

Research on Using Grammarly to Improve Students' English Writing

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Abstract

The study's aim is to explore the use of Grammarly in Writing three classes, evaluate students' perceptions of its advantages and drawbacks, and provide suggestions for resolving these issues. Over the course of a month, the researchers examined 40 writing samples from ten different students using a qualitative method. The research employs a qualitative design to analyze the writing errors, following the thematic approach. The study's conclusions show that Grammarly offers students dependable feedback on grammar, spelling, and sentence structure, which helps them write better by identifying mistakes. Students also thought that using Grammarly's recommendations as a resource rather than just accepting them at face value could help us become better writers and grammar experts.

Keywords: Grammarly, writing skills, errors

Introduction

At the end of 2019, on-site study became a challenge for teacher staff and students because of the COVID-19 epidemic. A key area where technology is having a significant impact is the use of AI-powered tools that support both teachers and learners by providing accurate and efficient feedback. Grammarly, a widely used writing assistant, exemplifies this trend. It automatically checks grammar, is easy to use, and is accessible to everyone, making it an excellent tool for students to improve their writing skills. Beyond grammar correction, Grammarly also offers features like paraphrasing, summarizing, and plagiarism detection that can help students refine their essays and writing assignments. For teachers, this reduces the amount of work associated with manually reviewing student work. With customizable options to identify specific writing issues such as tense, spelling, or repetition, Grammarly empowers students to take control of their writing process. This article explores how Grammarly can be a valuable tool for improving writing quality, especially for second-year English majors, and examines its effectiveness in improving key writing elements such as grammar, vocabulary, and context. Inspired by these benefits, our research team investigated the use of Grammarly to improve the writing skills of second-year students majoring in English.

The research aimed to:

- Investigate how Grammarly affects writing skills of Second-year English majors in Writing 3 at IUH.
- Find out the main problems in writing for second-year English majors at IUH by utilizing Grammarly.
- Propose some solutions to improve those difficulties in applying Grammarly to improve writing skills for Second-year English majors in Writing 3 at IUH.

Literature review

What is Grammarly?

Grammarly is an advanced spelling and grammar correction tool that helps users avoid errors when writing in English in browsers. Thanks to the free extension for Chrome, Firefox, Safari and Microsoft Edge, you can use the Grammarly app to open an email account in English to correct texts, fix errors and find synonyms instead. This software is an alternative to Google Translate to avoid possible vulnerabilities. Grammarly is an online software tool developed to examine texts such as essays, articles, etc. Qassemzadeh and Soleimani (2016) report the accuracy and consistency of this software. One of the most widely used automatic writing evaluation applications today is Grammarly, created in 2009 by two Ukrainian developers named Maz Lytvyn and Alex Shevchenko (Fernando & Suryaman, 2022). Now Grammarly is widely known and used worldwide, so this application has expanded globally. This application has key attributes such as a grammatical error display, spelling checker and plagiarism checker. 'Contextual spelling, grammar, punctuation, sentence structure, style, and vocabulary improvement' are one of the six categories that Grammarly classifies errors into (Fitria, 2021, p. 24).

Grammarly is available in two versions: Premium and Free. The Free edition is appropriate for proofreading emails and online writing and fixes 150 different error types, including punctuation, grammar, and spelling mistakes (Fitria, 2021; Nova, 2018). In the meantime, the Premium edition has over 400 checks and features and can recognize 250 grammatical rules. Upgrades include recommendations for improving language, identifying plagiarism, and providing citations (Nova, 2018; Wardatin et al., 2022). Additionally, Grammarly's web interface is easy to use and adaptable to a range of platforms and devices, providing users with convenience (Dembsey, 2017).

Review of previous studies

Previous research in the field have investigated numerous benefits when utilizing Grammarly to improve students' writing. The usefulness of grammar software in lowering student errors was assessed by Ghufron and Rosyida (2018) in the study about the Role of Grammarly in Assessing English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Writing. The research discovered that using grammar significantly reduces mistakes compared to indirect corrective input from teachers, particularly in vocabulary, language, and writing mechanics. In addition, Karyuatry et al. (2018) conducted an observation to determine the ability of applying Grammarly to improve the quality of student writing among 40 students. The results show that Grammarly can be a proper tool for automatically correcting errors and improving the quality of student writing. Another study,

"Using Grammarly Tools to Enrich Students' Writing Ability," was conducted by Maulidina, Putri & Wibowo, Hanafi. (2022).has shown that Grammarly could be used to enhance students' writing abilities. The findings showed that the participants had a positive perception of using Grammarly in writing recount texts, with a positive perception of genre-based learning and that using Grammarly significantly improved students' writing skills through genre-based approaches.

Sri Fahmi (2021) also carried out a research about Using Grammarly to Improve Students' Writing Skills for Second Grade in Senior High School. The study analyzed the data collected by 2 circles. The researchers compared the errors in writing processes in two different circles: before students used Grammarly and after students used Grammarly. The observations revealed the helpfulness of Grammarly in students' perceptions of writing, which cannot prevent their ideas and concepts from being built before. The findings showed that incorporating Grammarly into writing instruction can help students enhance writing proficiency, ultimately contributing to their overall academic success. In this way utilizing technology tools effectively can support students' learning and the development of language skills.

Zinkevich and Ledeneva (2021) did an experiment using the online writing assistant, Grammarly, to evaluate the essay writing skills of ESP (English for Specific Purposes) students. A total of 100 master's students' papers were analyzed through Grammarly to identify persistent errors typical at the master's level. Researchers assessed essays using five parameters: audience, formality, domain, tone, and intent, while Grammarly measured correctness, clarity, delivery, engagement, and style. Common errors included punctuation, wordiness, redundancy, and overuse of personal pronouns, indicating a need for remedial instruction in academic writing. The research finding also suggested Grammarly's as a tool for self-study, especially for advanced students, though it noted that Grammarly, while helpful, could not be a substitute for a teacher and occasionally makes errors. Hadiat et al. (2022) examined the integration of Grammarly into traditional writing instruction and conducted a case study with 30 students. The data in this study came from the questionnaire, interview, and online lesson observation. Data analysis uses four techniques including frequency table, content analysis, coding and triangulation analysis. The research finding suggested that Grammarly was a valuable tool for providing students with instant feedback on their writing and developing their self-editing skills.

In the context of Vietnam, there is a study conducted by Su, A. A. T., & Tran, T. H. N. (2024) which aimed to identify the limitations of Chat GPT in improving writing skill for students. However; the data collected was from the interview with seven Master students, which is very different from the current study. The main problem with Chat GPT was the false information given by the application. The author concluded that the assistance of Chat GPT could improve the students' vocabulary, structure, organization and concepts but not suitable for teaching research writing.

Vu (2024) conducted a study to examine the effectiveness of using Grammarly in improving learners' grammatical accuracy in writing. Qualitative and quantitative data were collected from a case study with 32 second-year college students. Surface structure taxonomy was used to analyze learners' writing tasks and a survey questionnaire was given to obtain quantitative data for research. Then a focus group interview was carried out to get in-depth thinking from the students. The results showed a reduction in learners' grammatical errors after the Grammarly intervention and their positive attitude towards using Grammarly to improve their English writing.

The review of previous studies has also revealed various challenges associated with using Grammarly, an online writing assistance tool, despite its advantages. A major challenge highlighted in several studies is internet connection dependency. O'Neill and Russell (2019) and Antony W (2023) and Pratama (2020) agreed that a stable internet connection was important for a smooth Grammarly experience, especially when accessing through the website. Insufficient internet speed could limit the functionality of Grammarly and affect students' writing improvement process. In addition, Grammarly's AI-based corrections sometimes did not always match students' writing intentions, leading to inaccuracies and misunderstandings (Nova, 2018; Ghufron & Rosyida, 2018; Pratama, 2020). Students might find Grammarly's feedback difficult to understand or inadequate to address their concerns, especially in long and complex sentences (Yasmin et al., 2021; Ummah & Bisriyah, 2022; Nova, 2018). In summary, while Grammarly provides valuable support for improving writing, challenges such as stable internet connection and misleading in AI-based feedback hinder its effectiveness. It is necessary to address these challenges to maximizing Grammarly's utility and improving students' writing experiences.

Research Questions

The research is to answer the following questions:

1. What are the effects of applying Grammarly on improving writing skills for second-year English major students?
2. What are the common obstacles to applying Grammarly to improve writing skills for Second-year English major students?

Methods

Pedagogic Setting & Participants

The primary observational participants in this study were second-year students majoring in the English language who learned the Writing 3 course in the second semester of the 2023-2024 academic year. They were anticipated to have an accurate point of view when performing the research observation because they had some experience using the Grammarly application in Writing 3 class. Prior to the introduction of Grammarly, the participants were asked to write an essay for the researchers to evaluate the current level of their writing proficiency. These participants will be able to engage in writing experiments using Grammarly on the Padlet website for one month. Because Writing 3 is an essential subject in the second semester of the second year, with limited time, the research team invited 15 participants to participate in the experiment within one month, and the results received only included 40 essays (10 assignments for 1 week), which are valid writing by 10 people within 4 weeks

Design of the Study

To gain a deeper understanding of the research process, the researchers chose to use observation to collect data as well as actual results for the study. The researcher designed essay writing samples for 10 FFL students in K18 (group 2022-2026) within 1 month (10 essays per week). The observation used essay samples because of the convenience of the qualitative method of collecting data. The validity of the data depends on the quality of the participants' writing. After collecting data from 40 articles, the researchers created profiles for each individual participant

to analyze the overall scores and find the most error-prone aspects of the articles. Grammarly has offered a report regarding the grading criteria (correctness, clarity, and engagement); thus, the researchers can evaluate common errors in the experimental group. With the criteria Correctness: Grammarly will show the problems of spelling, punctuation, and grammar in red. With the Clarity criteria: Grammarly underlines suggestions in blue to improve clarity and conciseness. Grammarly's engagement criteria suggests commonly overused words like in students writing and suggest replacing them with more specific words. From there, the researchers took notes on the details of common errors and presented them through an error assessment table of the data based on software experience within 4 weeks. In the next step, the researchers began to identify mistakes and recognized the common mistakes made by the FFL student group when participating in the study through observational implementation. Consequently, the researchers began to follow the individual results to analyze and list each individual's errors through the results of their writing each week. Then the researcher can evaluate the impact of Grammarly on participants in the essay writing process and the reasons behind this.

Data collection & analysis

After collecting 4 essays from each participant after 4 weeks, researchers created individual profiles to track overall scores and identify recurring writing problems. Grammatically prepared reports based on three key criteria: correctness, clarity and engagement, which allowed researchers to assess the most common errors within the group. After four-week observation period, these errors were recorded in an error evaluation table. The later analysis stage involved classifying and identifying the typical errors made by the students. Every week, the researchers observed each person's performance and recorded common mistakes such as poor word choice, punctuation, and tone. This method helped the researchers to compare writing progress in detail over time. By looking at individual scores and error patterns, researchers assessed Grammarly's effect on students' writing abilities and looked at the reasons behind some students' slow growth and offered information on the tools' limitations as well as their efficacy in enhancing writing abilities.

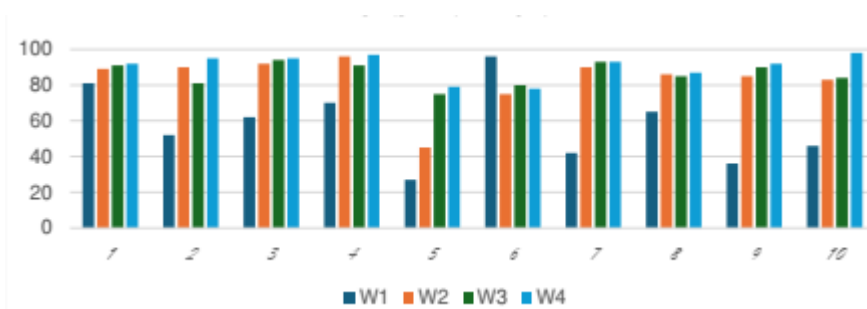
Results/Findings

Effect of using Grammarly to improve writing skills of Second-year English majors

Figure 1 shows the performance of the students' writing as shown through their total Grammarly evaluation scores from Week 1 (W1) to Week 4 (W4). The vertical axis presents the score given to each student's assignment that was previously evaluated by Grammarly. The horizontal axis lists each participant's name, converted into a number, in a range of 1 to 10. As a result, from left to right, the four columns are identified by a specific color: light blue, orange, green, and dark blue. The overall results of the writing tasks from week one (W1) to week four (W4) are displayed.

Figure 1.

The overall scores of participants within 4 weeks of observation



As illustrated in Figure 1, all 10 students fully participated in the observations over four weeks, utilizing Grammarly software to support their writing exercises, which were displayed on Padlet. The data collected from Figure 1 highlighted the effectiveness of Grammarly over this four-week period. Based on the scores, student performance was classified into three categories: level one (0–50), level two (51–70), and level three (71–100). In the first week, 4 students were categorized in level one, 3 in level two, and 3 in level three. These findings indicated that some students' writing abilities remained limited, leading the researchers to investigate the factors contributing to the lower scores.

Table 1.

Grammarly analysis performance of participants' 4-week writing

Percentage of errors (%)	W1	W2	W3	W4
Correctness	50	22.2	9.1	22.2
Clarity	17.7	11.1	36.4	22.2
Engagement	33.3	66.6	54.5	55.6

Analysis of students' writing performance over four weeks, focusing on the three key areas of accuracy, clarity and engagement, revealed varying results in terms of error percentage, as shown in the figure.

- Accuracy: In Week 1, 50% of students' writing performance had errors in accuracy, which improved significantly by Week 3, decreasing to 9.1%. However, by week 4 the error rate increased again to 22.2%.
- Clarity: The percentage of clarity-related errors fluctuated over the weeks. In week 1, the error rate was 17.7% and then decreased to 11.1% in week 2. After that the rate peaked at 36.4% in week 3 before improving slightly to 22.2% in week 4.
- Engagement: Engagement errors increased significantly from 33.3% in Week 1 to 66.6% in Week 2. However, there was a decline in the error rate, increasing to 54.5% in Week 3, remaining high and standing at 55 in Week 4 .6%.

These results suggest that despite improvements in certain aspects such as correctness, clarity and engagement, there still existed challenging areas of variability and persistent errors over the four week period.

The main problems in writing of Second-year English majors at IUH

Table 2.

The analysis of students' correctness errors

Student	Correctness			
	W1	W2	W3	W4
1	4	4	4	5
2	2	4	4	5
3	2	4	4	4
4	2	5	4	5
5	1	2	3	3
6	4	3	4	3
7	3	4	5	4
8	4	4	4	5
9	2	4	5	4
10	2	4	5	5
	EFFECTIVENESS			
Sum of errors	6	2	1	2

Correctness was the most common issue among students' writing errors, highlighting a major obstacle in language improvement. Grammarly's evaluation focused on spelling, grammar, and wordy sentences. Over four weeks, data from 10 students was categorized into five error levels, with a lower index indicating more frequent mistakes.

As can be seen from table 2, in Week 1, correctness errors accounted for half of the total mistakes. Even Student 2, who is a strong writer, struggles with verb agreement when seeing 'fast food industry' as singular. Student 10, who made the biggest gains overall, did not know much about punctuation at the start of the writing program and had quite limited and plain word choice.

Student 5 had the highest number of errors, largely due to punctuation and grammar issues. Grammarly corrected phrases like "fast food cause health problem" to "fast food causes health problems" and identified misspellings and verb form errors, resulting in a significantly lower score of 26 points.

Overall, correctness errors, particularly in grammar and sentence structure, were a major barrier to students' writing improvement. Specific areas of difficulty include verb agreement, punctuation, and word formation, which suggest the need for targeted interventions to improve writing accuracy.

Table 3.

The analysis of students' clarity errors

Student	Clarity			
	W1	W2	W3	W4
1	2	4	4	3
2	5	4	2	4
3	5	4	4	4
4	5	5	5	4
5	5	4	3	4
6	5	4	4	3
7	3	4	4	4
8	5	4	3	4
9	4	4	4	4
10	4	2	3	4
	NEUTRAL			
Sum of errors	2	1	4	2

Table 3 shows Grammarly's effect on students' writing clarity. It can be seen from the figure s that some students made progress in their ability to communicate ideas clearly while others faced new difficulties.

Student 1 had the most clarity mistakes in Week 1. For instance, Grammarly revised the sentence *"On one hand, it cannot be denied the convenience and variety of fast food"* to *"On the one hand, it cannot be denied that fast food offers convenience and variety,"* adding *"that"* for clarity. Another sentence was changed to read, *"Firstly, fast food is usually quick to prepare,"* from *"Firstly, fast food does not waste time to process."* lastly, *"Obviously, reasonable prices of fast food afford every customer to buy"* has been modified to *"Reasonable prices make fast food affordable for everyone."* By Week 4, Student 1 showed some improvement, though clarity issues persisted. For example, the sentence *"Grammarly has been very helpful in improving the overall quality of my writing"* had a minor issue with *"has been."* Similarly, the phrase *"Grammarly's ability to detect and correct spelling and grammar errors has been invaluable"* could have been further refined for better clarity.

In Week 1, Student 7 made several clarity errors. For instance, Grammarly revised *"Fast food is unhealthy for people"* to *"Consuming fast food is unhealthy for people"* to avoid an ambiguous subject. Another awkward phrase, *"people can get a bad quality of food when used fast food,"* was changed to *"people can receive poor-quality food when they eat fast food."* Additionally, the sentence *"It was prepared, people just give a money to buy"* was corrected to *"Fast food is pre-prepared, and people simply pay for it,"* improving the clarity of the process.

By Week 4, Student 7 showed improvement, avoiding major clarity errors, but still faced issues like wrong collocation usage ("*advantageous characteristics*" revised to "*useful features*") and repetitive word use, such as "writing."

Student 6, who made few clarity mistakes in Week 1, encountered more significant issues in Week 4. Examples include ambiguity errors like "*Some sentences lack clarity and need to be rephrased for better understanding,*" repetitive phrasing, and lack of specificity in statements, such as "*The points mentioned lack specific words or details.*"

In summary, while some students improved in avoiding clarity errors through Grammarly's feedback, others struggled or even introduced new issues by Week 4. This suggests that Grammarly's free version may not be sufficient for addressing clarity problems comprehensively, as its Premium version, with more advanced error detection and suggestions, is required for deeper clarity improvements.

Table 4.

The analysis of students' engagement

Student	Engagement			
	W1	W2	W3	W4
1	2	3	4	2
2	5	3	4	3
3	5	5	3	5
4	3	2	2	2
5	1	4	5	4
6	2	4	3	5
7	5	5	5	5
8	5	2	2	1
9	5	1	1	5
10	5	3	1	3
	NON-EFFECTIVENESS			
Sum of errors	4	6	6	5

This figure has revealed the impact of Grammarly on student engagement in writing. Whereas some students showed significant improvement in addressing engagement errors, others continued to struggle due to the tool's limitations in recognizing semantic inconsistencies, which may due to the fact that the free version may hinder effective error identification and correction.

In the first week, students 1, 5, and 6 had the most deployment errors (see Tables 1 and 4). However, in weeks 2 to 4, students 5 and 6 showed significant improvement in this area. Despite these advances, engagement failures remained prevalent among many students. Notably, Students 3, 7, and 9 showed minimal changes in their engagement errors throughout the study. Conversely, up to four students saw a significant decrease in their engagement errors after using Grammarly. Unlike clarity and other types of errors, commitment errors often persisted

throughout writing and manifested themselves in word repetitions and semantically inconsistent combinations. These errors are particularly difficult to identify because they require a sophisticated understanding of semantics and careful evaluation of word combinations, even when they are grammatically correct. The limitations of the free version of Grammarly became apparent as many students had difficulty identifying and correcting these usage errors. This difficulty hindered participants' ability to effectively improve their writing.

Discussion

Impact of using Grammarly

Researchers have recorded valuable results when comparing students' writing before and after using Grammarly, echoing findings by Pratama (2021), which indicated that students experience positive cognitive shifts. The use of Grammarly as an online language testing tool presents both advantages and disadvantages. Interestingly, the results reveal that method is beneficial for learning for Second-year students who have short class time and just can use application at home during investigation.

Grammarly corrects mistakes in spelling, types of word, quantifiers as well and does not take the sentence completely. Yet this can result in unintended alterations to the author's intended meaning as seen in Students 6, 8 and 10. Hence, it is important that the language be used contextually and structurally correct so that all these aspects are in sync with each other, enabling clarity and flow of information throughout the entire essay.

The researcher found a significant increase in students' weekly word counts, indicating that Grammarly enhances students' comfort and productivity in writing. But, the significant point was that Grammarly tended for correctness more and apparently less on clarity and sometimes engagement during the writing process. According to the clarity data, as Students 1 and 6 had no mistakes these remained on level 3 without any suggestions for sentences alterations or improvements.

For example, Student 6 board ignored content feedback and squandered the opportunity to apply more intensive revisions that would require their full attention in their fourth assignment. In the light of the results by Van Beuningen, De Jong and Kuken (2012) about self-correction behaviors in tasks like this one; reconsidered previously steps related to a lack of English language ability inhibit students from identifying correct answers and therefore these are not deeper reasons that make students believe there is something wrong.

Half of participants performed sub-optimally in terms of engagement (Levels 1–3]). Student 8 saw the greatest drop-off with their fourth and final assignment relegated from level 5 to level 1, lacking suggestions for guidance. Even so, this assignment still netted an 86-point mark in the final category of the final week It could be due to the features that are limited in the free version of Grammarly, that prevent access to its advanced options.

In summary, while Grammarly proves to be a valuable educational tool for foreign language students in writing practice, its full potential remains untapped due to the constraints of the free version, limiting comprehensive access to its superior functionalities.

Some drawbacks of using Grammarly

Negative outcomes emerged from the study, highlighting several issues with Grammarly's functionality. It was found that Grammarly's tips sometimes changed students' own thoughts, causing mix-ups and upset feelings. Even after four weeks of use, many students still made easy mistakes, and some even made old errors they had dodged in the first week.

Also, the limits of Grammarly's free version were clear. Students could only use simple parts that spotted small mistakes, like wrong punctuation and misspelled words. Thus, the way they used grammar was held back, making it hard for them to check their work well. The need to buy a plan to get better tools made things more complex, as users found this step hard. In the end, these points show the issues students face with Grammarly's free version, which may block their progress instead of helping it.

The researcher found that the free Grammarly did not help students get better at staying involved. While the tool did fix correctness mistakes, raising correctness scores, it led to lower involvement scores compared to how students did before without the app. As Nova (2018) stated, Grammarly's answers often do not match what users mean, sometimes shifting the sense and focus of sentences.

The slow shift in word types led to worse involvement scores, as the free version only showed words that were not engaging without giving good options. A big limit of this study was the four-week watch time, which might not have given students enough time to really get to know Grammarly's tools and ways. Plus, many students did not fully understand what the tool could do, stopping them from using it well.

Some solutions to overcome the problems

Following the study, the researchers discovered that in the context of the observation, three major aspects generated data: correctness, clarity, and engagement. However, after learning about Grammarly's effects, problems, and rewards, there are two major issues: Grammarly's repair of Clarity mistakes that are unsatisfactory to participants and the restricted correction of engagement. Based on this, the researcher presented many solutions to deal with these obstacles.

In order to address clarity errors, users must first consider and keep their ideas. Students make a poor effort to learn from their mistakes and place little value on the indirect corrective feedback they receive (Dodgson et al., 2016). This requires them to read the proposal carefully and comprehend it. Although this may take some time, using the error correction program can help users develop new vocabulary levels. Furthermore, they should limit their reliance on Grammarly's edits because, in the Grammarly post, they frequently concentrate on identifying prepositional errors that make it simple for users to stray from the original intended intent. Encourage students to maintain objectivity when collecting proposals and compiling their upcoming essays.

Secondly, regarding engagement errors, users are limited because this is a feature for users to pay; however, it also has the same assessment and refers to the type of error they are making, so learners can take advantage of it to evaluate the writing. It would be best to use the Premium

Version to assist pupils with run-ons, fragments, and verb tense issues. When Dodigovic and Tovmasyan (2021) compared Grammarly's results with those of human raters, they discovered that Grammarly Premium largely offered accurate feedback on mistakes in subject-verb agreement, sentence structure, and verb tense. Should Grammarly convince learners through its positive ability, the researchers recommend users use paid software to apply other superior features in a more detailed way.

Conclusion

The findings of this study confirm the usefulness of Grammarly in improving the grammatical accuracy of the writing of sophomore English majors. These results support the notion that Grammarly is a useful tool for improving writing in a second language. Grammarly Free Version has assisted English majored students in identifying and correcting errors related to verb forms, singular and plural nouns, spelling, articles, missing verbs, and prepositions. Grammarly provides invaluable assistance in detecting errors, thereby enhancing students' writing skills by providing reliable feedback on grammar, spelling, and sentence structure. Providing suggestions for improving its style will enrich students' writing proficiency. Additionally, Grammarly supports self-study, provides comprehensive feedback on assignments, and optimizes students' time without the need for constant supervision. However, alongside these benefits, some challenges also arise, including students' ability to change initial ideas and limited access to premium features. Furthermore, Grammarly's effectiveness in addressing vocabulary errors contrasts with its inability to provide feedback on sentence structure, leaving some aspects of writing unattended. In short, Grammarly is a valuable asset in a Writing 3 course, as long as it is used judiciously. By addressing its challenges and maximizing its benefits, educators can harness Grammarly's potential to significantly enhance students' writing in real-life academic contexts.

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Biodata

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