



Exploring EFL Prompting Strategies of ESL Hospitality Students in Essay Writing with ChatGPT

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ABSTRACT

Generative AI has been widely used in EFL writing classes, which raises interests in the prompts use employed by the students. This study attempts to answer two research questions: (1) What types of prompts do students use when interacting with ChatGPT to revise their essays? (2) To what extent do these prompts reflect high-order and low-order writing concerns? A total of 143 prompts were collected from 33 students during the revision phase of a writing assignment. These prompts were analyzed through qualitative content analysis to identify patterns in prompting behavior. Findings show that students predominantly used ChatGPT to address higher-order concerns, such as content development, academic tone, and organization, rather than surface-level issues like grammar correction. This suggests that students approached ChatGPT as a tool to improve the quality and coherence of their writing, not merely for mechanical edits. Prompting behaviors varied among individuals, with some students submitting multiple detailed prompts while others engaged minimally. The average number of prompts per student was similar between male and female students, despite considerable individual variation. These findings challenge the assumption that students rely on generative AI only for surface-level fixes. With proper instruction and support, students can engage with AI in thoughtful, ethical, and academically meaningful ways. The study highlights the need to incorporate AI literacy into academic writing instruction to help students develop effective and responsible prompting strategies.

KEYWORDS

ChatGPT; Prompting; Hospitality Students; AI; writing

ABSTRAK

Penggunaan Kecerdasan Buatan dalam teks generatif semakin marak digunakan di dunia kelas menulis EFL. Studi ini menjawab dua rumusan masalah: (1) Jenis-jenis *prompt* apa yang digunakan mahasiswa ketika berinteraksi dengan ChatGPT untuk merevisi esai mereka? (2) Sejauh mana *prompt* tersebut mencerminkan perhatian terhadap aspek penulisan tingkat tinggi (*high-order*) dan tingkat rendah (*low-order*)? Sebanyak 143 *prompt* dikumpulkan dari 33 mahasiswa selama tahap revisi tugas menulis. *Prompts* ini dianalisis menggunakan analisis konten kualitatif untuk mengidentifikasi pola perilaku dalam menggunakan *prompt*. Hasil menunjukkan bahwa mahasiswa lebih sering menggunakan ChatGPT untuk menangani aspek penting dalam penulisan, seperti pengembangan konten, nada akademik, dan

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ChatGPT; prompting; mahasiswa kesehatan; kecerdasan buatan; menulis

organisasi paragraf, daripada untuk memperbaiki hal-hal teknis seperti tata bahasa. Ini menunjukkan bahwa mahasiswa memanfaatkan ChatGPT untuk meningkatkan kualitas dan koherensi tulisan, bukan sekadar perbaikan permukaan. Perilaku dalam membuat *prompt* bervariasi antarindividu; beberapa mahasiswa mengajukan banyak *prompt* yang rinci, sementara yang lain hanya sedikit. Rata-rata jumlah *prompt* per mahasiswa relatif sama antara laki-laki dan perempuan, meskipun terdapat variasi signifikan pada tingkat individu. Temuan ini menantang anggapan bahwa mahasiswa hanya menggunakan AI generatif untuk perbaikan teknis. Dengan arahan dan dukungan yang tepat, mahasiswa dapat berinteraksi dengan AI secara kritis, etis, dan konstruktif secara akademik. Studi ini menekankan pentingnya mengintegrasikan literasi AI dalam pembelajaran menulis akademik agar mahasiswa dapat mengembangkan strategi *prompting* yang efektif dan bertanggung jawab.

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INTRODUCTION

The use of artificial intelligence (AI) in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) class has introduced new ways how students to approach their writing assignments. Among various AI tools available, Chat Generative Pre-Trained Transformer (ChatGPT) has gained significant attention for its ability to assist students in their studies to personalize learning, automate assessment, and provide students with detailed feedback for their assignments (Kohnke, 2023). Despite there is concerns about ethical usage (Farhi et al., 2023), most EFL learners consider it the most favorable AI tool when learning English compose essay assignments (Wulyani et al., 2024).

ChatGPT has also created new opportunities for personalized writing support, especially for EFL learners. Although teachers can clarify feedback and materials more effectively, ChatGPT provides important instant feedback for learners (Klimova et al., 2024). This is further supported by multiple studies that show how generative AI is used pedagogically in EFL writing, especially to improve idea organization and grammatical accuracy (Green-Eneix & Kohnke, 2025; Hwang et al., 2024). Mabuan (2024) emphasizes that language accuracy, clarity of argument, and textual coherence are essential in writing assignments. Consequently, students turn to ChatGPT as a real-time writing assistant that supports the development of both their writing and speaking skills. These applications highlight a changing form of writer–assistant interaction, where students interact with AI to enhance their ideas and develop more refined texts. Prior research has also explored students' mixed perceptions of ChatGPT's role in language learning environments or education in general.

While some previous studies indicate that students generally perceive the tool positively, they also point to the concerns about its ethical use and its shortcomings (Green-Eneix & Kohnke, 2025; Kohnke, 2023; Ngo, 2023). This situation has encouraged teachers to balance the advancement of technology with ethical considerations because this AI tool is prone to bias and data privacy problems (Green-Eneix & Kohnke, 2025). Regarding its shortcomings, some students consider that ChatGPT may give repetitive feedback when helping the

assignments (Tossell et al., 2024). Although ChatGPT has advanced with its most recent update to GPT-5, concerns about its performance remain noteworthy, particularly about the challenges learners face in formulating effective prompts.

Regarding the prompts, a study conducted by Levine et al. (2025) shows that high school students prompt ChatGPT to help them generate and organize ideas. In the computer and engineering field, Sawalha et al. (2024) students employed three main prompting strategies when using ChatGPT: directly copying and pasting questions without modification, rephrasing questions into a single prompt, and engaging the model through a series of follow-up questions. Moreover, students who used multi-question prompts tended to perform better in their final exams, suggesting a link between more interactive prompting and deeper learning.

In doing essay assignments in EFL classes, students need to craft prompts that are suitable for the objective of the writing tasks given to them. This skill in crafting prompts is important because the feedback provided by ChatGPT depends on how learners formulate their prompts, which in turn affects the variation in feedback outcomes (Cong-Lem & Daneshfar, 2024). Consequently, effective prompting has become a key skill for interacting with this generative AI tool. Prompting can be defined as an instruction, a question, or an input that users type to interact with ChatGPT (Tan et al., 2020). The effectiveness also relies on how users craft prompts (Hwang et al., 2024). The way students craft the prompt has indicated how their language skills can be enhanced through the assistance of ChatGPT (Werdiningsih et al., 2024). While there has been a growing interest in the affordances and risks of AI in writing instruction, empirical studies focusing specifically on how students write prompts to revise their essays remain scarce.

Existing research so far has highlighted various uses of ChatGPT in academic writing, including grammar correction, vocabulary enhancement, idea generation, argument development, and structural organization (Adel et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2024). However, these uses are often discussed in generalized terms, with limited exploration of the actual prompts that learners create to initiate these functions. Analyzing these prompts can offer insights into the types of writing assistance students seek, the depth of engagement they demonstrate, and the implicit writing instruction needs they express through their interactions with AI (Hwang et al., 2024).

Additionally, understanding the types of prompts students write can help educators identify areas of writing instruction that may need further emphasis, which includes argumentation, coherence, or academic tone. It can also offer insight into students' digital literacy, including how they frame questions or commands to technology. It is important to analyze not only what these tools can do but also how students interact with them in real classroom settings. This study contributes to a deeper and more nuanced understanding of student–AI interaction in the context of academic writing. It seeks to explore how learners engage with generative AI tools to support their revision practices, an area that remains underexplored in EFL writing research. The findings are expected to inform writing pedagogy and instructional design, particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education, where the integration of technological tools into the writing process presents opportunities to improve vocabulary, idea generation, grammar accuracy, and coherence (Kong et al., 2024; Marzuki et al., 2023; Werdiningsih et al., 2024).

Argumentative writing is a central component of academic literacy, requiring students not only to present opinions but also to justify them with evidence and logical reasoning. In

the textbook by Ramage et al. (2019), one influential framework for teaching and analyzing argumentation is Toulmin's model. This model breaks down an argument into core elements which include the claim (the position advanced), grounds (evidence or data supporting the claim), and warrant (the underlying principle linking the grounds to the claim that persuades the audience). The model also contains additional components such as backing (support for the warrant), and rebuttals (acknowledgement of opposing views), which provide further nuance and sophistication.

Toulmin system offers a useful scaffold for developing students' argumentative competence because it emphasizes on rhetorical triangle (logos, ethos, and pathos) and the use of explicit logical relationships between claims, evidence, and other persuasive principles (Khairuddin et al., 2021). In the present study, students were required to compose argumentative essays guided by the Toulmin framework prior to revising them with ChatGPT. This ensured that their texts contained identifiable argumentative elements, which in turn made it possible to analyze how students' prompts for AI-assisted revision interacted with the structure of Toulmin-based argumentation.

The study does not evaluate the quality or learning outcomes of the revised essays themselves; such an analysis will be presented in a separate publication. In line with the overall aims and scope of this study, the following research questions were formulated to guide the analysis and interpretation of the data collected from the student-generated prompts:

- (1) What types of prompts do students use when interacting with ChatGPT to revise their essays?
- (2) To what extent do these prompts reflect high-order and low-order writing concerns?

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research approach. The data were obtained from student-generated notes, which consisted of blank sheets where students independently recorded all the ChatGPT prompts they used during the essay revision process. These notes served as the primary data source and were analyzed using qualitative content analysis. This was chosen to examine the students' interactions with ChatGPT and to capture the variety of prompt usage.

While previous studies, such as Hwang et al. (2024), have employed thematic analysis to explore learners' strategies in using prompts and patterns, this study adopts a content analysis approach instead. Content analysis has been widely used in EFL research to investigate diverse aspects of language learning and teaching. For instance, Asakereh et al. (2019) analyzed ELT textbooks for English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) features, revealing a lack of contextual and cultural diversity. (Hashemnezhad, 2022) Used qualitative content analysis to uncover key factors influencing EFL learning, such as language policy, teacher characteristics, and learner traits. Chen et al. (2021) applied content and bibliometric analysis to examine e-book usage in EFL education, highlighting research trends in reading comprehension and learner engagement. Similarly, Başar & Şahin (2022) employed content analysis to track the rise of flipped and mobile-assisted language learning. These examples demonstrate the methodological versatility of content analysis in capturing patterns across varied educational contexts. Therefore, content analysis was deemed more appropriate than thematic analysis because of its systematic and replicable nature, particularly in categorizing the use of multiple student prompts while still accommodating qualitative interpretation.

The participants of this study were 33 undergraduate students enrolled in the Hospitality Program at a private university in Jakarta, Indonesia. All were learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and were taking part in an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) course focused on developing argumentative writing skills. The students' English proficiency levels ranged from beginner, intermediate to upper-intermediate, based on their diagnostic test in the first semester.

The writing task used for analysis was originally assigned as part of a graded mid-term examination in the English for Academic Purposes (EAP) course. In the first phase, students composed their argumentative essay drafts by hand during a supervised in-class session. Before the revision stage, they were reminded of the key structural components of an effective argumentative essay. These included an engaging introduction with a hook in the form of a background story or personal experience, as well as clearly stated reasons, supporting evidence, logical grounds, and appropriate backing. Previously, instruction had incorporated the Toulmin model of argumentation, which served as a conceptual framework for both the initial draft and the revision process.

In the second phase, students revised their handwritten essays using ChatGPT in a controlled setting at the university's computer laboratory. Each student accessed the platform individually and was encouraged to engage with ChatGPT by seeking feedback, clarifying ideas, and making revisions. Students were instructed to document all prompts submitted to ChatGPT in a written log. The revised essays were then saved in the university lab's computer system and later evaluated as part of the course assessment. Importantly, students' use of ChatGPT and their participation in the study did not influence their grades. Only the prompts submitted during the revision session were collected and analyzed.

To analyze how students used ChatGPT during their essay revision, each prompt was examined and categorized based on its function. The coding scheme was developed inductively and iteratively through close reading of the prompt dataset. The prompt categories are largely adapted from the study Hwang et al. (2024) with some modifications to make the analysis process more manageable. Table 1 provides sample prompts that guided the definition and application of each category.

Table 1. Prompt category and example of student prompt

No	Prompt Category	Example of Student Prompt
1	Content Development	<i>"Can you add an example to support this argument?"</i>
2	Feedback Request	<i>"Is this paragraph clear and convincing?"</i>
3	Style and Tone	<i>"Make this sound more academic."</i>
4	Task Clarification	<i>"What does this question mean?"</i>
5	Organization Structure	<i>"Help me reorganize this paragraph."</i>
6	Grammar Correction	<i>"Correct the grammar in this sentence."</i>
7	General Revision Request	<i>"Improve this paragraph."</i>

Prompts categorized under Content Development typically asked ChatGPT to help expand arguments, add claims, or include supporting evidence. Feedback Request prompts wanted evaluative comments or suggestions for improvement. Style and Tone prompts asked

ChatGPT to make the writing sound more academic or persuasive. Task Clarification prompts were used when students needed help understanding or interpreting the writing assignment. Organization Structure prompts focused on improving the logical flow or coherence of the text. Grammar Correction prompts targeted specific language issues, and General Revision Requests were broad, often non-specific calls for improving the text.

To ensure the reliability of the coding process, a second rater independently categorized 20% of the prompts, which were randomly selected. The inter-rater agreement reached 92%, and any discrepancies were resolved through collaborative discussion to reach consensus. Each prompt was manually coded and assigned to one category. The primary researcher conducted the initial coding and subsequently verified it through peer review to enhance consistency and validity. This categorization framework enabled both descriptive quantitative analysis of prompt frequency and qualitative interpretation of students' engagement with ChatGPT, particularly with their writing goals and revision strategies.

FINDINGS

Types of Prompts That Students Use When Interacting With Chat-GPT During the Essay Revision

A total of 143 student prompts were collected and categorized during the revision stage of their argumentative essays. Table 2 summarizes the distribution of prompt types, their frequency, percentage, and whether they reflect higher-order or lower-order concerns. Table 2 shows the distribution of prompt types, their frequency, percentage, and whether they reflect higher-order or lower-order concerns. The categorization provides insight into the kinds of assistance students most frequently sought from ChatGPT. It also gives an insight of the relative emphasis students placed on surface-level corrections (lower-order) versus deeper content and structural issues (higher-order). This distribution serves as the basis for analyzing how students engaged with generative AI during the revision process. This table also functions as a starting point for a more detailed discussion of how each prompt type shaped the students' revision strategies and the quality of their final drafts.

Table 2. Types of Prompts Used During ChatGPT-Assisted Essay Revision

Category	Percentage	Frequency	Order of Concern
Content Development	43.36%	62	higher-order
Feedback Request	13.99%	20	higher-order
General Revision Request	3.50%	5	higher-order
Grammar Correction	8.39%	12	higher-order
N/A	0.70%	1	unclassified
Not a Prompt	0.70%	1	unclassified
Organization Structure	9.09%	13	lower-order
Style and Tone	10.49%	15	lower-order
Total	100%	143	

Table 2 shows the distribution of prompts created by students in eight categories. The most frequent category was Content Development (43.36%, $n = 62$), indicating that nearly half of the students' prompts were aimed at expanding, clarifying, or improving the ideas and arguments in their essays. This suggests that students primarily viewed ChatGPT as a tool to support idea generation and elaboration rather than only for surface-level corrections. The second most common category was Feedback Request (13.99%, $n = 20$), in which students asked ChatGPT to evaluate their writing or provide suggestions. Prompts related to Style and Tone (10.49%, $n = 15$) and Organization Structure (9.09%, $n = 13$) also appeared frequently, reflecting students' concern with the rhetorical quality and coherence of their essays.

In contrast, fewer prompts focused on Grammar Correction (8.39%, $n = 12$) and General Revision Requests (3.50%, $n = 5$). These findings indicate that while some students relied on ChatGPT for language accuracy, it was not their primary use of the tool. A very small proportion of entries were categorized as N/A (0.70%, $n = 1$) or Not a Prompt (0.70%, $n = 1$), which may represent off-task responses or incomplete inputs.

Overall, the findings highlight that students strategically engaged with ChatGPT. The prompts were created not only for surface-level corrections but also for higher-order concerns such as content development, feedback, and discourse organization. This pattern suggests that learners perceived ChatGPT as a resource for both linguistic and cognitive mediation in the writing process.

Extent to which Prompts Address Higher and Lower-Order Concerns

As seen in Table 2, most of the prompts (approximately 80.42%) were categorized as higher-order concerns. These included prompts focused on content development (43.36%), feedback seeking (13.99%), task clarification (9.79%), style and tone adjustments (10.49%), organizational improvements (9.09%), and general revision requests (3.50%). These categories suggest that students were actively engaging in deeper levels of revision, such as improving arguments, clarifying purpose, refining structure, and aligning tone with academic expectations.

In contrast, only 8.39% of the prompts focused on lower-order concerns, such as grammar correction, indicating that surface-level issues were not the primary focus during the revision phase. A very small number of entries were classified as either "N/A" or "Not a prompt," suggesting minimal irrelevant or misclassified input.

Overall, this pattern shows a strong tendency among students to use ChatGPT to support substantive revisions rather than merely fixing superficial errors. This implies a meaningful level of engagement with the writing process and points toward the pedagogical value of prompting students to revise with critical intention.

Table 3. Gender Comparison Summary

Gender	Number of Students	Total Prompts	Average Prompts per Student
Female	19	81	4.26
Male	14	62	4.43

As shown in Table 3, a total of 143 prompts were submitted by 33 students, comprising 19 female students (81 prompts) and 14 male students (62 prompts). While the average number

of prompts per student was relatively similar—4.43 for males and 4.26 for females—the overall pattern reveals substantial individual variation in engagement with ChatGPT.

The most prolific user was S14 (male), who submitted 17 prompts, which approximately accounts for 12% of the entire dataset. Other students who demonstrated high engagement included S29 (female) with 11 prompts and S06 (female) with 8 prompts. On the other end of the spectrum, five students submitted only one prompt each: S08, S26, and S27 (female), along with S16 and S17 (male). Four of these minimal-use students used ChatGPT for Content Development, while S26 submitted a prompt categorized under General Revision Request.

These differences suggest that students approached ChatGPT in highly individualized ways. Some appeared to experiment extensively with higher-order revision strategies, while others engaged more narrowly. This pattern may be attributed to more focused revision goals, lower confidence in using AI, or limited familiarity with how to formulate effective prompts. Despite the small gender gap in average usage, the individual prompt counts suggest that personal prompting behavior played a more critical role than gender in shaping how ChatGPT was utilized during the revision process.

DISCUSSION

This study set out to examine how undergraduate students use ChatGPT to revise their academic essays, with a focus on the types of prompts they employ. The analysis of 143 student-generated prompts revealed a strong preference for addressing higher-order concerns (HOCs), such as content development, feedback requests, academic tone, task clarification, and organization, over lower-order concerns (LOCs) like grammar correction and general revision. In total, 87.94% of all prompts fell into the higher-order category, while only 12.06% addressed surface-level or mechanical issues.

These findings are significant because they challenge a prevailing concern in the literature that students tend to use generative AI tools superficially—for proofreading or surface-level edits only (Xiao & Zhi, 2023; Hwang, Jeens, et al., 2024). On the contrary, the students in this study engaged with ChatGPT as a tool to improve the *substance* and *clarity* of their writing. The most frequently used prompt type was *Content Development* (43.97%), indicating that students sought to add or refine arguments, claims, and evidence—core elements of effective academic writing.

This behavior parallels findings from Sawalha et al. (2024), who identified three prompting strategies: simple copy-and-paste (SCP), single reformulated prompts (SRP), and multiple-question prompting (MQP). Their study found that more active prompting approaches (SRP and MQP) were linked to higher response accuracy from ChatGPT and better student performance. While our study focused on prompt functions rather than prompting formats, the dominance of content-focused and feedback-seeking prompts suggests a similarly reflective and strategic use of generative AI.

A possible reason why students in this study demonstrated high-level prompting strategies is that they had previously received instruction on argumentative writing and essay organization. This aligns with Javier and Moorhouse (2023) who argue that scaffolding activities are essential for helping students develop productive and critical prompting habits

when using tools like ChatGPT. Instruction appears to play a key role in shaping how students interact with AI. Therefore, it is not just whether they use it, but how they use it.

Although a recent survey conducted by Welding (2023) found that 51% of college students believe that using AI tools for assignments or exams constitutes cheating or plagiarism, the behavior observed in this study challenges such perceptions. Rather than misusing ChatGPT to bypass learning, most students in our sample used it to meaningfully improve their writing, particularly in areas such as argument development, tone, and organization. This suggests that with the right academic context and guidance, students can use generative AI tools ethically and constructively. These results support the argument by Xiao and Zhi (2023) that students with strong critical thinking skills are less likely to misuse AI. In our study, students did not passively accept ChatGPT's outputs but used prompts to actively revise, seek clarification, and refine their ideas. These behaviors indicate evaluative thinking rather than academic dishonesty.

An analysis of prompt frequency by gender revealed that male and female students submitted a comparable number of prompts on average (4.43 and 4.26 respectively), suggesting that prompting behavior may not be strongly influenced by gender. However, there was considerable variation at the individual level, with some students submitting over ten prompts and others only one. This disparity points to differences in individual motivation, confidence, or prompting familiarity rather than demographic factors. These findings underscore the importance of differentiated instruction and AI literacy support, as students engage with generative tools in highly personalized ways.

Furthermore, while Klimova et al. (2024) noted that students are often satisfied with ChatGPT's speed and accuracy, they also highlighted its limitations, such as repetitive outputs and its inability to replace teacher explanations. This is consistent with observations in our context: although students relied on ChatGPT for support in revising their essays, they often asked it for feedback, clarification, or elaboration, which suggests that they were aware of the model's limitations and sought to use it critically rather than blindly. Similarly, the concern raised by Teng (2023) about the need to make AI more human-like and the call for stronger academic regulation are important reminders that institutional frameworks must evolve in parallel with student practices. Nonetheless, our findings point to the potential for generative AI to serve as a supplementary learning partner when students are provided with clear guidance and instructional scaffolding. The thoughtful, high-order nature of most prompts in this study indicates that, under the right conditions, students can engage with ChatGPT in ways that support rather than undermine academic integrity.

Although the actual scores of the revised essays were not included as part of this study's dataset, the nature of the prompts provides meaningful insight into students' revision behavior. The dominance of higher-order concerns in their ChatGPT prompts suggests that students were not simply seeking quick fixes but were actively engaging with the substance and structure of their writing. This reflects a promising shift toward intentional and reflective AI use in academic contexts. Even without outcome-based performance measures, the prompt data itself offers compelling evidence of student learning strategies and their capacity to use AI tools in thoughtful and responsible ways.

CONCLUSION

This study examined how undergraduate students use ChatGPT during the revision of academic essays, focusing on the types of prompts they generated and the cognitive level of their requests. The analysis revealed that students overwhelmingly used prompts targeting higher-order concerns—such as content development, feedback, tone, and organization—rather than surface-level corrections. These findings challenge the common perception that students engage with AI only for mechanical or unethical purposes and instead suggest that, when appropriately scaffolded, students can use generative AI tools in ways that support meaningful learning and academic integrity.

By integrating insights from recent studies on prompting strategies and AI use in education, this research highlights the importance of guided instruction in helping students use AI productively and critically. The evidence suggests that AI tools like ChatGPT can serve not as shortcuts to avoid learning, but as cognitive partners that support deeper engagement with writing—provided that students are taught how to use them intentionally and reflectively.

Although this study did not assess the final quality of student essays, the nature and focus of their prompts offer strong indications of strategic, high-level engagement with the revision process. This study also only involves a small number of students in a very specific context. Therefore, further studies may need to incorporate more participants in a more generalizable context regarding prompts crafting used by EFL learners, especially in the context of academic writing. As generative AI becomes more integrated into educational settings, future research should also continue exploring how prompting behavior influences learning outcomes and how teachers can best support students in developing the skills to use these tools responsibly. In this evolving landscape, understanding not just what AI can do, but how students choose to interact with it, is essential for shaping ethical, effective, and future-ready writing pedagogy.

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