and steps in the SPs. After categorizing and coding the SPs, they identified the following moves and their associated steps:

1. Move 1: *Opening Move*
    a. Move 1A: *Decision-Making*
        - Step 1: *Decision to enter medicine*
        - Step 2: *Decision to enter specialty*
    b. Move 1B: Personal Background
        - Step 1: *Personal narrative—autobiographical (self), biographical (family)*
        - Step 2: *Illness/injury/death narrative*
        - Step 3: *Doctor/nurse narrative*
        - Step 4: *Work narrative*
        - Step 5: *Sports/hobby narrative*
        - Step 6: *Patient narrative*
        - Step 7: *Travel narrative*

2. Move 2: *Schooling/Training*
    - Step 1: *Elementary/high school/college/graduate/medical school narrative*
    - Step 2: *Rotation narrative*
    - Step 3: *Specialty description*
3. Move 3: *Interests and Activities*
    - Step 1: *Extra-curricular activities/personal interests*
    - Step 2: *Volunteer narrative*
4. Move 4: *Career Goals*
    - Step 1: *Specialty description*
    - Step 2: *Career goals*
    - Step 3: *Personal characteristics* (pp. 83–84)

Barton et al. (2004) found that the applicants constructed four identities in their SPs: a "memorable self" associated with Move 1, an "accomplished self" associated with Move 2, a "well-rounded or worthy self" associated with Move 3, and a "professional self" associated primarily with Move 4, but sometimes overlapped with other moves (p. 100). They argued that the accomplished self is synonymous with personal self, because through this identity the applicants try to showcase their relevant personal backgrounds to the reviewers of the SPs. Overall, they found that all the above-mentioned identities were conveyed in personal terms and the goals of the applicants were established by indicating a suitable match between the personal identities and the perceived view of the practices in the medical discourse community. This strategy of presenting all the identities into

personal terms contradicted Brown's (2004) findings, which included that the applicants constructed two identities—professional and personal—distinctively.

Brown (2004) conducted an analysis on SPs submitted to the doctoral program in psychology in 2002 to understand what distinctive features distinguish a successful SP from an unsuccessful SP. He coded eighteen SPs, nine from successful applicants and nine from unsuccessful applicants. Additionally, he interviewed five faculty members to determine how the audience evaluate this genre. For the quantitative analysis, he divided the texts into t-units, each of which consisted of an independent clause (subject plus predicate) and any dependent or embedded clauses. For the qualitative analysis, he resorted to close reading protocol and interviews to determine how the successful applicants received much acceptance to the admission committee. He identified three moves (in his term, "content areas") in the SPs (pp. 247–248):

- topic RE (research experience: participation in research projects);
- topic RI (research interests: professed research interests for graduate study);
- topic PE (practical experience: volunteer or paid work as a counselor)

Although Brown (2004) never called these topics as moves, based on his approach—a structural inductive discourse analysis following Barton (2002)—I named his "content areas" (Brown, 2004, p. 247) as moves.

Based on findings from the interview, Brown (2004) came up with three binary opposites: intuition vs. empiricism, application vs. basic research, and egocentrism vs. communitarianism that might help distinguish the successful and unsuccessful SPs. He

found that the successful applicants chose to be on the side of empiricism, basic research, and communitarianism. He further noticed that, in their SPs, the successful applicants decided to discuss their topic of research much earlier than the unsuccessful applicants did. Overall, he found that the successful applicants constructed their research selves in their SPs based on the prompt given to the applicants from the psychology department, i.e., "Your personal statement should emphasize your research interests and research experience." This result showed that the applicants formed their SPs according to the admission committee's needs.

Bekins et al. (2004) conducted a study of the SP genre not to point out the typical methods of writing SPs but to offer an understanding of how the applicants perceive this SP genre, how they represent their skills and expertise (professional, extracurricular, academic, etc.) in their SPs, and how the audience (the admission committee) evaluates this genre. In order to achieve this goal, they took a two-part approach: firstly, they conducted a two-day workshop for the creation of SPs by actual student applicants (n=15) from the College of Sciences at a West Coast University, who intended to apply to medical, dental, pharmacy, or veterinary schools and secondly, they made the real audience (the members of the admission committee) evaluate those SPs. Also, they interviewed some of the scholars who were specialists in analyzing professional discourse genre to understand the features of this SP genre. After the interview and secondary research on this genre, they came up with the following five moves:

1. Move 1: *Hook* — an applicant uses personal narratives focusing on his or her one distinctive characteristic or experience to persuade the audience (similar to my *Personal Attributes* step);

2. Move 2: *Program* — an applicant states the reasons for pursuing a specific program or profession or specialization (similar to my *Reasons for Applying* move);
3. Move 3: *Background* — an applicant discusses his or her skills and accomplishments and critically evaluates them (similar to my *Establishing Credentials* move);
4. Move 4: *Self-promotion* — an applicant advertises himself or herself by pointing towards his or her unique qualifications and logically justify those qualities for the candidacy in the intended program; and
5. Move 5: *Projection* — an applicant shows awareness and soundness of choosing a specific field as the career choice (similar to my *Disciplinary and Research Reasons* step).

Bekins et al. (2004) taught these moves to the participants of the workshop. They found that, even after explaining those moves, the participants lacked the detailed explanation of how different life experiences prepared them or what kind of impact those life stories had on them in their SPs. Their findings showed many similarities with Barton et al.'s (2004) study in terms of suggesting that the applicants always tried to express their deep contemplation on their most valuable experiences in the SP genre. However, their findings were different from Brown's (2004) study which revealed that the self-contemplation was not prominent in the SPs submitted to the psychology department.

The last study—that I will discuss here—was conducted by Samraj and Monk (2008). They conducted a genre analysis on SPs submitted to master's programs in linguistics, electrical engineering, and business administration at a US university.

Additionally, they surveyed the websites and books offering information on SPs and interviewed the members of these departments to gain a thorough understanding on this genre. They found the following moves and steps (see Table 1 in "Research Study Design" section for detailed definitions of each move and step):

1. Move 1: *Introduction*
    a. Step 1: *Generalization*
    b. Step 2: *Background*
    c. Step 3: *Goals or decision to apply*
2. Move 2: *Background*
    a. Step 1: *General (Family/Travel etc.)*
    b. Step 2: *Work*
    c. Step 3: *Education*
    d. Step 4: *Research*
    e. Step 5: *Personal Attributes*
3. Move 3: *Reasons for Applying*
    a. Step 1: *Gap in background*
    b. Step 2: *Positive gains (incl. interests)*
    c. Step 3: *Program/university attributes*
    d. Step 4: *Disciplinary and research reasons*
4. Move 4: *Extra-curricular Information*
5. Move 5: *Conclusion*
    a. Step 1: *Goals and/or prediction of future*
    b. Step 2: *Self-evaluation*

I used these above-mentioned moves and steps as my coding scheme while categorizing and coding the SPs in my sample. Although I changed some of the names of the moves and steps and created some additional steps, Samraj and Monk's (2008) moves and steps were found to be relevant to my study. This move- and step-structure was detailed and able to include all possible strategies taken by an applicant to write his or her SP. Samraj and Monk's study was one of the important ones in the analysis of the SP genre because this study evaluated how the strategies of writing SPs changed due to the varying expectations of the admission committee in various disciplines. They found that the same move and step were not used similarly in all those SPs submitted to the three programs; rather, the frequencies and uses of the moves and steps varied based on the varying program goals and admission committee's expectations. They further confirmed the SP genre's semi-occluded nature based on their survey and interview results.

**2.1.1. Common Themes in Previous Studies.** Previous studies showed that the applicants always go by the goals of the department. If the program wants them to highlight their research skills, then the applicants construct their research selves. Some common themes found in the previous studies were as follows:

- **Sharing experience:** Most of the researchers found that the applicants highlight their professional and academic experiences and skills to convince the audience about their candidacy and suitability.
- **Stating reasons:** The applicants frequently mention why they want to apply for their intended program and how their goals match with the program objectives.

- **Stating life-experience:** The applicants talk about their personal background and life experiences contributing to their expertise and decision for applying to the intended program.
- **Narrative:** The applicants use the strategy of storytelling to establish credibility and win the trust of the audience in every move and step.
- **Picturizing a "kind" self:** Most of the applicants connect their reasons for applying to a specific program to their future goals of giving back to society and doing extra-ordinary activities for society.

**2.1.2. Hypothesis and Research Questions.** As Bekins et al. (2004) stated, there are still several discrepancies existing within the SP genre research—for example, some studies found that contemplation on the most profound experiences are predominant in SPs (Barton et al., 2004; Bekins et al., 2004) whereas some studies found that self-reflection is not the key initiative taken by the applicants in their SPs (Brown, 2004). These differences made it difficult to ascertain a group's shared understanding of the SP genre's communicative purposes as well the discourse communities' values, beliefs, and practices. Therefore, in my study, my goal is to provide additional information about the SP genre from the perspective of the applicants' shared understanding in terms of taking certain rhetorical moves and steps. My study will shed light on this shared understanding because the Department of English and Technical Communication gave few instructions about writing an SP and few statements about their expectations before my subjects applied to the program. Still, commonalities in their SPs suggested other influences and a common understanding of the SP genre.

Also, the characteristics of SPs beyond the psychology and medical departments (core science or related science departments/ STEM fields) need to be established in the arts and humanities fields, particularly in the professional degree programs like technical communication. The reason behind this is that the technical communication discourse community is not familiar to many people, and usually applicants from diverse backgrounds try to enter this field without having any concrete idea about the practices of the discourse community.

Based on the previous studies, I designed three hypotheses to test the three assumptions before conducting my study:

1. The frequency of statements about education and professional experience will be higher in my sample of SPs because the technical communication program does not explicitly focus on research;
2. The frequency of statements about monetary gain or other funding-related topics will be higher because the department explicitly requests that an applicant expresses a desire for GTA position; and
3. Narratives, a picture of benevolent self, and personal identities will be predominant in my sample because the technical communication program is located in humanities which are distinct from the sciences. The humanities are related to the study of human society and culture from the perspective of history, language, anthropology, visual arts, philosophy, literature, etc. When we talk about human society, social work comes to mind. Therefore, I can arguably hypothesize that the applicants will establish their benevolent selves in terms of acknowledging their obligations to society. Also, in this program, a personal self

will be more prominent than a professional research or laboratory self because the MS program does not advertise itself as providing strong research training, and I assume that mostly undergraduate students are interested in applying for this master's degree program. Most undergraduate students usually do not possess a strong professional experience.

In order to test these hypotheses, I designed two research questions for this part of the analysis of rhetorical moves in my sample:

1. How are rhetorical moves and steps employed in the SPs submitted to the Department of English and Technical Communication at Missouri S&T?
2. How do the applicants exercise their shared understanding regarding the rhetorical moves and steps in their SPs to establish their "selves"?

## 2.2. RESEARCH STUDY DESIGN

I analyzed a corpus of twenty-four SPs submitted to the English and technical communication department at Missouri University of Science and Technology (Missouri S&T) over the period of 2005-2019 as part of the graduate (MS) application process. My goal was to understand the following rhetorical features of the SP in three separate but related studies:

1. The first study was associated with the analysis of rhetorical moves;
2. The second with the analysis of *pisteis* (rhetorical appeals); and
3. The last with the analysis of *elocutio* (rhetorical style).

In this Section 2, I will discuss the research study design of the analysis of only rhetorical moves. I used both qualitative and quantitative methods (a mixed-method

approach) to investigate the SP genre at a mainly rhetorical level. Qualitative data are usually "nonnumeric" (Hughes & Hayhoe, 2008, p. 78), and the qualitative data was analyzed through categorizing and coding. In my study, particularly in the research design of rhetorical moves, categories and codes are synonymous with moves and steps respectively. Coding refers to the process of breaking down the data into small chunks and categorizing refers to the process of identifying patterns and grouping the data (Hughes & Hayhoe, 2008). Quantitative methods were used when numbers were calculated in my study, for example, the calculation of frequency, percentage, and standard deviation. This study was approved by the Missouri S&T Institutional Review Board (IRB). In this Subsection 2.2, I will describe the data collection technique, unit of analysis, pilot study, and the main study.

**2.2.1. Data Collection.** Over a period of three months (August 2018 - October 2018), I collected a corpus of twenty-seven SPs from both current and former students, including my own SP, submitted to the Department of English and Technical Communication at Missouri S&T. My sample included only successful SPs submitted to the department from 2005 (the year in which the program began) to 2019 (the year in which I began my research for this study). Because some of the current and former students did not allow me to access their SPs, my sample does not include all the successful SPs submitted to the department since 2005.

The SPs used in previous studies were written in response to descriptive prompts. For example, the SPs in Ding's (2007) study were written in response to questions such as the following:

1. Why do you choose to study in this program? Why here and now?
2. What is unique and exceptional about you?
3. Why are you qualified? What kind of relevant experience do you have?
4. What is your future study and career plan?

In Brown's study, the SPs were influenced by a prompt that asked the applicants to talk about their research goals and accomplishments.

The SPs in my sample were written in response to one of two prompts. From 2005 to 2011, applicants were prompted to write a letter of application to the department chair, and in that letter, to state their reasons for applying to the MS program and express their interest in a GTA position if they desired funding. From 2012 to 2019, applicants were prompted as follows: "Statement of Purpose: Please type or paste your personal statement of 1,000 words or less here. "

This "1,000 words or less" prompt specified a maximum length (1,000 words) but seemed to encourage "less." Different applicants perceived this length requirement differently. For example, one applicant wrote just 51 words while another applicant wrote 957 words. In the application portal, the heading used the term "Statement of Purpose," but the instructions used the term "personal statement." Therefore, there was every possible chance that applicants who focused on the words "Statement of Purpose" would perceive this SP genre differently from applicants who focused on the words "personal statement." This study aimed to analyze how other influences—such as the performance of the same social action—drove the applicants to use a specific format, similar content, and similar style in their SPs.

Before data collection began, each subject was sent a contact email (see Appendix A) and a consent form (see Appendix B) attached with that email. The goal of this consent form was to ensure that each subject's participation in this study was voluntary and to let them know that his or her identity would remain confidential. Each subject was sent a request for participation twice or thrice in a one-week gap because emails are easily overlooked or ignored. A total of thirty-five subjects were contacted. Twenty-six of those thirty-five subjects gave me permission to use their SPs in my study. Two subjects sent me their SPs and signed consent forms as replies to my contact email. The other twenty-four subjects gave me permission to retrieve their SPs from their departmental files. After receiving their signed consent forms, my advisor, Dr. Ed Malone, gave me both electronic and paper copies of their SPs.

As SPs are considered confidential documents and universities safeguard these documents carefully, I encrypted the files containing SPs using a Trusted Platform Module (TPM) with 128-bit encryption (NSA level) on my Acer laptop equipped with biometric security, following Vossler (2007). I ensured that access to the files was only restricted to my fingerprint, and only on my laptop. I ensured that nobody had access to the paper copies of SPs. As per the university requirement, I will shred the paper copies and delete the digital copies of the SPs from my laptop after 7 years.

**2.2.2. Unit of Analysis.** For the analysis of rhetorical moves, I considered each sentence as my unit of analysis. A sentence is defined as "a group of words beginning with a capital letter and ending with some mark of end punctuation" (Corbett & Connors, 1999, p. 370). In my unit analysis for sentence, I considered only three punctuation marks, namely a period (.), an exclamation point (!), and a question mark (?), for the

indication of the ending of a sentence. In that way, I investigated full sentences for the coding of rhetorical moves and steps. Each sentence contained at least a subject and a predicate, not just sentence fragments (incomplete sentences or pieces of sentences that have become disconnected from the main clause).

**2.2.3. Pilot Study.** To analyze rhetorical moves, I conducted a pilot study before proceeding with the main study. Conducting a pilot study is recommended practice in a qualitative study (Geisler, 2014). As stated by Blythe (2007), this pilot study helped me encounter any problems that I would not have anticipated in the beginning of my study. The pilot study was conducted by coding the data set primarily according to the predefined categories (moves) and codes (steps) (see Table 2.1) that were identified by Samraj and Monk (2008) in their study of the SP genre.

However, other previous researchers' moves and steps, including Ding (2007) and Lopez-Ferrero and Bach (2016), were considered while coding my sample. This kind of coding, in which a researcher develops specific categories and codes before the start of a research project, is known as deductive coding (Thayer, Evans, Mcbride, Queen, & Spyridakis, 2007). For this rhetorical move analysis in the pilot study, although I did not explicitly resort to inductive coding, in which a researcher creates codes during the study, i.e., the practice of "emergent coding" (Thayer et al., 2007, p. 270), still I kept myself open to the emerging codes. Through this pilot study, I was able to understand the codes present in my sample and after this pilot study, I merged codes that were overlapping or similar to each other and created new codes when the predefined codes did not explain the data.

Table 2.1 Definition of Samraj & Monk's (2008) rhetorical moves and steps

| **Move** | **Definition** | **Step** | **Definition** |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Introduction* | An applicant introduces himself or herself to the audience about his or her general background. | *Generalization* | Generalization of personal, professional, or discipline-related experiences |
| | | *Background* | A snapshot of general background |
| | | *Goals or decision to apply* | Purpose for applying to the program |
| *Background* | An applicant establishes his or her credibility by discussing past experiences. | *General (Family/Travel etc.)* | Suitable family background prepared for pursuing a graduate program |
| | | *Work* | Past professional background and its relevance to the intended program |
| | | *Education* | Past academic background and its relevance to the intended program |
| | | *Research* | Relevant past research skills required for the program |
| | | *Personal Attributes* | Appealing and unique characteristics of the applicants used to convince the audience |

Table 2.1 Definition of Samraj & Monk's (2008) rhetorical moves and steps (cont.)

| **Move** | **Definition** | **Step** | **Definition** |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Reasons for Applying* | An applicant provides suitable reasons for pursuing his or her intended program. | *Gap in background* | Gap in skills |
| | | *Positive gains (incl. interests)* | Fruitful gains and fulfilment of interests that could be fulfilled by the admission |
| | | *Program/university attributes* | University or program's appealing structure as one of the reasons |
| | | *Disciplinary and research reasons* | Value of intended program as a discipline and fulfilment of future research interests |
| *Extra-curricular Information* | An applicant talks about his or her extra-curricular interests and activities. | No Step | |
| *Conclusion* | An applicant concludes his or her SP. | *Goals and/or prediction of future* | Discussion of short- and long-term goals |
| | | *Self-evaluation* | Reinstatement of credentials |

In this pilot study, I randomly selected two subjects' SPs along with mine from the entire set of twenty-seven SPs. These three SPs were not used further for the main study of the analysis of rhetorical moves, rhetorical appeals, and rhetorical style. My SP

was numbered as Subject 1, and the other two SPs were numbered as Subject 2 and Subject 3 in this pilot study. The goals of this pilot study were to understand what rhetorical moves were present in those three SPs and how I should classify the SPs by using basic codes to distinguish the overall themes, followed by a more in-depth, interpretive codes. This in-depth analysis helped me identify the specific trends and patterns (both lexico-grammatical and rhetorical) present in the SPs. The way I identified the rhetorical moves and steps is described below.

**2.2.3.1. Identification of moves.** Before I explain how I applied the predefined moves (categories) and steps (codes) while coding my sample of SPs in the pilot study, I should clarify the procedure that was taken to identify the moves. The moves were identified in the texts considering both the "rhetorical purpose of the texts" and the meaningful units formed by linguistic clues, which indicated "discourse markers (connectors and other metatextual signals), marked themes, tense and modality changes, and introduction of new lexical references" (Connor & Mauranen, 1999, p. 52). As Ding (2007) mentioned, rhetorical moves are connected to rhetorical purposes, so I carefully separated the moves when I found the introduction of new themes. Paragraph division played an important role in identifying moves. Finally, the linguistic strategies taken by the applicants, for example, keywords, helped me determine the change of topics and themes resulting into producing new moves. So each move was identified according to topic or theme, which were *Introduction* (I), *Establishing Credentials* (EC), *Reasons for Applying* (RA), and *Conclusion* (C) based on Samraj and Monk's (2008) predefined moves. I conducted a hand-tagged move analysis following Henry and Roseberry (2001), Upton and Connor (2001), and Ding (2007).

**2.2.3.2. Identification of steps.** Sentence-level coding was conducted to evaluate the communicative purposes of the three SPs in my pilot study. Move analysis is related to the bigger picture of themes present in any genre, but step analysis on the more subtle level gives us a complete idea of rhetorical purposes about a move. For the sentence-level subtle analysis, I resorted to close reading as my primary tool. I read, reread, and then analyzed each sentence line by line to understand how I could associate those sentences to my predefined steps outlined by Samraj and Monk (2008). Like the rhetorical move analysis in my pilot study, in this step analysis, I constantly looked for the emerging themes so that I could associate them with the codes (steps) in my coding scheme. Before 2012, Missouri S&T required the applicants to write their SPs in a letter format addressed to the department chair. In my sample for the pilot study, I found one SP written in letter format and others in non-letter format or essay format lacking salutation, complementary closure, inside address, date, and identifying information (Markel & Selber, 2018). For the sentence level coding in this pilot study, I did not consider the salutation (Dear Dr. X), or the complimentary close (Sincerely, Yours Faithfully). I only considered the main body content of the SPs to determine my subjects' shared understanding.

For this thorough coding analysis, firstly, I tried to understand the goal and context of each sentence. Some of the sentences were difficult to judge without considering the context. For example, Subject 6 wrote, "It gave me a ray of hope." From this sentence, it was difficult for me to analyze what gave that subject a ray of hope. Therefore, I considered the previous and following sentences. Secondly, wherever possible, I connected each sentence with the predetermined steps pointed out by Samraj and Monk (2008). Samraj and Monk identified five rhetorical moves and fourteen steps

in the SPs submitted to the linguistics, electrical engineering, and business administration programs. Finally, through my analysis of SPs, I determined that a few of Samraj and Monks' steps were not applicable to my sample, and I eliminated them from my coding scheme (for example, *General* step under *Background* move). I also created some new steps for my study.

**2.2.3.3. Results of pilot study.** After validating four rhetorical moves (categories) and nineteen steps (codes) in the three SPs in the pilot study, I revised the coding scheme for use in the main study. First, I will give the definitions and examples of these moves and steps. Then I will explain why I renamed some of the steps and created some new steps. I used Samraj and Monk's (2008) definitions of the four moves and the fourteen steps from their study; I devised my own definitions for the newly created steps.

**Definitions and Examples:** In the following list, I name and define the moves and steps and give examples of them:

1. ***Introduction*** **(I):** In this move, the applicant introduces himself or herself by generalizing about his or her life experiences in terms of profession or discipline or personal motivations, giving a snapshot about his or her background, and indicating his or her goals in applying for the MS program.
    a. ***Generalization*****:** The applicant generalizes about personal, professional, or discipline related experiences in this step.
    **Example:** "Communication is an important part of any form of business transaction, knowledge transfer and even day to day life dealings whether it is personal or professional."

**b.** ***Background*****:** The applicant gives a snapshot about his or her background. This step is different from the *Generalization* step as in this step the applicant talks about his or her specific background in terms of personal or professional experience without making any generalized comment about life or discipline. This step is different from *Education* and *Work* steps in the way that it does not offer any concrete details regarding the specific education details and professional experience and skills. Rather, this step gives an idea about how an applicant's life history prepared him or her to pursue a graduate program and to make decisions about previous studies and future aspirations.

**Example: "**My senior high-school education took me to a village in the Western Region of Ghana."

**c.** ***Goals/Decision to Apply*****:** In this step, the applicant expresses his or her decision to apply for this program by explaining goals or objectives in the form of a statement. This step is related to a purpose statement and usually expressed in one or two sentences. The goal for identifying this step was to understand if there was any explicit purpose statement in my sample. If not, then how did the applicants express their desire to apply for the MS program?

**Example:** "I am writing to apply for admissions into the Technical Communications master program."

2. ***Establishing Credentials*** **(EC):** In this move, the applicants picturize their relevant selves (Bhatia, 1993). The applicants' two main rhetorical goals for this move are to showcase why they are desirable for the intended program and why they desire to apply for the intended program.

    a. ***Work*****:** In this step, the applicants argue why their professional background is a perfect fit for this program or should be valued by the program, or how their professional backgrounds shape their goals to apply for the program.

    **Example:** "I have over 10 years of experience in teaching mining, petroleum , geomatics, mechanical, electrical, and geological engineering students in subjects such as introduction to mining, mine machinery, mine ventilation, environmental management, alluvial and ocean mining, drilling and blasting, probability and statistics, technical communication and report writing, operations research, mining laws and regulations, and mine health and safety."

    b. ***Education*****:** In this step, the applicants argue why and how their academic background is befitting the program by highlighting their education. Even if the academic background is not relevant to the degree program, the applicants try establishing credibility by showing how the previous academic background might be linked to the degree and/or proving that the previous background would build up the current MS degree.

**Example:** "Being a recent graduate in technical communication, I feel like I am very qualified for this position. I have had the opportunity to take classes that are relevant to technical communication."

c. ***Past Research*:** In this step, the applicants discuss their relevant or irrelevant previous research experiences to convince the audience that they are capable of conducting research.

   **Example:** "I also have research experience from my undergrad project work, which is being developed into a paper for publication."

d. ***Relevant Experience (GTA)*:** In this step, the applicants discuss their relevant experiences particularly related to a graduate teaching assistant position. The applicants focus on their previous teaching, mentoring, and presentation skills and expertise that can be used in the GTA position in this step. This step is different from the *Work* and *Education* steps by having particular emphasis on only GTA related experience.

   **Example:** "I have been undertaking teaching assignments at various levels. These assignments have shaped my teaching abilities and taught me how to relate to students."

e. ***Personal Attributes*:** In this step, the applicants discuss their unique characteristics or qualifications that will be attractive to the admission committee and that make an applicant stand out from

other candidates. According to Bekins et al. (2004) and Monk (2004), this step is similar to "self-promotion" and the generalized skills mentioned in this step make the applicants appealing to the readers.

**Example:** "From childhood, I have displayed an apt interest in various modes of communication, such as prose, writing, verse writing, oratory, and drawing and painting. I have won many prizes at the school level, and all island level in these fields. I have also won several international awards for my achievements in drawing and painting and some of them are the certificate of distinction-Kanagawa prize in the 121 Biennial World Kanagawa Children's Art Exhibition 2003 (Japan), a prize for painting in Shankar's International Competition 2001(India), and a certificate of distinction-gold prize in the Eco-Art exhibition organized by AEPO-Japan 2002."

3. ***Reasons for Applying (RA)*:** In this move, the applicants provide suitable and relevant reasons and personal motivations (for example, life history) for pursuing the MS program, applying to the GTA position, and engaging with the discipline (technical communication). This move is different from the EC move because in the RA move applicants provide reasons regarding why the intended program is worth pursuing in terms of quality and what kind of benefits can be obtained from pursuing this program. On the other hand, in the EC move, the applicants' main focus is on

explaining why they are a good fit for the intended program in terms of skills, qualifications, and expertise.

a. ***Gap in Background*:** In this step, the applicants highlight a lack of skills or expertise related to technical communication (particularly communication) which they believe can be overcome through the intended program. In other words, the applicants make a connection of the gap between their previous education (undergraduate or graduate studies) and the intended program. They explicitly mention that in their previous education they were not able to achieve the desired skill required particularly for joining a workforce or getting a promotion in a job. This gap is not highlighted in terms of the break in professional or educational career, but it is highlighted in terms of the lack of necessary skills.

   **Example:** "However, when it came to creating technical reports or documentation, I often found myself at loss of words to best express these IT specifications. I was a specialist in IT, but a non-specialist in creating perfect custom reports, manuals and technical documentation. I then, realized towards the end of my Masters program that the skills I had acquired were more generic and my interest in the field of Information Systems had not yet achieved fruition. This triggered my inspiration to pursue a second Masters in the field of Technical Communication."

**b.** ***Positive Gains (MS)*:** In this step, the applicants state what kind of fruitful benefits they would derive by pursuing the intended program and how their interests are matching with the interests of the intended program, faculty research area, and university goals. This step is usually a continuation of the *Gap in Background* step, because in the previous step the applicants highlight the necessity to fulfill a gap in skills and in this step, the applicants highlight the way that gap can be fulfilled.

**Example:** "To advance my career, I started considering a degree of expertise in the field, especially pertaining to current developments and techniques in technical communication, with a view to applying them as an Engineering Technical Writer. A Master of Science program will help me channel my efforts in the proper manner."

**c.** ***Positive Gains (GTA)*:** In this step, the applicants state what kinds of fruitful benefits they would derive by being a GTA in the department and how their interests are matching with the goals of GTA position.

**Example:** "Getting the opportunity of being a GTA would be a true blessing for me. It would allow me to gain work experience in technical communication while earning money for school."

**d.** ***Program/University Attributes*:** In this step, the applicants state their intent to pursue only this particular intended program—not

just some other programs at other universities. Therefore, in this step, more than discipline specific interest, the applicants aspire to be associated with the intended program and the university. For showing this intention, they discuss how the program structure in a specific university is so appealing, how the faculties' research interests are superior and matching their interests, how some valuable courses are offered, how internships are encouraged in the department, and so on. In other words, in this step, audience focus is the principal factor which supports Swales and Feak's (1994) statement about genre. They described genre as a combination of four factors, namely, audience, purpose, organization, and presentation, in which the audience was the prime factor.

**Example:** "Honestly, I was pleased with the school's educational policies and its diverse environment as well as the exclusive GTA opportunity offered while studying in which I can learn from both professors and students of many nations, not to talk of the internship and career development programs put in place."

**e.** ***Disciplinary and Research Reasons*:** In this step, the applicants discuss their interest for the intended program in terms of the discipline. They eulogize the discipline's versatility, practical implication in the job or corporate world, possible research opportunities, etc.

**Example: "**In any organizational setting, the requisite for success is an effective method of communication that further drives efficient action. This not only means that a certain set of information has to be conveyed but also means that the process of conveyance must include tools and strategies that will make the information clearer and better to understand. This is where Technical Communication comes into picture: with a general focus on what to communicate, it lays specific focus on how and when to effectively communicate it."

**f.** ***Family Reasons*****:** In this step, the applicants discuss their family or personal experiences that contributed to take a decision like pursuing a graduate study.

**Example: "**In January 2016, I relocated to Rolla with my husband. We have spent this past year and a half becoming acquainted with this area, meeting wonderful people, and adjusting to our new jobs. Throughout this past year, I have had many valuable opportunities to build my professional skills and put down roots in the Rolla area, and I'm, excited at the prospect of pursuing graduate school here."

**g.** ***Monetary*****:** In this step, the applicants express their interest for the intended program due to the financial support associated with it (for example, assistantship and fellowship). They explicitly state that they do not have sufficient financial background to continue

with graduate study, but the intended program's assistantship opportunity is the prime reason for application.

**Example:** "Earning money for school will allow me to reach my full potential as a graduate student and allow me to focus on the most important thing—education."

4. ***Conclusion* (C):** In this move, the applicants reiterate their intent for applying to the intended program, restate any short- or long-term goals that can be achieved after the graduate program, point out the future scope of success because of the program, promote themselves for one last time by bringing the audiences' attention to the applicants' suitability to the program, and end politely to bring the SP to a close. This move usually appears in the last paragraph.

    a. ***Goals/Predictions of Future*:** In this step, the applicants point out the scope for future success which is possible after completing the program. In this way, this step is intertwined with the short- and long-term goals of the applicants.

    **Example:** "Coming from an entrepreneurial family, my long-term plan is to set up a technical communication consultancy for startups in India and abroad. I am sure the skills and knowledge I acquire in the MS in Technical Communication degree will play a major role in my success in the future ventures."

b. ***Self-evaluation*:** In this step, the applicants sum up their qualities for the last time and bring the audiences' attention to their suitability for the program.

   **Example: "**With these abilities, I promise to provide my best effort and sincerity to be a good Graduate Teaching Assistant."

c. ***Expressing Gratitude/Call-to-action/Ending Politely*:** In this step, the applicants express their gratitude to the admission committee for taking the time to review their applications and/or state their intention to be admitted to the program and/or end politely to bring the SP to a close.

   **Example:** "Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to hearing from you."

**Explanation for Renaming Moves and Creating New Steps:** From this pilot study, I noticed that four out of the five rhetorical moves identified by Samraj and Monk (2008) were present in the SPs: *Introduction* (I), *Background* (B), *Reasons for Applying* (RA), and *Conclusion* (C). The *Extra Curricular Information* move was absent in the three SPs. Although I found discussion about personal interests in the sample of my pilot study, I still did not put those discussions under the *Extra Curricular Information* move. The reason was that the personal interests were already interspersed with the *Positive Gains* step and those interests were synchronous with the communicative goals of the RA move, i.e., the program would give an opportunity to fulfill their interests. Barton et al. (2004) placed hobbies, personal interests, and volunteer activities within a single move called *Interests and Activities*. In my sample, I found that the hobbies were used as the

applicants' attractive qualifications. Therefore, in my sample, the step called *Personal Attributes* step subsumed those hobbies. However, the communicative goals of hobbies and personal interests were different. Hobbies were used to establish credibility about some unique qualifications synchronous with the EC move and personal interests were used to point out the gains that could be obtained from the program to achieve those interests synchronous with the RA move.

The I move was similar to the *Opening Move* found by Barton et al. (2004) in the SPs written for admission to the residency programs in medical schools. I changed the name of the *Background* (B) move to *Establishing Credentials* (EC) move, which I borrowed from Ding (2007). The reason for this change was firstly to reduce confusion with the *Background* step under I move. Secondly, the name *Establishing Credentials* (EC) seemed to be most appropriate in my sample because in this move the applicants established credibility by stating their academic, professional, and unique qualifications. In the EC and RA moves, I focused on how the applicants explained their qualifications and how the applicants offered reasons for applying to both the MS program and GTA position respectively. Although the GTA position was included within the MS program, still it was worth examining what kinds of approaches the applicants took separately to provide reasons for applying to the overall MS program and the GTA position. The MS program is associated with education whereas GTA position (assistantship) is associated with both financial support and teaching opportunity. The Department of English and Technical Communication at Missouri S&T strongly encourages prospective students to express a desire to be a GTA in the application materials particularly in the personal statement. Among the three SPs in my pilot study, I noticed that only one applicant

(Subject 3) did not express any interest in a GTA position. From the context of that applicant's SP, I learned that the applicant was already working, so a GTA position was not required for him or her.

I further observed that thirteen of fourteen steps found by Samraj and Monk (2008) were present in my sample of SPs used in the pilot study:

- *Generalization;*
- *Background;*
- *Goals or Decision to Apply;*
- *Work;*
- *Education;*
- *Personal Attributes;*
- *Past Research;*
- *Gap in Background;*
- *Positive Gains;*
- *Program or University Attributes;*
- *Disciplinary and Research Reasons;*
- *Self-evaluation;* and
- *Goals and/or Prediction of Future*.

I changed the name of the *Research* step to *Past Research* under EC move because there was another step called *Disciplinary and Research reasons* under RA move. Therefore, in order to avoid confusion between those two steps, I called the *Research* step as *Past Research* in which the applicants showcased their previous relevant research skills (past aspect). On the other hand, in the *Disciplinary and Research Reasons*

step under RA move, the applicants expressed their desire to do research in the MS program (future aspect) and used that step as one of the reasons for applying, not as establishing credentials, to the MS program.

I also found that the applicants always separately mentioned the gains they would get from the MS program and a GTA position. So instead of considering the *Positive Gains* as just one step, I came up with two steps: *Positive Gains (MS)* and *Positive Gains (GTA)* under RA move.

Additionally, based on the results of the pilot study, I created another step called *Monetary* under RA move, which was missing in Samraj and Monk's (2008) study. In this step, the applicants explicitly stated their needs for financial support from the GTA position, explained how the GTA position would help them pursue the intended program and/or live in Missouri, and used that step as one of the reasons for applying to the MS program. In other words, some of the applicants made a tacit threat that if they were not given funding, they would not join the program. In one sense, this step could have been considered as a sub-step of *Positive Gains*, because in *Monetary* step the applicants considered the assistantship as one of the short-term gains in the MS program. Obtaining short-term gains is one of the characteristics of *Positive Gains* step. However, in the *Positive Gains* step, the general interest or the short-term gains are subjective, not time-specific, and broad in scope, and in the *Monetary* step the gains are specific, urgent (time-specific), and narrow in scope (mainly financial gain). For example, Subject 7 wrote,

> "I am amazed by the skills that I can acquire by studying Technical Communication" (*Positive Gains* MS).

Subject 7 again wrote,

> "Besides, I am an international student from a middle-class family. This teaching opportunity will be a great help for me to support my education financially" (*Positive Gains GTA*).

The subject discussed the gains in skills, which were uncountable and could be applied after the MS program (possibly in the workplace or higher education) in the *Positive Gains (MS)* step, whereas the subject talked about the monetary gains (objective) that was context- and time-specific. The gains could be utilized only during the MS program because the assistantship associated with GTA position had nothing to do with the future employment. Therefore, it was worth separating the *Positive Gains* and *Monetary* steps because the applicants, in the *Monetary* step, employed an explicit rhetorical strategy to convince the admission committee, to whom they did not hesitate to convey that they needed money to sustain and continue their education.

Also, I created another step called *Family Reasons* under the RA move, in which step the applicants provided some sort of family grounds to apply for the graduate program and family or personal experiences that contributed to making decision to pursue a graduate study. This step is similar to Ding's (2007) *Describing the Motivation to Become a Doctor/Dentist due to Personal or Family Experiences* step under *Explaining the Reason to Pursue the Proposed Study* move (p. 376).

Finally, I created another step *Expressing Gratitude*/*Call-to-action*/*Ending Politely* under the *Conclusion* (C) move. I borrowed the name *Ending Politely* from Lopez-Ferrero and Bach (2016), although in my study the name *Ending Politely* did not exactly mean what it meant in Lopez-Ferrero and Bach's (2016) study. In their study, this

term meant a complementary closure, such as sincerely, yours faithfully, and usually, used in a letter format to come for polite ending. In my study, this term meant how politely the applicants closed their SPs either by thanking the readers or by urging the readers to contact them for any further queries. According to Markel and Selber (2018), this kind of ending is used in job application letters, and the applicants take this approach to emphasize what they want their audiences to do after reading their letters (call-to-action). In my sample for the pilot study, I found this step; for example, Subject 3 wrote, "I look forward to hearing from you." Also, I found that the applicants wrote sentences like, "Thank you for reviewing my application" in their C moves. Therefore, I created and named the step *Expressing Gratitude*/*Call-to-action*/*Ending Politely* through which the applicants either try to express gratitude to the readers for their time or try to hint that they want to hear back from the department or try to show their politeness. This new step was quite different from the other two steps under the C move mentioned by Samraj and Monk (2008).

**2.2.4. The Main Research Study.** After validating the categories and codes, I proceeded with the extensive study on twenty-four SPs from October 30 to November 30, 2019. For the main study, I hired two coders from the Missouri S&T campus because a two-person coding protocol helps establish reliability which is related to consistency (Geisler, 2004). Coders were not required to code in a restricted environment because they were given detailed training in the use of categories and codes developed from the pilot study. Also, I conducted several norming sessions with Coder 2 before actual coding with the samples that I used in my pilot study. I was not able to do several norming

sessions with Coder 1 due to time conflicts. A brief description of the coders, coders' training procedure, and interrater reliability is given below.

**2.2.4.1. Coders.** Both the coders completed their master's in technical communication from Missouri S&T, and currently they were working in the office of graduate studies. As a technical communication graduate, both of them were familiar with qualitative study, particularly the categorizing and coding procedure. Coder 1 already completed a MS thesis by conducting a qualitative study (categorizing and coding) and Coder 2 had previous experience of coding with different faculty members in the English and technical communication department at Missouri S&T. The native language of both is English.

**2.2.4.2. Coder training.** I provided training to Coder 1 and Coder 2 separately in the Curtis Laws Wilson Library (MST library) on October 15, 2019 and October 21, 2019 respectively. At first, I provided them with ten hard copies of randomly selected SPs from my main study sample of twenty-four SPs, handouts of coding tables (see Appendix C), and detailed explanation of the categories and codes. I carefully redacted any identifying information on the SPs, for example, applicant's name, country, and previous institution, in order to maintain the confidentiality of my subjects. For the categories and codes, I gave a definition and an example for each category and code in their handouts validated from my pilot study.

Then I proceeded with a training session of almost two hours for each coder. I first started with a brief explanation and the purpose of my study. Then I explained to them the rhetorical moves (categories) and steps (codes) with suitable examples validated from the pilot study. Also, I briefly talked about SPs and the unit of analysis in those SPs.

After the explanation, they were given a few sentences from the SPs to code in order to understand if the three of us were on the same page and if the codes were mutually exclusive. According to Geisler (2004), mutual exclusiveness of codes is essential in the coding process.

We did code-norming sessions for two more times after the pilot study. Once we completed the code-norming sessions, the coders were given two weeks to complete the coding process. During the coding process, I did not guide them regarding how to code, but I answered whenever they needed further explanation about any specific code. Within two weeks, both the coders completed their coding and returned me the handouts of their coding tables with the coded data. Then, I started calculating the intercoder or interrater reliability. The purpose of calculating interrater reliability in my study was to understand if my understanding of the codes was similar to each coder's understanding of the codes.

**2.2.4.3. Interrater reliability.** Inter-rater reliability is the degree to which two or more raters or coders agree. Kreutzer, Caplan, and DeLuca (2011) state that inter-rater reliability "addresses the issue of consistency of the implementation of a rating system." High inter-rater reliability refers to the strong agreement between two raters indicating higher consistency and more credible research results. Low inter-rater reliability refers to the lower degree of agreement between two raters indicating less consistency and credible research results. Even with using the same coding structure, two or more coders' coding can subject to differ. Therefore, a high inter-rater reliability is important in a qualitative study (Benoit & Holbert, 2008). There are many ways to calculate inter-rater reliability, for example, percentage agreement, Cohen's kappa, product-moment

correlation, and intraclass correlation coefficient. In my study, I used percentage agreement to measure the inter-rater reliability.

Percent or simple agreement is the simplest form of interrater reliability in which the proportion of coded units between two coders can be calculated. One of the advantages of percent agreement is that it is easy to calculate, simple, and intuitive (Lombard, Snyder-Duch, & Bracken, 2002). To calculate the percent agreement, I tabulated the result in MS Excel. I first counted the number of ratings in agreement. Then I counted the total number of ratings. After that, I divided the total by the number in agreement to get a fraction and finally, I converted the fraction to a percentage. I used the following formula in MS Excel to calculate percent agreement:

$$P_A = NA/ (NA + ND) X 100$$

$P_A$ is the percent agreement, NA is the number of agreements, and ND is the number of disagreements.

The interrater reliability of me with the two coders was 79.8%, but Coder 2 and I reached an agreement level of 89.97% on the codes of those ten SPs. Table 2.2 shows the agreement level with Coder 2. I reached an agreement level of 69.7% with Coder 1. Geisler (2003) noted that 85% agreement level in a qualitative study is generally acceptable. The reason behind a low level of agreement with Coder 1 could be because Coder 1 and I were not able to do several norming sessions due to time crunch and unavailability. I wish I could have done more norming sessions with both the coders in order to achieve a greater level of agreements, and I believe if I included the coders during my pilot study, then I would have achieved a higher-agreement level.

Table 2.2 Percent (%) agreement with Coder 2

| **Subject's SP** | **Percent (%) Agreement with Coder 2** |
|---|---|
| 1 | 93.75 |
| 2 | 81.25 |
| 3 | 88.9 |
| 4 | 90 |
| 5 | 58 |
| 6 | 90.25 |
| 7 | 100 |
| 8 | 87.5 |
| 9 | 88 |
| 10 | 95 |
| **Total** | **89.97** |

Once I was done with coding the entire corpus of twenty-four SPs with the revised coding scheme validated from the pilot study, I proceeded with data analysis both qualitatively and quantitatively.

## 2.3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, I will present the coding results for the rhetorical move and step analysis from the main study. I will present my results in three parts. In the first part, I will discuss the qualitative and quantitative analysis of each move and step present within my study. For each move and step, I calculated the relative frequency in terms of my overall sample (twenty-four SPs) and each SP. Relative frequency refers to the number of sentences coded under a certain code (step) and category (move) from the analyzed data. Based on the relative frequency, I deduced general patterns observed in the data. In the

second part, I will discuss the relevance of storytelling in my sample of SPs. Finally, in the third part, I will point out the summary of major trends obtained from the rhetorical move and step analysis.

Considering previous studies on rhetorical move and step analysis in the SP genre, including Samraj and Monk (2008) and Ding (2007), I expected at the beginning of my study that the SP genre includes two principal rhetorical moves: *Establishing Credentials* (EC) and *Reasons for Applying* (RA). I further assumed that applicants would devote a large portion of their SPs to discuss their educations, since in my sample the applicants' intention was to be admitted for a master's program. Usually, most of the applicants enter their master's right after their undergraduate educations. Thus, most of the applicants might not have a lot of professional experience at the time of application. This fact also led me to assume that the applicants would not have a lot of research experience before coming to the master's program. Therefore, I expected that applicants would devote a small portion to the *Past Research* step. Furthermore, SPs are written according to the goals of the intended program or department (Samraj & Monk, 2008). The Department of English and Technical Communication at Missouri S&T asked the prospective candidates to express interest about GTA position (not in the prompt, but on their website). The website does not explicitly say that the department would provide extensive research training. Therefore, I assumed that the *Past Research* step would be less frequent than other steps in the EC move. The department's goal further led me to expect that the candidates would try to state their suitability for the GTA position more than the other steps.

Regarding the RA move, I assumed that the applicants would express their motivation to pursue a graduate study mostly due to having fruitful gains and the structure of the university or the intended program, based on the analysis of SPs submitted to the linguistics program in Samraj and Monk's (2008) study. Although I expected a predominance of the EC and RA moves, still I assumed that the applicants would take a moment to introduce themselves by talking about their personal background, i.e., *Introduction* (I) move and to conclude properly by either thanking the audience or reestablishing their selves one last time, i.e., *Conclusion* (C) move.

**2.3.1. Quantitative and Qualitative Analysis of Move and Step.** Twenty-four SPs were coded into 608 units (total number of sentences in twenty-four SPs), with 25.33 average units per SP. Table 2.3 summarizes the number and percentage of SPs containing a specific move and its associated steps. All the moves and steps obtained from my pilot study were present in my main study. Table 2.4 summarizes the frequency of different moves in each subject's SP.

Table 2.3 Number and percentage (%) of SPs that use different rhetorical moves and steps

| **Rhetorical Move (Category)** | **Number of SPs in Which Move Is Present** | **Percentage (%) of Total (24 SPs) in Which Move Is Present** | **Step (Code)** | **Number of SPs in Which Step Is Present** | **Percentage (%) of Total (24 SPs) in Which Step Is Present** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Introduction (I) | 23 | 95.83 | Generalization | 5 | 20.83 |

Table 2.3 Number and percentage (%) of SPs that use different rhetorical moves and steps (cont.)

| **Rhetorical Move (Category)** | **Number of SPs in Which Move Is Present** | **Percentage (%) of Total (24 SPs) in Which Move Is Present** | **Step (Code)** | **Number of SPs in Which Step Is Present** | **Percentage (%) of Total (24 SPs) in Which Step Is Present** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Background | 17 | 70.83 |
| | | | Goals/Decision to Apply | 18 | 75 |
| Establishing Credentials (EC) | 23 | 95.83 | Work | 13 | 54.17 |
| | | | Education | 21 | 87.5 |
| | | | Past Research | 5 | 20.83 |
| | | | Relevant Experience (GTA) | 7 | 29.17 |
| | | | Personal Attributes | 13 | 54.17 |
| Reasons for Applying (RA) | 22 | 91.67 | Gap in Background | 7 | 29.17 |
| | | | Positive Gains (MS) | 19 | 79.17 |
| | | | Positive Gains (GTA) | 9 | 37.5 |
| | | | Program/University Attributes | 13 | 54.17 |
| | | | Disciplinary and Research Reasons | 9 | 37.5 |
| | | | Family Reasons | 1 | 4.17 |

Table 2.3 Number and percentage (%) of SPs that use different rhetorical moves and steps (cont.)

| **Rhetorical Move (Category)** | **Number of SPs in Which Move Is Present** | **Percentage (%) of Total (24 SPs) in Which Move Is Present** | **Step (Code)** | **Number of SPs in Which Step Is Present** | **Percentage (%) of Total (24 SPs) in Which Step Is Present** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Monetary Reasons | 3 | 12.5 |
| Conclusion (C) | 22 | 91.67 | Goals/Predictions of Future | 10 | 41.67 |
| | | | Self-evaluation | 11 | 45.83 |
| | | | Expressing Gratitude/Call-to action/Ending Politely | 12 | 50 |

Table 2.4 Percentage of I, EC, RA, and C moves in each subject's SP

| **Subject's SP** | **Percentage of I Move in Subject's SP** | **Percentage of EC Move in Subject's SP** | **Percentage of RA Move in Subject's SP** | **Percentage of C Move in Subject's SP** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Subject 1 | 10.81 | 45.95 | 35.14 | 8.11 |
| Subject 2 | 20 | 48 | 28 | 4 |
| Subject 3 | 9.76 | 73.17 | 14.63 | 2.44 |
| Subject 4 | 12.5 | 43.75 | 37.5 | 6.25 |
| Subject 5 | 0 | 75 | 0 | 25 |
| Subject 6 | 18.75 | 18.75 | 50 | 12.5 |
| Subject 7 | 24.44 | 13.33 | 53.33 | 8.89 |
| Subject 8 | 3.57 | 57.14 | 28.57 | 10.71 |
| Subject 9 | 25 | 25 | 50 | 0 |
| Subject 10 | 6.25 | 68.75 | 12.5 | 12.5 |

Table 2.4 Percentage of I, EC, RA, and C moves in each subject's SP (cont.)

| **Subject's SP** | **Percentage of I Move in Subject's SP** | **Percentage of EC Move in Subject's SP** | **Percentage of RA Move in Subject's SP** | **Percentage of C Move in Subject's SP** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Subject 11 | 60 | 0 | 40 | 0 |
| Subject 12 | 22.22 | 51.85 | 14.81 | 11.11 |
| Subject 13 | 30.77 | 53.85 | 0 | 15.38 |
| Subject 14 | 47.62 | 9.52 | 38.09 | 4.76 |
| Subject 15 | 12.5 | 64.58 | 20.83 | 2.08 |
| Subject 16 | 16.67 | 50 | 26.67 | 6.67 |
| Subject 17 | 15.63 | 56.25 | 15.63 | 12.5 |
| Subject 18 | 18.18 | 47.72 | 18.18 | 15.91 |
| Subject 19 | 26.66 | 40 | 26.66 | 6.67 |
| Subject 20 | 16.66 | 62.5 | 4.17 | 16.66 |
| Subject 21 | 22.22 | 44.44 | 22.22 | 11.11 |
| Subject 22 | 27.66 | 36.17 | 27.66 | 8.51 |
| Subject 23 | 30.77 | 38.46 | 23.08 | 7.69 |
| Subject 24 | 3.13 | 23.13 | 37.5 | 6.25 |
| **Average** | **20.07** | **43.64** | **26.05** | **8.99** |

Table 2.3 suggests that twenty-three SPs (95.83%) included I and EC moves and twenty-two SPs (91.67%) included RA and C moves. These moves appeared in those SPs at least once. Table 2.4 indicates that the EC move is the most dominant one (43.64%) in my sample, which is similar to the SPs written for medical programs in Ding's (2007) study, where 41% T-units were devoted to this move. Although most of the SPs included all the moves, all the steps associated with those moves were not present in twenty-four SPs. A detailed analysis of moves and steps based on Table 2.3 and Table 2.4 can be found below.

**2.3.1.1. I move and associated step analysis.** As mentioned earlier, 95.83% subjects used the *Introduction* (I) move, which suggests that the applicants did not jump into their education and professional background right at the beginning of their SPs. First, they set the stage by explaining the general background or general knowledge that prepared them to pursue their previous studies or professions and to apply for the intended program. This move helped the audience get to know the applicants in a personal way—a way that was not possible from other moves like EC and RA. Because the EC and RA moves are associated with education and professional backgrounds, they can only reveal an applicant's external qualifications. But this I move revealed the applicants' inner desire and qualifications for pursuing a graduate program, which could not be expressed through GPA, years of professional experience, and so on.

A significant number of sentences, i.e., 20.08% on average in each SP, were devoted to this I move (see Table 2.4), which was the third dominant move after the EC and RA moves in my sample. In the I move, the *Background* step is the most dominant one in terms of number of sentences used for this step, and the *Goals/Decision to Apply* step is the most dominant one in terms of frequency of selection of this step by the subjects.

Table 2.3 shows that most of the applicants (75%) expressed their purpose to apply for their intended program explicitly in the form of a purpose statement. By one widely available definition, a purpose statement refers to "a declarative sentence which summarizes the specific topic and goals of a document" ("Writing Effective Purpose Statements," n.d.). In the SPs in my sample, applicants summarized their goals of writing the SPs in order to be admitted to the MS program and chosen for an assistantship (in this

case, a graduate teaching assistantship). For example, many subjects wrote, “I would like to apply for the MS program in technical communication at your esteemed university” or “I am interested in applying for the graduate teaching assistantship available in your department.” In none of the SPs did these two goals appear simultaneously in a single paragraph; rather, in all of the SPs, both these goals appeared in different paragraphs. The goal to be admitted to the MS program usually appeared in the first paragraph, whereas the goal to be chosen for GTA position usually appeared in the second or third paragraph, depending on the SP’s length and paragraphing structure. The *Goals/Decision to Apply* step played an important role in Samraj and Monk’s (2008) study under the I move, as it did in my study where this step was used to communicate the whole agenda of writing the SP. The applicants wanted to ensure what the readers could expect from their SPs in this step.

Figure 2.1 illustrates that five subjects decided to devote 100% of their sentences to the *Goals/Decision to Apply* step under the I move. Except for three subjects, i.e., Subjects 7, 16, and 17, who devoted only 18.18%, 20%, and 20% of their I-move sentences to this step, most of the subjects devoted at least 25% of their I-move sentences to this step. As this step was expressed usually in one or two declarative sentences, Figure 2.1 illustrates that most of the subjects did not devote a large portion of their overall SPs to this step. On average, eighteen subjects devoted 47.39% of their I-move sentences to this step, and 6.26% of their SP sentences to this step.

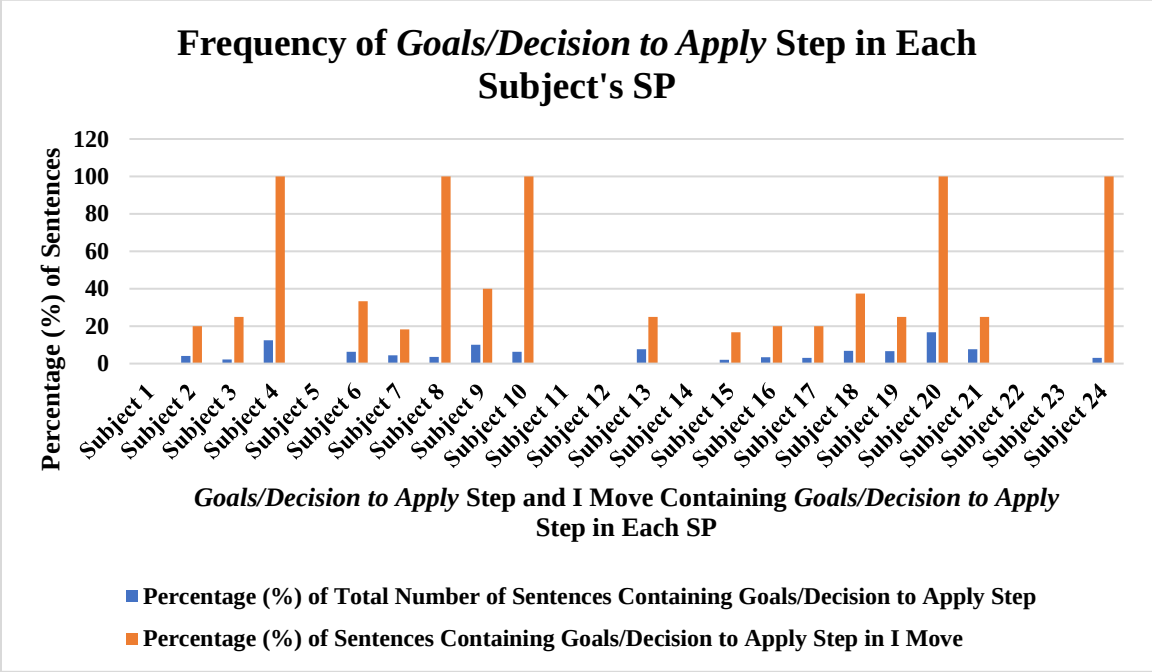



Figure 2.1 Frequency of *Goals/Decision to Apply* step in each subject's SP. Five subjects devoted 100% of their sentences to this step in the I move, and most of the subjects devoted at least 25% of their sentences to this step in their I move. On average, eighteen subjects devoted 6.26% of all their sentences to this step and 47.39% of their I-move sentences to it in their SPs.

In the I move, the subjects did not rely very much on generalizing about personal, professional, or discipline-related information—a conclusion that is suggested by my finding that only five SPs have the *Generalization* step (20.83%) out of twenty-four SPs. Figure 2.2 illustrates that two of the five subjects, Subject 2 and Subject 12, devoted a lot of their I-move sentences—80% and 66.67% respectively—to this step, while the other three subjects devoted around 25% of their I-move sentences to this step. On average, those five subjects devoted 44.47% of their I-move sentences to this step. However, a high standard deviation (27.81) pointed towards potential outliers (Subject 2 and Subject 12) and raised a question about the significance of this step in understanding the

communicative goal of this SP genre—a question whether this step is required in the SPs to convince the audience.

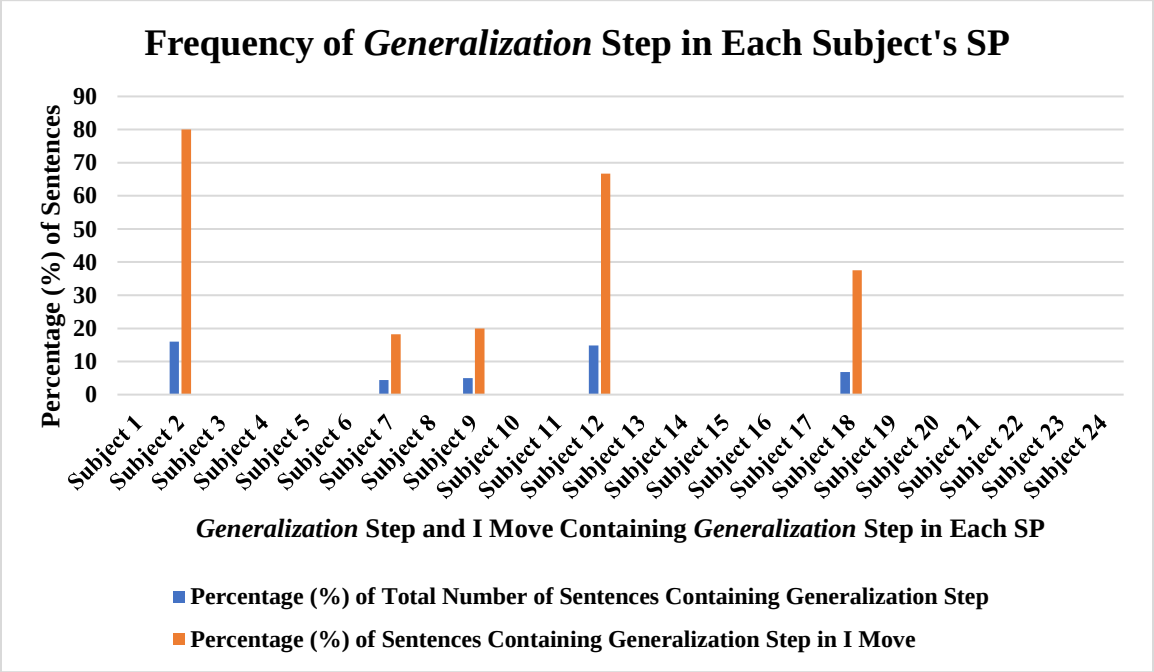



Figure 2.2 Frequency of *Generalization* step in each subject's SP. Only five subjects used this step, and except Subject 2 and Subject 12, other subjects did not devote too many sentences in this step in their I move and entire SP. On average, those five subjects devoted 44.47% of their I-move sentences to this step and 9.42% of all their sentences to it in their SPs.

Besides, on average, only 9.42% of the five subjects' sentences were devoted to this step in their SPs. Samraj and Monk (2008) similarly found that this step was used infrequently by the applicants. In fact, only two SPs out of twelve written for the linguistics, two out of nine for the electrical engineering, and four out of fourteen for the business administration doctoral programs contained this step. In other studies, including

Ding (2007)'s study, this step is mostly absent. Therefore, it could be assumed that the applicants in my sample as well as Samraj and Monk (2008) and other researchers' samples had a shared understanding that in this genre an applicant should not rely on this step to persuade the audience.

Instead of the *Generalization* step, the applicants found it useful to discuss their general background through the *Background* step while introducing themselves to the admission committee. Seventeen SPs, i.e., 71% (see Table 2.3), included this *Background* step—a result that contrasted with the findings of Samraj and Monk's (2008) study. In their study, this step did not appear in many of the SPs related to linguistics applications, and they did not find this step to be crucial in understanding the characteristics of the SP genre. In my sample of SPs, most of the applicants' embracing this *Background* step showed that the applicants used the rhetorical strategy of narratives (a primary characteristic of the *Background* step) to first give a general account of their personal history and then give their specific credentials about education, professional and research experiences, unique characteristics, and fruitful gains and interests in the *Work*, *Education*, *Personal Attributes*, *Past Research*, and *Positive Gains* steps. This step played an important role in Barton et al.'s (2004) study as well; they stated that this step was frequently used by the applicants in their SPs. This step was similar to the move called *Discussing relevant life experiences* found in Ding's (2007) study—a move which occurred at least once in each edited and unedited SPs. She found that the applicants used this move to cover up their lack of relevant background (clinical experience) to persuade the audience.

My study similarly found the importance of this step in terms of the applicants' shared understanding of the SP genre because they were given very little indication regarding what to mention in the SPs, but decided to use this step as one of the primary strategies to fill in the gaps between their previous background (which was in most cases irrelevant to technical communication) and the intended program. Some examples of the *Background* step are given below from my sample:

Subject 1 wrote,

> "My senior High School Education took me to a village in the Western Region of Ghana."

Subject 13 wrote,

> "My interest in the MS Technical Communication program was informed by a desire to contribute to knowledge generation in my field and communicating effectively with Stakeholders and others who are interested in my work through the use of appropriate and varying tools for communication."

Subject 15 wrote,

> "My primary interest is in the field of Technical Communication, an area I have been passionate about since my undergraduate days."

Although the above-quoted sentences did not discuss specific academic qualifications (GPA, awards, achievements, and skills) or professional qualifications (work experience, expertise, skills, and awards), still they seemed to act as one of the persuasive strategies by compelling the admission committee to think what made the applicants interested in technical communication and what special personal history could

substantiate the applicant's capability of staying in a rural place like Rolla (Subject 1: experience in living in the rural area). This step further substantiated the trustworthiness of the applicant by showing that the decision to apply to the MS program was not a casual or whimsical or money-driven (assistantship) decision. The decision resulted from and was motivated by the applicants' early days of college experience or childhood affinities. Therefore, this step could be one of the important determining factors for admission to the MS program and played an important role to evaluate the shared understanding of the SP genre.

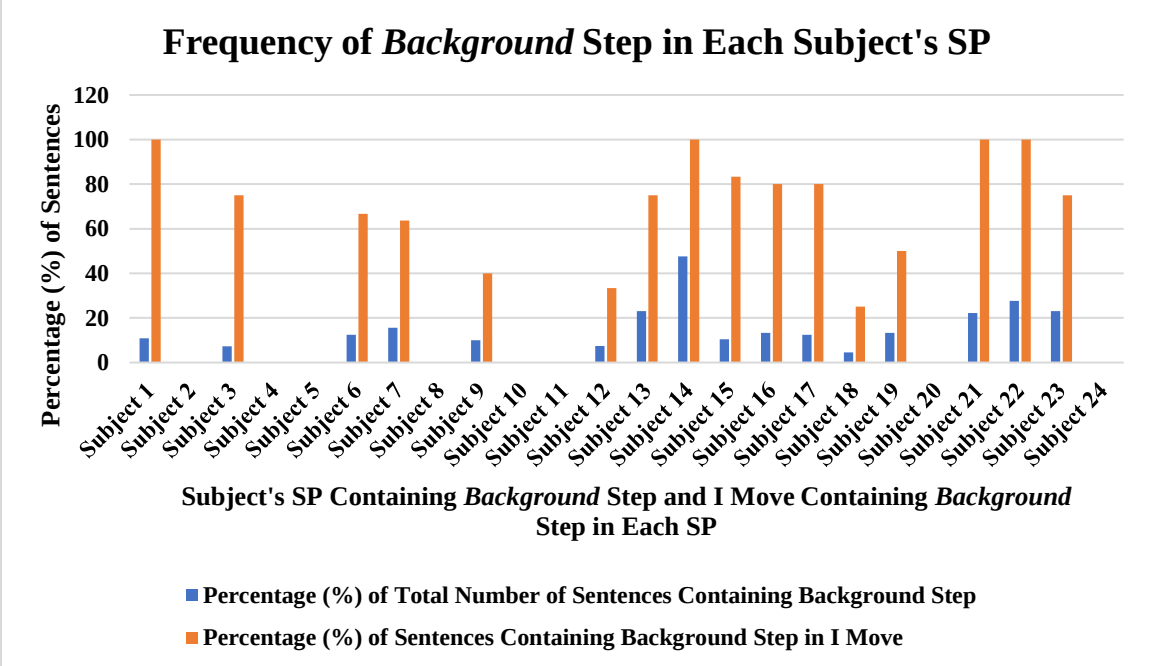



Figure 2.3 Frequency of *Background* step in each subject's SP. Being one of the dominant steps in I move, this step contains highest percentage (71.69%) of sentences in the I move. Four subjects devoted 100% of their sentences to this step in the I move, and most of the subjects devoted at least 40% sentences to this step in their I move. On average, seventeen subjects devoted 71.69% of their I-move sentences to this step and 16.34% of all their sentences to it in their SPs.

The significance of this *Background* step is suggested by the quantitative analysis as well. Figure 2.3 illustrates that each of four subjects (Subject 1, Subject 14, Subject 21, and Subject 22) decided to devote 100% of their sentences to this step in the I move, and except for Subject 18, each of the subjects among the sixteen applicants devoted more than 40% of their I-move sentences to this step. On average, 71.69% of the seventeen subjects' I-move sentences were devoted to this step, and 16.34% of all their sentences in those seventeen SPs were devoted to this step.

**2.3.1.2. EC move and associated step analysis.** The *Establishing Credentials* (EC) move was utilized by the applicants to point out all their past accomplishments, which were further tied to their future aspirations expressed in the RA move. Overall, twenty-three subjects, i.e., 95.83% of all SPs (see Table 2.3), used the EC move, and on average, 43.64% of all sentences in the SPs were devoted to this move (see Table 2.4). Except for two outliers, Subject 11 and Subject 14, who devoted just 0% and 9.52% of their sentences to this move, most of the applicants devoted more than 40% of theirs to this move (see Table 2.4). A high standard deviation of 20.17 suggested that those subjects were potential outliers.

As discussed earlier, the EC move is the most dominant one among all the moves, and *Education* is the most developed step within this EC move (see Figure 2.4) in terms of the number of applicants who used this step. This step was used by twenty-one subjects (87.5%) in their SPs (see Table 2.3). Figure 2.4 illustrates that even one applicant (Subject 14) decided to establish his or her credentials only through this step. On average, 17.82% of all sentences in twenty-one SPs were devoted to the *Education* step; however, a high standard deviation (12.65) suggested the possible outliers, Subject

14 and Subject 15, who devoted 100% and 78% of their sentences to this *Education* step respectively. On the other hand, 37.21% of the twenty-one subjects' EC-move sentences, on average, were devoted to the *Education* step. In this case also, a high standard deviation (24.09) suggested the possible outliers—Subject 1 and Subject 20—devoting 11.76% and 5.89% of their EC-move sentences to the *Education* step respectively.

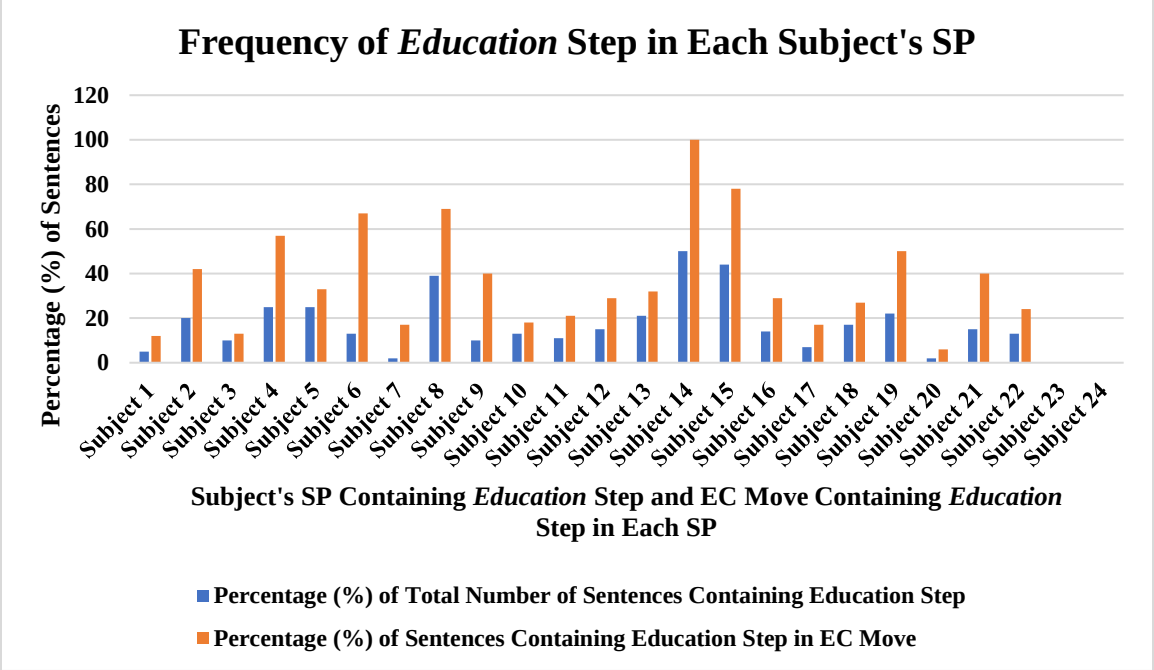



Figure 2.4 Frequency of *Education* step in each subject's SP. One subject devoted 100% of his or her sentences to this step in the EC move. Twenty-one subjects, on average, devoted 17.82% of all their sentences and 37.21% of their EC-move sentences to this step.

Therefore, the results matched my assumption regarding the *Education* step, which was prevalent in my sample. In this step, most of the applicants mentioned their

academic backgrounds in terms of previous courses, certificates, degrees, GPA, expertise and skills acquired from previous degrees, awards, and achievements to prove their credibility for the MS program. One notable finding in this step was that, more than discussing the courses or GPA (only three applicants mentioned their GPA and highlighted their GPA as one of their unique characteristics), the applicants focused on skills and expertise, such as design, presentation, interpersonal communication, and analytical skills, which they had acquired from their previous academic programs. The reason behind this strategy was that most of the applicants came from diverse disciplines, for example, management, chemical engineering, psychology, and English, which were not related to technical communication (only two applicants completed their undergraduate degrees in technical communication). Therefore, there was no point for them to discuss their previous courses; rather, it was their shared decision to highlight their soft skills, which were closely related to the technical communication field. This strategy also suggested that the applicants conducted enough research about the technical communication field before writing their SPs.

Under the EC move, the *Work* step was present in thirteen SPs, i.e., 54.17% of all SPs (see Table 2.3 & Figure 2.5). In this step, the applicants tried to prove their candidacy for their intended program by discussing their professional experience, specific skills and expertise, years of experience, and awards and affiliations. Almost all the applicants to the linguistics department in Samraj and Monk's (2008) study used the *Work* step in their SPs. Ding (2007) also suggested that the *Professional* step was the most developed one in her corpora of SPs, and that step helped the applicants gain admission to the academic programs of medicine or dentistry.

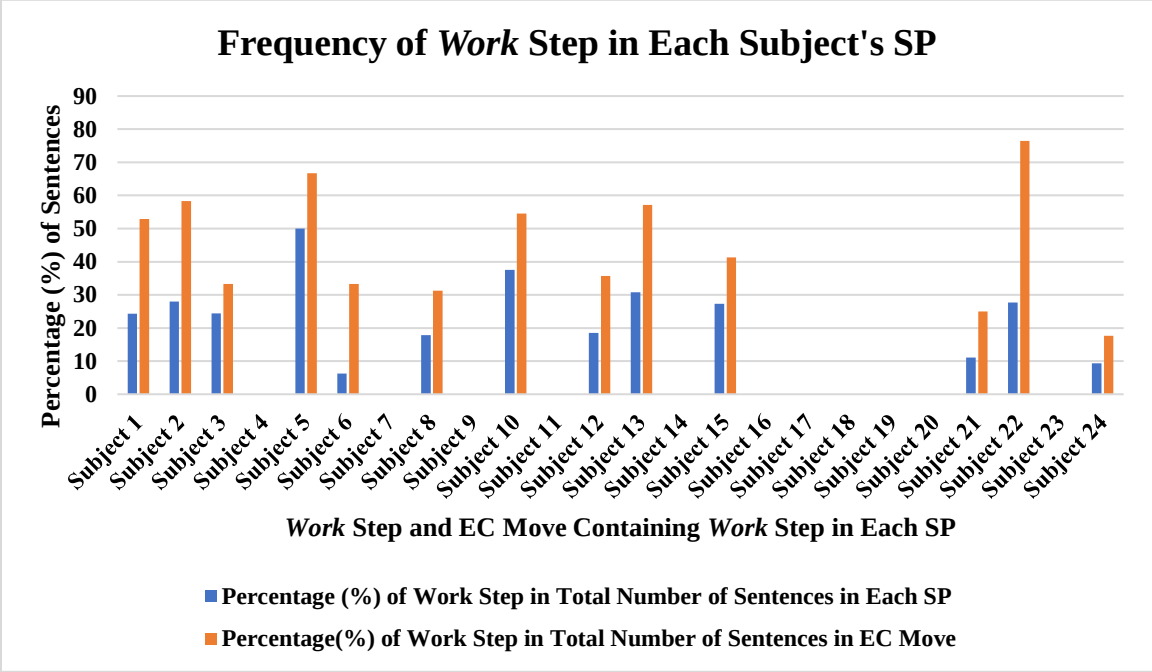



Figure 2.5 Frequency of *Work* step in each subject's SP. While no subject devoted 100% sentences to this step, thirteen subjects who had a lot of professional experience that could be connected to the technical communication field devoted 24.08% of their sentences to this step in their SPs. Those thirteen subjects devoted 44.91% of their EC-move sentences to this step. In terms of frequency, this step is the most developed one.

In my sample of SPs, the *Work* step was used less often than the *Education* step probably for three reasons. Firstly, I created another step *Relevant Experience (GTA)* that also included the applicants' professional expertise and skills, but those expertise and skills were only related to establishing credentials for a GTA position, not particularly for admission to the MS program. However, even if I had merged these two steps, the percentage of SPs containing the *Work* step still would have been less than the percentage of SPs containing the *Education* step. Secondly, most of the applicants in my sample were undergraduates with very limited work experience. Even when they had experience, that experience was not related to technical communication field. Lastly, the Department

of English and Technical Communication does not require any specific professional experience for the applicants to be admitted to the graduate program ("English and Technical Communication," n.d.). Therefore, the strategy of not emphasizing the *Work* step by highlighting irrelevant professional experience is synchronous with the goals of the department.

A notable finding for the *Work* step in my study was that although this step was not used by almost half of the applicants in my sample, still those who chose to use this step, utilized it generously. For example, on average, 24.08% of the sentences in those thirteen SPs were devoted to the *Work* step, and 44.91% of the EC-move sentences in the same SPs were devoted to this step; the thirteen subjects used the *Work* step with greater frequency than the *Education* step (see Figure 2.5). Therefore, in terms of frequency, the *Work* step was the most developed one.

On close scrutiny, I found that the applicants who chose to highlight their professional expertise had several years of experience. And that experience, although not in the field of technical communication, could be easily linked to the technical communication field. Because, before entering the technical communication program, most of the students have a vague idea that technical communication is mostly related to any communication-oriented field, for example, business communication, marketing communication, and mediated communication. When we talk about communication, some very common skills come to our minds, such as presentation and interpersonal skills. Most of my subjects highlighted these skills because they thought they were relevant to the technical communication field. Those applicants with huge experience

ignored *Education* step. For example, Subject 1 devoted nine sentences to the *Work* step and just two sentences to the *Education* step.

Under the EC move, the *Personal Attributes* step was present in thirteen SPs, i.e., 54.17% of all SPs (see Table 2.3), which was similarly distributed as the *Work* step. *Personal Attributes* are associated with presenting unique or appealing qualifications to the audience to establish attractiveness and credibility. This step is similar to Ding's (2007) *Describing Personality* move that was a "more elective one" than the other "quasi-obligatory" moves (p. 378). Ding found that this move was not used by the applicants frequently in both the edited and unedited SPs—a result, which matches my sample of SPs. The *Personal Attributes* step was also less frequently used in Samraj and Monk's (2008) sample of SPs. This step is similar to the *Self-promotion* move in Bekins et al. (2004) and Monk's (2004) study, but I did not create any separate *Self-promotion* move because an applicant tries to promote himself or herself through almost every move and step. As I mentioned previously, this SP belongs to an academic promotional genre (Bhatia, 1993).

Figure 2.6 illustrates that, except for Subject 14, the other subjects in my study did not devote a huge portion of their SPs to the *Personal Attributes* step. On average, 15.5% of all sentences in thirteen subjects' SPs was devoted to this step, and 36.19% of the EC-move sentences in their SPs were devoted to it. However, a high standard deviation in both these cases, 7.47 and 23.09 respectively, indicated towards a potential outlier, i.e., Subject 14 who devoted 100% of his or her sentences to this step. Another potential outlier could be Subject 15 who devoted only 6.45% of his or her EC-move

sentences to this step. A further study is still warranted to reach a concrete conclusion about the frequency of this step in both the overall SPs and the EC move.

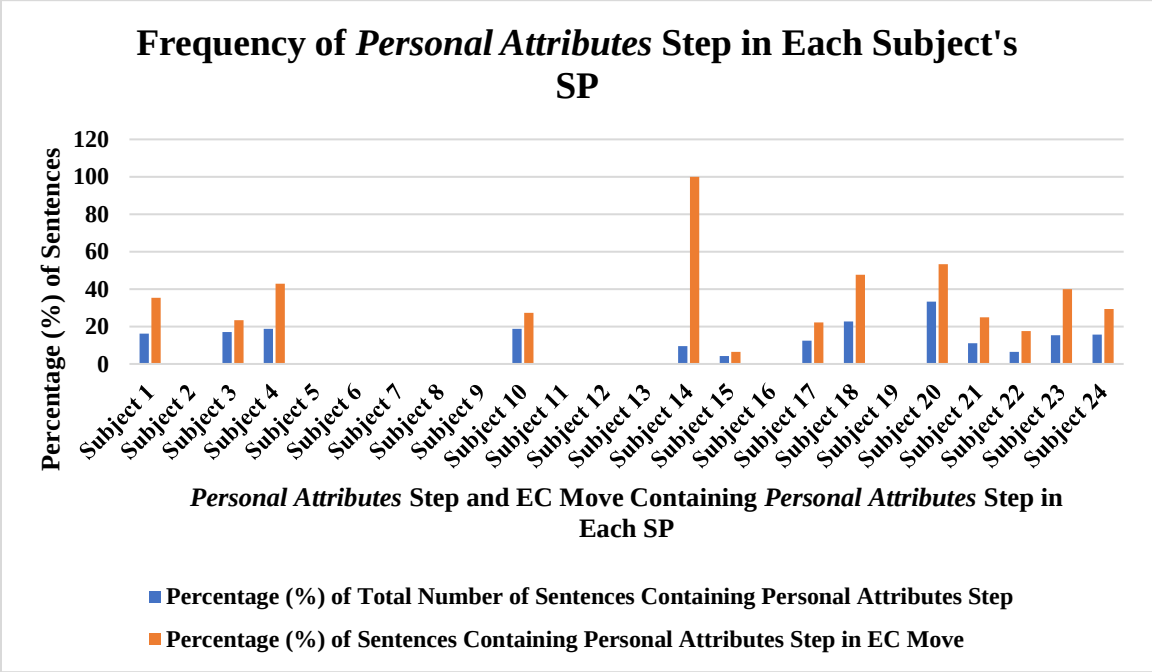



Figure 2.6 Frequency of *Personal Attributes* step in each subject's SP. Except for Subject 14 and 15, who devoted his or her 100% and 6.45% EC-move sentences to this step, the other eleven subjects, on average, devoted 33% of their EC-move sentences to this step. On average, 15.5% of all sentences in thirteen subjects' SPs were devoted to this step.

Another thing I noticed was that applicants who did not have previous professional experience and whose academic backgrounds were completely distant from technical communication—for example, whose backgrounds were in engineering or psychology—resorted to this step for establishing their suitability for the program. For example, Subject 4 wrote,

> "I am a dedicated worker, and it is my nature to be both detailed and helpful."

This subject pointed out his or her personal attributes but did not relate them to any professional experience or educational background. In fact, in this subject's SP, there was no comment on professional experience or educational background; thus, we are not able to understand how the subject acquired this unique attribute—what kind of previous academic background or professional experience made this subject a dedicated worker and a detail-oriented and helpful person. But at least this subject's claim about his or her personal attribute could intrigue the admission committee because any graduate program requires their students to be dedicated and detail oriented.

Under the EC move, the *Past Research* step was present in only five SPs, i.e., 20.83% of all SPs (see Table 2.3), and this result matched my assumption. In my sample, most of the applicants did not rely heavily on this step to establish their suitability for the intended program. Figure 2.7 further illustrates that, on average, the five applicants, who chose to use this step, devoted only 8.33% of all their sentences to the *Past Research* step, and 13.33% of the EC-move sentences to this step in their SPs. Noticeably, among those five subjects three (Subject 3, Subject 13, and Subject 15) of them devoted 15% of their EC-move sentences to this step on average, whereas the other two subjects devoted only around 5% of their EC-move sentences to this step. Overall, in my sample, the subjects did not find any value in this step because the department did not require research experience from their prospective students. Moreover, the applicants probably felt hesitant to show off their irrelevant research experience, if possessed. Among the five

subjects, only one or two applicants who had research experience relevant to technical communication (for example, Subject 3) used this step for self-promotion in their SPs.

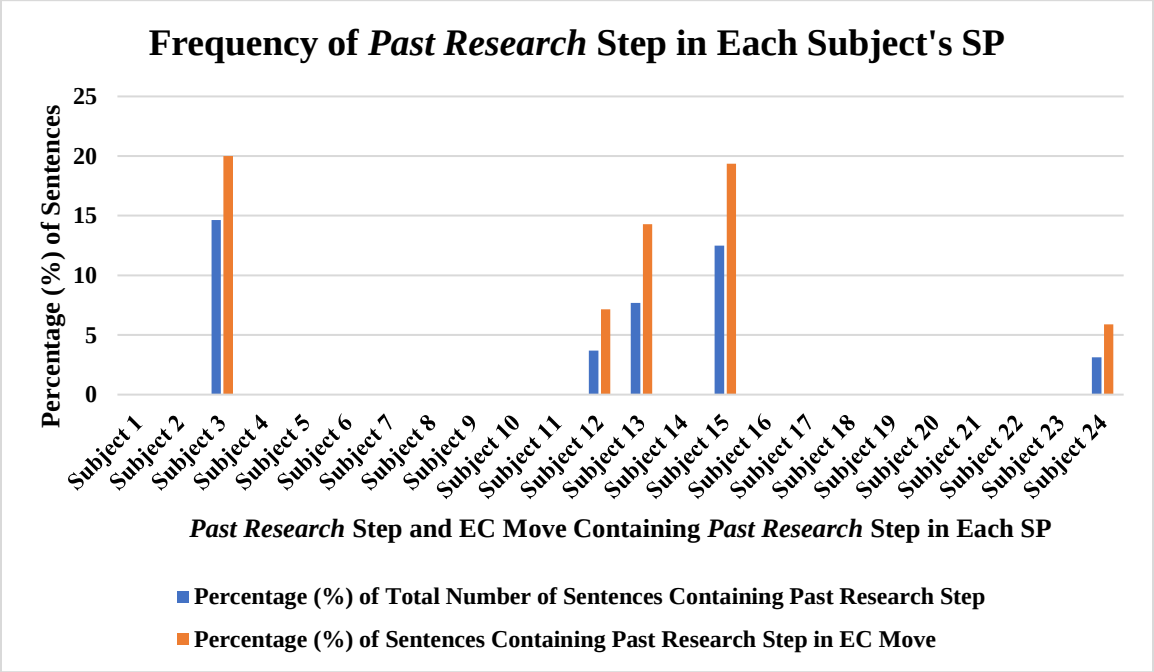



Figure 2.7 Frequency of *Past Research* step in each subject's SP. Only five subjects used this step, and among those five subjects, only three of them used this step substantively, i.e., on average, they devoted 15% of their EC-move sentences to this step. On average, the five subjects devoted 8.33% of all their sentences to this step.

At the beginning of my study, I assumed that the applicants would put special emphasis on highlighting their relevant skills and expertise for the GTA position because the department explicitly requested that applicants express a desire to become a GTA and point out their relevant skills. To my surprise, only seven subjects (29.17% of all SPs) included this step (see Table 2.3) in their SPs, in which the applicants discuss their

relevant experience (a combination of academic, professional, and research expertise and skills) in regard to the GTA position. Figure 2.8 illustrates that, five of the seven subjects (Subject 9 and Subject 19 excepted) did not devote too many sentences to this step. On average, in those seven SPs, 14.12% of all sentences were devoted to this step, and 39.43% of the EC-move sentences were devoted to it. However, those two outliers (Subject 9 and Subject 19) made the standard deviation high (28.68).

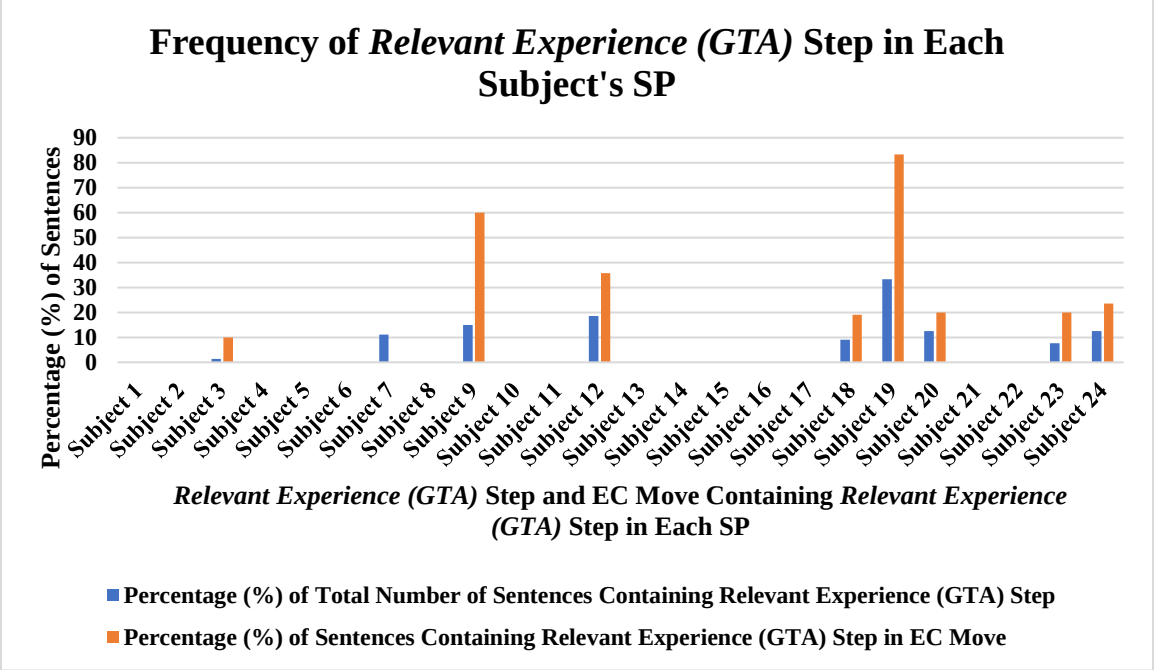



Figure 2.8 Frequency of *Relevant Experience (GTA)* step in each subject's SP. Among the seven subjects, Subject 19 and Subject 9 devoted 83.33% and 60% of their EC-move sentences to this step. The other five subjects did not devote more than 25% of their EC-move sentences to this step. While, on average, 14.12% of all sentences in those seven SPs were devoted to this *Relevant Experience (GTA)* step, 39.43% of EC-move sentences were devoted to this step in those SPs.

Among those seven subjects, mostly the alumni applicants (six subjects) who wrote letter-format SPs indicated their suitability for a GTA position. Those applicants' strategy could be due to the fact that, at some point in the past (between the years of 2005 and 2012), all the applicants to the MS program were obligated to write about their suitability for a GTA position in a letter format. During that period, the department did not explicitly require that applicants write about their suitability for admission to the MS program. However, after that period (after 2012), the department stopped giving explicit information for the applicants on the application portal to express a desire for a GTA position.

When the only instruction given to the SP writer was to explain why he or she wanted a GTA position, the applicant focused on pointing out the relevant experience that could persuade the audience about their suitability for a GTA position. However, when the instruction given to the SP writer became simply "write 1,000 words or less" without explicitly mentioning how much of the SP should be devoted to the MS program admission and how much should be devoted to a GTA position, the applicants focused more on the program admission rather than the GTA position. This decision might be due to an implicit shared understanding that program admission should be prioritized or a shared assumption that admission would automatically lead to GTA position at some point in time.

**2.3.1.3. RA move and associated step analysis.** The *Reasons for Applying* (RA) move is the second most developed one: twenty-two applicants out of twenty-four, i.e., 91.67% of all SPs (see Table 2.3), provided reliable reasons to pursue a graduate program at Missouri S&T. Before 2012, the English and technical communication department

used to give a prompt to the prospective students to write about why they were applying for the MS in technical communication program in the SPs. But, for more than a few years (2012 to 2019), no such prompt has been given to the applicants. Still, most of the subjects in my sample (both current and former students in the department) decided to choose this move in their SPs and devote a significant number of sentences to this move. The basic difference between the RA and EC moves is that the RA move is associated with future fulfillments (which are only possible by getting an admission to the MS in technical communication program) and the EC move is associated with the past fulfillments or accomplishments. On average, 26.05% of the sentences in all SPs were devoted to this move (see Table 2.4). In this move, *Positive Gains (MS)* was the most dominant step, which was used by 79.17% subjects.

Under the RA move, the *Gap in Background* step was used by only seven subjects (29.17%) in their SPs (see Table 2.3). Figure 2.9 illustrates that in general, Subject 2 and Subject 15 excepted, the five subjects devoted an average of 4.76% SP sentences to this step, and the average number of sentences (14.49%) devoted to this step in those five subjects' RA moves was low, also. Overall, on average, in those seven SPs, 6.87% of all sentences were devoted to this step, and 24.22% of RA-move sentences were devoted to it. Except Subject 2 and Subject 15, who devoted 57.14% and 40% sentences to this step respectively, other subjects relied on other steps to provide suitable reasons for applying to the MS program. This step was found in ten out of fourteen SPs written for business administration program in Samraj and Monk's (2008) study—a distribution higher than in my sample. However, in SPs written to the linguistics and electrical engineering departments, this step was not prevalent (Samraj & Monk, 2008).

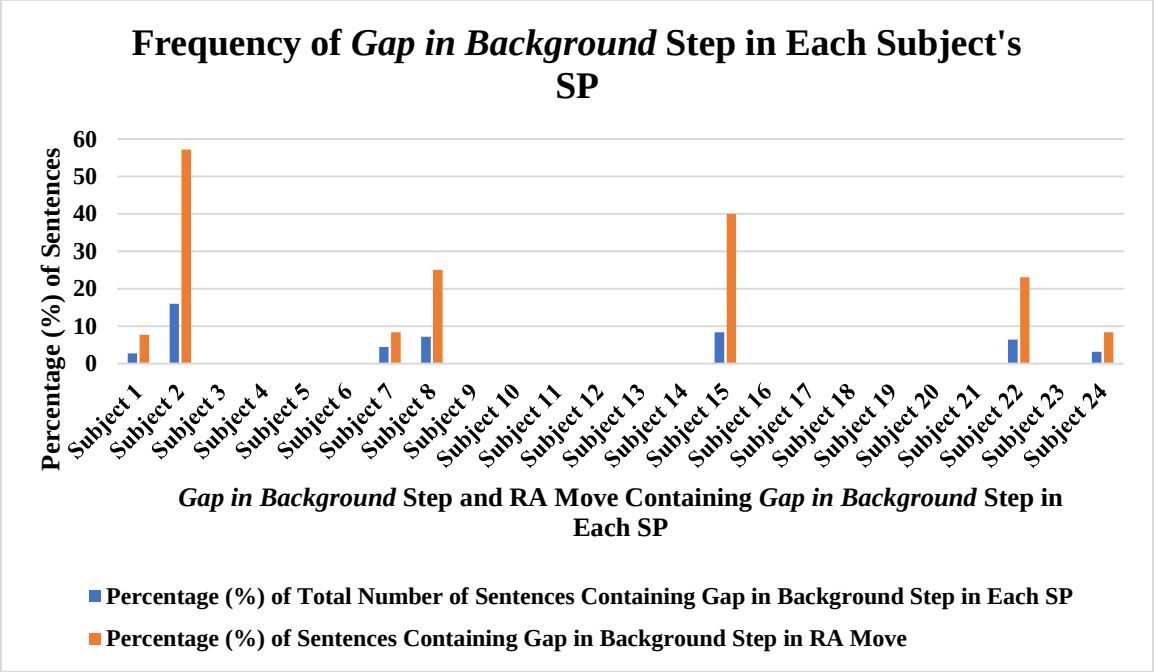



Figure 2.9 Frequency of *Gap in Background* step in each subject's SP. Only Subject 2 and Subject 15 devoted 57.14% and 40% of their RA-move sentences to this step on average. The other five subjects devoted only 24.22% of their RA-move sentences to this step on average. While, on average, 6.87% of all sentences in the seven SPs were devoted to this step, Subject 2 and Subject 15 excepted, 4.76% of all sentences in the five SPs were devoted to it.

Similarly, in my sample, the *Gap in Background* step was not predominant, and this step, whenever present, was developed as it was in the SPs for the business administration program in Samraj and Monk's (2008) study. The applicants always moved from their educational and professional background to point out a gap in their skills and expertise, for example, lack of presentation, written, verbal, and visual communication, and web-based communication, which might be one of the important factors for their future career. This gap in skills and expertise led to a statement of how this MS program would further benefit them in filling that gap. This step most of the time

led to the *Positive Gains (MS)* step in which they related their lack of skills to their short-term goals and interests.

As I discussed in the "Research Study Design" section, the *Positive Gains* step was divided into two parts: *Positive Gains (MS)* and *Positive Gains (GTA)*. Nineteen subjects, i.e., 79.17% of all SPs (see Table 2.3), used *Positive Gains (MS)* step (the most developed step in the RA move) to express how the MS program would be fruitful for them to achieve their short-term goals and follow their interests. On the other hand, only nine subjects, i.e., 37.5% of all SPs (see Table 2.3), explicitly expressed the gains from the GTA program by using the step called *Positive Gains (GTA)*. Figure 2.10 shows that four subjects devoted 100% of their RA-move sentences to the *Positive Gains (MS)* step in order to convince the audience. On average, 52.93% of the nineteen subject's RA-move sentences were devoted to this *Positive Gains (MS)* step in my sample, and 14.15% of all their sentences were devoted to it.

Likewise, Figure 2.11 illustrates that one subject (Subject 23) devoted 100% of his or her RA-move sentences to the *Positive Gains (GTA)* step in order to discuss the expected gains from a GTA position. Two subjects (Subject 6 and Subject 24) devoted 50% of their RA-move sentences to this step, and they devoted 25% and 18.75% of all their SP sentences to it respectively. The remaining six subjects devoted 14.75% of their RA-move sentences to this step and 5.36% of all their sentences to it. Interestingly, three subjects (Subject 7, Subject 16, and Subject 18) devoted 12.5% of their RA-move sentences to this step. On average, the nine subjects devoted 11% of all their SP sentences to this step, and 32.06% of all their RA-move sentences to it.

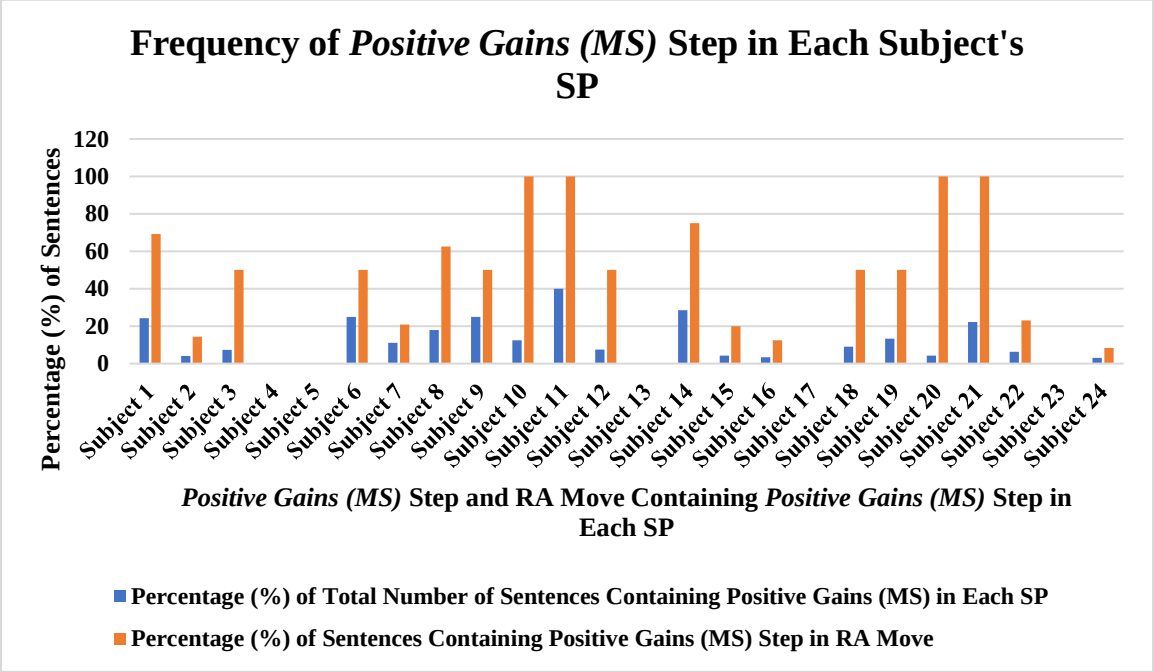



Figure 2.10 Frequency of *Positive Gains (MS)* step in each subject's SP. Four subjects (Subject 10, Subject 11, Subject 20, and Subject 21) devoted 100% of their RA-move sentences to this step, and on average, nineteen subjects devoted 52.93% of their RA-move sentences to it. On average, 14.15% of all sentences in those nineteen subjects' SPs were devoted to this step.

The subjects used the *Positive Gains (MS)* and *Positive Gains (GTA)* steps to match their general interests and short-term goals to the program and department. More subjects used these two steps in combination than they used any single step. Their heavy reliance on these two steps indicates that the subjects wanted to enhance the audience's trust by indicating their personal motivations (interests and future gains) for this particular program while establishing their credentials. However, the applicants discussed achieving their short-term goals more in relation to the MS program than in relation to the GTA position. This finding mirrors a similar finding with respect to the *Establishing Credentials* (EC) move, in which the subjects chose to talk about their past credentials

more in relation to the MS program than to the GTA position. The applicants mostly prioritized their admission to the MS program over obtaining funding and teaching experience through a GTA position. Most likely, the applicants thought that admission to the MS program would eventually open the door for a GTA position.

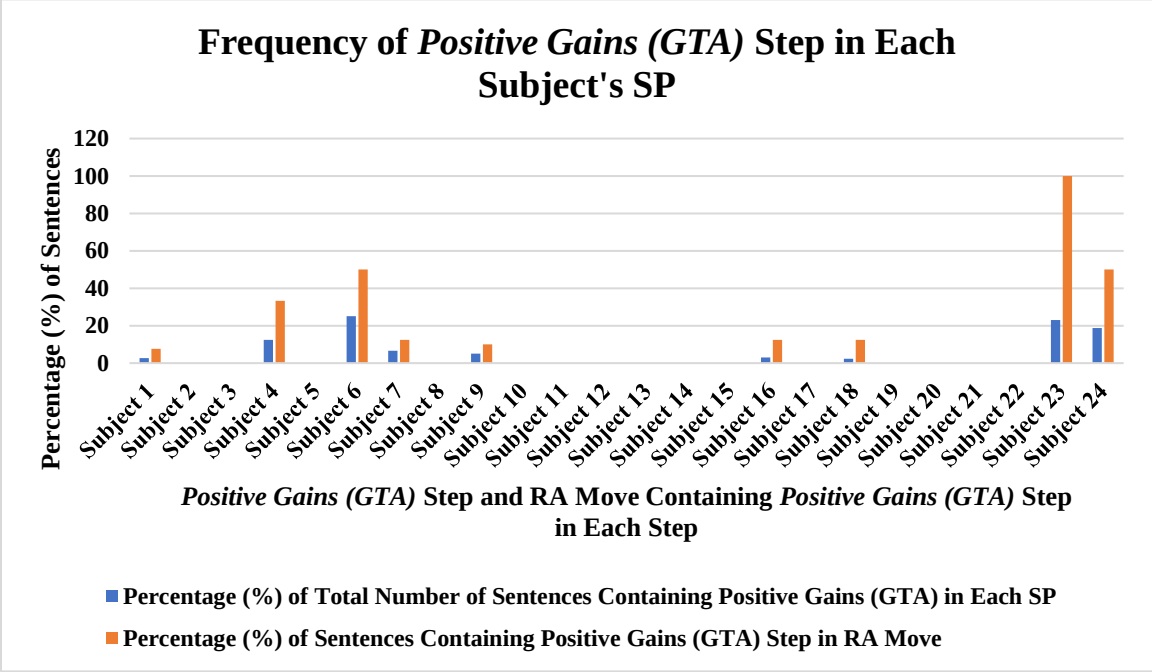



Figure 2.11 Frequency of *Positive Gains (GTA)* step in each subject's SP. Except for one subject (Subject 23), who devoted 100% of his or her RA-move sentences to this step, on average, the other eight subjects devoted 22.47% of their RA-move sentences to it. On average, 32.06% of all RA-move sentences were devoted by nine subjects to this step, and 11% of all sentences in those nine subjects' SPs were devoted to it.

Another important part of these *Positive Gains (MS)* and *Positive Gains (GTA)* steps was the applicants' pointing out their personal interests. There seems to have been a shared understanding that the admission committee would value the applicants' personal

interests, which might prove their candidacy in a unique way, over their academic and professional experience. Because the admission committee gets multiple applications at a time and reviews SPs each semester, the subjects in my study chose to use storytelling to highlight personal interests, such as an inclination for teaching and mentoring, in order to make their SPs memorable and unique. The admission committee might be persuaded that the subject would accept an offer and follow through by enrolling if the subject's personal interests and expected gains were linked to the program and department. The admission committee would be able to sense the sincerity of the applicants through this step. Barton et al. (2004) similarly found that personal interests were important in the SPs written to the residency program in medical schools, in which different hobbies like cooking, writing, and reading were presented in the narrative form.

Table 2.3 shows that thirteen subjects (54.17%) used the *Program/University Attributes* step, which was associated with highlighting the strengths and appealing features of the program, department, university. Figure 2.12 illustrates more elaborately that although this step was the second most developed one in my subjects' RA moves, still the applicants did not devote a large number of SP sentences to this step. Subject 22 devoted 14.89% of the sentences in his or her SP to this step, and this percentage was the highest. That same subject devoted 53.85% of RA-move sentences to this step. Beside that subject, three subjects devoted only 3% each to this step in their SPs, and the same three subjects devoted 13% of their RA-move sentences to it. On average, the thirteen subjects in my sample devoted 7.43% of all SP sentences and 26.61% of all RA-move sentences to this step.

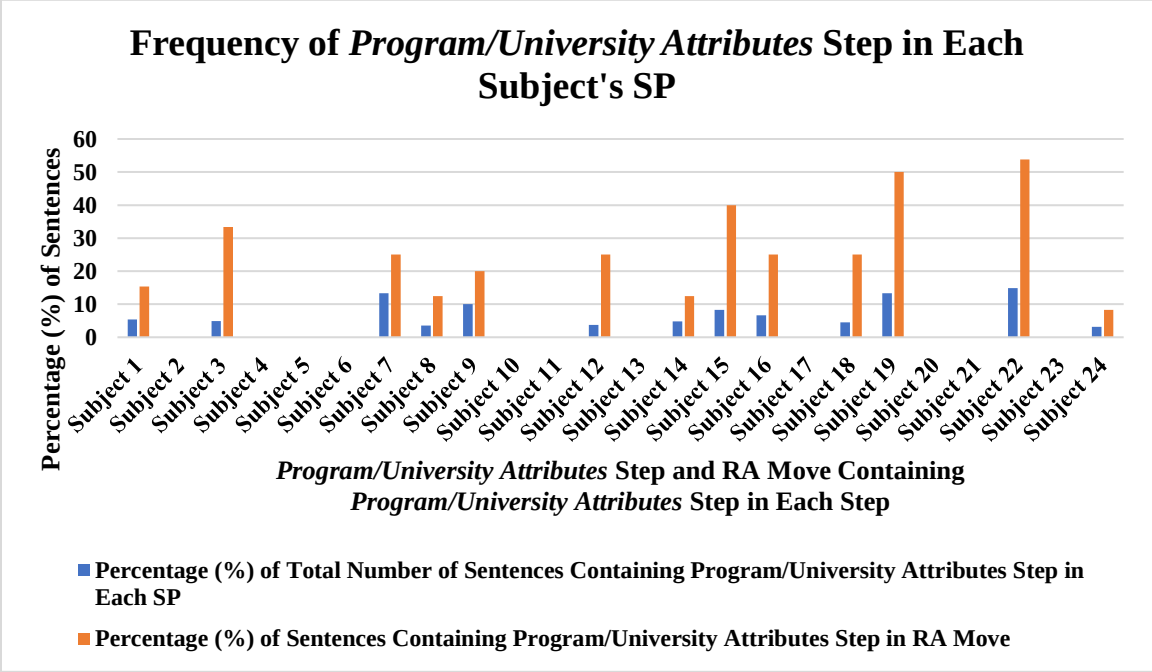



Figure 2.12 Frequency of *Program/University Attributes* step in each subject's SP. Although this step is the second most developed one in the RA move, on average, thirteen subjects devoted 7.43% of all SP sentences and 26.61% of all RA-move sentences to this step. No subject devoted 100% of their RA-move sentences to this step.

Despite the low frequency of the *Program/University Attributes* step, this step was at least used by more than half of my subjects in their SPs, as it was in the SPs examined by Samraj and Monk (2008). In Samraj and Monk's study, this step was used by eight out of twelve applicants to the linguistics, six out of nine applicants to the electrical engineering, and eight out of fourteen applicants to the business administration doctoral programs. They found that this step was unfavorably received by the engineering department. In my study, this step seemed to be received favorably by the English and technical communication department because my study only contained successful SPs.

Other studies conducted on the SP genre (Bekins et al., 2004; Brown, 2004; Vossler, 2007; Ding, 2007) did not find this step in their sample of SPs.

Table 2.3 shows that most of the applicants did not use the *Disciplinary and Research Reasons* step; only nine subjects, i.e., 37.5% of all SPs, used this step. Figure 2.13 illustrates that, except for Subject 17, who devoted 100% of his or her RA-move sentences to this step, most of the applicants did not use this step frequently in their SPs or RA moves. On average, 8.87% of sentences were devoted to this step in those nine subjects' SPs, and 32% of the sentences were devoted to this step in the RA move of those subjects. A high standard deviation (23.23) suggested the potential outliers (Subject 16 and Subject 18) who devoted 50% and 100% of their RA-move sentences to this step.

The possible reason for not using this *Disciplinary and Research Reasons* step in my subjects' SPs could be that technical communication as a discipline is not very familiar or popular to most of the audience, particularly with the international students. In India, there is no program in the universities particularly dedicated to technical communication. In some corporate sectors, specifically in the IT and medical sectors, the technical writing profession is getting noticed. Even today, many people tend to connect technical communication to English or other communication-related programs. A lack of understanding of the discipline further leads to a lack of knowledge of the research areas present within the discipline. Therefore, a vague knowledge about this discipline might have led to a shared understanding in the applicants to English and technical communication department of not using this step frequently in their SPs. Samraj and Monk (2008) similarly found that the applicants to the linguistics department did not discuss their future research interests and discipline-specific reasons due to having only

surface level of knowledge about the discipline. One of their interviewees from the admission committee also confirmed that the applicants from master's programs hardly have sufficient knowledge about discipline-specific research interests.

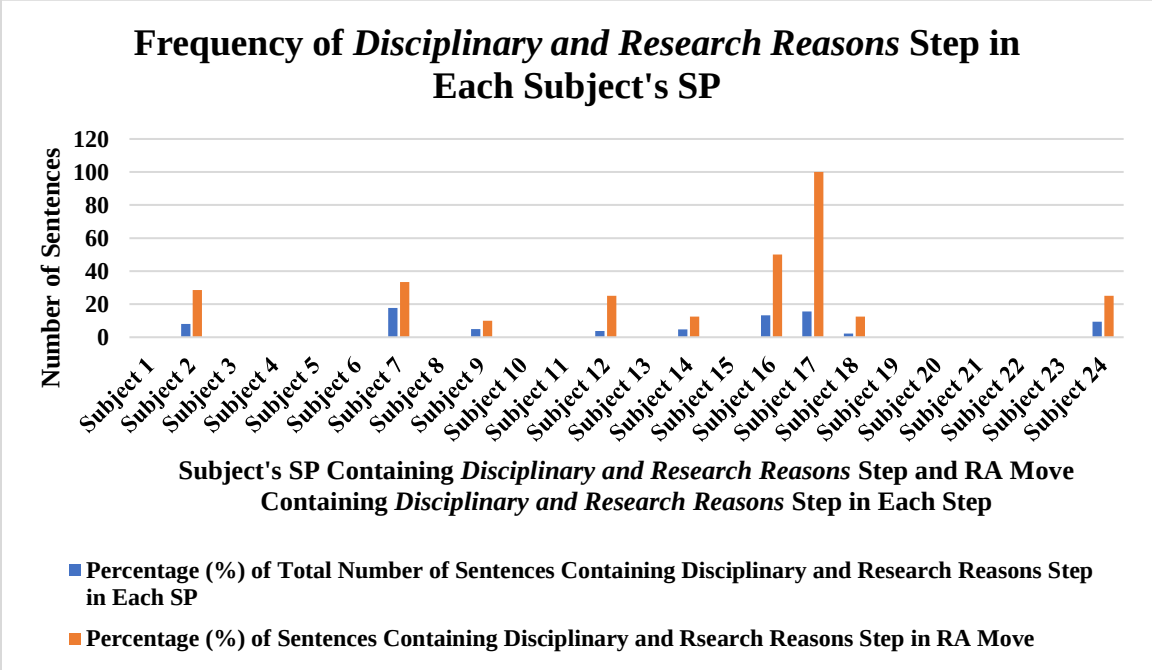



Figure 2.13 Frequency of *Disciplinary and Research Reasons* step in each subject's SP. Only one subject (Subject 17) devoted 100% of his or her RA-move sentences to this step. On average, nine subjects devoted 8.87% of all their sentences and 32% of their RA-move sentences to this step.

Table 2.3 shows that only three subjects (12.5% of all SPs) used the *Monetary* step, which was associated with using financial need as a reason for application. Figure 2.14 illustrates that, except for one applicant—Subject 4, who devoted 25% of his or her all sentences and 66.67% of his or her RA-move sentences to this step—the remaining

two subjects devoted only 4.44% and 5% of all their sentences and 8.33% and 10% of their RA-move sentences to this step respectively. This monetary need was explained by two international students and one domestic student. It could be understood from the low frequency of this step in my sample that applicants did not want to explicitly highlight their financial need in order to convince the audience, and in fact, to my knowledge, no other previous studies found this step in their sample of SPs.

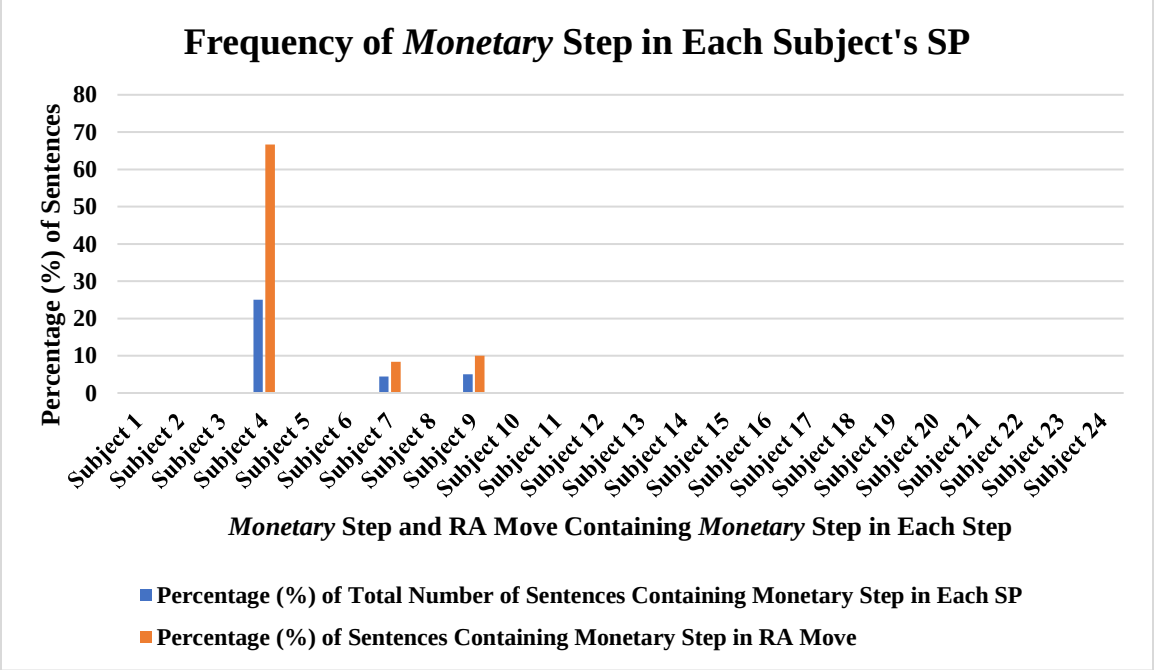



Figure 2.14 Frequency of *Monetary* step in each subject's SP. Only three subjects used this step, and the frequency of using this step is low comparative to other steps in the RA move. Except for one subject, Subject 4, the other two subjects devoted only 4.44% and 5% of all their sentences and 8.33% and 10% of their RA-move sentences to this step respectively.

The last step, *Family Reasons*, was used by only one applicant (2% of all SPs) in his or her SP (see Table 2.3). Since I also found this step in my pilot study (in one SP) and this step did not belong to the criteria set up for the other codes, I did not discard this step. In this step, the subject gave the reason for pursuing graduate studies because his or her family relocated to Rolla. This special characteristic of this step did not belong to any of the definitions of my other codes. Further investigation is required to determine the importance of this step—is this an important strategy to convince the audience that the applicant would surely join the program, if given a chance, because their family members are nearby? Many times, applicants who are admitted do not enroll due to this proximity factor and/or sometimes international students do not join even if admitted due to location issues. This question needs to be resolved in future studies.

**2.3.1.4. C move and associated step analysis.** The *Conclusion* (C) move was used by twenty-two subjects, i.e., 91.67% of all SPs (see Table 2.3), which suggests that most of the applicants took the effort to properly conclude their SPs without leaving it in an unfinished manner. As Table 2.4 suggests, this move was used less frequently (on average, 8.99% of sentences per SP) than the other moves; still, this move had a special significance. This move brought the audiences' attention back to the main point after walking them through different arguments and reasoning for the applicant's suitability for the program. The main point was that the applicants wanted to be admitted to the program and they were the best fit for the intended program. In Samraj and Monk's (2008) study, this move was present only in those SPs that were long (in terms of sentences), but in my study, I found that even a short SP with five sentences contained

this move. Figures 2.15 through 2.17 illustrate that the *Expressing Gratitude/Call-to-action/Ending Politely* step was the most developed step within the C move.

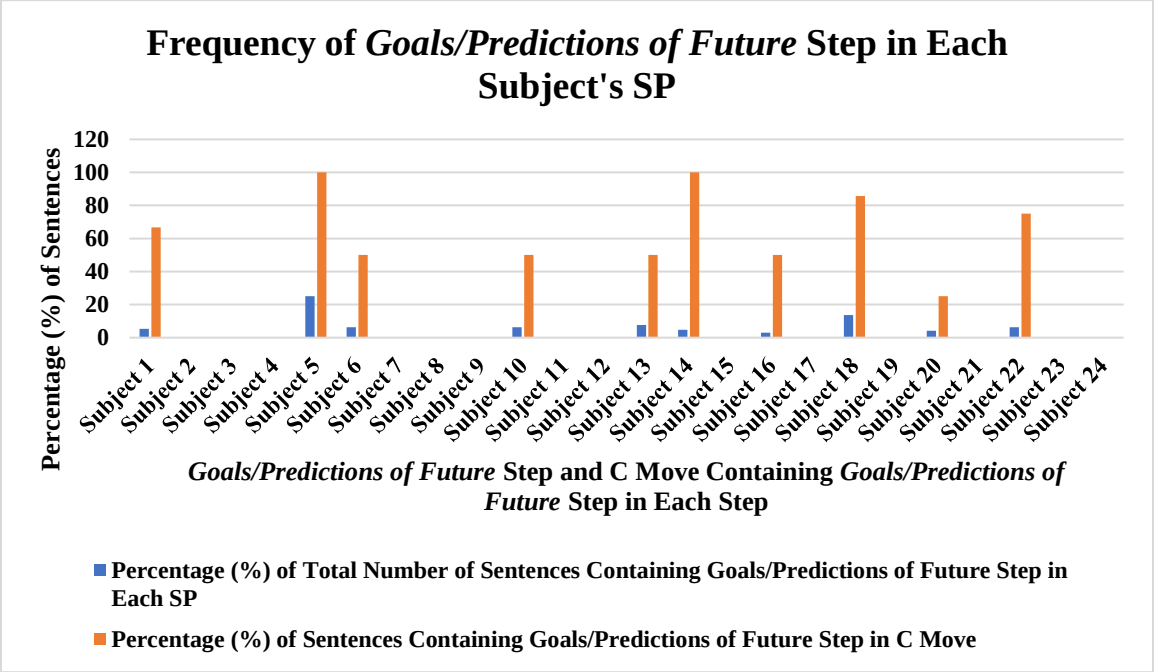



Figure 2.15 Frequency of *Goals/Predictions of Future* step in each subject's SP. Two out of ten subjects devoted 100% of their C-move sentences to this step. On average, ten subjects devoted 65.24% of their C-move sentences and 3.44% of all their sentences to this step.

Table 2.3 suggests that ten subjects (41.67% of all SPs) decided to use the *Goals/Predictions of Future* step in their SPs. Figure 2.15 illustrates that, in their C move, most of the subjects devoted a very small portion to this step (on average 6% of their C-move sentences), but two subjects (Subject 5 and Subject 14) devoted 100% of their C-move sentences to this step. On average, the ten subjects devoted 65.24% of their C-

move sentences to this step, which was closer to the other two steps: *Self-evaluation* and *Expressing gratitude/Call-to-action/Ending Politely*. On average, those ten subjects devoted 3.44% of all their sentences to this step.

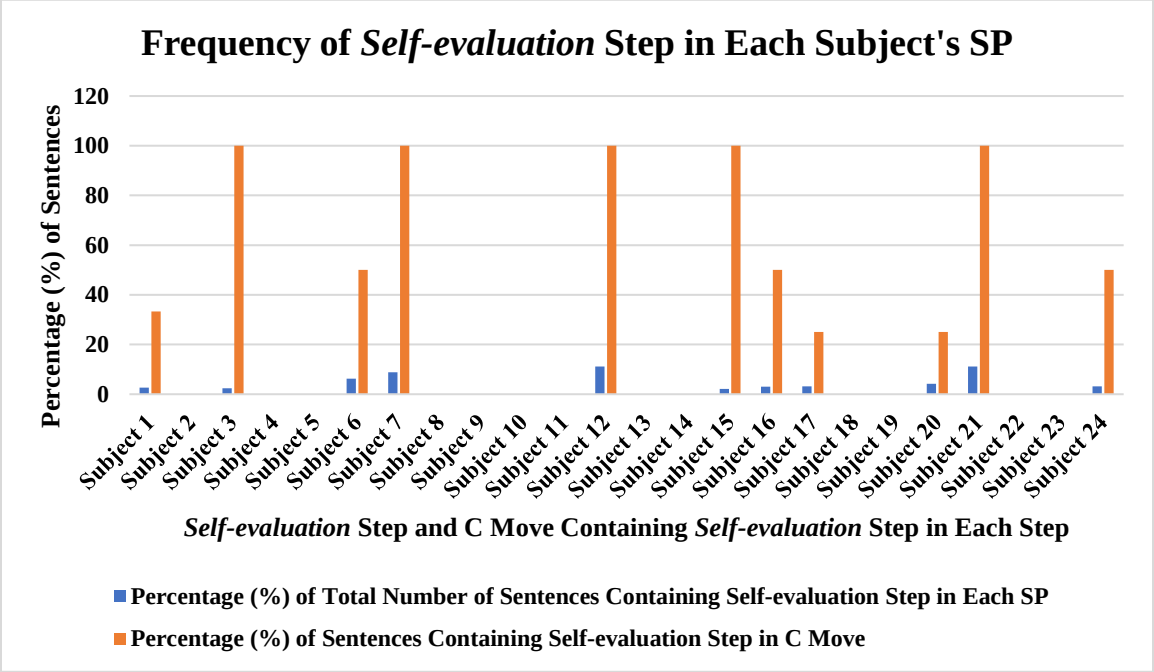



Figure 2.16 Frequency of *Self-evaluation* step in each subject's SP. Five out of eleven subjects devoted 100% of their C-move sentences to this step. On average, eleven subjects devoted 66.67% of their C-move sentences and 5.27% of their SP sentences to this step.

Table 2.3 shows that the *Self-evaluation* step was used by eleven subjects (45.83% of all SPs) in their SPs. Figure 2.16 illustrates more clearly that five subjects chose to devote 100% of their C-move sentences to this step. This result suggests that the applicants did not want to miss any chance to promote or sell their qualifications and

skills to the audience one last time. On average, the subjects devoted 5.27% of their SP sentences to this step and 66.67% of their C-move sentences to this step. Overall, the subjects did not devote many sentences to this step, but within the C move, this step bore a special significance.

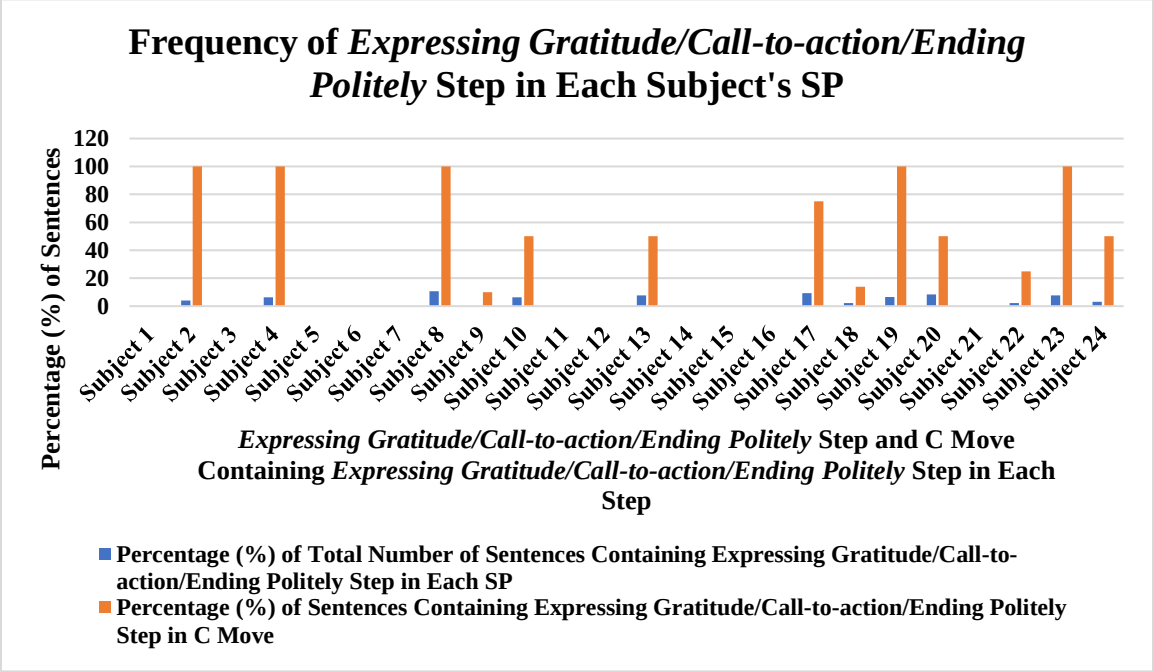



Figure 2.17 Frequency of *Expressing Gratitude/Call-to-action/Ending Politely* step in each subject's SP. Five subjects devoted 100% of their C-move sentences to this step. On average, twelve subjects devoted 67.83% of their C-move sentences and 6.21% of their SP sentences to this step.

Table 2.3 shows that the *Expressing gratitude/Call-to-action/Ending Politely* step was used by twelve subjects (50% of all SPs). Figure 2.17 illustrates that five subjects devoted 100% of their C-move sentences to this step, like the way five subjects devoted

100% of their C-move sentences to the *Self-evaluation* step. On average, 6.21% of a subject's SP sentences were devoted to this step and 67.83% of each subject's C-move sentences were devoted to this step. This step was absent in Samraj and Monk's (2008) and others' studies. However, Lopez-Ferrero and Bach (2016) found a similar type of move in their letter-format SPs. In my sample of SPs, I found that most of the subjects did not forget to thank the audience for taking the time to review their applications, and some of the applicants restated their contact information so that the audience could get in touch with for any questions regarding their application materials. Finally, most of the subjects showed their enthusiasm through this step to join the intended program, department, and university.

Overall, the moves and their associated steps did not appear in my subjects' SPs in a linear order. Sometimes, the I move, particularly the *Goals/Decision to Apply* step within that move, appeared in the second or third paragraph. The *Background* step was interspersed in many paragraphs. The EC and RA moves were mostly integrated with each other. Most common finding was that the applicants developed the *Gap in Background* step from the *Education* and *Work* steps, which eventually gave rise to the *Positive Gains* step. The C move was the only move to appear in the last paragraph or in the last section of each SP.

**2.3.2. Analysis of Storytelling in Different Moves and Steps.** Ding (2007) stated that the genre of SP is about explaining an applicant's past experiences to construct a relevant self in the eyes of the admission committee, and to construct that picture stories play an important role. Like Ding, I did not quantitatively analyze the relevant and irrelevant stories present in my sample, but I qualitatively analyzed the stories. For this

analysis, I followed the close reading strategy of Barton et al. (2004), who found narratives to be important in the SPs. However, a detailed quantitative analysis of narratives, which are filled with *pathos*, can be found in my "Rhetorical Appeal" analysis section.

In my sample of SPs, I found that every move, except the C move, was presented in a narrative form—a narrative (storytelling) helps turn any story into information and knowledge for a better understanding of the readers and a narrative differs from exposition, i.e., explanation and description, i.e., picturizing selves based on the story. In my study, the *Background* step was explicitly related to storytelling—that storytelling helped the applicants portray a suitable and unique picture of themselves for the admission committee. In this step, the applicants narrated their abstract credentials of life history which in turn connected to more concrete credentials through the *Education* and *Work* steps. Some examples of narrative in the *Background* step are as follows:

> "Some of my fondest childhood memories are pretending to be the editor of the newspaper, researching topics using the books in our school library, writing articles to publish in my newspaper, and circulating it among a small group of indulging family and friends." (Subject 24)
>
> "My introduction to the field of technical communication was as an eight-year old school-goer, when my parents had me subscribed to a Science weekly published for school kids." (Subject 22)
>
> "I've had to put my college career on hold twice due to cancer related issues. Even though I had my health challenges, I still was employed and

> kept a student status. I am now cancer free and continuing to push myself to succeed." (Subject 16)
>
> "In talking with Dr. [X] about different options available to me if I were to be accepted, she mentioned the idea of becoming a graduate teaching assistant." (Subject 19)
>
> "I believe, as my father always says, that woman or man, born on this earth, has been gifted a special set of talents to perform a specific task for the betterment of this world. I'm glad to have found mine and to have followed the proper academic stream to fulfill my ambitions." (Subject 18)

In the *Background* step, the storytelling was mainly in the form of narrating how the applicants were able to succeed in technical communication field because of the childhood inclinations and experiences, to take up the pressure of a rigorous program even if several hurdles were already faced in the lifetime, to become a teacher under the influence of the faculty members in the department, and to make the right decision at the right moment. For this narrative creation, the applicants referred to faculty members, parents, or reputed personalities and their influence on their decision making, etc. This type of storytelling helped the applicants construct a clear picture of not only the professional self but also the personal self. In the words of Barton et al. (2004), the professional selves were presented through personal selves or terms in this step.

But this storytelling was not only restricted to the *Background* step; it was used when talking about the applicants' educational background, professional expertise, and unique qualifications. Also, the applicants used storytelling while offering suitable reasons for applying to the program.

Storytelling in the *Education* step did not go back to elementary school. Rather, while talking about education, the applicants usually included narratives of their college-level education, showing its relevance to the technical communication program. The discussion of college level education revealed two sides:

- The applicants wanted to show their adult experience; and
- The applicants wanted to show their awareness of the gravitas of a graduate program.

Some of the examples of education storytelling are given below.

> "I have worked very hard to learn the rhetorical approach and practice. I have written several analysis reports in classes such as: *Media Analysis and Criticism, Introduction to Film, and Witting about Film.* Also, in my Media Design and Production class, I took part in creating a series of short films directed at specific types of audiences." (Subject 17)
>
> "My association with the Department of English Literature gave me a diversity of opportunities to participate in unique programs and events. One such occasion of which I was an essential part was the Navarasa Program that emoted the nine sentiments as conceived by Bharat Muni in his treatise Natyashastra. My responsibility was to create and deliver content for the entire program in the form of PowerPoint presentations, scripts for different performances, as well as speeches relevant to the

> program. The process was challenging but phenomenal." (Subject 16)

Not only in these above-mentioned excerpts, but in almost all the SPs, the applicants linked their previous education to their suitability for the technical communication program. Their narratives revealed what made them accept challenges, helped them to become critical thinkers, and prepared them to do detailed analysis of any genre. These narratives suggested that the applicants, although not fully aware of the common practices of discourse community, wanted to take a guess about the discourse community's common practices.

Storytelling in the *Work* and *Relevant Experience (GTA)* steps was mainly associated with establishing a self of having expertise in teaching, mentoring, communicating, writing, editing, presenting, and setting interpersonal skills. Some of the excerpts are given below:

> "I gained considerable experience by working with more than 250 children of different ages. I completed a workshop about Nature School and collaborated with their group afterward. In this workshop, I experienced many new methods and learned how a natural environment could help children to discover their abilities rather than being taught in small classrooms." (Subject 8)
>
> "During my 4 years of university life, I worked part-time as a teacher in a renowned coaching center. Even after coming to the U.S. I started working as a volunteer teacher once in a week. I enjoy working with students." (Subject 7)

> "I developed short cover letters to foundations, hitting the highlights of the Sparrow's Nest program. I wrote email blasts to supporters, community organizations, and churches." (Subject 4)

In the *Personal Attributes*, step, storytelling was related to making a connection between the uniqueness of the candidate and the intended program. For example,

> "I am extremely organized and time conscious. This is one characteristics that has always received recommendation. I pay particular attention to detail which I believe has contributed to my success thus far. I take pride in my work, and I look at it as a representation of myself. This has actually contributed to the leadership roles assigned to me." (Subject 1)

In the above-mentioned excerpt, Subject 1 wanted to highlight his or her skills of being organized, time conscious, and detail-oriented assuming that the technical communication program requires these skills. Several instances of this kind of narrative were found in my sample. This strategy could lead to the assumption that since the applicants did not know about the exact practices of the discourse community, they tried to put forth narratives that proved their suitability for a graduate program in general. It is commonly understood that a graduate program requires those skills. In the *Personal Attributes* step, the applicants further linked their identities to their career goals, exactly in the way that the applicants to the residency program did in the SPs Barton et al. (2004) studied.

In the *Gap in Background* step, the subjects narrated their aspirations to gain an understanding of various skills and expertise, for example, writing, editing, and communicating, to fulfill their short- and long-term goals. Their storytelling revealed that

those skills could be obtained only from the master's program in technical communication.

In the *Positive Gains* steps, the applicants used narratives to highlight personal interests and short-term goals that could only be achieved by studying technical communication. Also, the applicants expressed intense desire to be a part of the technical communication program because the program matched their interests. While discussing their personal interests, the applicants were extremely interested in giving back to society. Barton et al. (2004) also found that the applicants showed a desire to contribute to society through clinical research. In my sample, the work included educating underserved community, teaching children, and helping women in the underprivileged area to speak for themselves. Some excerpts are given below from my sample.

> "The Master of Science in Technical Communication program aligns perfectly with my academic background and skills which intensifies my yearning to be a part of it." (Subject 16)

In the above-mentioned excerpt, the subject expressed his or her desire to be a part of the technical communication program.

> "Aside all these factors, an MS Technical Communication degree will bring into reality my strong passion of establishing a Book Publishing Firm, specifically at my hometown and its surrounding villages where I can translate the ideas and write ups of indigenous Ghanaians in a book form." (Subject 1)
>
> "In the future, I would love to work with people about their complex situations in their workplace and help them to overcome the problems.

> This not only will be a big achievement for themselves, but also for the whole society." (Subject 14)

In the above two excerpts, the subjects illustrated a desire to give back to society. In other words, in the *Gap in Background* and *Positive Gains* steps, the applicants' narratives imagined selves moving from incomplete and unaccomplished to complete and accomplished.

In the *Program/University Attributes* step, the applicants narrated the unique position of the audience in terms of quality of education, program structure, etc.—this narrative helped construct a high pedestal picture of the audience. In the *Disciplinary and Research Reasons* step the applicants narrated their desire to contribute to the discipline—this narrative helped construct an aspirant self of the applicants. In the *Monetary* step, the applicants narrated their financial need to the admission committee—this narrative helped construct an enthusiast but financially needy self of the applicants.

Overall, the applicants created a definition of technical communication as a discipline before writing their SPs and accordingly put forth narratives to construct their identities. Technical communication encompasses written, oral, and visual communication. However, the applicants mostly constructed their identities as an aspirant of becoming a skilled writer, specifically a technical writer. Additionally, the applicants created benevolent selves by showing concern about the societal issues.

## 2.4. SUMMARY OF MAJOR TRENDS

This study is limited by its small sample size, but the results from rhetorical move and step analysis revealed some important characteristics of my subjects' shared

understanding of the SP genre. In this kind of qualitative study, it is not possible to generalize beyond my sample. The applicants showed the following shared understanding regrading rhetorical moves of the SP genre written for a master's program in technical communication:

- The applicants interspersed stories with almost every move in their SPs;
- The applicants constructed both the pictures of professional and personal selves through their SPs;
- The applicants' goal or decision to apply for a graduate program revealed their sincerity and knowledge of the SP genre;
- Most of the applicants chose educational background to help establish their credibility;
- When present, the applicants used their professional experience more frequently than their educational background;
- The applicants constructed a professional identity by highlighting their presentation, communication, interpersonal, writing, and editing skills;
- The applicants constructed an aspirant self by highlighting their lack of skills in the domains of presentation, communication, writing, editing, etc.
- The applicants constructed a personal identity by highlighting their benevolent selves as social workers;
- The applicants constructed a relevant self by highlighting their life history or background;
- The applicants constructed a high-pedestal picture of the audience by highlighting the audience's unique attributes;

- The applicants constructed an enthusiastic but financially needy self by highlighting their monetary need although they prioritized their admission to the program over the monetary gain (assistantship);
- The applicants' desire to obtain fruitful gains from the intended program and to discuss their matching interests with the program seemed to attract the audiences' attention;
- Most of the applicants did not establish a research self by discussing their previous research experience considering the goals of the program; and
- The applicants constructed a humble self by politely thanking the audience.

# 3. RHETORICAL APPEALS

After analyzing the rhetorical moves, I continued examining the SPs in my sample from the perspective of rhetorical appeals (*pisteis*). In the rhetorical move analysis section, I explored how my subjects arranged their arguments to achieve the communicative purpose of the SP genre. For a communicative purpose to be achieved, an audience needs to be persuaded by the arguments of the writer or speaker. In this section, I will discuss what types of arguments were used by the subjects in their SPs, what mode of presenting arguments was taken, what thematic subcodes were used to activate specific appeals, and to what extent or by what means the arguments were successful in persuading the audience.

## 3.1. RHETORIC

Before I explain the *pisteis*, I should stipulate a definition of rhetoric and its importance, because my research is governed by classical rhetorical theory. Aristotle defined *rhetoric* as the "ability," "capacity," and "faculty" to see the "available means of persuasion" in any given case and the way "persuasion may be effected" (Kennedy, 2007, p. 37). Aristotle primarily connected rhetoric to speeches in civic contexts or public address but sometimes he connected it to poetry or historical writing (Kennedy, 2007, p. 37). Therefore, according to Aristotle, rhetoric is primarily concerned with persuasive discourse, i.e., how writers and speakers use words to influence an audience in a given context and this kind of rhetoric can be considered as classical rhetoric. In its modern form, rhetoric is connected to "informative" or "expository" means of discourse—a

writing that seeks mainly to explain rather than mainly to persuade (Corbett & Connors, 1999, p. 16).

*Rhetorical analysis* refers to the process of analyzing any text in great detail to understand the writer's goals and techniques for creating certain effects in the audience—persuasion, entertainment, and/or information. *Classical* refers to the ancient or traditional or well-established process. So the main purpose of rhetorical analysis is to articulate how the authors write rather than what they write. In the move analysis, my goal was to interpret what my subjects wrote, but while analyzing *pisteis*, my goal was to interpret how my subjects wrote to persuade the audience.

Classical rhetoricians classified rhetoric into five broad categories known as *canons*: *inventio* (invention or discovery of arguments), *dispositio* (arrangement or organization of written or spoken discourse), *elocutio* (style of writing or speaking), *memoria* (process of memorizing speeches), *and pronuntiatio* (delivery of writing or speech). The *pisteis* are classified under inventio: Aristotle defines *pisteis* as "means of persuasion." There are two broad categories of *pisteis—atechnic*, i.e., "non-artistic" and *entechnic*, i.e., "artistic" or "embodied in art" (Kennedy, 2007, p. 38). Non-artistic means are arguments which are not provided by the speaker or writer but are instead preexisting. These arguments require no effort or skill from the writer or speaker to invent, whereas artistic means are the arguments which need to be invented with proper effort and skill by the writer or speaker. For example, in my sample of SPs, the GPA of any applicant is a non-artistic means (because the applicant does not need to invent it), but any explanation about GPA (high GPA or low GPA) and use of GPA to persuade the audience in order to prove candidacy belong to the artistic category (because here the strategy of persuasion

needs to be invented). The three main Aristotelian *pisteis* or triad (rhetorical appeals) are as follows: *logos* (rational appeal), *pathos* (emotional appeal), *and ethos* (ethical appeal).

## 3.2. PISTEIS

In this section, I will discuss the definitions of *pisteis* in its traditional and modern forms, because the definitions have evolved from ancient philosophers like Aristotle to modern rhetoricians like Campbell (1776). In fact, Killingsworth (2005), a technical communication scholar reconceptualized the *pisteis* in modern context.

**3.2.1. Aristotelian Artistic *Pisteis*.** As mentioned earlier, *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos* belong to the artistic means of persuasion. Aristotle defined *ethos* as the way of persuasion through character in any oral speech (Kennedy, 2007, p. 38). Aristotle specifically distinguished between "fair-mindedness" and "character" by stating that "fair-mindedness" is not directly related to persuasion, but "character" made a person more trustworthy in front of the audience (Kennedy, 2007, pp. 38–39). Character should be revealed through the speech itself, not from any preconceived notion about the speaker. Aristotle particularly focused on confidence which, he thought, should be created in the audience. Confidence can be ingrained through three attributes of *ethos*: *phronesis* (sound sense), *arete* (good character), and *eunoia* (good will). In this regard, *ethos* is concerned with a rhetor's choice of including or excluding something from a discourse to persuade the audience.

Aristotle defined *pathos* as the means of "disposing the listener in some way" (Kennedy, 2007, p. 38). The strategies for making a listener receptive cannot be the same when a person feels pain and when a person feels pleasure. Also, these strategies change

when a person feels "friendly" and when a person feels "hostile" (Kennedy, 2007, p. 39). Therefore, in order to create positivity among audience members, an orator should be aware of the audiences' emotions. Aristotle particularly emphasized that if audience members are not receptive to the orator's arguments and become angry with the orator, then they cannot be moved. Aristotle was reluctant to include *pathos* within rhetoric initially as he believed that rhetoric should solely deal with rational appeals (Corbett & Connors, 1999, p. 18). However, he knew that people make many judgements based on emotions; therefore, *pathos* should be used as one of the primary modes of persuasion. Emotions are present in every situation; however, it is a rhetor's duty to stir that emotion in the audience members. By emphasizing stirring emotion, Aristotle differentiated *pathos* from *logos* and *ethos*, the other two appeals. At the same time, he argued that emotional appeals can be a possible barrier to logical reasoning, because *pathos* is deeply rooted in subjective judgments.

Aristotle defined *logos* as the mode of persuasion through an orator's "arguments," which try to show the "truth" or "apparent truth" to the audience (Kennedy, 2007, p. 39). One can reason either deductively (moving from general to specific) or inductively (moving from specific to general). Aristotle put syllogism (consisting of a major premise, a minor premise, and a conclusion) and enthymeme (a truncated syllogism, with either one of the premises or the conclusion missing) in deductive reasoning and example in inductive reasoning.

**3.2.2. Modern Artistic *Pisteis*.** Kinneavy (1996), rather than just categorizing *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos* as appeals, considered them as "positions" which were spatially and metaphorically connected, indicating towards a triangulation. Kinneavy (1996)

conceptualized *ethos* as being focused on the author and showing the attractiveness of the character and the authority of the author that creates inspiration (pp. 225–226). He viewed the Aristotelian triad as a communication triangle, in which *ethos* is connected to the *encoder* (author). According to Kinneavy (1996), the different elements (*encoder*, *decoder*, and *reality*) are present in any communication scenario, but the predominance of one of the elements can create a specific kind of discourse. He connected *ethos* to "expressive" discourse—*ethos* was author focused. He conceptualized *pathos* as being involved with "the audience, especially the emotions of the audience" (pp. 225–226). He connected *pathos* to the *decoder*, one of the elements of the communication triangle. According to him, *pathos* can create a "persuasive" discourse because of its audience focus. Kinneavy (1996) finally defined *logos* as being involved with references to the world (reality) shared by the author and audience (pp. 225–226). He connected *logo*s to "reality" and stated that *logos* can create a "reality-oriented" discourse. He argued that the reality is connected to establish credibility by not only providing existing proofs used and discovered by previous scholars, but also by creating new proofs (or new worldviews) that can attract the audience and establish a new set of authorities.

Based on Kinneavy's implicit positioning of Aristotelian *pisteis* in a communication triangle, Killingsworth (2005) revised the triangle by positioning three elements: "author," "audience," and "value" (p. 251). He connected "the position of the author" to *ethos* where the invisible "we" in *ethos* is disguised in the garb of "I." Killingsworth's categorization contradicts that of Aristotle, who stated that *ethos* is concerned only with the words of the speaker and his or her character. On the other hand, Killingsworth pointed out that the speaker is not a single individual (but a "complex

individual") who does not only reveal his or her personal account, but also considers the "communal outlook" consisting of commonly held values and beliefs pertinent to the rhetorical situation (Killingsworth, 2005, p. 252). In this context, *ethos* is related to *kairos*, which refers to the propitious or opportune moment to do the right things or to make the right decisions or to say the right words in relation to the rhetorical situation. For example, Guark (1997) noticed that while online, the ethical character of the rhetor was established by his or her professional affiliations and "contributions to life on the Internet."

Regarding *pathos*, Killingsworth (2005) stated that the "the position of the audience" (p. 252) or the audience's point of view regarding a specific matter (for example, an established theory in science) is somewhat different from that of the author; therefore, there is every possible chance of having differences of opinion between the author and the audience—an emotional disconnection occurs between the author and the audience. In order to remove those differences, an author appeals to the audience for "alignment." While trying to align the author's viewpoint with the audience's viewpoints, an author tries to merge with the audience by neglecting "you" and "I" and embracing "we."

Killingsworth (2005) connected *logos* to "the position of value" (p. 252). He stated that *logos* helps to reinstitute the other two positions: author and audience. In other words, the commonly held belief systems and the alignment in viewpoints between the author and audience are reestablished through *logos*. While persuading the audience through "the position of value," au author controls the audience members by making them think in a certain way and act in a specific direction.

**3.2.3. Some More Contemporary Views on Artistic *Pisteis*.** Contemporary technical communication literature sometimes portrayed *ethos* as "roughly equivalent to credibility" (Anderson, 2011, p. 120), sometimes as distinct from "persona" (Cherry, 1998), and sometimes as separated into situated and invented *ethos* (Brown, 2009). Cherry (1998) claimed that *ethos* is developed through the writer's ability to gain trust through the strategies of writing and speaking; on the other hand, persona is an artificially created identity the writer creates to effectively communicate. For example, an instructor in his or her syllabus mentions that he or she will not tolerate any plagiarism; every student has to give credit to the sources properly even if the student only uses someone else's ideas in any assignment—a strategy of writing through which the instructor shows his or her strong set of ethics or strict moral codes (*ethos*). Here, the artificial identity is probably an "ethical or moral personality" that is created by the writing strategy. Brown (2009) defined situated *ethos* as the author's reputation that is known ahead of time to the audience and invented *ethos* as the author's reputation that is created through text or speech "through the use of certain tropes and figures along with various other textual strategies" (p. 245).

Although Aristotelian *pathos* was connected to mainly "pain and pleasure," Tirdatov (2014) added two more emotions with negative connotations: fear and anxiety. Also, not all modern researchers accept the Aristotelian view that *pathos* contradicts *logos*. For example, Jasinski (2001), and Katula (2003) advocated that "emotion can complement rather than contradict logical analysis" (as cited in Kostelnick, 2016).

**3.2.4. Present Study: Traditional and Modern *Pisteis*.** Considering both Aristotle's and Killingsworths' definitions of *logos*, this study examined the logical or rational claims in the statements of purpose (SPs) submitted by a sample of successful applicants to the technical communication master's degree program at Missouri S&T between 2005 to 2019. Because the ultimate goal of the applicants was to secure admission and financial support, the "truth or an apparent truth" to be proved in this case would be that their intention to be admitted to the graduate program is genuine, their intention to pursue graduate studies in technical communication at Missouri S&T is genuine, and their admission would be fruitful for the department. Killingworth's focus on controlling the audience through *logos* can be demonstrated in this study by the applicants' following either a letter or an essay format of the SPs (although no instruction was given regarding the format in the application portal) and corroborating each claim (such as why a GPA is lower than expected, what benefits would the applicant derive from the department) with substantive proofs. The specific approach of analyzing *logos* is further discussed in the "Research Study Design" section.

Considering the modern view of *pathos*, in which a speaker wants to merge emotionally with the audience, I intended to investigate in my study how the applicants in my sample tried to merge themselves emotionally with the audience. I found that my subjects overwhelmingly used narratives or storytelling techniques to stir the emotion of the audience. Considering the Aristotelian version of *pathos*, which is related to pleasure, I intended to investigate what arguments my subjects used to activate pleasure in the audience. I did not rule out the other three components of *pathos*—pain, fear and anxiety. Therefore, I also intended to investigate what arguments my subjects used to activate fear

and anxiety (for example, an applicant might pose a tacit threat to the admission committee regarding funding: if the department does not offer any funding, then the applicant would not join the program) and pain (for example, an applicant might discuss a childhood trauma or hurdles in life that he or she surpassed) in the audience.

I intended to investigate in my study not only the applicants' choice of inclusion or exclusion of a topic in their SPs (an Aristotelian concept of *ethos*), but also the way an applicant established his or her good character in front of the audience (modern interpretation of *ethos*). In my study, I noticed that it is impossible for the audience (admission committee) to know the reputation of most of the authors (applicants) prior to application—except for those Missouri S&T undergraduate students who applied for the MS in technical communication program (only five subjects); therefore, the applicants had to establish their *ethos* through the words in their SPs (written communication), which could be compared to an invented *ethos* (Brown, 2009) or a created "persona" (Cherry, 1998). Considering Guark's analysis of *ethos*, I found that the applicants projected their competence (academic, professional, and social), professionalism, and moral character to establish *ethos*; and the applicants took the appropriate strategy considering the requirement of the situation (Killingsworth, 2005).

### 3.3. PREVIOUS WORK

To my knowledge, no researchers have conducted a rhetorical appeal analysis solely to understand the SP genre's conventions—or, as in my study, a group's shared understanding of those conventions. Samraj and Monk (2008) only briefly discussed how *ethos* was established differently in the SPs submitted to different disciplines (linguistics,

electrical engineering, and business administration). However, several researchers (particularly in the field of technical communication) previously analyzed Aristotelian *pisteis* in other contexts. For example, Kostelnick (2016) examined *pathos* in contemporary data visualization and evaluated how *pathos* evolved from the time of Aristotle to the time of George Campbell in data design. Bridgewater (2018) examined *ethos* on the "About" pages of election technology companies to understand the possible implications of those companies' strategies on the constitutional discourse about voting. Spoel, Goforth, Cheu, and Pearson (2009) investigated the available means of persuasion in the context of arousing public's informed participation in science policy discussions. Friess (2010) conducted a case study to determine how a group of novice technical communicators used rhetorical appeals to advocate for their design decisions at the time of group meetings.

My study is specifically motivated by the research approach taken by Tirdatov (2014) and Ross (2009). I will discuss their methodological approach here; Tirdatov and Ross' studies played an important role when I constructed my research design for analyzing the SPs in terms of rhetorical appeals.

Tirdatov (2014) qualitatively analyzed thirteen crowd funding project descriptions published on a Web site to identify the rhetorical techniques for securing investors' support. For this study, her unit of analysis was a sentence, although Tirdatov did not define "sentence" as a philological or grammatical unit. She coded the texts based on the basic framework of *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos* and developed detailed "subcodes" of rhetorical modes of persuasion under one of each basic appeal (*ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*)

during the course of four reviews. Her criteria of separating *logos* and *pathos* was as follows:

- Information lacking "hyperbolized/emotional narrative" was considered as *logos*;
- Information using forceful adjectives and adverbs (emotional) was considered as *pathos*;
- Descriptive information containing emotion was considered as both *logos* and *pathos*; and
- Descriptive information lacking emotion was considered as solely *logos*.

After the coding procedure, she counted the occurrences of each "subcode" to analyze her results both qualitatively and empirically. She found that all three appeals and a total of twelve "subcodes" were present in those thirteen projects.

Ross (2009) also conducted a textual analysis of 130 personal solicitation emails (PSEs) according to the Aristotelian *pisteis* framework. For his study, he and four graduate students devised nineteen categories belonging to *logos*, *pathos*, *ethos*, or *kairos*. He further analyzed each category and its influence on persuading the audience. His nineteen categories under each primary appeal were as follows:

1. *Logos*
    a. *Contact information*
    b. *Financial specificity*
    c. *Format*
    d. *Offers to meet in person*

2. *Pathos*
    a. *Adventure/roguishness*
    b. *Charity*
    c. *Death*
    d. *Ego-complementary*
    e. *Ego-poor-letter construction*
    f. *Honor*
3. *Ethos*
    a. *Formality*
    b. *Institutional markers*
    c. *Market terminology*
    d. *Nationality*
    e. *Politeness*
    f. *Religiosity*
    g. *Safety*
    h. *Title*
4. *Kairos*
    a. *Urgency*

I have borrowed his four categories—*Format*, *Ego-complimentary*, *Formality*, and *Politeness*—for use in my research study while coding my sample of SPs. His methodological approach, despite some weakness and vagueness regarding the coding scheme and unit of analysis, serves as a helpful guide for conducting rhetorical-appeal analyses of different genres, including online and academic writing genres.

### 3.4. RESEARCH STUDY DESIGN: *PISTEIS*

As I explain in Section 2, I analyzed a corpus of twenty-four SPs submitted to the Department of English and Technical Communication at Missouri University of Science and Technology (Missouri S&T) as part of the graduate (MS) application process. For analysis of *pisteis*, I considered each sentence and the format of each SP as my units of analysis for the *pisteis*. A sentence is defined as "a group of words beginning with a capital letter and ending with some mark of end punctuation" (Corbett & Connors, 1999, p. 370). In my definition of sentence, I considered only three punctuation marks—namely a period (.), an exclamation point (!) and a question mark (?)—for the indication of the ending of a sentence.

For this investigation, I first considered whether a sentence exhibited *logos*, *pathos*, or *ethos*. *Logos*, *pathos*, and *ethos* are the artistic modes or means of arguing, and the logical appeal, emotional appeal, and ethical appeal are the actual arguments or statements made to activate a certain type of persuasion. In the beginning of the study, I assumed that throughout a discourse, these three modes of persuasion could have been pervasive. For example, an applicant might want to construct *ethos* in his or her SP from the beginning to the end, but there might be sentences or parts of sentences where the applicant particularly emphasized *ethos* to ingratiate himself or herself with the audience by establishing a credible character. Killingsworth (2005) mentioned that writers always try to demonstrate their character in written or oral communication. While demonstrating, the authors try to connect with the audience emotionally and offer substantial proof to support their arguments. Aristotle also believed that the three rhetorical appeals must be employed simultaneously in order to persuade, but at any given time one of them may be

more predominant. In other words, a sentence almost always has more than one *pistis*, but the end goal of each sentence particularly indicates towards a prominent *pistis*.

Therefore, I carefully read the words in each sentence of each SP. The criteria I used for considering a sentence as *logos*, *pathos*, or *ethos* were as follows:

- ***Logos:*** The following criteria for *logos* were chosen on the basis of both traditional and modern definitions of *logos*. In its modern form of *logos*, logical appeal can be established by not only through offering linear logic, but also through just presenting information that an audience can relate to (Welch, 1999).
    - Objective tone lacking exaggerated emotions;
    - Explicit claims such as knowledge of the technical communication field or teaching profession;
    - Clarifications, such as a GPA explanation and application information;
    - Neutral or descriptive part, such as overall format of the SP and a family reason; and
    - Gains not directly derived from the audience.
- ***Ethos:*** For *ethos*, I chose the following criteria:
    - Character-based claims, such as dedicated and detail-oriented nature of an applicant;
    - Professional and educational affiliations, such as years of professional experience; and
    - Goodwill highlighting, such as a desire to give back to society.

- ***Pathos:*** For *pathos,* I chose the following criteria.
    - Exaggerated emotions (pleasure, pain, fear, or anxiety) or "hyperbolized/emotional narrative" (Tirdatov, 2014), such as a sense of the audience's superiority and a sense of the writer's inferiority; and
    - Forceful adjectives and adverbs, such as "extraordinary amount of cooperation," "extremely organized," "very much excited," "boundless opportunity."

After the sentence-level coding, I further examined how the applicants tried to persuade the audience by maintaining a specific format of writing (overall presentation) followed by Ross (2009). Then I started generating subcodes or special topics from the initial codes (*logos, pathos,* and *ethos*).

**3.4.1. Subcodes and Their Relation to Special Topics.** After the initial coding of each sentence and the overall format of the SP for *logos, pathos,* and *ethos,* I generated twenty-nine subcodes (see Table 3.1) of those primary codes or appeals following the method of subcode generation by Ross (2009) and Tirdatov (2014). These thematic subcodes were used to generate a certain type of appeal. For example, *pathos* is the mode of appeal and *Ego-complimentary* is used to activate a sort of emotional appeal (a sense of superiority in the audience). These subcodes can even be called special topics of the SP genre, because the subcodes were used by the applicants as "argument-making machines" (Rubinelli, 2009, p. 14). A topic (Greek word "topoi," Latin word "locus;" both meaning "place," as cited in Malone & Bashyal, 2017) is a "place" where a rhetor or writer or orator finds things to support his or her arguments or to look for "available

means of persuasion" (Kennedy, 2007, p. 44). Special topics help a writer discover matter for creating three modes of appeal (*logos*, *pathos*, and *ethos*). Aristotle divided topics into two parts: common topics and special topics (Kennedy, 2007, p. 45). Common topics are general lines of reasoning and special topics are specific lines of arguments. An explanation for those Aristotelian topics is as follows (as cited in Malone & Bashyal, 2017, p. 238):

- **Common topics (koinoi topoi):** Common topics are limited in number but can be applied to almost any subject.
- **Special topics (idioi topoi or eide):** Special topics are relevant to a particular kind of oratory or discourse such as deliberative or forensic or epideictic; they are several in number.

Deliberative rhetoric deals with convincing people to do something (to act in a specific manner) or to accept a rhetor's viewpoint (Corbett & Connors, 1999, p. 23). In this branch of rhetoric, the persuasion takes at least two forms: "exhortation" (pushing the audience forward to take some action for the good) and "dehortation" (discouraging someone to take certain action due to the harmfulness of the action) (Kennedy, 2007, p. 48). The two principal special topics related to this branch of rhetoric are the "expedient" or "advantageous" and the "inexpedient" or "disadvantageous" and the "worthy" or "good" and the "unworthy" or "bad" or "evil." The SP genre can be classified as deliberative rhetoric because an applicant tries to exhort the audience to offer him or her an admission (to act in a specific way) in this genre. Therefore, in this study, my goal was to interpret how the applicant pushed the audience forward to offer him or her an admission, how the audience was made to think that by offering admission to a certain

candidate they (the department, program, discipline, and university) would benefit (advantage), and how the applicant proved worthiness in his or her SP.

The SP genre to some extent might belong to forensic rhetoric, which is commonly known as “legal” or “judicial” discourse. In this discourse, the fairness or unfairness of a specific allegation or charge is considered. The means associated with this branch of rhetoric are “accusation” which is used to incriminate someone or impute a case and “defense” which helps to vindicate a person or statement (Kennedy, 2007, p. 48). The special topics associated with this branch of rhetoric are as follows: “justice” and “injustice.” In SPs, an applicant might defend his or her low GPA (if it was low) and provide reasons for changing academic fields (for example, shifting from chemical engineering to technical communication) and/or having a career-track gap. After defending, the applicant might look for justice from the admission committee—expecting an admission to the MS in technical communication program.

Likewise, the SP genre to some extent belongs to epideictic rhetoric because the writing of an SP is one of the traditional rituals that an applicant must perform to accomplish the ultimate goal of obtaining a graduate degree. In this branch of rhetoric, praising or blaming someone takes prominence instead of compelling or convincing others. The special topics associated with this branch of rhetoric are “honor” and “dishonor.” In SPs, an applicant might praise the activities of giving back to society or doing good for underserved communities. In this way, that applicant might gain honor from the admission committee because everyone appreciates a person with a benevolent and kind attitude.

**3.4.2. Generation of Subcodes.** I borrowed four subcodes—*Ego-complimentary*, *Format*, *Formality*, and *Politeness*—from Ross because these subcodes were evident in my sample of SPs. Some of the other subcodes were similar to the steps created by Samraj and Monk (2008) in their investigation of SPs, although I changed the names of those steps in my subcodes without altering the meaning and came up with the most relevant names to fit the meanings of the sentences present in my sample of SPs. In other words, I focused on what exact arguments constituted a rational, emotional, or ethical appeal in a sentence, and accordingly, I named the subcode in my study. For example, the *Personal Attributes* step (Samraj & Monk, 2008) was named as *Unique Qualifications* for use in my *pisteis* analysis of SP sentences because the applicant tried to establish an *ethos* by emphasizing his or her uniqueness—an argument, which was used to "exhort" the audience to think about the writer's "worthy" self. During the generation of the "subcodes" or special topics, I consistently followed the comparative method of qualitative research (Glaser, 1965).

After generating the subcodes, I calculated the frequency of each code (appeal) in the twenty-four SPs as a whole and the frequency of each associated subcode. For the first part, I counted the sentences in all the twenty-four SPs. Then, I counted the sentences devoted to *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*. After that, I counted the sentences devoted to each of the subcodes under *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*. Finally, I calculated the percentage of each *pistis* in all twenty-four SPs by the following formulas:

Percentage of Ethical Appeals in the Subjects' SPs = (Total Number of Sentences Containing *Ethos*/Total Number of Sentences) X 100

Percentage of Emotional Appeals in the Subjects' SPs = (Total Number of Sentences Containing *Pathos*/Total Number of Sentences) X 100

Percentage of Rational Appeals in the Subjects' SPs = (Total Number of Sentences Containing *Logos*/Total Number of Sentences) X 100

To understand the format-related rational appeal present in the subjects' SPs, I counted how many SPs followed a specific document format, for example, a letter or an essay format. For the letter format, I looked for different elements of a letter, for example, an applicant's contact information, salutation, body text, complementary closure, and signature. For the essay format, I looked for the number of paragraphs and number of sentences. If the SP was written in just four or five sentences and/or in one paragraph, then I did not consider it to be written in a proper essay format.

Then I calculated the frequency of the "subcodes" associated with each *pistis* by using the following method: I counted the sentences devoted to one subcode in twenty-four SPs and then counted the sentences devoted to the appeal to which the subcode belonged. For example, *ethos* is an appeal and one of its associated subcodes is *Awards and Achievements* (see the Results and Discussion section for more details about the appeals and their associated categories). Finally, I calculated the percentage of each subcode of rhetorical appeals by the following formula:

Percentage of the subcode (for example, *Awards and Achievements*) in Subjects' SPs = (Total Number of Sentences Containing that subcode/Total Number of Sentences Containing the Associated Appeal) X 100

In the end, I characterized the applicants' shared understanding of the SP genre in terms of how they discovered arguments through *logos*, *pathos*, and *ethos*.

## 3.5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

My investigation of twenty-four SPs led to the identification of twenty-nine subcodes or special topics in the SPs. These subcodes belong to one of the three modes of rhetorical appeals: *ethos*, *pathos*, or *logos*.

I developed fifteen subcodes under *ethos* (see Table 3.1). These subcodes of *ethos* present in the SPs perfectly follow Aristotle's three strategies required to exert *ethos*, i.e., to convince the audience either about the applicant's sound sense (*phronesis*), i.e., common sense properly applied, or moral character (*arete*), or benevolent nature (*eunoia*). Along with moral character, an applicant explicitly expressed his or her academic and professional affiliations to establish credibility based on contemporary versions of *ethos*. Results showed that twenty-four out of twenty-four (100%) SPs included *ethos* at the sentence level, and each of the twenty-four SPs had at least more than three *ethos* subcodes.

I developed five subcodes under *pathos* (see Table 3.1). These subcodes of *pathos* create certain emotions in the audience so that the audience is compelled to be engaged with the content of the SP, or to feel sympathy for the applicant, or to feel good about themselves. Results showed that twenty-two out of twenty-four SPs (91.67%) included *pathos* at the sentence level, and each of the twenty-two SPs had at least one of the *pathos* subcodes.

I developed seven subcodes under *logos* (see Table 3.1) based on the sentence level evaluation. Another subcode, *Format*, was constructed under *logos* based on the overall format (a letter or an essay format) of the SPs. The applicant logically persuaded the audience through these subcodes or special topics that his or her intention to begin a

graduate study and pursue the MS in technical communication at Missouri S&T is genuine and that he or she is suitable for the MS program—specifically, that he or she is aware of the technical communication field, the value of teaching profession, and the value of writing SP in a professional format. Also, the applicant persuades the audience to believe through *logos* subcodes that he or she is able to justify any discrepancy in GPA or application materials, and he or she knows clearly the purpose of writing the SPs. Results confirmed that only fourteen out of twenty-four SPs (58.33%) included *logos* at the sentence level and nineteen out of twenty-four SPs (79.16%) included *logos* at the format level. Five of the SPs were so short that they did not adhere to either the essay or letter format. Each of the nineteen SPs had at least two of the *logos* subcodes.

Table 3.1 Subcodes of rhetorical appeal present in statements of purpose (SPs)

| **Rhetorical Appeal Category** | **Description** |
|---|---|
| 1. *Ethos* (*Awards and Achievements*) | In this appeal, the applicant constructs an *ethos* through showcasing the applicant's awards or affiliations (for example, scholarships, fellowships, best student awards). In this appeal, the applicant also talks about whether he or she secured a good rank in national or board exams (particularly international students) or in university exams. |

Table 3.1 Subcodes of rhetorical appeal present in statements of purpose (SPs) (cont.)

| **Rhetorical Appeal Category** | **Description** |
|---|---|
| 2. *Ethos* (*Personal Motivation/Inclination*) | In this appeal, the applicant constructs an *ethos* by emphasizing his or her personal motivation or inclination (special interest) in pursuing a graduate program specifically in the technical communication field. |
| 3. *Ethos* (*Educational Information*) | In this appeal, the applicant constructs an *ethos* is by detailing his or her academic qualification (for example, previous academic degrees, courses taken, skills gathered from academic degrees). |
| 4. *Ethos* (*Professional Expertise*) | In this appeal, the applicant constructs an *ethos* by detailing his or her professional skills and expertise (for example, years of job experience, job roles and responsibilities). |
| 5. *Ethos* (*Research Expertise*) | In this appeal, the applicant constructs an *ethos* by emphasizing his or her skills and interests in conducting research through past research experience. |
| 6. *Ethos* (*Credible Motive—Beneficial to University/Program*) | In this appeal, the applicant constructs an *ethos* by showing his or her future motives in contributing significantly to the university or the program (in this case, technical communication). The contributions can be in the form of conducting research for the department and sharing previous educational or professional skills with the faculty and students. |

Table 3.1 Subcodes of rhetorical appeal present in statements of purpose (SPs) (cont.)

| **Rhetorical Appeal Category** | **Description** |
|---|---|
| 7. *Ethos* (*Credible Motive—Beneficial to Community*) | In this appeal, the applicant constructs an *ethos* through his or her desire to work for the larger benefits of society or community. The applicant shows that he or she does not want to restrict himself or herself to bookish knowledge, but he or she wants to make a significant difference in society through the MS in technical communication program. |
| 8. *Ethos* (*Credible Motive—Beneficial to Professional Field*) | In this appeal, the applicant constructs an *ethos* by showing his or her future motives in contributing significantly to the technical communication field by producing original research or by helping organizations in understanding the value of the technical communication field or by assisting organizations in performing technical communication-related activities more efficiently. |
| 9. *Ethos* (*Credibility—Ready to Take Challenge*) | In this appeal, the applicant constructs an *ethos* by showing that he or she is not afraid of taking any challenges during the MS program. In other words, he or she stresses his or her awareness of the upcoming challenges and preparedness for meeting those challenges. |

Table 3.1 Subcodes of rhetorical appeal present in statements of purpose (SPs) (cont.)

| **Rhetorical Appeal Category** | **Description** |
|---|---|
| *10. Ethos* (*Unique Qualifications*) | In this appeal, the applicant constructs an *ethos* by highlighting his or her unique skills or qualifications that could grab the audiences' attention. The unique skills are for example, presentation, organization, time management, attention to details, leadership, writing, storytelling, aptitude, teamwork, and technical proficiency. |
| *11. Ethos* (*Fitness to Program*) | In this appeal, the applicant constructs an *ethos* by claiming that he or she is the perfect fit for the MS program because of his or her relevant skills and expertise. This appeal is similar to *Unique Qualifications*, *Educational Information*, and *Professional Expertise*, but in this appeal an applicant explicitly points out his or her skills and explain how those skills are aligned with the departmental goals. For example, an applicant informs that he or she can bring the past experience to the department, or that the structure of the MS program aligns perfectly with his or her academic and professional backgrounds. |

Table 3.1 Subcodes of rhetorical appeal present in statements of purpose (SPs) (cont.)

| **Rhetorical Appeal Category** | **Description** |
|---|---|
| 12. *Ethos* (*Future Aspirations*) | In this appeal, the applicant constructs an *ethos* through explicit statements about his or her future aspirations. This appeal is different from the three appeals, namely, *Ethos* (*Credible Motive*, *Beneficial to University/Program*, *Beneficial to Commun*ity, and *Beneficial to Professional Field*). In this appeal, an applicant does not emphasize his or her intention to contribute either to the university or program or community or professional field, but he or she argues for future goals and the role of the MS program to accomplish those goals. The future goals are, for example, aspirations to enter into a PhD program or other technical communication-related programs like travel journalism, creative writing, or to make a career in the software industry as a technical writer, or to enhance communication and teaching skills. |
| *13. Ethos* (*Formality*) | In this appeal, the applicant constructs his or her *ethos* through the use of formal language and formal presentation. In this case, an applicant expresses his or her interests to apply for this program or introduce himself or herself or give information about what other application materials, for example, resume, letter of recommendation, are attached with the SP in a formal manner, without using any causal format or language. |

Table 3.1 Subcodes of rhetorical appeal present in statements of purpose (SPs) (cont.)

| **Rhetorical Appeal Category** | **Description** |
|---|---|
| 14. *Ethos* (*Professor's Markers*) | This appeal is specific to the existing students (particularly BS in technical communication or other programs) at Missouri S&T. The existing student constructs an *ethos* by pointing out his or her association with specific professors or faculty members in the technical communication department. The arguments here were created by highlighting how a professor motivated him or her to enroll in technical communication courses and eventually gain acceptance into the MS in technical communication program. |
| 15. *Ethos* (*Politeness*) | This appeal is similar to *Ethos (Formality)* except for the use of polite words or phrases, for example, "Thank you," "Please," "Kindly," "Grateful." In this appeal, the applicant constructs his or her *ethos* by creating a "polite" self. |
| 16. *Ethos* (*Excitement*) | In this appeal, the applicant constructs an *ethos* by enhancing the audiences' trust—he or she expresses excitement (enthusiasm) to pursue the MS program in technical communication. In particular, an applicant shows his or her eagerness to obtain an admission offer from the department, for example, "I look forward to hearing from you soon" and "I cannot wait to join your program." |

Table 3.1 Subcodes of rhetorical appeal present in statements of purpose (SPs) (cont.)

| **Rhetorical Appeal Category** | **Description** |
|---|---|
| 17. *Pathos* (*Narrative*) | This is a common appeal in the SPs. In this appeal, the applicant constructs *pathos* by taking the strategy of storytelling either to describe his or her childhood activities or community services or growing interests in the field of technical communication in order to emotionally engage the audience with the context and content. |
| 18. *Pathos* (*Ego—Lack of Skills*) | In this appeal, the applicant constructs *pathos* by making the audience feel capable of offering the required skills and expertise to him or her, which the applicant currently lacks. In this way, the audience is placed in a superior position. The applicant places himself or herself in an inferior position by professing to not yet have appropriate skills to be successful in the professional field. For example, words or phrases like "upgrade my skill set," "non-specialist in communication," and "lack of communication skills" are frequently used to bestow that superior feeling to the audience. |

Table 3.1 Subcodes of rhetorical appeal present in statements of purpose (SPs) (cont.)

| **Rhetorical Appeal Category** | **Description** |
|---|---|
| 19. *Pathos* (*Humor*) | In this appeal, the applicant constructs *pathos* by using humorous languages to lighten the seriousness of the SPs. Usually, in most cases, the SPs are written in a serious and formal pattern, but this appeal is used occasionally to lighten the audience's mood without losing the gravity of the SPs. Also, this appeal helps to establish a cordial connection with the audience and establish rapport. |
| 20. *Pathos* (*Ego-complimentary*) | This is a simple appeal to flatter the audience. In this appeal, the applicant constructs *pathos* by bolstering audience's ego—he or she showcases that the university or the department or the MS program are the best in the USA in terms of quality of education, atmosphere of campus, quality of research and teaching, etc. |
| 21. *Pathos* (*Financial Need*) | In this appeal, the applicant constructs *pathos* by attempting to create sympathy in the audience by highlighting his or her poor monetary condition. The applicant emphasizes if he or she is not given any assistantship, then he or she would not be able to sustain in the USA or pursue education. So both the applicant and department would be at loss by not fulfilling the dreams of pursuing graduate study and by not obtaining the expertise that could be brought by the applicant to the department respectively. |

Table 3.1 Subcodes of rhetorical appeal present in statements of purpose (SPs) (cont.)

| **Rhetorical Appeal Category** | **Description** |
|---|---|
| 22. *Logos* (*SP Objective Specificity*) | In this appeal, the applicant constructs *logos* by specifying about the goal of writing his or her SPs (exact purpose statement). This appeal does not create any suspense for the audience, but logically presents the applicants' objective. For example, "I would like to apply for the MS in technical communication program at Missouri S&T." |
| 23. *Logos* (*GPA Explanation*) | In this appeal, the applicant constructs *logos* by justifying reasons for getting a low GPA (if he or she has one) and providing causal statements such as if there had not been extenuating circumstances, then the GPA could have been much better, or the low GPA was only due to the grades in minors. |
| 24. *Logos* (*Field Value*) | In this appeal, the applicant constructs *logos* by offering many reasons to choose the technical communication field. They give sound reasons about the value of this field. For example, technical communication is related to many fields, it is an interdisciplinary field, it offers an exciting and challenging career, it helps in meaningful exchanges of messages, or it enables people to use technology effectively. |

Table 3.1 Subcodes of rhetorical appeal present in statements of purpose (SPs) (cont.)

| **Rhetorical Appeal Category** | **Description** |
|---|---|
| 25. *Logos* (*Teaching Profession Value*) | In this appeal, the applicant constructs *logos* by highlighting the value of the teaching profession. This appeal is mostly used while discussing the application for a GTA position. The applicant argues that since he or she is aware of the benefits and values of the teaching profession, he or she wants a GTA position in the department. This GTA position would not only help that applicant gain expertise in teaching and professional development but also help him or her to enjoy the rewards of teaching careers in the future. |
| 26. *Logos* (*Benefits*) | This appeal is almost similar to the *pathos (Ego-complimentary)* appeal, but here the applicant constructs *logos* by not explicitly mentioning that the department or the university is going to benefit him or her in achieving his or her future aspirations. Rather, the applicant argues why an MS program is required and how in general an MS program can help him or her to be successful in his or her future endeavors. |
| 27. *Logos* (*Family Reason*) | In this appeal, the applicant constructs *logos* by arguing that since his or her family members are in Rolla or in the university as students or employees, he or she does not want to go to other universities for higher education. |

Table 3.1 Subcodes of rhetorical appeal present in statements of purpose (SPs) (cont.)

| **Rhetorical Appeal Category** | **Description** |
|---|---|
| 28. *Logos* (*Application Information*) | In this appeal, the applicant (mostly an existing undergraduate student) constructs *logos* by providing information regarding when he or she has applied to the MS program, what is the goal of applying to the MS program, and which course (in this case technical communication) he or she has applied to take part in this department. |
| 29. *Logos* (*Format*) | In this appeal, the applicant constructs *logos* by following a specific format (either essay or letter) to write his or her SP. The applicant sometimes chooses to provide a title to his or her SP like "Statement of Purpose," or sometimes he or she chooses to write the department's name and the degree's name in the title. |

**3.5.1. Statistical Analysis of *Pisteis* and Their Associated Subcodes.** Results (sentence level analysis) showed that the applicants relied heavily on *ethos* to persuade the audience. In twenty-four SPs, there are 612 sentences, and 398 sentences of those sentences (or 65.03%) were devoted to *ethos*, 165 sentences (26.96%) were devoted to *pathos*, and forty-nine sentences (8%) were devoted to *logos* (see Figure 3.1).

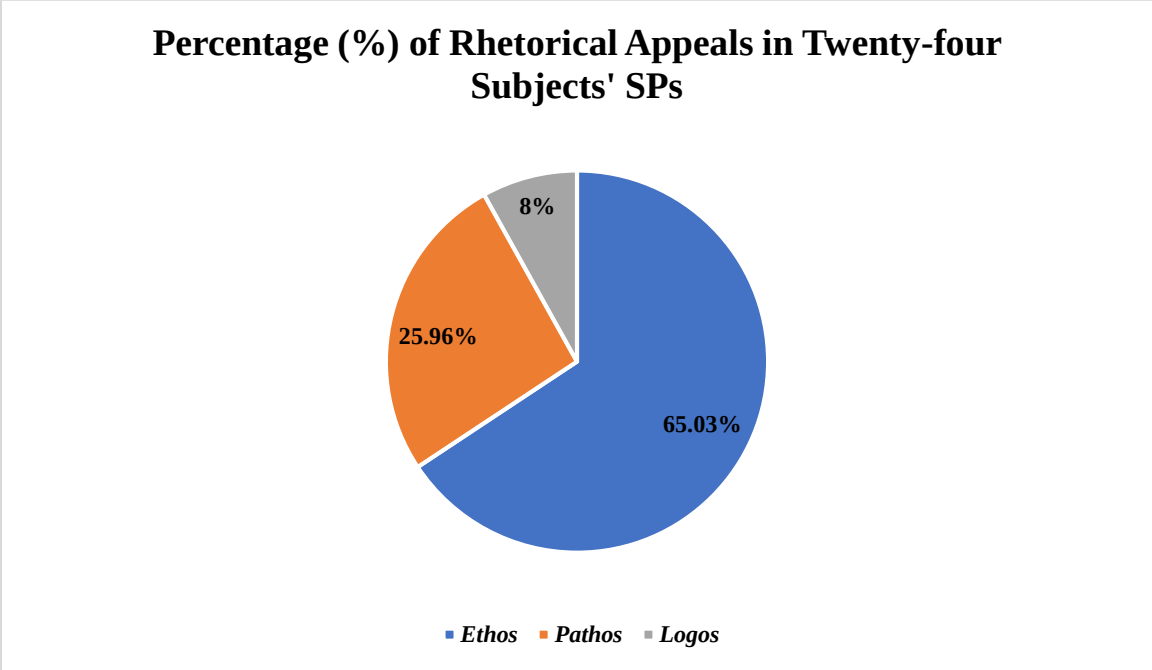



Figure 3.1 Percentage (%) of rhetorical appeals in the subjects' SPs at the sentence level. *Ethos* is heavily used (65.03%) and *pathos* is moderately used (29.96%) whereas *logos* is used insignificantly (8%) compared to *ethos* and *pathos* by the applicants to persuade the audience.

Figure 3.2 illustrates that two subcodes of *ethos*, namely, *Professional Expertise* and *Educational Information*, which consisted of 25.88% and 20.1% of the 398 *ethos* sentences, respectively, were used substantively to establish credibility. The *Professional Expertise* subcode was present in 16.83% of the total sentences (612) in the SPs, which is the highest percentage among all subcodes, and the *Educational Information* subcode was present in 13.07% of the total sentences, which is the third highest percentage among all subcodes.

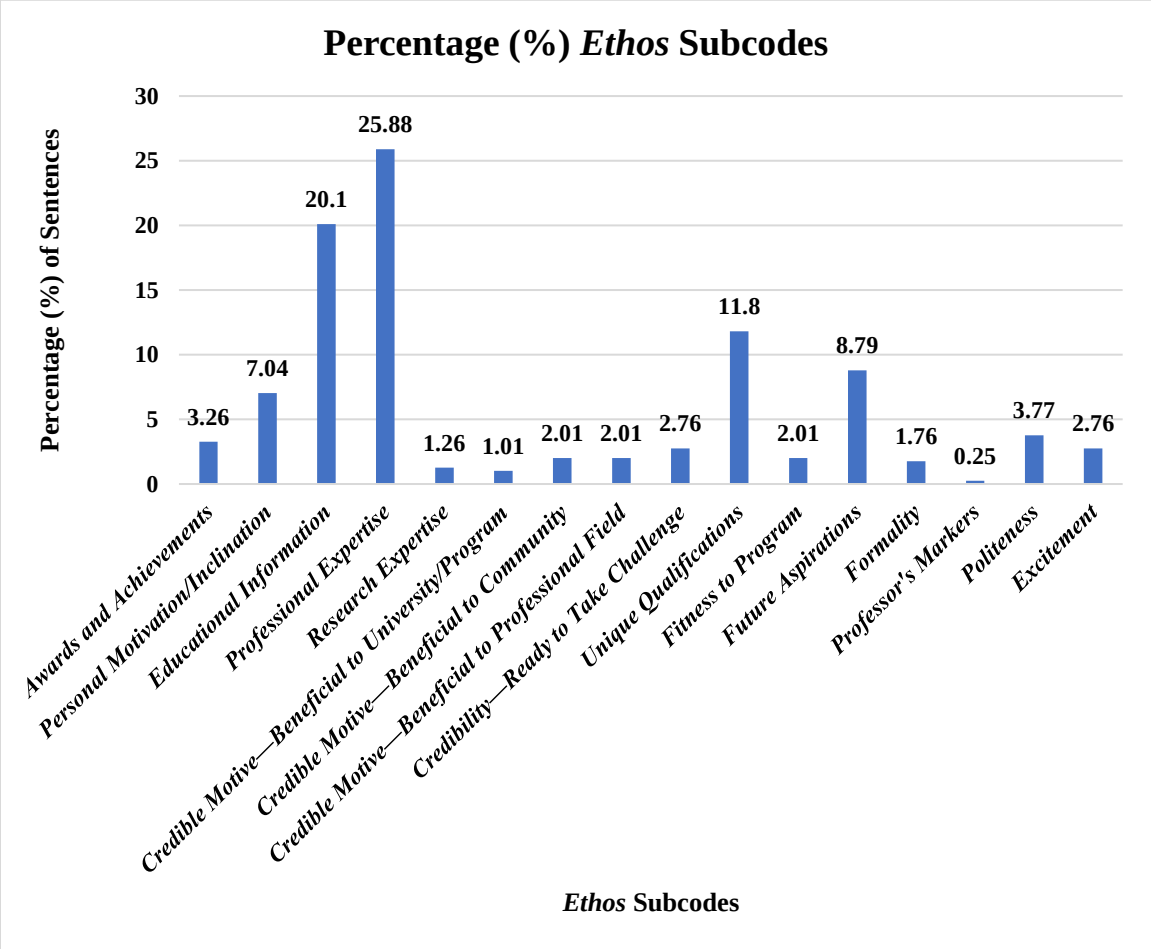



Figure 3.2 Percentage (%) of *ethos* subcodes in the subjects' SPs at the sentence level. *Ethos (Professional Expertise)* at 25.88% and *ethos (Educational Information)* at 20.1% were the dominant *ethos* subcodes in my sample of SPs. The subjects did not rely heavily on *ethos* (*Professor's Markers*) in their SPs.

On the other hand, the applicants rarely highlighted the names of the department's faculty (only 0.25% of the sentences) to show that they were already in touch with faculty members or to say that faculty members motivated them to pursue this MS program. The applicants highlighted their *Unique Qualifications* (11.8%), *Future Aspirations* (8.79%), and *Personal Motivations/Inclinations* (7.04%) moderately in the SPs. The other *ethos*

subcodes such as *Awards and Achievements*, *Research Expertise*, *Credible Motive—Beneficial to Professional Field*, *Credible Motive—Beneficial to Community*, *Credible Motive—Beneficial to Community*, *Ready to Take Challenge*, *Formality*, *Politeness*, and *Excitement* accounted for 20.88% of all *ethos* sentences (398).

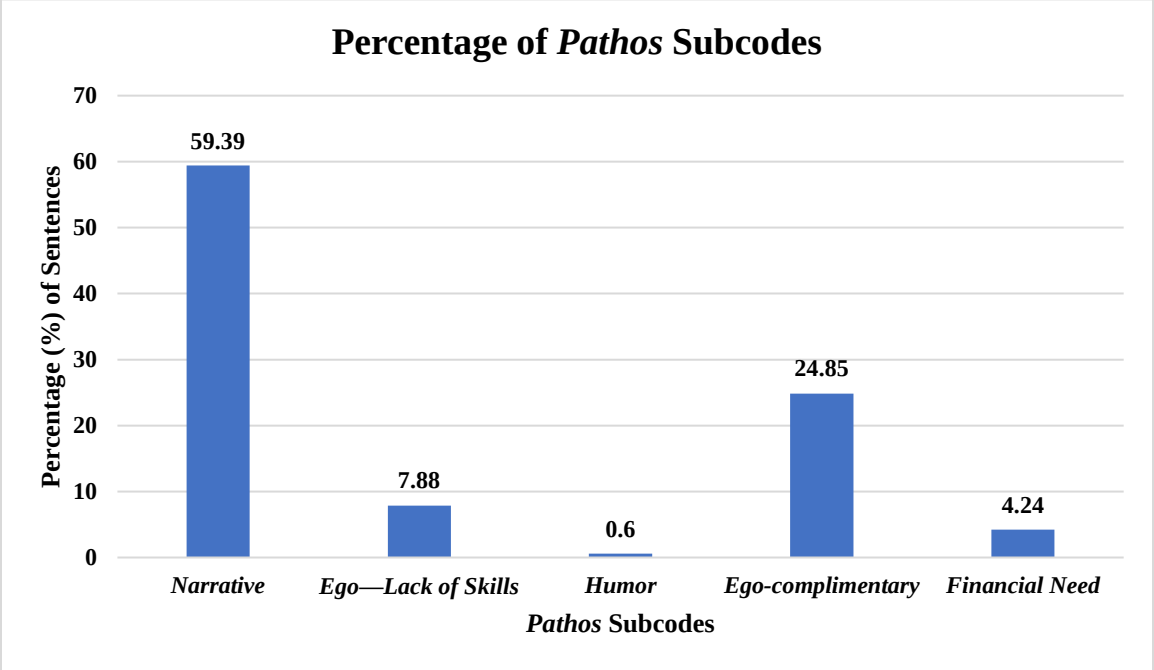



Figure 3.3 Percentage (%) of *pathos* subcodes in the subjects' SPs at the sentence level. *Pathos (Narrative)* at 59.39% plays a significant role in my sample of SPs, whereas *pathos (Humor) at* 0.6% is the least used category by the applicants to persuade the admission committee.

Figure 3.3 illustrates that one subcode of *pathos* (*Narrative*) played a significant role in my subjects' SPs to stir a certain emotion in the audience. Ninety-eight out of 165 *pathos* sentences (59.39%) were devoted to this subcode. This subcode occupied 16.01%

(98 out of 612 sentences) of all sentences in the SPs, which is the second highest percentage among all subcodes. Another subcode called *Ego-complimentary* was present in forty-one sentences out of 165 *pathos* sentences (24.85%). The other subcodes of *pathos*, *Humor*, *Ego—Lack of Skills*, and *Financial Need*, accounted for 0.6%, 7.88%, and 4.24% of the *pathos* sentences, respectively.

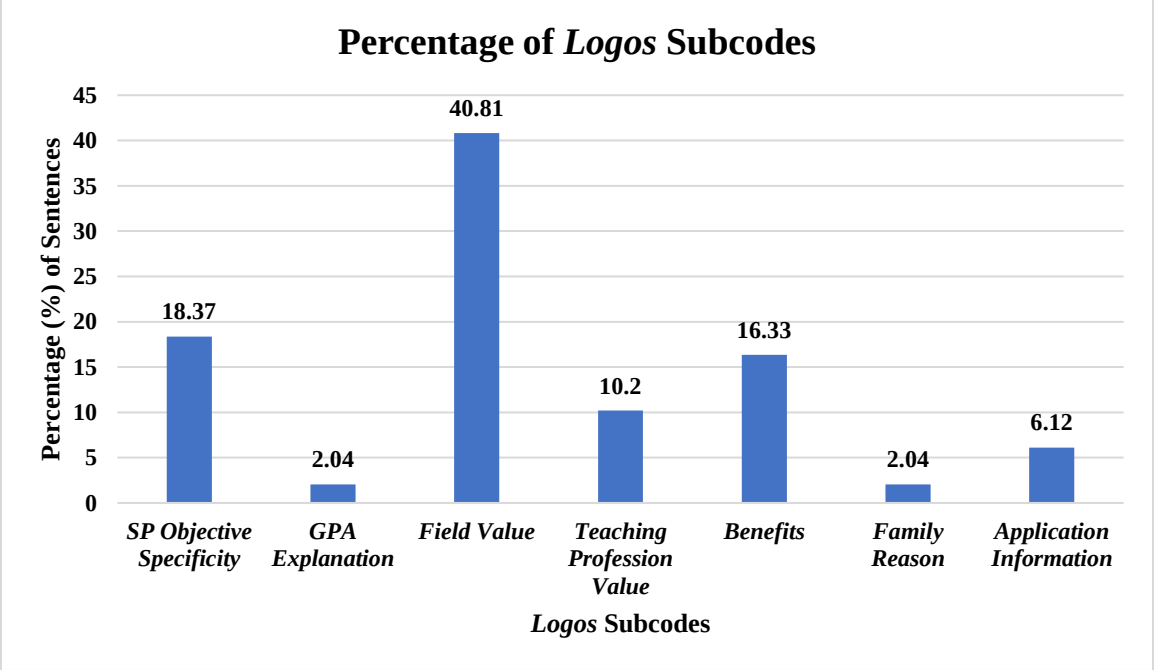



Figure 3.4 Percentage (%) of *logos* subcodes in the subjects' SPs at the sentence level. *Logos* (*Field Value*) at 40.81% plays a significant role in my sample of SPs, whereas *logos* (*Family Reason*) at 2.04% and *logos* (*GPA Explanation*) at 2.04% are the least used subcodes by the applicants.

Figure 3.4 illustrates that the applicants relied significantly on arguments about the *Field Value* in my sample of SPs. Twenty out of forty-nine *logos* sentences (40.81%)

were devoted to *Field Value*, 10.2% to *Teaching Profession Value*, and 18.37% to *SP Objective Specificity*. *Family Reason* (2.04%) and *GPA Explanation* (2.04%) were used infrequently in rational appeals.

**3.5.2. Qualitative Analysis of Subcodes.** The *ethos* subcodes are important because they enable an applicant to establish credibility in terms of sound sense (*phronesis*), moral character (*arete*), and benevolent nature (*eunoia*). Table 3.2 summarizes how different attributes of *ethos* are related to the subcodes.

Table 3.2 Relationship of e*thos* attributes with the subcodes

| ***Ethos* Attribute** | **Subcode** | **Relation** |
|---|---|---|
| *Phronesis* (sound sense) | Awards and Achievements | Sound sense of achieving success in the intended program |
| | Research Expertise | Sound sense of contributing knowledge |
| | Credibility- Ready to Take Challenge | Sound sense of preparedness to succeed |
| | Personal Motivation/Inclination | Sound sense of motivations to be successful |
| | Educational Information | Sound sense of academic erudition |
| | Professional Expertise | Sound sense of professional erudition |
| | Unique Qualifications | Sound sense of attractive erudition (i.e., learning that is attractive) |

Table 3.2 Relationship of e*thos* attributes with the subcodes (cont.)

| ***Ethos* Attribute** | **Subcode** | **Relation** |
|---|---|---|
| | Future Aspirations | Sound sense of seriousness and sincerity |
| | Fitness to Program | Sound sense of judging oneself from the perspective of the program |
| | Professor's Markers | Sound sense of highlighting motivation from the discourse community |
| | Formality | Sound sense of observing decorum |
| | Excitement | Sound sense of showing enthusiasm about the intended program |
| | Politeness | Sound sense of showing politeness |
| *Arete* (moral character) | Unique Qualifications | Moral character of possessing distinctive qualifications |
| | Credible Motive- Beneficial to Community | Moral character of doing good for community |
| | Credible Motive- Beneficial to University/Program | Moral character of contributing to the university or program |
| | Credible Motive- Beneficial to Professional Field | Moral Character of contributing to the discipline |

Table 3.2 Relationship of e*thos* attributes with the subcodes (cont.)

| ***Ethos* Attribute** | **Subcode** | **Relation** |
|---|---|---|
| *Eunoia* (benevolent nature) | Credible Motive- Beneficial to Community | Benevolent character of doing good for community |
| | Credible Motive- Beneficial to University/Program | Benevolent character of contributing to the university or program |
| | Credible Motive- Beneficial to Professional Field | Benevolent Character of contributing to the discipline |

When applicants demonstrated sound sense, morality and benevolence were implicit in their arguments. Still, in my sample of SPs, the applicants tried to prove their sound sense more than their moral and benevolent characters, because, in any graduate study, a student needs to be of sound sense, professionally, educationally, etc. Some of the subcodes could not be placed in only one of the attributes because an intention to do good in a community reveals both a moral and benevolent nature—a respect for acknowledged virtues and an interest to sacrifice any vested interest.

The *pathos* subcodes are important because they "draw their strength from their ability to emotionally exhaust the reader's defenses" (Ross, 2009, p. 31). Being a member of an admission committee, the audience wants to feel that they are superior, or the universities or programs the audience members are associated with are special. Most of the applicants sought at least one argument to bolster this "ego" (a sense of superiority)

of their audience by writing at least one sentence about how the university or program is special.

Storytelling plays a significant role in this genre and is usually absent in other occluded genres like letters of transmittal or job application letters (Ding, 2007). In my sample, I found that the applicants sometimes became too "personal" with the audience as they shared their life story or experience; in other words, the applicants attempted to establish a friendly or emotional connection with the audience. This is a strategy to win the audience's trust by aligning the applicant's narrative with the goals of the audience—goals of the university, goals of the department, or goals of the program. The subject matter of the storytelling was diverse—for example, what values the applicants held, how the values were gathered over a period of time, how childhood experiences made a candidate suitable to pursue a graduate program, how some skills were still lacking in the applicants, and how the applicants got to know about technical communication field. This storytelling tended to cast an applicant in a favorable light even when he or she declared that he or she lacked some skills required for technical communication and walked the audience through the applicant's strengths and vulnerabilities. During storytelling, expressive descriptions of people, places, or events were used. For example, one subject wrote,

> "My senior High School Education took me to a village in the Western Region of Ghana. Expectations for good education is limited in such communities due to lack of adequate and competent teachers not to talk of poor teaching resources."

The *logos* subcodes are important because an applicant puts forth logic reasoning to create believability and activate rational appeal among the audience. Gaining the trust of an audience depends partly on the effective presentation of information. Being aware of this criterion, the applicants took a common approach of formatting the SP as an essay or a letter, instead of haphazard paragraphing, wording, or phrasing. An applicant attempted to logically explain any discrepancy in GPA or application information. In this case, rather than just including a fact, i.e., low GPA (a non-artistic proof), the applicants packaged the fact in a mitigating argument.

By discussing the technical communication field in an informed manner, an applicant attempted to convince the audience that he or she was not applying casually just to get an admission to a graduate program; rather he or she was truly interested in the MS program and his or her admission would be fruitful to the department. For this rational appeal, the arguments were given inductively. Inductive reasoning refers to going from specific to general and deductive reasoning refers to going from general to specific arguments. In my sample, I found that the arguments for the subcode of *Field Value* were put in the following way:

1. The technical communication discipline has diverse values and benefits (specific proposition);
2. Technical communication can help fulfill the goals of the applicants and help achieve their future aspirations (specific proposition);
3. Therefore, technical communication is a great field to pursue (general proposition).

The applicants used *Field Value* arguments to show familiarity with the discipline and acknowledge the positive attributes of the discipline.

While discussing the value of the teaching profession, most of the applicants did not explicitly say that they required GTA position because of the funding associated with it. Rather, the applicants argued that the teaching profession is highly respected in society, and they were truly interested in entering this profession. For example, one applicant wrote,

> "According to Ever Garrison, 'A teacher is a compass that activates the magnets of curiosity, knowledge, and wisdom in pupils.' I know good teachers make all the differences."

Based on my findings, this SP genre can be called as an expressive genre based on Kinneavy's (1996) definition, because this genre is used by the applicants to establish their *ethos* (character, affiliations, and credibility). Guarks' (1997) analysis proved to be true in my sample of SPs, where the applicants focused on their professional affiliations—not only highlighting their professional experiences but also showcasing their good academic backgrounds. The applicants created their persona through their text, which matched the version of situated *ethos* of Brown (2009) and Aristotle's traditional definition of *ethos*. Based on the requirement of the situation, in which very little direction was given to the applicants, the applicants' shared understanding of this genre pushed them to highlight their sound sense. This genre is also a persuasive one because the applicants attempted to stir the emotion of the audience by giving them a sense of superiority sometimes by praising the university, department, or program or praising committee members and sometimes by mentioning the applicants' own weaknesses.

Compared to *pathos* and *ethos*, *logos* was not significant in my sample of SPs at the sentence level to demonstrate the applicants' worthiness.

### 3.6. SUMMARY OF MAJOR TRENDS

Considering this SP genre primarily as a deliberative rhetoric, I began this research to analyze how the admission committee derived happiness at the prospect of offering admission to an applicant. Based on my analysis of the *pisteis* in the SPs, I found that the applicant's shared understanding of the SP genre was manifested in the following ways:

- The same artificial proof dominated each SP: *ethos* (particularly *Professional Expertise*);
- The same *ethos* attribute dominated each SP: sound sense (phronesis);
- *Ethos* was established not only by the character of the applicant but by his or her unique attributes, affiliations, communal identity, and social obligatory role, and the power of merging himself or herself with the audience;
- Each applicant used at least four subcodes (special topics) out of twenty-nine subcodes in their SPs;
- To establish *ethos*, the applicants derived some arguments from their professional expertise and educational background;
- To establish *ethos*, the applicants derived some arguments from their unique and appealing qualifications;
- To establish *logos*, most applicants adhered to either an essay format or a letter format as evidence of their professionalism;

- To establish *logos*, most applicants proved the genuineness of their applications by showing awareness and knowledge of the intended field and the teaching profession; and
- To establish *pathos*, most applicants used storytelling in their SPs in order to create a personal bond with the audience.

# 4. RHETORICAL STYLE

According to Aristotle, a rhetor considers three parameters while composing a speech: sources of *pisteis* (*inventio*), *lexis* (style), and organization (Kennedy, 2007, p. 194). Therefore, it is worth studying what writing style an applicant uses in his or her SP in order to understand the SP genre rhetorically. Genre analysis can be conducted from various perspectives, but according to Bhatia (1993), genre analysis is concerned with two main aspects: firstly, common and conventional textual features contributing to the pedagogical understanding of genre in terms of form and function and secondly, "socio-cultural" and "cognitive constraints" prevalent in a specific field (p. 16). Bhatia's (1993) genre analysis model included seven stages:

1. *Placing the given genre-text in a situational context*;
2. *Surveying existing literature*;
3. *Refining the situational/contextual analysis*;
4. *Selecting corpus*;
5. *Studying the institutional context*;
6. *Levels of linguistic analysis*; and
7. *Specialist information in genre analysis* (pp. 22–34).

The sixth stage (linguistic analysis) is concerned with analyzing textual features. Stylistic analysis is one way of analyzing textual features. Casañ-Pitarch and Calvo-Ferrer (2015) included moves and step analysis within linguistic analysis. According to them, a researcher needs to focus on three aspects while doing a linguistic analysis: lexico-grammatical features (i.e., primarily a statistical analysis of grammatical features

and common language usage in a genre), text-patterning (i.e., an analysis of syntax or language choices), and structural interpretation of the text genre (i.e., structural interpretation of moves and steps in a genre) (Casañ-Pitarch & Calvo-Ferrer, 2015, p. 77). Before I explain stylistic analysis, I must first define style.

## 4.1. DEFINITION OF STYLE

As style is one of the major bases for my rhetorical analysis, it is important to define style and explain how style is related to the analysis of SPs. The Latin word for style is *elocutio* (speaking out) and the Greek word for style is *lexis* (thought and word). The perspectives of thought and word are closely related to *logos*, but style is the "way of saying something" and *logos* is "what is said" (Kennedy, 2007, p. 193). There are many definitions of style, so defining style is not an easy task. Kennedy (2007) connected style to clear speech and correct grammar—a perspective that was slightly reformulated by Cicero. Cicero stated that four things are required to produce a good style: "correctness," "clarity," "propriety," and "ornamentation" (Kennedy, 2007, p. 197).

One common definition of style is "the dress of thought"—that is, ornamentation (Corbett & Connors, 1999, p. 338). Although style may be decorative, Cunningham, Malone, and Rothschild (2019) stated that "style is more than a dressing up of ideas. It is literally putting ideas into words: no style, no words, just thoughts in a person's mind. Style makes linguistic communication possible" (p. 160).

> *Silva Rhetoricae*'s definition of style is quite expressive and easy to understand: "Style concerns the artful expression of ideas. If invention addresses *what* is to be said, style addresses *how* this will be said. From a rhetorical perspective style is

> not incidental, superficial, or supplementary: style names how ideas are embodied in language and customized to communicative contexts" (*Silva Rhetoricae,* n.d.).

While *Silva Rhetoricae*'s definition gives us the starting point to consider style from a practical perspective, Jones's (1998) definition gives us an overall picture of style:

> "Style is your choices of words, phrases, clauses, and sentences, and how you connect these sentences. Style is the unity and coherence of your paragraphs and larger segments. Style is your tone—your attitudes toward your subject, your audience, and yourself—in what you write. Style is who you are and how you reflect who you are, intentionally or unintentionally" (p. 3).

There is an intricate relationship between grammar and style, so it is important to understand the similarities and differences between these two. Grammar is "the internalized system of rules" that helps build a person's language ability (Kolln & Gray, 2019, p. 2). Corbett and Connors (1999) simplified the definition of grammar and provided an easily understandable distinction between grammar and style. They stated that grammar is the way of using language (particularly words), whereas style is the way of crafting meaning by using those words. Jones's (1998) distinction of grammar and style is more usable, i.e., grammar "depends on rules" and style depends on the "matter of choice" (p. 43). Metaphorically, we can therefore surmise that grammar comes from the "brain" and style comes from the "heart." Grammar is relatively rigid, and style is relatively flexible; according to the rhetorical situation, style can be molded.

## 4.2. STYLISTICS: LITERARY AND NON-LITERARY TEXTS

Stylistics is one of the prime methods for analyzing text through the interpretation of language (Simpson, 2004). One can categorize or classify written works by quantifying stylistic features present in them (Peng & Hengartner, 2012). Stylistic analysis is closely associated with literary genres, but in fact it can be applied to both literary and non-literary texts. There is a strong tradition of stylistic analysis of non-literary texts, such as political speeches, media articles, and television and web broadcasting (Jeffries & McIntyre, 2010; Stockwell & Whiteley, 2014).

When analyzing literary genres, many earlier studies quantified style based on "concordances, or inventories of the frequency of every word in a text" (Peng & Hengartner, 2012, p. 2). Some of the studies analyzed word length and vocabulary richness in a written text. Williams (1940) analyzed sentence lengths of works written by G. K. Chesterton, H. G. Wells, and George Bernard Shaw. Morton (1965) also investigated sentence length in ancient Greek texts. Mosteller and Wallace (1963) considered word counts to understand the difference between Alexander Hamilton and James Madison in their seminal analysis of the *Federalist Papers*.

To analyze non-literary genres, Li (2009) conducted a stylistic analysis of "Atkins Chocolate Chip Granola Bar" to understand the style-related characteristics of the commercial advertisement genre. Fomukong (2016) conducted a stylistic analysis on the advertisement of Dangote Cement on billboards in Barmenda, North West Region, Cameroon. He employed Jeffries' (2016) apparatus for textual analysis: prioritization, implying and assumption, listing, naming, and description.

The modern view of stylistic analysis ranges from Simpson (2004), who related this type of analysis to counting nouns and verbs, to Jeffries and McIntyre (2010), who related this type of analysis to how language works in a system, what kinds of meanings a certain type of text conveys and how readers construct those meanings, what kinds of interpretations any text requires, and why readers interact with a certain type of text in a certain manner.

## 4.3. RHETORICAL STYLE IN THE SP GENRE

Since the SP is the most important part of a graduate application, prospective graduate students should be informed about how to maintain an appropriate style in their SPs. In the scholarly literature, I was not able to find explicit research on style in the SP genre. However, some popular books and websites provide recipe-type guidance on style so that prospective applicants can write their SPs. For example, Mumby (1962) emphasized “clarity,” “originality,” and “content” (p. 130) in a winning SP. He stated that an SP should contain “affirmative statements” (p. 130) and include only appropriate (relevant) content devoid of controversy and jocularity. Regarding clarity, he mentioned that the SPs should be free of mechanical errors and be perfect grammatically.

Stewart (2009) devoted four pages (pp. 16–19) to explaining what kind of style and format an applicant should use while writing an SP. He pointed out that SPs are highly acceptable to the audience when they are written in first person, use words characteristic of formal writing, avoid discipline-specific jargon and creative writing tactics, apply conventional typefaces and fonts, and adhere to word and page limits.

Overall, he said that the applicants should avoid “unconventional” and “gimmicky” writing styles (p. 17).

In her textual analysis of SPs, Ding (2007) considered the lexical strategies taken by applicants. Textual analysis closely resembles stylistic analysis because both are concerned with text, and text is comprised of words, phrases, sentences, and content; additionally, style is the choice of those words and phrases, the way of formulating sentences, and the way of organizing content (paragraphing). Therefore, one can understand a genre’s style by conducting a textual analysis—focusing, for example, on what choices of words and phrases are made in the text to convince the audience (Stockwell, 2014).

Ding (2007) conducted a genre analysis of SPs (n=30), both edited and unedited, submitted to medical and dental schools. Along with a move analysis, she paid special attention to lexical features (analysis of words) to understand what kind of words and word structures differentiated the edited and unedited SPs. She used concordance software, Concapp and Concordance, to run frequency word counts on edited and unedited SPs submitted to medical or dental schools in the USA. She found that the word *and* was used an average of 22.2 times in an edited SP and 24.2 times in an unedited SP. The word *and* was used mostly between two nouns or two verbs in binary phrases. A higher percentage of binary noun phrases related to medicine- or dentistry-related content was used in the edited SPs, whereas a lower percentage was used in the unedited SPs. More irrelevant content, particularly noun phrases expressing content irrelevant to the medicine or dentistry field, were used in the unedited SPs.

Previous studies indicate a dearth of research in analyzing the SP genre from a stylistic perspective. Mumby (1962) and Stewart (2009) offered some advice regarding style, but that advice is not objective. For example, Mumby (1962) stated that prospective graduate applicants should maintain clarity in their SPs; however, his definition of clarity and its application in the practical sense are difficult to understand. Also, previous research studies did not thoroughly analyze the SPs graphologically, morphologically, syntactically, semantically, and lexically. The use of pronouns, contractions, and verb voice in the SP genre has never been studied, to the best of my knowledge. In this study, I examined my subjects' use of diction (personal pronouns, contractions, and verb voice), sentences (length and variety), and paragraphing (length and development) in their SPs. My goal was to learn more about my subjects' shared understanding of the SP genre through their writing style.

## 4.4. RELATED WORK

In this section, I will discuss some of the previous researchers' techniques of stylistic analysis in other genres like scientific and engineering communication, financial websites, advertisements, and news stories. As mentioned before, I was not able to find relevant studies on stylistic analysis in the SP genre. Therefore, to determine which stylistic features (lexical, graphological, morphological, and semantic) I should analyze in my sample of SPs, I relied on stylistic studies conducted in other genres. I also relied on Corbett and Connors' (1999) protocol for stylistic analysis, which is the basis of my research study design. However, I will defer my discussion of that protocol until the next section (Section 4.5 Methods: *Elocutio*).

Li (2009) conducted a stylistic analysis of the advertisement of Atkins Chocolate Chip Granola Bar to determine the characteristics of commercial advertisements. To determine the stylistic characteristics, she considered the following aspects:

- Linguistic description (graphological style markers, lexical style markers, syntactic style markers, grammatical style markers, and semantic style markers);
- Textual analysis (the layout and the paragraph development, cohesive devices); and
- Contextual analysis (medium of communication and role-relationship).

Li engaged in both quantitative and qualitative analysis in her study by measuring the length of sentences in terms of the number of words, and she investigated the grammatical types of sentences: simple, complex, compound, and compound-complex. She examined the paragraphs in terms of the number of sentences. She further analyzed the choice of words and cohesive devices. Her methodological framework, particularly her sentence-level analysis (both length and variety) and analysis of paragraphing, influenced the design of my research study for stylistic analysis.

To understand the role of personal pronouns on banks' corporate websites, Casañ-Pitarch (2016) conducted a stylistic analysis on sixty-four webpages from bank websites. His study revealed the way English discourse operates in the banking area. His study was divided into four parts:

1. Quantification of pronouns in the whole corpus;
2. Classification of pronouns into categories according to their types (subject, object, possessive, reflexive, and possessive determiners);

3. Determination of the pronoun's case, person, number, and gender; and
4. Evaluation of pronouns (qualitative analysis).

Casañ-Pitarch (2016) found that the frequency of pronouns was lower than the nouns in banking websites—a type of formal writing genre. He further found that the most frequent pronouns were first person plural ("we") and the "neutral" form of third person singular ("it"). He concluded that the types of pronouns differ based on the nature and purpose of the intended text in which the pronouns are used. Adopting this framework, in my study I examined how pronouns were used in a rhetorical style to persuade the audience.

Rodman (1994) conducted a study of sixteen scientific research articles from the disciplines of chemical engineering, civil engineering, physics, and mineralogy to determine the verb voice (active voice). Rodman's method included both aggregate and selective analysis to conclude why authors used active voice and what common patterns they used for active voice—a framework which I also used for my study to analyze verb voice. She found that authors in her study used active voice in the "Introduction" section to cite a source, introduce a current work, and state a scientific truth (p. 322). In the "Methods" section, they used active voice to indicate the functions of equipment, introduce a figure or table, and indicate the way characteristics of the sample were determined (p. 323). In the "Results" section, they used active voice to introduce a figure or table, present the basis of a result, comment on the reliability of a result, present the work of other authors, and present mathematical arguments (p. 325). In the "Discussion" section, they used active voice to cite the work of other researchers, emphasize the work of the authors, explain or interpret results, and introduce metadiscourse, a signal to the

readers about the direction of a particular paragraph (p. 326). In the "Conclusion" section, they used active voice to introduce metadiscourse (p. 327). This study helped me understand the goals of using active voice.

Halloran (2003) analyzed Francis Crick and James Watson's famous *Nature* article "Molecular Structure of Nucleic Acid: A Structure for Deoxyribose Nucleic Acid" in order to understand the larger context of scientific communication from a stylistic perspective. He thoroughly analyzed each paragraph of the paper to determine what kind of tone and persona the authors wanted to maintain. He found that the authors maintained a "genteel tone" to achieve two purposes: to tactfully criticize some scholars who previously proposed the deoxyribose nucleic acid (D.N.A.) structure and to maintain a personal style in the paper (pp. 42–43).

I relied on Kolln and Gray's (2019) protocol for identifying contractions; however, I will defer my discussion of that protocol until the next section (Section 4.5: Methods: *Elocutio*). In summary, these studies helped me develop a framework for stylistically analyzing the SPs in my sample both quantitatively (number of personal pronouns, verb voice, sentences, and paragraphs) and qualitatively (analysis of the use of personal pronouns, verb voice, long and short sentences, and paragraphs).

## 4.5. METHODS: *ELOCUTIO*

In this section, I will discuss the procedure of analyzing rhetorical style in my sample of SPs. For more information on the data collection and sample, refer to Section 2. For the analysis of diction, I considered each occurrence of a personal pronoun, contraction, and verb voice as the unit of analysis. For the analysis of sentence length and

sentence variety, I considered each sentence as the unit of analysis. A sentence is defined as "a group of words beginning with a capital letter and ending with some mark of end punctuation" (Corbett & Connors, 1999, p. 370). When identifying a sentence, I considered only three punctuation marks, namely a period (.), an exclamation point (!) and a question mark (?), as end punctuation. For the analysis of paragraph length and paragraph development, I considered each paragraph as my unit of analysis.

Stylistic analysis should not be the product of "ad hoc and impressionistic comments" (Simpson, 2004, p. 4), but instead should follow an understandable or "replicable" and "retrievable" framework (Simpson, 2004, p. 4). Language analysis might become "haphazard" when researchers focus only on specific markers of style without providing a rationale for their specialized treatment (Fahnestock, 2005, p. 282). This type of selective analysis is not always able to provide accurate descriptions of a genre's conventional stylistic features; still, it can provide some valuable information about the genre. However, a combination of aggregate and selective analysis allows a researcher to evaluate specific linguistic features properly, and the aggregate analysis offers appropriate justification for selective analysis. Similarly, Casañ-Pitarch (2017) cautioned against directly examining micro-linguistic features without also considering the macro-linguistic features. He explained that the analysis of macrostructure (number of words, sentences, and paragraphs) helps build the foundation of understanding the main characteristics of a target genre. In this study of style, I therefore focused first on aggregate (macrostructure) analysis with proper justification. I then moved onto the selective analysis (microstructure) to highlight the essential characteristics of my subjects' shared understanding of the SP genre.

For my aggregate analysis, I followed the subsets of stylistic features proposed by Corbett and Connors (1999) and the stylistic analysis protocol given by Li (2009). This type of analysis produced both qualitative and quantitative data. Corbett and Connors (1999) outlined seven features one should look for "when analyzing prose style" (p. 360):

- Kind of diction
- Length of sentences
- Kinds of sentences
- Variety of sentence patterns
- Means of articulating sentences
- Uses of figures of speech
- Paragraphing

These proposed subsets of Corbett and Connor (1999) are similar to Li's (2009) stylistic analysis protocol. For example,

- Li's textual and syntactic style markers (the determination of sentence and paragraph structure);
- Li's syntactic style markers and grammatical style markers (the determination of types of sentence);
- Li's cohesive devices (the determination of sentence openers); and
- Li's semantic style markers, lexical style markers, and graphological style markers (the determination of diction or word choice).

To clarify why I chose certain stylistic features and why I excluded others for my analysis of SPs, I need to explain some of the stylistic features or markers proposed by Corbett and Connors (1999) and Li (2009).

**4.5.1. Kind of Diction.** Corbett and Connors (1999) suggested that the researchers count only the substantive words (nouns, pronouns, verbs, verbals, adjectives, and adverbs) while analyzing diction; based on those substantive words, they suggested looking for the following features of diction:

- Latinate (usually polysyllabic) or Anglo-Saxon (usually monosyllabic);
- Formal or informal;
- Common words or jargon;
- Passive or active voice;
- General or specific;
- Abstract or concrete; and
- Referential (denotative) or emotive (connotative) (p. 360).

Li's (2009) list of markers for diction is quite similar, but includes extra markers like:

- Hard words;
- Affirmative or commendatory words; and
- Personal pronouns (p. 64).

All these features aid the researcher in analyzing writing style, but some of the features are contradictory to the objective approach of my study. For example, the abstract or concrete feature of any word depends somewhat upon the perception of a researcher. Also, some words might be considered abstract in one context and concrete in another context. Similarly, a word can be formal in one situation and informal in another situation. Regarding jargon, there are many differences of opinion. Gowers (2014) mentioned that jargon was similar to the technical terms used in a discourse community. Hirst (2003) called jargon "bad" when "it is used improperly" and when "the borrowing

or transliteration or coining of a term is bad" (p. 211). He called jargon "good" when it is "well formed and well used" (p. 217). At the same time, he restated that no matter how jargon is used—in an effective or ineffective way—it should be considered as "neutral" (p. 225). Hirst stated that members outside the discourse community would find jargon "unintelligible" (p. 210). If I had to do this jargon analysis, I would have to take opinions about whether the jargon is regarded as good and bad in the discourse community of technical communication. So I decided not to analyze jargon as part of my stylistic analysis. In order to avoid the subjective approach, I focused on the following three quantifiable features for analyzing diction:

- Personal pronouns;
- Contractions; and
- Verb voice.

In the following sections, I will define and justify my reasons for including personal pronouns, contractions, and verb voice as the stylistic features for diction analysis.

**4.5.1.1. Use of personal pronouns.** As mentioned earlier, one of Corbett and Connor's (1999) stylistic markers "formal or informal" is subjected to a researcher's perception. Corbett and Connor stated, "Judgments about the formality or informality of a person's style are made largely on the basis of the level of diction used" (p. 361). The four widely accepted levels of diction are as follows: *formal*, *informal*, *colloquial*, and *slang* (Jones, 1998, p. 87). However, the identification of accurate levels of diction in a writing might often be subjective; for example, Jones stated that "*colloquial* refers to conversation or diction used to achieve conversational prose" (p. 88) and *slang* is "the

most informal" diction and sometimes slang and colloquial dictions overlap. Probably, because of this subjectivity, Markel and Selber (2018) cautioned that there is "no standard definition of levels of formality" (p. 228). Even Jones' (1998) definitions of *formal* and *informal* dictions are subjective: "formal means following an established form, custom, or rule" (p. 87) and "informal refers to ordinary, casual, or familiar use" (p. 88).

Therefore, in order to use the formal-informal distinction in my objective approach to stylistic analysis, I relied on the definition of formal style in SUNY Geneseo's Writing Guide (Schacht & Easton, 2008). This guide gives us the quantifiable markers for analyzing the formality of writing style. The guide suggested that formal prose has the following characteristics:

- Conservative (adherence to professional writers' and editors' stamp of approval);
- Contraction-free (absence of contractions);
- Restrained (absence of coarse language and slang);
- Impersonal (absence of personal pronouns); and
- Properly documented (adherence to standard forms of documentation).

Among these characteristics, two of them are easily quantifiable: the first is contractions and the second is personal pronouns. SUNY Geneseo's Writing Guide (Schacht & Easton, 2008) claims that formal writing follows an impersonal and objective style, which are devoid of contractions and "I," "me," and "my." Considering this argument, I decided to use the stylistic markers of contractions and personal pronouns in order to determine how my subjects maintained a personal or impersonal—i.e., informal

or formal—writing style in their SPs. In this section, I will discuss my approach for analyzing personal pronouns. In the next section, I will discuss my approach for analyzing contractions.

Pronoun usage indicates the way audiences are perceived and conceptualized by speakers and writers in academic discourse (Fortanet-Gomez, 2004)—or, as in my study, how my subjects conceptualized the audience (admission committee) of their SPs. As far as I know, I am the first researcher to apply this type of pronoun analysis to the SP genre. *Pronouns* take the place of nouns, noun phrases, or noun clauses (Schmidhauser, 2010), or, in other words, *pronouns* substitute for the names of referents, for example, people, animals, ideas, or things (Nordquist, 2019b). While discussing the function of pronouns, Manning (2005) stated that pronouns assist in condensing sentences and simplifying communication. *Personal pronouns* refer to specific persons, groups, or things (Nordquist, 2020). Casañ-Pitarch (2016) suggested that types of pronouns differ based on the nature and purpose of the intended text in which the pronouns are used.

Considering this framework, in my study I intended to analyze how personal pronouns were used in a rhetorically persuasive style. In my analysis of personal pronouns, I followed the classification systems of Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech, and Svartvik (1972, 1985) and Casañ-Pitarch (2016) (see Table 4.1). I treat possessive pronouns and reflexive pronouns as types of personal pronouns. Moreover, I separate the possessive pronouns into possessive determiners (*my*, *her*, *their*, etc.) and possessive pronouns (*mine*, *hers*, *theirs*, etc., sometimes called nominal pronouns or absolute possessive pronouns).

Below are the definitions of the types of personal pronouns that I looked for in my study:

- **Subject Pronoun:** A personal pronoun in the subjective case is used as the subject of a clause.
    - Example: *I* live in Rolla (*I* is a subject pronoun).
- **Object Pronoun:** A personal pronoun in the objective case is used as an object of a verb or a preposition; it is not reflexive.
    - Example: Mary gave this gift to *me* (*me* is an object pronoun).
- **Possessive Pronoun:** A possessive pronoun takes the place of a noun phrase to show ownership and can stand alone.
    - Example: This gift is *mine* (*mine* is a possessive pronoun).
- **Possessive Determiner:** A possessive determiner has pronoun-like qualities, such as referring to an antecedent, as well as adjective-like qualities in its modification of a noun.
    - Example: *My* elder sister lives in Rolla (*my* is a possessive determiner).
- **Reflexive Pronoun:** A reflexive pronoun always ends with "-self" or "selves," usually points to a previously named noun or pronoun in the same sentence, and functions either as an object (i.e., a traditional reflexive pronoun) or an intensifier (i.e., an intensive pronoun).
    - Example: I gave *myself* a bath (*myself* is a reflexive pronoun).

Table 4.1 Model of personal pronouns used in this thesis (Quirk et al., 1972, p. 209; Quirk et al., 1985, p. 346; Casañ-Pitarch, 2016, p. 39)

| **Person** | **Number and Gender** | | **Subject** | **Object** | **Possessive** | | **Reflexive** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | **Determiner** | **Pronoun** | |
| First | Singular | | I | Me | My | Mine | Myself |
| | Plural | | We | Us | Our | Ours | Ourselves |
| Second | Singular/Plural | | You | You | Your | Yours | Yourself |
| Third | Singular | Feminine | She | Her | Her | Hers | Herself |
| | | Masculine | He | Him | His | His | Himself |
| | | Nonpersonal/ Neuter/Neutral | It | It | Its | Its | Itself |
| | Plural | | They | Them | Their | Theirs | Themselves |

First- and second-person pronouns are directly related to the author and the audience, so I focused on these two types of pronouns in this study along with third-person personal pronouns. Also, first-person pronouns help in understanding the "specific attitude" of a writer's involvement or responsibility (Casañ-Pitarch, 2016), and second-person pronouns involve directness (Williamson, 2006). Third-person pronouns, though not directly related to the reader and the writer, also play a major role in understanding the style of a person's writing by showing whether the writer uses "indirectness" (Cornish, 2005). Similarly, the study of "neutral pronouns" (i.e., *it*, *its*, and *itself*, which refer to things, animals, or ideas) gives us an idea how many times a writer uses neutral pronoun forms to refer to "direct and indirect ideas or things within the text without revealing the identity of these" (Casañ-Pitarch, 2016, p. 41). These pronouns are

traditionally classified as neuter or nonpersonal in grammatical gender, and I included them, along with other third-person personal pronouns, in my study. Although Klammer and Schulz (1992, p. 88) stated that only pronoun person, gender, and number are relevant when studying diction, I also considered case: "case is determined by the pronoun's function in the sentence—subjective, objective, or possessive" (Kolln & Gray, 2019, p. 208).

For both quantitative and qualitative analysis of pronouns, I followed Casañ-Pitarch's (2016) four-step protocol:

1. In the first step, I counted the personal pronouns in each SP; results were presented as frequencies (average);
2. In the second stage, I classified those pronouns into categories according to case and/or some other property: subject pronoun, object pronoun, possessive pronoun, possessive determiner, and reflexive pronoun;
3. In the third stage, I determined each pronoun's person, number, and gender; and
4. Finally, I compiled the results in a tabulated form and qualitatively analyzed the main uses of pronouns in the SP genre and the reason behind emphasizing certain types of pronouns.

**4.5.1.2. Use of contractions.** I chose to analyze the use of contractions along with personal pronouns to find out if the applicants attempted to create a formal or informal style in their SPs. Although the definition of a contraction is widely accepted, I use Jones' (1998) definition in this study: "A contraction is a shortening of a word, syllable, or word group by omission of a sound or letter. An apostrophe is used to

substitute for the missing letter or letters: *can't* for *cannot*; *shouldn't* for *should not*" (p. 99).

Not only does SUNY Geneseo's Writing Guide (Schacht & Easton, 2008) confirm that contraction-free writing belongs to the formal style, but also other researchers, such as Jones (1998) and Kolln and Gray (2019), argue that contraction-free writing creates a formal writing style. Jones (1998) stated that, if a writer wants to "achieve an informal style" (p. 99), then he or she should use contractions. Kolln and Gray (2019) also stated that contractions aid in a "more conversational, less formal" writing style (p. 182).

In this study, I modified and used the categories suggested by Kolln and Gray (2019) when I was identifying contractions in my sample:

- Negatives, for example, *don't* (do not)*, can't* (cannot)*, isn't* (is not), *hasn't* (has not), *shouldn't* (should not), and *won't* (will not);
- Main verbs (usually *be* or *have*) or helping verbs (i.e., either primary auxiliaries, *be*, *have,* and *do*, or modal auxiliaries), for example, *you're* (you are), *I've* (I have), *he's* (either he is or he has), *she'd* (she had or she would), *it's* (it is or it has), and *I'm* (I am); and
- Other, for example, *ma'am* (contraction of a noun), *o'clock* (contraction of a preposition and omission of an article), and *'tis* (contraction of a pronoun).

I did not expect to find any contractions in the "Other" category in my sample of SPs because these contractions are fairly uncommon in most writing situations.

**4.5.1.3. Voice.** Voice is another feature that can determine the personal or impersonal style of the writing. Although there is strong consensus regarding the definition of verb voice, I used Jones' (1998) definition in my study.

According to Jones (1998), voice is "the relationship of subject and object" (p. 279) in a transitive clause, and it is also used as "a narrative point of view" (p. 279). Jones (1998) stated that "active voice is another strategy for helping your reader recognize the agent or doer of an action" and "passive voice makes the agent of the action less clear" (p. 93). Klammer and Schulz (1992) stated that passive voice "deemphasizes" the role of the agent by placing the verb's direct object or indirect object in the subject position; active voice conveys that the agent performs the action expressed by a verb (p. 290). Jones (1998) believed that voice could be used to set the tone (personal or impersonal) of technical prose.

Previous studies on the SP genre did not focus on the analysis of verb voice. In fact, there are not many large-scale studies that analyze passive voice in any genres (Conrad, 2018). The e-book *Writing Personal Statements Online* guided prospective students to use active verbs and active voice to establish a personal tone with readers (Dutton, n.d.). Additionally, major studies on passive voice were conducted in medical, science and engineering communication or writing genre (Sheen, 1982; Conrad, 2018; Klammar & Schulz, 1992; Gross, Harmon, & Reidy, 2002; Hanna, 2004; Rodman, 1994; Porter, 2005). Considering the protocol used in previous studies of verb voice in engineering communication, particularly Rodman's (1994) research, in this study I focused on the active or passive distinction of verb voices in clauses with transitive verbs. This protocol helped me understand the diction strategy of the applicants in terms of

formal and informal or impersonal and personal writing style. I chose transitive verbs because clauses with intransitive verbs rarely have any “voice” at all. With just a few exceptions, an intransitive clause cannot be made passive. Also, my goal for analyzing verb voice in the SP genre was to determine to what extent this SP genre was different from or similar to academic or workplace writing genres or science, engineering, medical, and nursing genres in terms of voice usage. For example, Porter (2005) mentioned that, even though many sources advise against relying on passive voice, in workplace writing and other genres, writers do use passive voice substantively.

To analyze verb voice quantitatively, I identified a clause as active or passive by looking for three things: first, whether the clause included a “be” verb, i.e., *am*, *is*, *are*, *was*, *were*, *be*, *been*, or *being*; second, whether there was a verb after the "be" verb; and third, whether the verb after the “be” verb ended in “ing” or something else (such as “ed” or one of the other past participle endings). To make my determination, I followed the steps in Cunningham, Malone, and Rothschild (2019, p. 334-335):

1. If the clause does not have a "be" verb, it is either active or neither active nor passive. It is active if the non-"be" verb has an object.
    - Active: The pilot landed the plane.
    - Neither active nor passive: The plane arrived.
2. If the "be" verb is not followed by another verb, the clause is neither active nor passive.
    - Neither Active nor Passive: The plane <u>was</u> yellow and blue.

3. If there is only one verb after the "be" verb and it ends in “ing,” the clause is either active or neither active nor passive. It is active if the verb phrase has an object.
    - Active (transitive): The pilot must be landing the plane.
    - Neither active nor passive (intransitive): The plane was arriving.
4. If it there is one or more verbs after the "be" verb and the last verb ends in something other than "ing," the clause is passive.
    - Passive (transitive): The plane has been landed by the pilot.
    - Passive (transitive): The plane was being driven on the tarmac.

Next, I counted total sentences, sentences containing active voice, and sentences containing passive voice in each subject’s SP. Finally, I calculated the percentage of each voice in each SP and in the total twenty-four SPs. For qualitative analysis, I examined each SP to determine the “context” (Porter, 2005, p. 2) of active or passive voice use in order to understand the functions of active or passive voice in the SP genre from my subjects’ shared understanding perspective.

**4.5.2. Length of Sentences.** I used MS Word to determine the length of each sentence in each subject’s SP by converting the entire text of each SP from PDF to MS Word (.DOCX) format. MS Word counted the words in a given text by using spaces between words as separators, when I highlighted each sentence separately. The length of each sentence was measured in number of words.

At first, I counted total words and then total sentences in an SP. After that, I determined the average length of sentence by using the following formula:

Average Sentence Length (in number of words) = Total Number of Words/Total Number of Sentences

Then, I identified the longest and shortest sentence (in number of words) in each SP. The goal of this quantitative sentence length analysis was to make a "tenable generalization" (Corbett & Connors, 1999, p. 361) about my subjects' shared understanding of appropriate sentence length in the SP genre and to understand the relationship between sentence length and rhetorical situation. Also, my goal was to understand if applicants used varying sentence lengths in their SPs because variations in sentence length play an important role in establishing an effective style (Jones, 1998). Jones (1998) believed that particularly in technical writing, "too many short sentences" create a "choppy style" and "too many long sentences" create a "wordy style" (Jones, 1998, p. 155).

**4.5.3. Sentence Type (Grammatical and Rhetorical).** Coulthard (1994) claimed that written text is interactive, so text analysis must be aware of the "purpose and process" of its creation (p. 3). Sentence variety therefore might affect the clarity of the written piece. Corbett and Connor (1999) outlined their analysis of sentence types from three perspectives: functionally, grammatically, and rhetorically.

Functional analysis involves determining whether each sentence is declarative (a statement), interrogative (a question), imperative (a command), or exclamatory (an exclamation).

- **Declarative:** A declarative sentence presents simple fact or information in the form of a statement.

- **Interrogative:** An interrogative sentence poses a question and typically ends with a question mark and is marked by inversion of the subject and predicate.
- **Imperative:** An imperative sentence issues a directive.
- **Exclamatory:** An exclamatory sentence expresses strong feelings in the form of an exclamation (Nordquist, 2019d).

In my study, I did not engage in this functional analysis of sentences because I assumed that the SP audience (admission committee) would be looking for statements of facts, ideas, or arguments to gauge an applicant's fitness for the intended program, and knowing this, the applicants would provide information mainly in the form of statements. The applicants are not in a suitable position to command or direct the admission committee, and an SP is not the proper place to ask questions. Therefore, I did not think I would find many interrogative and imperative sentences in the SPs. However, in the course of my analysis, I did notice two interrogative and two imperative sentences, and the reason for the applicant including those sentences was entirely rhetorical. The two imperative sentences are as follows:

> "Please feel free to contact me with any questions you may have."
>
> "Please know I am passionate about the art of communication and how it impacts our everyday lives."

The two interrogative sentences are as follows:

> "However, what if I wanted to work in another field outside of universities?"

> “Would I be backed into a corner as a result of only my studying my passion?”

Similarly, I assumed that the applicants in my sample would not use exclamatory sentences because of the non-literary style of this genre. In this case, I also found only two exclamatory sentences in my sample. My explanation of the applicants' use of these sentences can be found in the “Results and Discussion” section. The two exclamatory sentences are as follows:

> “I look forward to coming to campus in the fall to begin my studies!”
>
> “All I can recount is that she makes me believe in human power; and how, when utilized altogether, it can do wonders!”

In this study, I particularly focused on the analysis of grammatical and rhetorical types of sentences to understand the syntactical style of the SPs in my sample. The grammatical types of sentences are simple, complex, compound, or compound-complex. The definition of each type is widely accepted. Both Corbett & Connors (1999) and Rude and Eaton (2011) defined each type in almost the same way. In my study, I used the definitions given by Corbett and Connors (1999, pp. 374–375).

- **Simple:** One independent clause. The sentence begins with a capital letter and ends with a terminal punctuation mark.
- **Compound:** Two or more independent clauses. The sentence begins with a capital letter and ends with a terminal punctuation mark.
- **Complex:** One independent clause and one or more dependent clauses. The sentence begins with a capital letter and ends with a terminal punctuation mark.

- **Compound-Complex:** Two or more independent clauses and one or more dependent clauses. The sentence begins with a capital letter and ends with a terminal punctuation mark.

The rhetorical types of sentences are loose, periodic, balanced, and antithetical (Corbett & Connors, 1999, p. 360), based on the arrangement of the material. In this study, I used Jones' (1998) definitions of these types of sentences. According to him, loose sentences are those complex sentences that put the main clause (i.e., the main idea) first and put one or more subordinate clauses second (p. 149). He said that loose sentences are easily comprehensible for readers, and these types of sentences are predominant in technical prose style. Periodic sentences are complex sentences in which the main clause (i.e., the main idea) is placed later in the sentence. Lanham (1983) also stated that periodic sentences create suspense among readers, do not reveal the main idea until the last minute, and end with an "emphatic climax" (p. 55). Jones (1998) argued that periodic sentences have low readability because "readers have to hold all of the earlier information in memory" (p. 148).

Balanced sentences are those types of sentences which repeat a "pattern that is used at the beginning of the sentence" in another place in the same sentence (Jones, 1998, p. 148). As Jones (1998) explained, balanced sentences can be periodic or antithetical as well, as long as the sentences maintain parallelism. In fact, some rhetoricians do not distinguish between periodic and balanced sentences; rather, they prefer to treat them as the same sentence type. Jones (1998) argued that balanced sentences bring forth an elegance in writing. Balance can be achieved by using two segments which are roughly equal, not only in length, but also in grammatical structure and meaning. Antithetical

sentences are those types of balanced sentences in which “one half of a sentence is pitted against the other” (Jones, 1998, p. 149). In other words, contrasting ideas are juxtaposed in balanced phrases (Nordquist, 2019a). Jones (1998) stated that antithetical sentences are less common in technical prose but are quite prevalent in literary styles.

For my analysis of sentence types, I made separate tables for grammatical and rhetorical sentences. Each table had five columns. The columns in the table for grammatical sentences had the following headings: “subject’s sentences,” “simple sentences,” “compound sentences,” “complex sentences,” and “compound-complex sentences.” The columns in the table for rhetorical sentences had the following headings: “subject’s sentences,” “loose sentences,” “periodic sentences,” “balanced sentences,” and “antithetical sentences.”

Using the MS Word text highlighting tool, I highlighted each type of sentence, such as “simple” or “loose,” with different colors. For example, simple, compound, complex, and compound-complex sentences were highlighted as orange, yellow, gray, and blue, respectively. Loose, periodic, balanced, and antithetical sentences were highlighted as red, green, purple, and brown, respectively. However, influenced by Jones's (1998) point that a sentence can be more than one type, I coded some of the sentences as both periodic and balanced. For example, one applicant wrote,

> **“Because l can** see that good communication can significantly benefit these environments whether through documentation, presentations, or informal discussions and **because I know** that I have many key skills and experiences that enable me to communicate in a particularly effective fashion in each of these cases, I have developed an intense desire to seek out methods through which I

may contribute to the improvement of communication practices in as many sectors of industry as possible."

For these types of sentences, I highlighted both the periodic and balanced columns with green and purple.

After highlighting, I counted the total number of occurrences of each sentence type and then calculated the percentage by using the following formula:

(Total Number of Occurrences of a Sentence Type/Total Number of Sentences) X 100

In the case of those sentences containing both periodic and balanced types, I counted the sentence once as periodic and once as balanced. For the grammatical sentence analysis, I did not need to consider occurrences within each sentence because each sentence was only one of the following: simple, compound, complex, or compound-complex.

**4.5.4. Paragraphing.** As defined by Corbett and Connors (1999), paragraphing is "a typographical device for punctuating units of thought larger than the thought conveyed by a single sentence" and readers are comfortable in seeing paragraphs marked by "indentations" as "segments of thought" (p. 367). Although Corbett and Connors emphasized the role of punctuation and capitalization in paragraphing, the notion of larger units of thought in their definition of paragraphing made a strong connection between style and paragraphing. According to the definitions of style used in this study, for example, "thinking out into language" and "artful expression of ideas," one could argue that there is an explicit connection between style and paragraphing. One could also argue that there is an explicit connection between paragraphing and *dispositio* rather than

*elocutio* because paragraph involves partitioning/dividing/grouping. Although there is no consensus regarding how many sentences should be devoted to a paragraph to express a single complete idea (Jones, 1998), the amount of information an author chooses to include in a paragraph nevertheless becomes an essential aspect of style.

In this study, I identified paragraphs in one of three ways: either by the indentation of the first line of a block of text, extra line spacing between blocks of text, or a substantial gap between the end of a sentence and the right margin. In my sample of SPs, my subjects used extra line spacing between paragraphs far more often than first-line indentation to demarcate paragraphs. Thus, when the first line of a paragraph was not indented but there was extra line spacing between paragraphs, I assumed that the extra line spacing was for paragraphing. In an SP with no first-line indentation or extra spacing between paragraphs, I looked for a larger-than-normal gap between the end of a sentence and the right margin. In those cases, I considered the next sentence as the beginning of a new paragraph. When an SP consisted of a single block of text, I considered that block of text to be a standalone paragraph.

I made four types of calculations and analyses regarding paragraphing.

- I identified the longest paragraph (in number of sentences) in each SP;
- I identified the shortest paragraph (in number of sentences) in each SP;
- I calculated the average paragraph length (in number of sentences) in each SP; and
- I counted the number of paragraphs devoted to each move—whether a single paragraph contained only one move, or a single paragraph contained more than one move.

The average length of paragraph was calculated by the following formula:

Average Length of Paragraph = Total Number of Sentences/Total Number of Paragraphs

## 4.6. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

In the following sections, I will discuss the results and analysis of rhetorical style of the SPs in my sample. I provide excerpts from the subjects' SPs so that the reader can draw important conclusions from the data. In the excerpts, I did not alter any grammar, punctuation, or capitalization. I chose each example on the basis of its ability to demonstrate the findings accurately and describe the most important phenomena.

**4.6.1. Kind of Diction.** My analysis of the diction in the SPs revealed interesting results regarding the heavy use personal pronouns and active voice. In the sample, I found only a few contractions. In the following sections, I discuss in more detail the implications of the applicants' rhetorical strategy of using personal pronouns and active voice but not using contractions.

The qualitative nature of my study prevented me for making valid generalizations about major phenomena. Also, this study was limited in scope by its small sample size. Hughes and Hayhoe (2008) mentioned about quantitative data that the inferences drawn from smaller sample size can be made reliable by examining the variance in the data (p. 62). As my stylistic analysis of the SPs involved quantitative data analysis to some extent along with the qualitative analysis, I measured the reliability of my results from the purely quantitative part of my study. The most popular method to investigate variance is by calculating the standard deviation ($\sigma$), which measures the extent of dispersion in a

given data set, i.e., the distance between data points and average mean (μ). A low standard deviation indicates that most of the data points are close to the average (mean) and a high standard deviation indicates that the data points are more dispersed. In my sample, I found higher standard deviations in some cases, but on close scrutiny, I was able to explain the reason for those higher dispersions.

**4.6.1.1. Use of contractions and personal pronouns.** In this study, I found that only four out of twenty-four subjects (16.67% of all SPs) used contractions. Table 4.2 summarizes the use of contractions in my sample of SPs.

Table 4.2 Quantitative analysis of contractions

| **Subject** | **Contraction** | **Number of Times a Contraction Used** |
|---|---|---|
| Subject 3 | Didn't | 1 |
| | I'm | 1 |
| | I've | 2 |
| Subject 6 | I'm | 1 |
| | I've | 3 |
| | I'll | 1 |
| Subject 19 | I've | 2 |
| | I'm | 2 |
| Subject 24 | Can't | 1 |
| | Don't | 1 |

Out of those four subjects, three of them used "be" and "have" verbs acting either as main verbs or as helping or auxiliary verbs, for example, "I'm" and I've." Two of

those four subjects used negative contractions, for example, “didn’t” and “can’t.” However, even these four subjects used contractions sparingly, a maximum of five times in an SP. On average, the twenty-four subjects used contractions 0.45 times, and a high standard deviation (1.1) suggested the potential outliers, Subject 6 and Subject 19, who used contractions three- and four-times respectively in their SPs.

This absence of contractions from most of the SPs in my sample suggested my subjects’ shared understanding of the formality level of the SP genre. Biber, Johansson, Leech, Conrad, and Finegan (1999) stated that contractions are mostly found in speech and informal writing, but formal genres like business reports and journal articles are not characterized by contractions. Babanoğlu (2017) also stated that contractions result in the “informal tone to writing” and do not follow the conventions of the genres like business presentations and academic research papers (p. 56). Therefore, it could be argued from the absence of contractions from most of the SPs in my sample that each subject perceived the SP genre as a formal writing genre.

Tables 4.3 to 4.6 summarize the use of personal pronouns in my sample of SPs. Results showed that first-person pronouns in subjective, objective, and possessive cases and reflexive form were predominant in my sample. Among the different forms of personal pronouns, the most prevalent were “I” as subject pronoun and “my” as possessive determiner. In their SPs, twenty-four subjects used first-person pronoun in subjective case (i.e., “I”), twenty-three in objective case (i.e., “me”), two in possessive case (i.e., “mine”), and twenty-four as possessive determiner (i.e., “my”). Only one subject used second-person pronouns in subjective case (i.e., “you”), but five used them in objective case (i.e., “you”) and eight used them as possessive determiners (i.e.,

"your"). Second-person personal pronouns in possessive case and reflexive form were entirely absent. The subjects in my sample used third-person personal pronouns more than second-person pronouns. Six subjects used the third-person plural pronoun in subjective case (i.e., "they"), nine in objective case (i.e., "them"), and seven as possessive determiners (i.e., "their"). One subject used this pronoun in reflexive form (i.e., "themselves"). No subject used this pronoun in possessive case (i.e., "theirs"). Sixteen subjects used the third-person neutral pronoun in subjective case (i.e., "it") and nine in objective case (i.e., "it"). Six used the neutral pronoun as possessive determiners (i.e., "its" as in "I wish to develop my career to its fullest potential") and only one used it in reflexive form (i.e., "itself"). No subject used this pronoun in possessive case (i.e., "its" as in "My speed is no match for its").

This high frequency of first-person personal pronouns in my sample suggested that the applicants tried to make their SPs' style personal for their audience. From the absence of contractions in twenty SPs, I was able to conclude that SPs were a formal writing genre. However, the high use of first-person personal pronouns raised the question regarding the formality of this SP genre because many researchers and scholars, including Schacht and Easton (2008) and Jones (1998), stated that formal writing genres are usually devoid of first-person personal pronouns. In formal writing genres, objectivity is usually maintained through impartiality (Schacht and Easton, 2008). However, in this SP genre, the applicants established *ethos* by using first-person pronouns and generally avoiding an impersonal tone. While describing their qualifications, skills and/or other information, the applicants did not confuse their readers by maintaining an impersonal tone; rather they used a personal tone to establish a connection with the readers. In fact,

some of the applicants used “I” five or six times in a single sentence to make the tone personal. The following excerpts by Subject 6 and Subject 14 illustrate this point:

> **“I** understand that the challenges and situations that **I** will face as a graduate student will be notably different than those that **I** have faced as an undergraduate, and **I** look forward to these encounters and to the things that **I** will be able to learn through them.”
>
> **“I** must admit that this time **I** do not know exactly what job **I** will be looking for once **I** graduate, but **I** do know that **I** will have a wider variety of careers to choose from.”

Some of the applicants used “my” many times in a single sentence in my sample of SPs. For example, Subject 14 wrote,

> “I strove to do the best I could in **my** classes, and **my** efforts are reflected in **my** grades and **my** professors' interest in me as an apt student.”

“You” as an object pronoun was used mostly when the applicants wanted to thank the audience for either reviewing their SPs or for considering their SPs. The use of “you” is unconventional in technical communication genres such as the instruction manual, grant proposal, and report (Jones, 1998; Markel & Selber, 2018). However, here the use of second-person pronouns played the most important part. Through using “you” an applicant was able to show his or her politeness: the applicant showed that he or she really appreciated the audience’s effort for taking the time to review the SP. Additionally, the applicant was able to thank the individual reviewer (i.e., each member of the admission committee individually) as well as the entire committee collectively because both the singular and plural forms of the second person pronoun are “you.”

The applicants used third-person personal pronouns in greater frequency than they used second-person pronouns. However, the applicants used third-person personal pronouns in much lower frequency than they used first-person pronouns. Rather than discussing other people or emphasizing others' influence on their lives, the applicants highlighted their own personal accounts. "It" or the neutral pronoun was usually used as subjects when subject pronouns were renamed. However, the applicants in my sample did not feel the need to rename their identity. For example, Subject 15 wrote,

> "I graduated from [X] college of Engineering, one of the top Engineering colleges in [Y] country, in the year 2002." (I have redacted the name of the college and country in order to conceal the subject's identity)

This sentence could have been written like the following:

> "It was I, who graduated from X college of Engineering, one of the top Engineering colleges in Y country, in the year 2002."

Therefore, in order to avoid unnecessary expansion of the sentence, the applicant preferred to use "I" as a subject instead of "it." Overall, personal pronoun analysis suggested that the maximum use of first-person pronouns, particularly in the forms of subject and possessive determiner (*I* and *my*), is part of my subjects' shared understanding of the SP genre.

Table 4.3 Quantitative analysis of subject pronouns (first, second, and third person)

| **Subject** | **I** | **We** | **You** | **He** | **She** | **It** | **They** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Subject 1 | 29 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 |
| Subject 2 | 14 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 |

Table 4.3 Quantitative analysis of subject pronouns (first, second, and third person) (cont.)

| **Subject** | **I** | **We** | **You** | **He** | **She** | **It** | **They** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Subject 3 | 45 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 2 |
| Subject 4 | 16 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Subject 5 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 1 |
| Subject 6 | 31 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 |
| Subject 7 | 45 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Subject 8 | 25 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Subject 9 | 23 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Subject 10 | 20 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Subject 11 | 11 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Subject 12 | 17 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Subject 13 | 13 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 |
| Subject 14 | 38 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Subject 15 | 43 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 |
| Subject 16 | 11 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 0 |
| Subject 17 | 25 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 2 |
| Subject 18 | 44 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 0 |
| Subject 19 | 23 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 0 |
| Subject 20 | 28 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Subject 21 | 8 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Subject 22 | 47 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 3 | 0 |
| Subject 23 | 10 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 |
| Subject 24 | 36 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 |
| **Total** | **606** | **5** | **1** | **1** | **2** | **36** | **8** |

Table 4.4 Quantitative analysis of object pronouns (first, second, and third person)

| **Subject** | **Me** | **Us** | **You** | **Her** | **Him** | **It** | **Them** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Subject 1 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Subject 2 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Subject 3 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 |
| Subject 4 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Subject 5 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Subject 6 | 7 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 |
| Subject 7 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 |
| Subject 8 | 6 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Subject 9 | 3 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Subject 10 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 0 |
| Subject 11 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Subject 12 | 6 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Subject 13 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 |
| Subject 14 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Subject 15 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Subject 16 | 15 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Subject 17 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Subject 18 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 1 |
| Subject 19 | 8 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Subject 20 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Subject 21 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Subject 22 | 4 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Subject 23 | 10 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Subject 24 | 7 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| **Total** | **104** | **1** | **7** | **2** | **0** | **18** | **11** |

Table 4.5 Quantitative analysis of possessive determiners (first, second, and third person)

| **Subject** | **My** | **Our** | **Your** | **Her** | **His** | **Its** | **Their** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Subject 1 | 26 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 6 | 1 |
| Subject 2 | 10 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| Subject 3 | 33 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 |
| Subject 4 | 9 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Subject 5 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Subject 6 | 15 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Subject 7 | 18 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Subject 8 | 15 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 7 |
| Subject 9 | 7 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Subject 10 | 10 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Subject 11 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Subject 12 | 10 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Subject 13 | 12 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Subject 14 | 26 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 |
| Subject 15 | 22 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Subject 16 | 24 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Subject 17 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Subject 18 | 14 | 1 | 7 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Subject 19 | 6 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Subject 20 | 9 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Subject 21 | 6 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Subject 22 | 25 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Subject 23 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Subject 24 | 8 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| **Total** | **320** | **5** | **18** | **3** | **2** | **11** | **20** |

Table 4.6 Quantitative analysis of possessive pronouns (first, second, and third person)

| **Subject** | **Mine** | **Ours** | **Yours** | **Hers/His** | **Its** | **Theirs** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Subject 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Subject 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Subject 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Subject 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Subject 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Subject 6 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Subject 7 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Subject 8 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Subject 9 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Subject 10 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Subject 11 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Subject 12 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Subject 13 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Subject 14 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Subject 15 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Subject 16 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Subject 17 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Subject 18 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Subject 19 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Subject 20 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Subject 21 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Subject 22 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Subject 23 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Subject 24 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| **Total** | **2** | **0** | **0** | **0** | **0** | **0** |

Table 4.7 Quantitative analysis of reflexive pronouns (first, second, and third person)

| **Subject** | **Myself** | **Ourselves** | **Yourself** | **Herself/Himself** | **Itself** | **Themselves** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Subject 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Subject 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Subject 3 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

Table 4.7 Quantitative analysis of reflexive pronouns (first, second, and third person) (cont.)

| Subject | Myself | Ourselves | Yourself | Herself/Himself | Itself | Themselves |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Subject 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Subject 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Subject 6 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Subject 7 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Subject 8 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Subject 9 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Subject 10 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Subject 11 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Subject 12 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Subject 13 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Subject 14 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Subject 15 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Subject 16 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Subject 17 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Subject 18 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Subject 19 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Subject 20 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Subject 21 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Subject 22 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Subject 23 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

Table 4.7 Quantitative analysis of reflexive pronouns (first, second, and third person) (cont.)

| Subject | Myself | Ourselves | Yourself | Herself/Himself | Itself | Themselves |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Subject 24 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| **Total** | **18** | **0** | **0** | **0** | **0** | **1** |

**4.6.1.2. Voice.** Table 4.8 summarizes the use of active and passive voice in each subject's SP. It shows that the applicants in my sample tended to favor active voice (96.05%) over passive voice (3.95%).

Dutton (n.d.) suggested that, in order to maintain an assertive and personal tone in a personal statement, an applicant must emphasize active verbs and active voice. The applicants for the MS in technical communication program at Missouri S&T seemed to follow Dutton's suggestion. From the high frequency of active voice in my sample of SPs, it can be argued that the SP genre is different from other academic genres, which are characterized by a heavy reliance on passive voice (Porter, 2005). From close analysis, I tried to discern the applicants' reasons for using active voice and avoiding passive voice in their SPs.

The applicants used active voice in order to emphasize human agents (in most cases, the applicants themselves). As Rodman (1994) stated, passive voice is used when the writer does not want to recognize or emphasize the agent. In my sample of SPs, the applicants did not want to deflect the audience's attention from the agents, i.e., the applicants themselves. This high use of active voice suggested that the applicants were not defensive (Brooks, 1998); rather, they were confident and capable enough of making

sound judgments. Also, the applicants did not want to deny the identity of the agents (i.e., themselves). Moreover, they attempted to establish a rapport with the audience through the use of active voice in their SPs.

Table 4.8 Quantitative analysis of voice in transitive main verbs in each subject's SP

| **Subject's SP** | **% Active Voice** | **Average** | **% Passive Voice** | **Average** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Subject 1 | 86.49 | 96.05% | 13.51 | 3.95% |
| Subject 2 | 92 | | 8 | |
| Subject 3 | 100 | | 0 | |
| Subject 4 | 100 | | 0 | |
| Subject 5 | 100 | | 0 | |
| Subject 6 | 100 | | 0 | |
| Subject 7 | 97.78 | | 2.22 | |
| Subject 8 | 96.43 | | 3.57 | |
| Subject 9 | 95 | | 5 | |
| Subject 10 | 93.75 | | 6.25 | |
| Subject 11 | 100 | | 0 | |
| Subject 12 | 100 | | 0 | |
| Subject 13 | 92.31 | | 7.69 | |
| Subject 14 | 90.48 | | 9.52 | |
| Subject 15 | 95.83 | | 4.17 | |
| Subject 16 | 100 | | 0 | |
| Subject 17 | 100 | | 0 | |
| Subject 18 | 95.45 | | 4.55 | |
| Subject 19 | 93.33 | | 6.67 | |
| Subject 20 | 100 | | 0 | |
| Subject 21 | 88.89 | | 11.11 | |
| Subject 22 | 93.62 | | 6.38 | |
| Subject 23 | 100 | | 0 | |
| Subject 24 | 93.75 | | 6.25 | |

The applicants in my sample typically used two types of grammatical subjects in active voice:

- Human agents (*I*, *faculty*, etc.) and
- Inanimate agents (*writing*, *seminars*, *projects*, subjects or courses, curriculum, etc.).

In most of the sentences, the applicants used human agents, particularly "I," to provide information about their educational background, to highlight their professional expertise, to walk the audience through narratives, to provide several reasons for applying to the program, and to thank the admission committee for reviewing the application. This emphasis on human agents reduced any ambiguity that might have been created by using passive voice. Also, the applicants used "my" many times as their active agent. For example, Subject 1 wrote,

> "My return to the industry after school will see to the implementation of my learning outcomes in management [redacted] to mention a few."

Subject 4 wrote,

> "My grades, as well as my loyalty to my work and the English department, are strong arguments for my candidacy."

In these sentences and other sentences in my sample of SPs, an applicant used active voice to make arguments. Riley (1991) found a predominance of active voice in the sections of introduction and discussion in scientific writing, and these sections were argumentative. My findings matched Riley's result: through an SP, an applicant tried to put forth several arguments to prove his or her credentials. My subjects' shared

understanding of the SP genre was that it is an argumentative discourse with the prevalence of active voice.

Inanimate agents were used sparingly in my sample, which suggested the subjects' stylistic decision to directly communicate information regarding their qualifications by putting themselves into action. For example, Subject 8 wrote,

> "I gained considerable experience in pre-school center by working with more than 250 children of different ages."

This sentence could have been written as follows as well:

> Pre-school center gave me considerable experience in working with more than 250 children of different ages.

However, the writer chose the previous style—putting the self into action—in order to emphasize that it was he or she who had gained the experience and to deemphasize that the pre-school provided the experience. So the applicants throughout the SPs took the rhetorical strategy of making themselves prominent by using active voice and tactfully reducing the importance of other aspects.

In this study, I found that an applicant used passive voice when the agents were inanimate, which was acceptable according to Cornelis (1995). Cornelis (1995) stated that in the case of prominent agents, actions are seen through the agent; however, an inanimate agent cannot have a point of view. Also, an applicant used passive voice when he or she did not feel the need to keep the audience's attention on the agent, i.e., the applicants himself or herself. For example, Subject 7 and Subject 9 wrote similar sentences:

> "I was even more impressed with the quality of the Technical Communication program in your department."

In this sentence, the emphasis was placed on the high quality of education or structure of the technical communication program at Missouri S&T. The applicant, on one hand, created *pathos* by flattering the members of the admission committee, diverting the focus from himself or herself to the action of being impressed by the program structure. On the other hand, the applicant gave the admission committee a valuable reason for applying to the intended program by focusing on the admission committee (*Reasons for Applying* move).

I also found that an applicant used passive voice whenever he or she discussed receiving any award, scholarship, or promotion in any organization or educational institute. For example, Subject 24 wrote,

> "I was awarded "caller of the semester" title for excellent communication skills and for raising maximum funds to the university."

Subject 22 wrote,

> "I was awarded the 'Applause Award' 4 times during my tenure at Symantec for my contributions to the InfoDev team."

Subject 10 wrote,

> "In February 2011, I was promoted to Assistant Director for Student Employment, and [redacted] to my success."

In the above sentences, the applicants emphasized their winning an award and their promotion by focusing on the effects of an action rather than its cause. In other words, the applicants tried to demonstrate that they succeeded previously in other

endeavors (effects) and that success was proof of their suitability for the program. Also, the applicants attempted to show politeness by emphasizing indirectness through passive voice in the above instances. Lastly, the applicants did not highlight the agents (the award-giving organizations) in these three sentences because rhetorically, I assume, their receiving an award was the important factor, and focusing on the award giver in the sentence's beginning might distract the reader from understanding the value of the action (winning award). The applicants may not have felt that the agent was as important as the patient in this context (Rodman, 1994).

Other instances of passive voice were found when an applicant discussed his or her obtaining a company job, being assigned any activity in an organization (for example, presentation and teaching), or demonstrating interest in the technical communication field. From this analysis, I concluded the following regarding my subjects' shared understanding of passive voice usage in the SP genre:

- Although the applicants deemphasized the agents in sentences by using passive voice, they never deemphasized themselves and
- The applicants highlighted both politeness and the effects of actions through passive voice.

**4.6.2. Sentences.** In the following sections, I explain the inferences I drew from the sentence-level analysis of the data. The sentence-level analysis revealed important stylistic strategies taken by the applicants in their SPs.

**4.6.2.1. Length of sentences.** Figure 4.1 illustrates the average sentence length in each subject's SP. On average, I found that the applicants used 23.96 words per sentence, which was longer than the average sentence length (eighteen words) in technical prose, as

pointed out by Jones (1998, p. 155). However, the applicants' average sentence length (23.96 words) was shorter than sentence lengths common among writers in earlier centuries (Corbett & Connors, 1999). The high standard deviation (7.66) in Table 4.9 indicated the potential outliers, Subject 6 and Subject 13, who had an average sentence length of 51.75 and 37.15 respectively in their SPs.

My subjects' average sentence length (in number of words) suggested that they wanted to show their expert level writing skills to the admission committee. Technical communication is primarily concerned with written, oral, and visual communication, in which writing plays a significant role. Missouri S&T does not require any writing sample, so the SP plays an important role in understanding the applicant's writing ability. Also, clarity—which is inherently associated with style—can be utilized properly by articulating ideas in well-written sentences. Sometimes, complex information cannot be provided in just five words.

Table 4.9 Average sentence length and standard deviation in twenty-four SPs

| | |
|---|---|
| **Average Sentence Length (In Number of Words)** | 23.96 |
| **Standard Deviation** | 7.66 |

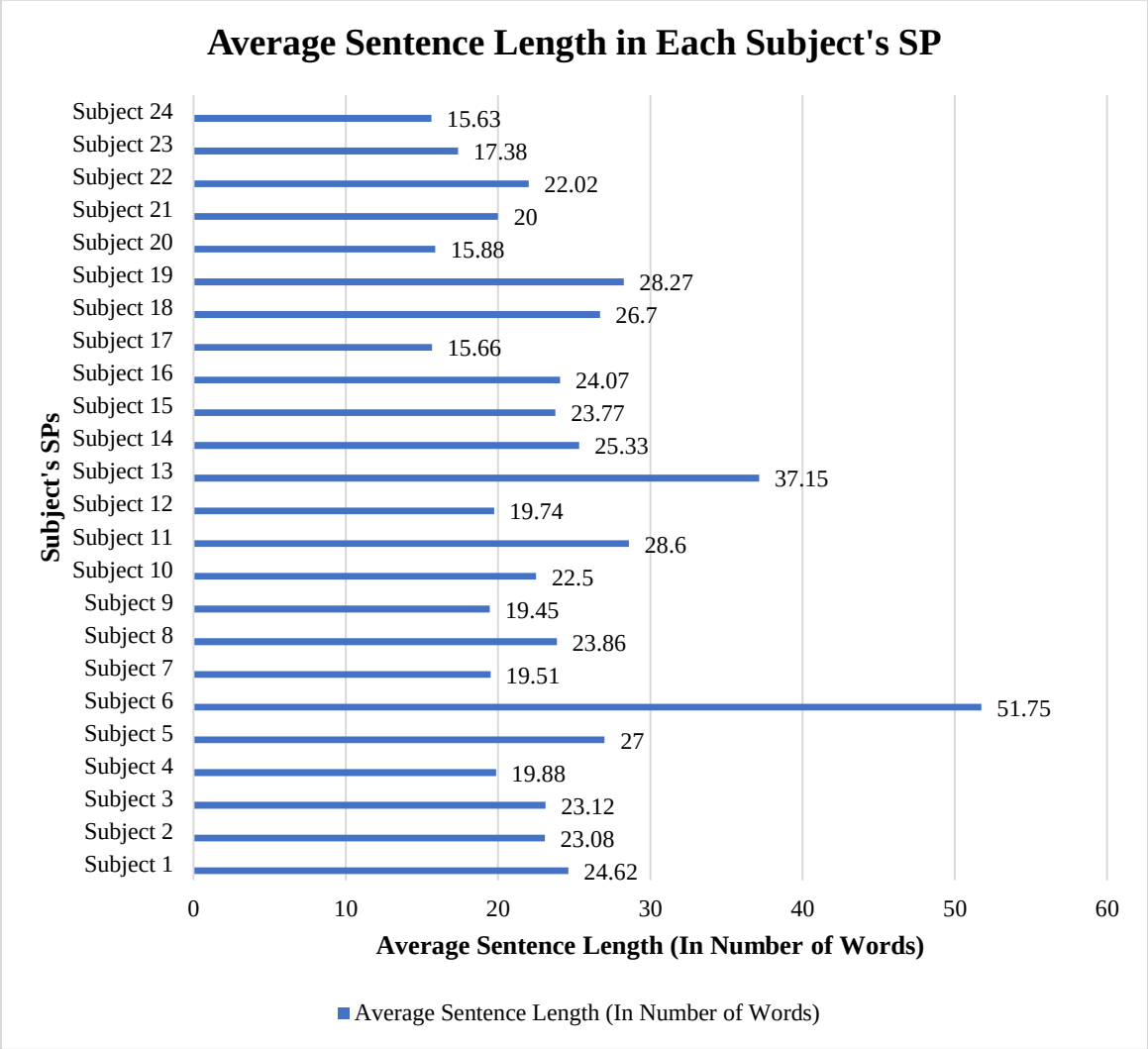



Figure 4.1 Average sentence length in each subject's SP in number of words. The average sentence length is more than fifteen words in each of the twenty-four SPs. In Subject 13's and Subject 6's SPs, the writers devoted 37.15 and 51.75 words per sentence on average. These averages were potential outliers.

In the SP genre, the applicants always endeavor to highlight their academic, professional, and general qualifications to obtain an admission. Therefore, it was probably the applicants' shared understanding of the genre and rhetorical situation to use at least fifteen words per sentence, on average, for articulating their ideas. In this way, the

applicants attempted to showcase their ability to control the long sentences grammatically.

Table 4.10 Longest and shortest sentence in each subject's SP

| **Subject** | **Longest Sentence (In Number of Words)** | **Average Longest Sentence (In Number of Words)** | **Shortest Sentence (In Number of Words)** | **Average Shortest Sentence (In Number of Words)** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Subject 1 | 49 | 41.42 | 7 | 10.58 |
| Subject 2 | 47 | | 8 | |
| Subject 3 | 34 | | 10 | |
| Subject 4 | 37 | | 11 | |
| Subject 5 | 34 | | 18 | |
| Subject 6 | 96 | | 24 | |
| Subject 7 | 37 | | 5 | |
| Subject 8 | 48 | | 7 | |
| Subject 9 | 26 | | 13 | |
| Subject 10 | 40 | | 7 | |
| Subject 11 | 37 | | 13 | |
| Subject 12 | 39 | | 9 | |
| Subject 13 | 59 | | 21 | |
| Subject 14 | 34 | | 11 | |
| Subject 15 | 45 | | 9 | |
| Subject 16 | 39 | | 6 | |
| Subject 17 | 24 | | 9 | |
| Subject 18 | 58 | | 9 | |
| Subject 19 | 41 | | 17 | |
| Subject 20 | 25 | | 10 | |
| Subject 21 | 32 | | 10 | |
| Subject 22 | 43 | | 7 | |
| Subject 23 | 41 | | 7 | |
| Subject 24 | 29 | | 6 | |
| **Std. Dev.** | **14.75** | | **4.9** | |

Table 4.10 summarizes the results regarding the longest and shortest sentences in each subject's SP. I noticed a significant difference between the longest and shortest sentences in all twenty-four SPs. In the sample of twenty-four SPs, the average length of the longest sentence was 41.42 while the average length of the shortest sentence was 10.58.

In my sample, an applicant tried to engage the audience's attention by creating sentence variety in terms of length. In my judgment, based on my analysis of the SPs in my sample, the applicants did not put together too many long sentences at a time to create a "wordy style" or too many short sentences to create a "choppy style" (Jones, 1998, p. 155). Rather, the applicants chose to use long sentences sometimes and short sentences other times in order to retain the audience's attention. The use of varying sentence length is said to be one indicator of experienced writing. Lu et al. (2018) noticed that native English speakers were more proficient in using varying sentence lengths than non-native speakers. My analysis suggested that, in order to show writing skill in the SPs, the applicants, irrespective of being native or non-native English speakers, attempted to vary their sentence lengths.

I noticed two types of strategies of using long and short sentences in my sample of SPs. In the first strategy, an applicant stated a fact by using a short sentence and then supported the fact with evidence in a long sentence. In the second strategy, an applicant took a different approach by placing the supporting arguments in a long sentence and then claiming a fact by using a short sentence. Only in one subject's SP (Subject 6) did I find that a series of long sentences was used when both stating a fact and supporting it.

Subject 6 continuously used long sentences in his or her SP (an average sentence length of 51.75 and a longest sentence of ninety-six words). The example of Subject 6's longest sentence is as follows:

> "Overall, I firmly believe that I would make a strong candidate for the M.S. program for Technical Communication at Missouri S& T, especially as a participant in the Graduate Teaching Assistantship, because of the foundational skills I've acquired as an Undergraduate, the distinct opportunity for further academic and professional growth in this particular graduate program, the opportunity to contribute to the department directly through teaching one of the service courses, and the passion that I have for learning the subject matter and applying it in effective ways in the communication contexts in which I find myself."

In this long sentence, the applicant tried to convince the audience about his or her suitability for a GTA position. In this sentence, the applicant chose three different moves to demonstrate his or her suitability: the applicant's previous relevant educational background, intension to contribute to the department, and passion for learning from the teaching opportunity. The applicant could have divided this sentence into three separate sentences for the audience, but he or she made the rhetorical decision to use one long sentence (ninety-six words). The applicant's goal was to obtain a GTA position; probably Subject 6 did not want to distract the readers from the single point—that he or she is a suitable candidate for the GTA position—by breaking it into three separate sentences. Interestingly, in my sample, most of the applicants (eighteen out of twenty-four, i.e.,

75%) used their longest sentence to prove their suitability for the GTA position (*Establishing Credentials* move). For example, Subject 7's longest sentence is as follows:

> "I always tried to create an environment for the students to participate in classroom discussion so that they could be eager to learn new things and I could fulfill the goal that I set for every class."

In this sentence, the applicant's goal was to indicate his or her previous relevant experience in teaching and eventually demonstrate his or her suitability for the GTA position. This common strategy of presenting information regarding the suitability for a GTA position in one sentence might indicate that the applicants wanted to achieve one of the following three goals or all the three goals in their longest sentences:

- To launch an argument (suitability for a GTA position) and explain that argument thoroughly;
- To create suspense by revealing the main point (suitability for a GTA position) at the end of a sentence; and
- To substantiate an argument (suitability for GTA position) with various and vivid descriptions and proofs, for example, previous relevant experience, passion, or zeal for teaching.

In my sample of SPs, the shortest sentences were used mostly in the *Introduction* (I) and *Conclusion* (C) moves, particularly the *Goals/Decision to Apply* step. For example, Subjects 24's and 23's shortest sentences are as follows respectively:

> "Thank you for reviewing my application."
>
> "Thank you for your time and consideration."

In the first and last paragraphs of the SPs, the applicant often used short sentences. More importantly, in those paragraphs, the information was quite simple, not complex. Usually, in the first paragraph, applicants stated their purpose for writing the SP, and in the last paragraph they thanked the audience either for reading their SPs or for reviewing their application materials. These short sentences created a polite tone in the SPs either by expressing the desire to apply for the program, by thanking the audience, or by stating their decision for their pursuing graduate study.

In the middle paragraphs, applicants provided more complex information while describing their credentials and specific reasons for applying to the technical communication program. Therefore, rhetorically it is quite significant that the applicants resorted to long sentences in the middle paragraphs, particularly while walking the audience through narratives of relevant experience and educational background.

**4.6.2.2. Kinds of sentences.** Jones (1998) believed that "sentence variety is essential for achieving an effective style" (p. 155). However, Corbett and Connors (1999) found that modern writers do not always create "a notable variety" in their sentences (p. 363). In my sample, I found that the subjects generally varied the grammatical types of sentences in their SPs. Table 4.11 summarizes my analysis of grammatical types of sentence in each subject's SP.

Results showed that simple sentences were more prevalent than the other types of sentences, and compound-complex sentences were less common than the other types. The applicants preferred compound sentences after simple ones in terms of frequency. Complex and compound-complex sentences are considered to be earmarks of an advanced style of writing, and inexperienced writers might make mistakes while creating

complex sentences. In order to make no mistakes grammatically in their sentences, my subjects probably chose more simple sentences than other types of sentences. The high standard deviation warranted further study in a bigger and varying sample to confirm the grammatical sentence variety in the SP genre.

Table 4.11 Frequency of grammatical types of sentences in each subject's SP

| **Subject's SP** | **% Simple** | **% Compound** | **% Complex** | **% Compound-Complex** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Subject 1 | 51.35 | 13.51 | 29.73 | 5.40 |
| Subject 2 | 68 | 0 | 16 | 16 |
| Subject 3 | 41.46 | 41.46 | 9.76 | 7.32 |
| Subject 4 | 43.75 | 56.25 | 0 | 0 |
| Subject 5 | 25 | 25 | 25 | 25 |
| Subject 6 | 6.25 | 31.25 | 37.5 | 25 |
| Subject 7 | 60 | 22.22 | 15.56 | 2.22 |
| Subject 8 | 46.43 | 14.29 | 28.57 | 10.71 |
| Subject 9 | 45 | 15 | 25 | 15 |
| Subject 10 | 37.5 | 25 | 18.75 | 18.75 |
| Subject 11 | 20 | 20 | 0 | 60 |
| Subject 12 | 70.37 | 7.41 | 14.81 | 7.41 |
| Subject 13 | 69.23 | 23.08 | 7.69 | 0 |
| Subject 14 | 28.57 | 19.04 | 28.57 | 23.80 |
| Subject 15 | 58.33 | 27.05 | 12.5 | 2.08 |
| Subject 16 | 60 | 13.33 | 16.67 | 10 |
| Subject 17 | 68.75 | 21.88 | 9.38 | 0 |
| Subject 18 | 27.27 | 40.90 | 25 | 6.81 |
| Subject 19 | 20 | 33.33 | 26.67 | 20 |
| Subject 20 | 66.67 | 20.83 | 12.5 | 0 |
| Subject 21 | 44.44 | 22.22 | 33.33 | 0 |
| Subject 22 | 57.45 | 31.91 | 8.51 | 2.13 |
| Subject 23 | 69.23 | 0 | 23.08 | 7.69 |
| Subject 24 | 71.88 | 21.88 | 3.13 | 3.13 |
| **Average** | **48.21** | **22.79** | **17.82** | **11.19** |
| **Std. Dev.** | **19.21** | **12.69** | **10.46** | **13.4** |

Table 4.12 Frequency of rhetorical types of sentences in each subject's SP

| **Subject's SP** | **% Loose** | **% Periodic** | **% Balanced** | **% Antithetical** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Subject 1 | 54.05 | 21.62 | 24.32 | 0 |
| Subject 2 | 52 | 28 | 20 | 0 |
| Subject 3 | 39.02 | 26.83 | 34.15 | 0 |
| Subject 4 | 62.5 | 12.5 | 25 | 0 |
| Subject 5 | 75 | 25 | 0 | 0 |
| Subject 6 | 18.75 | 31.25 | 50 | 0 |
| Subject 7 | 68.89 | 22.22 | 8.89 | 0 |
| Subject 8 | 50 | 32.14 | 17.86 | 0 |
| Subject 9 | 60 | 30 | 10 | 0 |
| Subject 10 | 56.25 | 18.75 | 25 | 0 |
| Subject 11 | 20 | 20 | 60 | 0 |
| Subject 12 | 81.48 | 11.11 | 7.41 | 0 |
| Subject 13 | 76.92 | 7.69 | 15.38 | 0 |
| Subject 14 | 66.67 | 19.05 | 14.29 | 0 |
| Subject 15 | 50 | 37.5 | 12.5 | 0 |
| Subject 16 | 66.67 | 30 | 3.33 | 0 |
| Subject 17 | 78.13 | 18.75 | 3.13 | 0 |
| Subject 18 | 50 | 43.18 | 6.81 | 0 |
| Subject 19 | 53.33 | 46.67 | 0 | 0 |
| Subject 20 | 91.67 | 8.33 | 0 | 0 |
| Subject 21 | 55.56 | 44.45 | 0 | 0 |
| Subject 22 | 76.6 | 19.15 | 4.26 | 0 |
| Subject 23 | 69.23 | 30.77 | 0 | 0 |
| Subject 24 | 81.25 | 18.75 | 0 | 0 |
| **Average** | **60.58** | **25.15** | **14.26** | **0** |
| **Std. Dev.** | **18.06** | **10.78** | **15.96** | **0** |

The arrangement of the sentence conveys the rhetorical style taken by the writers (Jones, 1998). Table 4.12 summarizes the use of rhetorical sentences in each subject's SP. No applicants used antithetical sentences in my sample of SPs. Jones (1998) stated that antithesis is not common in technical prose genres, and his statement proved to be true in my sample of SPs. Valid generalizations cannot be made regarding other types of

rhetorical sentences in my sample of SPs because of the high standard deviation; nevertheless, the results showed some important trends in the data.

Most of the applicants wrote loose sentences (60.58% on average) in their SPs, and the high standard deviation pointed to two potential outliers: Subject 6 and Subject 11, who wrote only 18.75% and 20% loose sentences in their SPs, respectively. The high frequency of loose sentences indicated the applicants' choice of maintaining directness, naturalness, and lucidity throughout the SP. The high frequency of simple sentences and personal pronouns also assisted the applicants in maintaining a lucid and direct style in their SPs. Jones (1998) mentioned that loose sentences are "easier for readers to understand because the main clause is at the beginning" (p. 149). Probably, the applicants did not want to create any suspense for the readers by making them wait to comprehend the main message until the sentence's end. Also, since periodic sentences are difficult to comprehend, the applicants' rhetorical strategy of using more loose sentences in their SPs was reasonable.

**4.6.3. Paragraphing.** Figure 4.2 illustrates the average paragraph length, longest paragraph, and shortest paragraph in number of sentences in each SP, and Table 4.13 summarizes the average paragraph length, longest paragraph, and shortest paragraph in number of sentences in my sample (n=24) of SPs. Table 4.13 summarizes the number of paragraphs devoted to each move in the SPs.

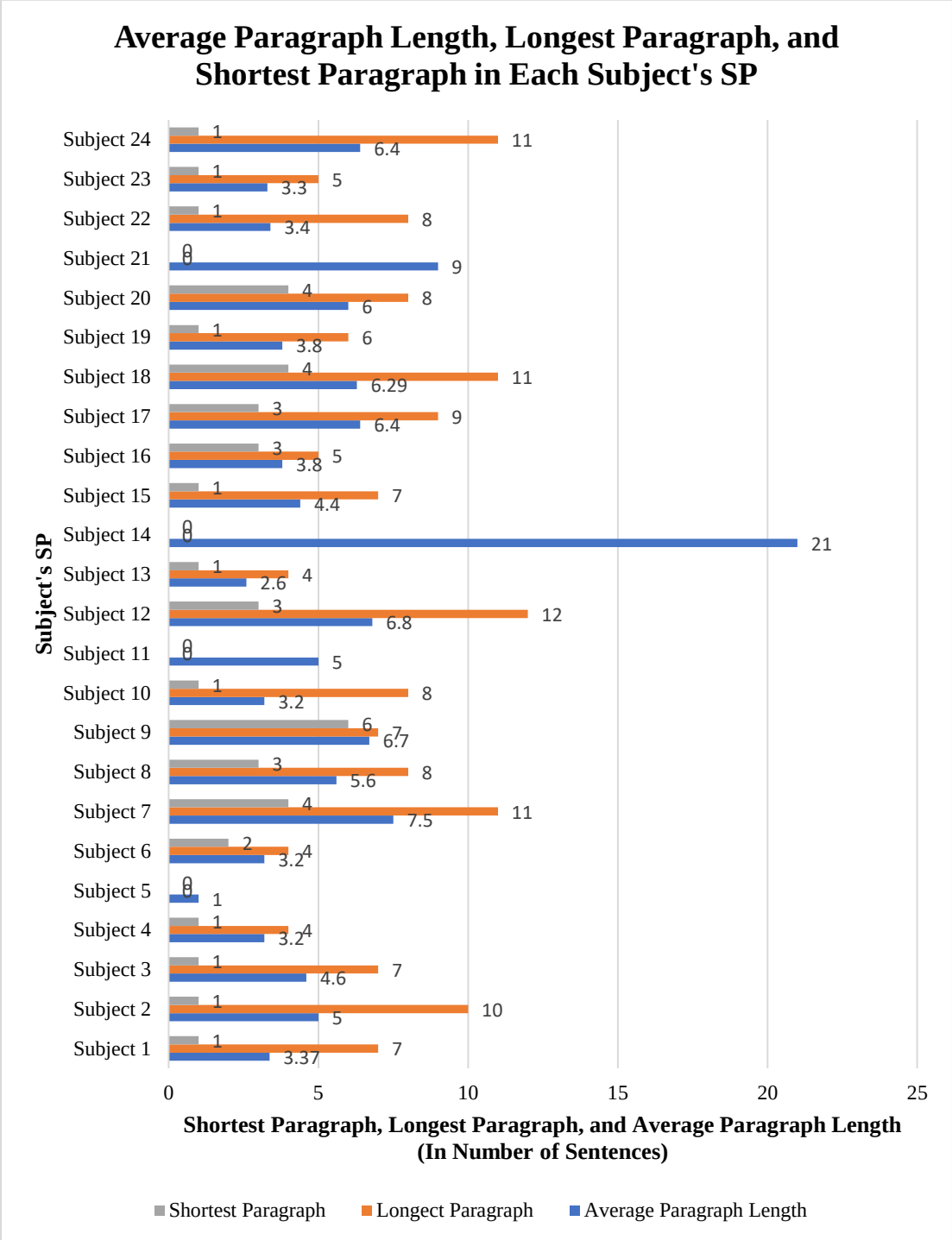



Figure 4.2 Shortest paragraph, longest paragraph, and average paragraph length in number of sentences in each subject's SP. Each subject wrote at least three sentences per paragraph. Subject 14's devoting twenty-one sentences in one paragraph can be considered as an outlier. The longest paragraph contains twenty-one sentences and the shortest paragraph contains one sentence in my sample of SPs.

Table 4.13 Average paragraph length, average longest paragraph, and average shortest paragraph in twenty-four SPs

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Average Paragraph Length** | 5.48 | **Std. Dev.** | 3.78 |
| **Average Longest Paragraph** | 6.33 | **Std. Dev.** | 3.68 |
| **Average Shortest Paragraph** | 1.79 | **Std. Dev.** | 1.58 |

Similar to the other results, the results regarding sentences per paragraph cannot be generalized to the entire SP genre. The high standard deviation in Table 4.13 shows that the variance in the sample data is not sufficient to infer valid generalization. However, the paragraph analysis provided some interesting trends about my subjects' shared understanding of the SP genre.

Results showed that sixteen out of twenty-four applicants (66.67%) decided to devote a sole paragraph to the C move, and out of those sixteen applicants, seven applicants used only one sentence for the C move in their SPs. In twenty-two out of twenty-four SPs (91.67%), the C move was found in the last paragraph. For example, Subject 2 wrote,

> "To realize my cherished dreams I need a context and association with faculty and people with profound professional skills and that can only happen if my candidature for the Masters program is considered favorably."

Subject 3 wrote,

> "I believe I am fully equipped both academically and intellectually to pursue a graduate degree in Technical Communication, and I am very excited to embark upon this journey."

Subject 4 wrote,

> "Thank you for considering me as an applicant, and I look forward to hearing from you soon. "

According to Corbett and Connors (1999), these sentences do not meet the traditional definition of a paragraph because a single sentence cannot convey a unit of thought large enough to be a paragraph. However, these single-sentence paragraphs helped to convey the larger units of thought in other paragraphs in the SP. In the provided examples, the applicants emphasized their enthusiasm for joining the intended program, restated their interest and qualifications in the context of obtaining admission, and politely ended the document by acknowledging or thanking the readers. These single sentences communicated the goal of the applicants' writing their SPs and brought the readers' attention back to the main agenda of the SP: gaining admission to the MS program and securing financial support.

Similar to the sentence analysis results, I found a significant difference between the longest and shortest paragraphs. Twenty-four applicants used 6.33 sentences on average for the longest paragraph and 1.79 sentences on average for the shortest paragraph (see Table 4.13). The length of the longest paragraph suggested that the applicants tried to show that they were experienced or proficient writers because inexperienced writers are often unable to create substantive paragraphs containing five to

six sentences (Jones, 1998). Also, in my opinion, the strategy of using occasional short paragraphs was intended to reduce monotony for the readers and show variation in writing. The results of my paragraph-level analysis were similar to the results of the sentence-level analysis: the subjects varied the lengths of their sentences as well as the lengths of their paragraphs to show writing proficiency.

Table 4.14 Number of paragraphs for each move

| **Subject's SP** | **Number of Paragraph Devoted to Each Move** | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **I** | **EC** | **RA** | **C** | **EC + RA** | **I + EC + RA** | **RA + C** | **I + RA** | **I + RA + C** | **I + EC** | **C + EC + RA** | **I + EC + RA + C** |
| Subject 1 | 1 | 4 | 4 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Subject 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Subject 3 | 1 | 6 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Subject 4 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Subject 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Subject 6 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Subject 7 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Subject 8 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Subject 9 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Subject 10 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

Table 4.14 Number of paragraphs for each move (cont.)

| **Subject's SP** | **Number of Paragraph Devoted to Each Move** | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **I** | **EC** | **RA** | **C** | **EC + RA** | **I + EC + RA** | **RA + C** | **I + RA** | **I + RA + C** | **I + EC** | **C + EC + RA** | **I + EC + RA + C** |
| Subject 11 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Subject 12 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Subject 13 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Subject 14 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Subject 15 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| Subject 16 | 1 | 4 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Subject 17 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Subject 18 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Subject 19 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Subject 20 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Subject 21 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Subject 22 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Subject 23 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Subject 24 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |

As Table 4.14 demonstrates, except for three applicants, twenty-one applicants chose to use several paragraphs to communicate their arguments for suitability and

explain those arguments. Sixteen out of twenty-four (66.67%) and fourteen out of twenty-four (58.33%) applicants devoted more paragraphs to *Reasons for Applying* (RA) and *Establishing Credentials* (EC) moves than to other moves. Twenty-four out of twenty-four (100%) applicants merged various moves, and out of them, twelve applicants (50%) merged the EC and RA moves. As the SP's goal is to convey the relevant and unique qualifications from both educational and professional perspectives and the reasons for pursuing a graduate program, this rhetorical decision of devoting more paragraphs to the RA and EC moves is easily understandable. Also, the EC move, which is used to mainly communicate qualifications, achievements, and accomplishments, shares a close relationship with the RA move, which communicates the suitable reasons for applying to any intended program. So 50% applicants combined the two moves in a single paragraph instead of communicating the information separately.

Four applicants combined the I and EC moves in a single paragraph. In the I move, particularly the *Background* step, the applicants provided background information, and in the EC move, the applicants provided academic, professional, and research credentials. The rhetorical decision of those four applicants to integrate the background information (abstract) with the relevant and concrete credentials (educational GPA, certificates, courses taken, professional skills, experience) attempted to make their arguments persuasive. In other words, the applicants attempted to connect the two relevant ideas—intangible background information and tangible credentials—in a single paragraph. Thus, in my sample of SPs, sometimes the applicants communicated multiple relevant ideas through a single paragraph.

## 4.7. SUMMARY OF MAJOR TRENDS

The results of my SP analysis suggested some important trends in my subjects' shared understanding of the SP genre:

- Active voice as the persuasive tool to maintain directness;
- First-person personal pronouns as the persuasive tool to maintain personal style;
- Combination of long and short sentences as the persuasive tool to maintain engagement;
- Short sentences as the persuasive tool to maintain politeness;
- Simple sentences as the persuasive tool to maintain clarity;
- Loose sentences as the persuasive tool to maintain lucidity;
- Less variant sentence structure as the persuasive tool to maintain consistency; and
- Structured paragraphing as the persuasive tool to maintain coherence.

# 5. CONCLUSION

I started my research to determine my subjects' shared understanding of the SP genre by analyzing their SPs submitted to the Department of English and Technical Communication at Missouri S&T from three perspectives: rhetorical moves, rhetorical appeals, and rhetorical style. The SP genre's occluded nature and situation in a rhetorical vacuum (a vague understanding of the genre and few explicit instructions about the expectations of the audience) often create anxiety among prospective students and intrigued me to explore this genre from a rhetorical perspective. In particular, the context of my study—a graduate program that gave applicants almost no instructions for writing their SPs—was one of my motivations for investigating this genre. The SPs in my sample had many similarities in content and style of writing. Previous scholars' analysis of only moves and steps—i.e., only structural analysis of texts—in this genre indicated the need for future investigation. With the aim of filling a gap left by previous studies, I explored the content, structure, appeals, and style in a small corpus of SPs.

Three levels of analysis revealed the group's shared understanding of this SP genre as social action in response to a recurrent or typified rhetorical situation associated with a specific discourse community (in this case, a discourse community in the humanities, specifically technical communication). According to Miller's (1984) definition, a situation that recurs in society (such as applying for admission to graduate school) gives rise to an exigence (an individual's need to submit an application package), which in turn motivates an individual to engage in social action (such as writing an SP). That action mediates private intention (the individual's desire to gain admission and

make a better future for himself or herself) and a public need (a university's need to recruit students and a society's need to educate its citizens) (Malone & Wright, 2018, p. 124).

In my sample of SPs, a group of prospective graduate students achieved both the purposes (gaining admission and financial support) or one (gaining admission). To achieve that purpose, they gathered meaning from the context to perform the action of writing their SPs and demonstrating their candidacy. Because limited instructions were provided from the audience, applicants were required to first define the SP genre in their own terms. They defined this genre as a preliminary step of establishing a relationship with a few individuals in the discourse community to ultimately become an integral part of that community. This strategy of establishing a relationship motivated the applicants as actors to pursue their audience through their SPs. The SP was a vehicle (social action) for them to pursue their private intentions (for example, gaining admission and securing funding), but it was also a vehicle for them to meet a social need (i.e., to give the university what it needs—sincere, first-rate students—and to give society that it needs—educated citizens who can contribute to society, to be productive and give back). They revealed their "private intentions" (Miller, 1984) in a personal but professional way. Considering the goal of a technical communication degree, which is to produce a professional writer or communicator, my subjects created professional selves.

The following commonalities among the applicants' SPs revealed their shared understanding Ars dictaminis perverted of the SP genre:

- The applicants established credibility by structurally paying more attention to the EC and RA moves;

- The applicants intertwined the EC and RA moves to establish credibility regarding both the past accomplishments and future intentions—a result similar to one found by Samraj & Monk (2008);
- The applicants constructed different selves in their SPs: a professional self, a personal self, an aspirant self, a relevant self, an enthusiastic but financially needy self, a benevolent self, and a humble self.;
- The applicants did not restrict their identity to a discipline-specific self only, for example, "a tech-commie";
- In knowing the connection of technical communication to the humanities, the applicants revealed their intention to give back to society—a result similar to one found by Barton et al. (2004);
- Considering the goals of the program, the applicants did not create research selves (the department advertises teaching assistantships, not a research assistantship; probably the technical communication discipline's research focus is unknown to many undergraduate students);
- The applicants established *ethos* consistently with both Aristotle's and modern scholars' versions of *pisteis*;
- The social action revealed through the applicants' use of *ethos* was to establish professional affiliations in terms of professional experience and academic background;
- The social action revealed through the applicants' use of *pathos* was to establish a personal identity through storytelling and to reveal their unknown and unrevealed sides, which cannot be expressed through other application

materials such as transcripts or letters of recommendation. The ultimate goal was to establish a personal relationship with the audience;

- The social action revealed through the applicants' use of *pathos* was to appeal to the audience's self-*ethos* and highlight the applicants' own weaknesses;
- The social action revealed through the applicants' use of *logos* was to establish a believable self by demonstrating the knowledge of values and beliefs of the discipline—a result similar to one found by Barton et al (2004).;
- The applicants made their SPs personal and formal by using first-person personal pronouns heavily and contractions sparingly;
- The applicants established clarity and directness by using active voice and simple and loose sentences;
- The applicants maintained a formal style by writing their SPs in structured and coherent paragraphs; and
- The applicants used a combination of long and short sentences to create an engaging style.

Brown (2004) described the SP as a "prospective" genre (p. 259) but "prospective" describes only one aspect of the SP: looking forward. Another aspect of the SP is self-reflection, which involves looking back at past accomplishments. Therefore, the SP is better described as a prospective and retrospective (or "self-reflective") genre. Through this SP genre, an unknown personality (an applicant) reveals himself or herself to a group of unfamiliar people (members of the admission committee) to initiate a relationship—a relationship that is the starting point to become familiar with the values and the common practices of the discourse community.

My study on the SP genre from a shared-understanding perspective will help future graduate students and admission committees to understand this genre rhetorically. I cannot claim that future students will get a ready-made answer to "how to write a statement of purpose" from this study. At the same time, I can at least claim that the common threads identified in my sample offer future students a glimpse of the SP genre as social action. For example, future students will at least get a glimpse of what exactly clarity and directness means in terms of using simple and loose sentences and active voice, what exactly personal means in terms of using personal pronouns, what exactly formal means in terms of using minimal contractions, what arguments are commonly discovered and used to establish *ethos, pathos,* and *logos,* and how moves and steps are used in SPs.

My study has positive pedagogical implications. The SP genre is a neglected genre in university technical writing courses. Because we are instructors in technical communication, it is our responsibility to expose our students to different kinds of technical communication genres. In most cases, technical writing courses prepare students to write cover letters, resumes, or emails and enter the profession; however, many students aspire to go on to graduate school for further education. The SP plays an important role in admission decisions at universities. My study can serve as an inspiration to include the SP genre in the technical writing curriculum. My comprehensive rhetorical examination of SPs will help educators to integrate this genre in their courses and give students many heuristics for understanding this genre. The rhetorical analysis that I performed from multidimensions will help the students analyze other genres in terms of *pisteis, elocutio,* and moves and steps.

The qualitative nature of my study prevented generalization to the overall SP genre. My study was limited in scope by having only twenty-four SPs as the data and by analyzing only SPs submitted to one university program. Future researchers should evaluate SPs submitted to other departments and include a greater number of SPs for rhetorical analysis. Also, a future researcher should undertake a comparison of how domestic students and international students use the strategies of rhetorical appeals and style in their SPs. A more thorough stylistic analysis could be performed by focusing on other elements such as figures of speech and use of clauses. A few questions still need to be resolved through more detailed analysis of SPs in the future:

1. What motivates an applicant to integrate specific stories in an SP?
2. How does an applicant decide the length of an SP?
3. What drives an applicant to write an SP either in a letter or an essay format?
4. Do all SPs adhere to a formal format instead of an informal format?
5. Is there any specific order of rhetorical appeals in the SP genre?
6. What figures of speech (schemes and tropes) are employed in the SP genre?
7. What kinds of cohesive devices are used in the SP genre primarily?

Additional methods, greater numbers, and diverse types of SPs in analyzing this SP genre would shed light on the deeper characteristics of SPs and contribute to genre analysis (SP) pedagogy from a rhetorical perspective.

# APPENDIX A.

# CONTACT EMAIL

From: Pgfm5@mst.edu
To: Student email ID
Subject: Research Support Request

Dear [Student Name],

My name is Priyanka Ganguly, and I am a graduate student in the Department of English and Technical Communication at Missouri University of Science and Technology (S&T). I am writing to request your participation in my research study, "A Rhetorical Analysis of Statements of Purpose (SPs) for Admission to Graduate School." The purpose of my research is to determine the writers' shared understanding of the genre of SP.

I would like to request that you send me your SP submitted for admission to the MS program in technical communication at S&T. If you do not have access to the SP that you submitted as a part of your graduate application, then I would request that you give me permission to access your SP from your records in the department. My advisor (Dr. Ed Malone) can help me to gain access to your SP, but only if you give consent. Attached is the consent form.

Your SP is valuable to me, and I would appreciate your participation in my research. Your information will remain confidential, and your participation in my study must be completely voluntary. If you should have any questions about this research project, please feel free to contact me at (573) 202-1797/ or pgfm5@umsystem.edu or my advisor Dr. Malone at malonee@mst.edu. For additional information regarding human participation in research, please feel free to contact the Missouri S&T Campus IRB Chair, Dr. Kathryn Northcut, at (573) 341-6498.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

Priyanka Ganguly

## APPENDIX B.

## CONSENT FORM

I volunteer to participate in a study tentatively titled "A Rhetorical Analysis of Statements of Purpose (SPs) for Admission to Graduate School," to be conducted by Priyanka Ganguly, a graduate student in the Department of English and Technical Communication at Missouri University of Science & Technology (S&T).

I agree to submit my statement of purpose written as part of the application process for admission to the Master of Science in Technical Communication at S&T. I admit that this is the same statement of purpose that I submitted to S&T at the time of my application for graduate study. I have not made any subsequent changes to the statement of purpose. If I do not have access to the statement of purpose I submitted, I give permission to the Department of English and Technical Communication to provide Ms. Ganguly with a copy of my SP from records in the department. I understand that Ms. Ganguly's academic advisor (Dr. Ed Malone, malonee@mst.edu) can help the researcher secure access to my SP with my permission.
I understand that Ms. Ganguly will not identify me by name in any reports using information obtained from my statement of purpose, and that my participation in this study will remain confidential. I further understand that my year of admission or graduation will not be revealed in any report. If I am a current graduate student, then my grades in classes will not be affected by my participation or lack of participation in this study. Finally, I understand that the risk of my participation in this study is very small, as I am directly not participating in this study.

If I should have any questions about this research project, I can contact Ms. Priyanka Ganguly at (573) 202-1797/or pgfm5@umsystem.edu or her advisor Dr. Ed Malone at malonee@mst.edu. For additional information regarding human participation in research, I can contact the Missouri S&T Campus IRB Chair, Dr. Kathryn Northcut, at (573) 341-6498.

Signature:
Printed Name:
Date:

## APPENDIX C.

## A SAMPLE OF CODING TABLE

**Subject 1**

| **Sentences** | **Code (Step)** | **Category (Move)** |
|---|---|---|
| 1st Sentence | | |
| 2nd Sentence | | |
| 3rd Sentence | | |
| 4th Sentence | | |
| 5th Sentence | | |
| 6th Sentence | | |
| 7th Sentence | | |
| 8th Sentence | | |
| 9th Sentence | | |
| 10th Sentence | | |
| 11th Sentence | | |
| 12th Sentence | | |
| 13th Sentence | | |
| 14th Sentence | | |
| 15th Sentence | | |
| 16th Sentence | | |

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# VITA

Priyanka Ganguly earned a Master of Science in Botany from University of Calcutta in May 2009. She received a Master of Science in Technical Communication from Missouri University of Science and Technology in May 2020. While studying at Missouri S&T, she worked as a Graduate Teaching Assistant in the Department of English and Technical Communication and taught English 3560 Technical Writing course to the undergraduate students. She also gained experience as a technical communications intern at Shure Incorporated during the summer of 2019. Before coming to Missouri S&T, she worked in three companies in the roles of client executive, human resource executive, and customer service executive.

After completing the M.S. in Technical Communication, she attended Virginia Tech University and began work on her PhD in Rhetoric and Writing.