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The longitudinal development of second language writers' metacognitive genre awareness

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ABSTRACT

Recently, scholars have begun to adopt *metacognition theory* as a lens for understanding how learners' genre awareness develops over time. However, many of such studies have tended to focus on contexts involving applied linguistics training programs or English for Academic Purposes rather than professional contexts where writers are learning non-academic genres. Adopting a longitudinal case study design, the researcher investigated this issue by following six L2 English students as they learned to write a professional legal genre called the office memorandum as a part of their legal education program. Using metacognition theory as a lens, the researcher examined the focal students' emerging metacognitive genre awareness, the domains in which they developed that awareness, and finally, how that awareness differed among individual students. Findings show that despite receiving the same classroom input, the students' acquisition of genre knowledge was non-linear, with some learners' developmental trajectories differing substantially both in terms of their reported awareness of the genre (i.e., metacognitive knowledge) and how they reported using that awareness when writing (i.e., metacognitive regulation). These findings are discussed in relation to future research and classroom pedagogy.

1. Introduction

A number of scholars have explored second language (L2) learners' development of genre awareness (e.g., Negretti, 2012; Negretti & Kuteeva, 2011; Tardy, 2005; Yasuda, 2011a, 2011b; Yeh, 2015), which refers to an individual's conscious or explicit understanding of a given genre that may include an awareness of facets such as audience, rhetorical knowledge, and more (Tardy et al., 2020). Of note, many recent studies have used *metacognition theory* (Flavell, 1979) as a lens for illuminating the intricate nature of acquiring genre awareness. While the theory has furthered understandings of the complex nature of genre-learning, studies in this area have often been limited to applied linguistics or English for Academic Purposes (EAP) contexts—(i.e., by focusing on applied linguists teaching to applied linguists in-training, who are learning about research articles in applied linguistics). While scholars continue to develop insights into the intricate nature of developing genre awareness (see Tardy, 2006 for a review), relatively little is known when it comes to professional, non-academic contexts. However, applying metacognition theory to understanding the development of genre awareness across a diverse range of contexts, genres, and learner populations is critical. This is because findings have the potential to provide insights into any differences or similarities pertaining to the nature of acquiring awareness in different instructional contexts. In turn, this has the capacity to reveal if certain types of knowledge may be relatively easier (or more challenging) for learners to acquire in different contexts, thereby providing practitioners with vital information about how best to approach specific populations.

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The current study explores this gap by investigating writers' developing genre awareness in relation to a professional genre. Set in the context of a legal research and writing course in a Master of Laws program, for 15 weeks I adopted a case study design to track six L2 English students as they learned to write a legal genre called the *office memorandum*, a critical document in the legal profession. In keeping with prior studies, learners' development was examined using metacognition theory. Data included a survey, semi-structured interviews, students' texts, and modified stimulated recalls.

2. Literature review

2.1. Metacognition theory

Of the studies that have traced L2 learners' developing genre awareness, many have adopted metacognition theory for understanding changes in learners' cognition. Originally proposed by Flavell (1979), multiple researchers have since developed metacognition theory into a robust theory and model for understanding the nature of cognition and how individuals use their awareness when performing various tasks (e.g., Brown, 1978; Flavell, 1979; Pintrich, 2002, 2004; Schraw & Dennison, 1994). Broadly speaking, metacognition is individuals' awareness of their own thinking (Flavell, 1979). Schraw and Dennison (1994) have further described it as "the ability to reflect upon, understand, and control one's learning" (p. 460).

Today, scholars generally agree upon two sub-components of metacognition: *metacognitive knowledge* and *metacognitive regulation* (see Fig. 1 for a synthesized model as depicted in Negretti & McGrath, 2018, and in: Brown, 1978; Flavell, 1979; Pintrich, 2002; Schraw & Dennison, 1994). Metacognitive knowledge refers to one's general awareness of his/her own cognition (Pintrich, 2002), while metacognitive regulation refers to the aspect of control or how individuals assert regulation over various sub-processes (Schraw & Dennison, 1994). These constructs also contain multiple sub-orders. Metacognitive knowledge is theorized to consist of: *declarative*, *procedural*, and *conditional knowledge*. As Negretti and McGrath (2018) explain, these concepts refer to "what we know (declarative knowledge), how to apply it (procedural) and why it is relevant to the current learning conditions (conditional)" (p. 15). Importantly, these concepts are associated with individuals' conscious knowledge and what they report being aware of, or as Schraw and Dennison (1994) state, individuals' abilities to verbalize their knowledge of "about," of "how," and of "why" and "when" (p. 114). Conversely, learners' metacognitive regulation refers to how learners use their knowledge to engage in: *planning* (before a task), *monitoring* their performance (during a task), and *evaluating* their performance (post-task) (Negretti, 2012; Schraw, 2009).

Flavell (1979) originally theorized metacognition would play an important role in numerous areas related to task comprehension and performance, and his predictions have tended to be highly accurate (see Hacker et al., 2009). As such, the theory has played a prominent role in first language (L1) research, and it is increasingly being adopted by L2 researchers interested in examining the relationship between learners' awareness and their comprehension or performance on different tasks (e.g., Qin & Zhang, 2019; Sato, in press; Sato & Loewen, 2018; Taki, 2016).

2.2. Developing genre awareness

When it comes to genre awareness, multiple researchers have explored phenomena related to the nature of awareness and learners' development over time (e.g., Gao, 2012; Negretti, 2012; Negretti & Kuteeva, 2011; Tardy, 2005, 2009; Yasuda, 2011a, 2011b; Yeh, 2015). Works by Tardy (2005, 2009) and Gao (2012) have suggested that acquiring genre awareness is multifaceted and a skill that is gradually constructed. Their studies suggest that awareness and performance may be highly susceptible to individual factors such as learners' content familiarity, linguistic differences, and L1-based knowledge such as rhetorical expectations.

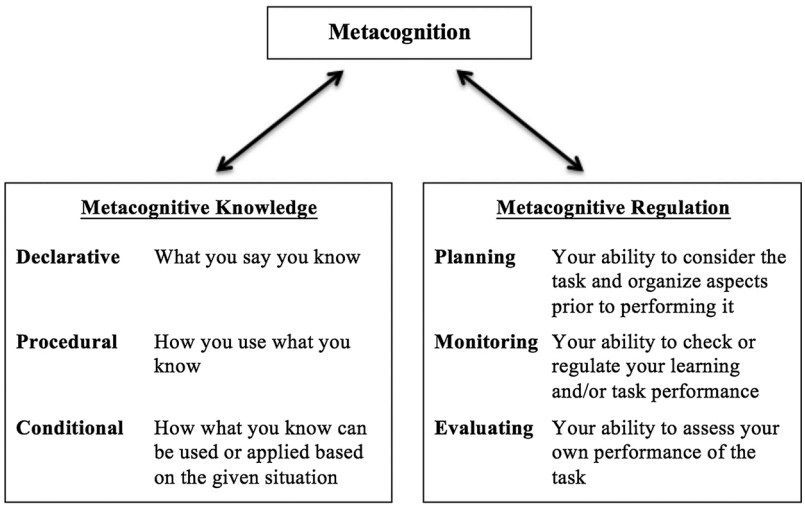

Fig. 1. Metacognition Model.

More recently, metacognition theory has been adopted as a means for understanding the longitudinal nature of genre learning. In particular, Negretti and Kuteeva (2011) have called for investigations into how *metacognitive genre awareness* develops, with Negretti (2017) arguing that the theory holds potential for shedding light on the complex interplay of cognitive, social, and textual elements involved in learning written genres. In Negretti and Kuteeva's (2011) own study, they explored preservice English teachers' development of metacognitive knowledge over three weeks as participants were taught to analyze academic research articles using an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) genre analysis approach. Their participants all developed declarative and procedural knowledge, yet few developed conditional knowledge (e.g., of when/why articles differed in features across subjects or domains). This led the researchers to conclude that only students who could provide in-depth analyses of the texts were also able to exhibit conditional awareness.

Also using an ESP genre analysis approach, Yeh (2015) examined English as a foreign language learners' development of metacognitive regulation, as participants were trained in an online course management system to analyze the rhetoric of research articles. Learners wrote drafts of academic research proposals, completed online actions logs, and responded to a questionnaire that targeted students' applications of their genre knowledge. Yeh's students remarked that the planning stages did not necessarily "lead to well written texts" (p. 491), which prompted Yeh to suggest that although instruction developed students' genre awareness with planning, students still struggled in monitoring these principles while writing. Learners also required additional collaborative support from their peers, particularly when evaluating their writing performance. Relatedly, Negretti (2012) examined how academic writers developed rhetorical consciousness in a composition course by attempting to connect learners' general awareness with how they used that awareness in regulating their writing. As students completed writing assignments during a semester, they engaged in reflective journal activities, eliciting their writing task strategies and how they evaluated their performance. Negretti reported that learners' metacognitive awareness—especially their conditional awareness—appeared strongly interconnected with self-regulation, noting that conditional knowledge aided students in being strategic while writing.

These studies highlight the complex nature of learning to write in a particular genre, suggesting that when it comes to acquiring genre awareness, not all facets develop uniformly among learners. Some students may quickly excel in one area, such as planning, only to face struggles in evaluating their performance in relation to the discourse community's expectations (e.g., Yeh, 2015). Likewise, it may be that one facet of metacognitive knowledge, such as conditional knowledge, may be more closely tied to aspects of regulation like monitoring (e.g., Negretti, 2012).

Clearly, metacognition theory can enrich understandings of the nature of developing genre awareness. However, it is important to note that those few studies that have adopted the theory have been conducted in a fairly unified context. Firstly, such students are taught academic genres only (i.e., research papers); secondly, students are often taught by applied linguists who adopt ESP approaches where students even practice rhetorical move analyses. Although these studies have facilitated greater understandings of the nature of genre acquisition, not all genre teaching and learning unfolds under such narrow, applied linguistics-specific conditions. Thus, it is critical for scholars to apply metacognition theory to understanding how genre awareness develops across a variety of instructional contexts and genres beyond that of applied linguistics. Such findings may afford insights into similarities or differences in genre learning that may be ubiquitous across all learners and/or those that may be context-specific.

2.3. *Master of laws programs and the office memorandum*

When it comes to applied linguistics research, Baffy (2017) has noted that one underexplored context is that of Master of Laws (LLM) programs. In the area of legal education in the US, there are hundreds of LLM programs, which are often designated for international students (Hartig & Lu, 2014). Over the past several years, LLM programs have seen increasing enrollment, with approximately 19,800 students enrolled in 2019 compared to 11,100 enrolled in similar programs only six years earlier (American Bar Association, 2019). Typically lasting one-year, LLM programs provide students with an overview of the U.S. common law system and opportunities to take coursework in specialized topics (e.g., international tax law, intellectual property). Students who enroll in LLM programs are usually quite diverse, representing a broad spectrum of L1s and different educational, work, and life experiences.

There have been a handful of L2 studies involving LLM programs, yet no studies have explored the development of LLM students' genre awareness, as previous studies have typically taken ESP-oriented approaches to examining the discourse of legal genres (e.g., Bhatia, 1993; Hafner, 2010; Hartig & Lu, 2014). Importantly, one of the genres included in these studies is the *office memorandum* (office memo). When it comes to transitioning between law school and real-world practice, the office memo is a key genre for students to master. In a study by Chew and Pryal (2015) that surveyed 160 employers, 91 % expected new hires to be able to write an office memo "proficiently" and "with minimal supervision" (p. 6) upon joining their company/firm. When applying for jobs, too, office memos can serve as an applicant's writing sample (Oates et al., 2018). Thus, as many LLM students hope to remain in the US post-graduation, being able to produce an office memo is critical.

The office memo is a predictive legal document written in response to a client's legal issue(s) (Chew & Pryal, 2016). Office memos are usually intended for internal use by law firms to advise on a particular course of action (e.g., to take an issue to court, to settle), although clients also may view memos. The genre is objective and "should not argue on the client's behalf, but should instead be an honest evaluation of the merits (if any) of the client's position in the legal dispute" (Piccard, 2017, p. 100). Due to the genre's critical nature and the financial implications involved in predicting future outcomes, office memos are typically a formal document and relatively formulaic. For learners who seek instruction in how to write a memo, regardless of the textbook they use, they will likely find a similar formatting and organization, consisting of sections including: 1. Heading, 2. Question(s) Presented, 3. Brief Answer, 4. Fact Statement, 5. Discussion, and 6. Conclusion (and Recommendation) (e.g., Chew & Pryal, 2016; Oates et al., 2018; Piccard, 2017). Despite its formulaic nature, Oates et al. (2018) have noted that learning to compose it can be daunting due to the complex skills that

are required:

> To write an effective memo, you need to know how to do legal research; how to analyze and synthesize statutes, regulations, and cases; how to construct arguments; how to evaluate the merits of different arguments; and how to write about complex issues clearly and concisely. (p. 131)

2.4. The current study

The current study responds to calls to investigate the development of L2 learners' genre awareness and to do so by adopting metacognition theory. Additionally, this study expands investigations into a non-applied linguistics/EAP context. Adopting a case study design, I followed six L2 English learners in an LLM program as they learned to write the office memo genre over a 15-week period. This study was guided by the following research questions (RQs):

RQ1: To what extent do the case study participants develop genre awareness of the office memo over a semester? In which area(s) does that awareness develop?

RQ2: To what extent are there variations in students' individual trajectories in terms of developing genre awareness?

3. Method

Data for this study come from a doctoral dissertation (i.e., Kessler, 2020), which explored the intersection of a law instructor's genre pedagogy, L2 learning, and writing performance. In this section, I describe the context of the current study, followed by the participants and data.

3.1. Context

This study took place at Hutz Law School (pseudonym), a highly competitive, premier school in the Midwestern US. Hutz offers a number of degree programs such as: an LLM, a Juris Doctor (JD), and a Doctor of Juridical Science. As part of Hutz's one-year LLM program, students can enroll in a legal research and writing course, which is designated for LLM students only. One instructor teaches this course. The course goal is to introduce LLM students to "how American lawyers research and analyze legal problems and communicate their analysis to senior attorneys and clients"; it also focuses on "what senior attorneys in the US expect of junior lawyers" involving legal analysis, written and oral communication, and research (excerpts from course syllabus).

The course is divided into two sections. The first eight weeks introduce students to research and analysis in the common law system, emphasizing research and learning to write the office memo; it culminates with students completing one office memo assignment. The second seven-week section expands on the first, providing additional instruction in how to read, analyze, and compare legal cases, along with how to construct the office memo genre—(e.g., more on the genre's audience; features of composing the text, such as organization; and information on constructing legal arguments). This second section also gives students another opportunity to practice their research and analysis skills in drafting a second memo. Most LLM students enroll in the course because they plan to remain in the US to take the bar examination, and this particular course fulfills part of the eligibility criteria to sit for the bar in certain states (e.g., New York).

3.2. Participants

Twenty LLM students were enrolled in the course, and 14 completed a background questionnaire and volunteered to participate in the study. Six LLM students were selected for the case study. These six were selected using purposive sampling (Duff, 2008) so that

Table 1
Case Study Participant Biographies.

Name[b]	Age	Home country	Years of L2 English study	Additional background post-law school and experiences involving office memos[a]
Aashna	23	India	17	• Recently graduated from law school in India; no experience reading/drafting memos
Jing	24	China	11	• Worked as a legal specialist for two years in China after completing law school; a few formal work experiences in reading memos
Luisa	29	Mexico	13	• Worked as a legal research associate for two years in Germany after completing law school in Mexico; a few work experiences in reading/drafting memos
Paul	29	Germany	7	• Served as a law school research assistant for three years in Germany after completing law school; no experience in reading/drafting memos
Yuki	30	Japan	7	• Served as an attorney for nearly five years in Japan after completing law school; some formal work experiences in reading/drafting memos
Yurui	23	China	15	• Recently graduated from law school in China; two experiences in an internship in which he was asked to draft a memo

[a] Participants' law school and post-law school experiences occurred outside of the US.
[b] All names are pseudonyms.

students represented a diverse participant pool (e.g., different genders, L1s) and a range of experiences (e.g., those with formal work experiences after law school, those who had recently graduated). Purposive sampling was adopted to explore the potential influences of different factors on individuals' metacognitive genre awareness, since research has suggested that development may be susceptible to individual factors. Table 1 describes the six participants.

3.3. Researcher positioning

I was a doctoral student and instructor during data collection, so this duality helped me establish relationships with participants. During interactions, I attempted to connect with students over life as a graduate student, and I attempted to connect with them as a teacher who could later provide support with writing-related issues. Although participants were paid $30 for each interview, based on De Costa's (2015) work, I also attempted "to treat the [research] exchange as being more than a transaction" (p. 249). Therefore, I tried to serve as a *researcher-as-resource* (Sarangi & Candlin, 2003) by offering to provide individualized feedback on their writing post-study.

3.4. Data and procedures

Table 2 outlines the data along with the data collection timeline. In what follows, I provide a detailed description of each source of data.

3.4.1. Background questionnaire

Prior to starting the course, students were provided with a background questionnaire. This questionnaire consisted of multiple questions that elicited information about students' ages, L1s, prior educations, work experiences, and their experiences in engaging with different legal genres, including the office memo.

3.4.2. Students' office memos

During the course, students completed two office memos—their only writing assignments for the course. Memo 1 was due Week 8, and Memo 2 was due Week 15. The topics of these memos were related to legal malpractice (Memo 1) and a contracts issue involving third-party beneficiaries (Memo 2). Each assignment was to be 10 pages maximum, and students were provided with a list of cases to use when writing their memos (i.e., students were required to construct their texts using the same sources). The memos students submitted for the two assignments totaled 109 pages, with a mean of 8.17 pages ($SD = 2.14$) for Memo 1 and 10.5 pages ($SD = 2.36$) for Memo 2. Students' memos were written using word processing programs and were submitted both to the course instructor for grading and to me for use in interview/stimulated recall sessions.

3.4.3. Semi-structured interviews and modified stimulated recalls

During the semester, I conducted three semi-structured interviews with students. Interviews were designed to understand students' prior education, writing experiences, and existing knowledge of the office memo (Interview #1), but also to understand how their genre awareness developed over the semester (Interviews #1-3). To assess development, I created a list of questions and asked students these same questions during all three interviews. Questions were created based on the metacognition model described earlier, and questions were drafted in relation to the *metacognitive knowledge* model component (i.e., declarative, procedural, and conditional knowledge of the memo). For example, one question that aimed to tap into the students' declarative knowledge was: "What is the purpose of writing an office memo? Why would someone write one?" Thus, the goal was to understand how learners' responses evolved (see Appendix A for the complete list of questions).

During interviews #2-3, modified stimulated recalls were conducted with students and their memos. Gass and Mackey (2017) have suggested stimulated recalls should be conducted immediately following a task's completion. However, because of the extended nature of the writing tasks combined with participants' schedules, this was not feasible. Therefore, I adopted a 'modified' stimulated recall (see Brooks & Swain, 2009 for an 'augmented' recall), where recalls occurred within 24 hours of students' memos being completed.

Table 2
Data Collection Timeline.

Week of semester	Data collected
Pre-course (week prior)	• Background questionnaire • Semi-structured interview (1 of 3)
Week 8	• Office memo #1 • Semi-structured interview (2 of 3) • Modified stimulated recall (1 of 2)
Week 15	• Office memo #2 • Semi-structured interview (3 of 3) • Modified stimulated recall (2 of 2)

Table 3
Students' Development of Metacognitive Genre Awareness.

Participant	Pre-course[1]		Week 8				Week 15			
	Metacognition exhibited (# of comments)	Total comments	Metacognition exhibited (# of comments)			Total comments	Metacognition exhibited (# of comments)			Total comments
Aashna	Declarative ——————— ———————	4	Declarative (9) Procedural (3) Conditional (5)	——————— Monitoring (2) ———————		19	Declarative (10) Procedural (3) Conditional (5)	——————— Monitoring (1) Evaluating (5)		24
Jing	Declarative ——————— ———————	4	Declarative (9) Procedural (3) Conditional (8)	Planning (2) Monitoring (3) Evaluating (5)		30	Declarative (7) Procedural (2) Conditional (8)	Planning (1) Monitoring (2) Evaluating (6)		26
Luisa	Declarative (2) Procedural (3) Conditional (2)	7	Declarative (8) Procedural (3) Conditional (5)	Planning (2) Monitoring (3) Evaluating (3)		24	Declarative (8) Procedural (8) Conditional (4)	Planning (1) Monitoring (3) Evaluating (1)		25
Paul	Declarative ——————— ———————	3	Declarative (9) Procedural (7) Conditional (4)	Planning (3) Monitoring (1) Evaluating (7)		31	Declarative (7) Procedural (5) Conditional (4)	Planning (1) Monitoring (3) Evaluating (12)		32
Yuki	Declarative ——————— ———————	4	Declarative (7) Procedural (1) Conditional (5)	Planning (1) Monitoring (2) Evaluating (6)		22	Declarative (7) Procedural (5) Conditional (4)	Planning (1) Monitoring (4) Evaluating (2)		23
Yurui	Declarative (6) Procedural (1) Conditional (3)	10	Declarative (6) Procedural (3) Conditional (5)	Planning (1) Monitoring (1) Evaluating (6)		22	Declarative (5) Procedural (4) Conditional (10)	Planning (1) Monitoring (1) Evaluating (7)		28
	Group total	32	*Group total*			148	*Group total*			158
	Subtotals		*Subtotals*				*Subtotals*			
	Declarative	23	Declarative	48	Planning	9	Declarative	44	Planning	5
	Procedural	4	Procedural	20	Monitoring	12	Procedural	27	Monitoring	14
	Conditional	5	Conditional	32	Evaluating	26	Conditional	35	Evaluating	33

[1] *Note.* Metacognitive regulation was not assessed at the pre-course stage since there was no memo task for students to perform.

Recall questions were created to assess students' *metacognitive regulation* (i.e., their planning, monitoring, and evaluating). Thus, the term 'modified' references that learners were asked to reflect on phases of their writing processes (before, during, and after). For example, after being asked the declarative question "Who reads office memos (who is the audience)?", participants were then asked a *monitoring* recall question, such as: "Was there a time you thought about the audience while writing and you changed or added something because you were thinking about them? If so, can you give me an example(s) from your memo?"

3.5. Data analysis

All interviews and stimulated recalls were audio-recorded. Recordings were transcribed and uploaded into MAXQDA (VERBI Software, 2019), a qualitative data analysis tool. For tracing students' developing metacognitive genre awareness, I first independently coded a subset of the data through deductive and inductive coding (e.g., Polio & Friedman, 2017). Deductive coding was used since specific questions were designed to elicit students' metacognition surrounding the office memo in accordance with the model. Inductive coding was also used in the analysis, as students' comments might be idiosyncratic in nature within the model. For instance, when responding to a declarative question, one student might exhibit awareness of the genre's differences between L1 and L2 contexts; meanwhile, another student might not respond with such comparisons and might exhibit another sub-type of declarative awareness (e.g., knowledge of the legal audience's expectations, knowledge of the memo's standard organizational scheme).

Once the scheme was solidified through reading multiple interview transcripts, a second coder received training using the scheme. The coder, who was a second-year PhD student in an applied linguistics-related field and an experienced L2 writing instructor, independently coded 11 % of the dataset. When coding for the six different metacognition categories, any occurrence of a student showing metacognitive genre awareness (e.g., declarative, procedural) was marked simply as being present. Inter-coder reliability was sought to obtain a raw frequency count for the number of metacognitive comments students produced over time. If one code appeared multiple times per transcript (e.g., if the code "declarative knowledge" appeared in the first minute of the interview and again later in the interview), it was counted as occurring multiple times to see which areas students developed the most and/or least awareness. Initial inter-coder reliability was 83%, after which we discussed and resolved any differences. Once reliability was achieved, I independently coded the remaining data.

4. Findings

I first provide an overview of the six case study participants as a cohort in terms of the major areas in which they developed metacognitive genre awareness of the office memo (RQ1). I then provide a more in-depth analysis of two case study participants, showing how individuals' awareness developed both similarly and differently over the 15 weeks (RQ2).

4.1. RQ1: The six participants' self-reported development of metacognitive genre awareness

In terms of students' development as a cohort, Table 3 shows how students' comments were distributed across the six-metacognition categories as they learned to write the genre during the semester. At the pre-course stage, most LLM students exhibited little awareness of the office memo. As time progressed though, their awareness grew in the overall number of comments they could produce (from 32, to 148, to 158 comments, respectively). However, when examining the categories in which development occurred, the LLM students appeared more adept in discussing their metacognitive knowledge versus how they regulated their performance (100 vs. 48 comments in Week 8, and 106 vs. 52 comments in Week 15).

While students could explicitly discuss more about the genre over time, development did not appear to progress linearly within each category. For instance, students' procedural and conditional knowledge increased during each data collection period. Declarative knowledge increased substantially between the pre-course and Week 8 periods yet appeared to decease slightly between Weeks 8 and

Table 4
Top 15 Most Frequently Recurring Metacognition Comment Codes.

Rank	Metacognition category	Subdomain	Code category	Total comments
1	Metacognitive Knowledge	Declarative	Audience	30
2	Metacognitive Knowledge	Procedural	Integrating cases	29
3	Metacognitive Knowledge	Declarative	Purpose	26
4	Metacognitive Knowledge	Conditional	Audience affects content	23
5	Metacognitive Knowledge	Declarative	Audience's expectations	23
6	Metacognitive Knowledge	Conditional	Audience affects language	22
7	Metacognitive Regulation	Evaluating	Planning	21
8	Metacognitive Knowledge	Declarative	Language	19
9	Metacognitive Regulation	Evaluating	Content	18
10	Metacognitive Knowledge	Procedural	Organization	13
11	Metacognitive Knowledge	Conditional	Memo section affects language	11
12	Metacognitive Knowledge	Conditional	Audience affects language	11
13	Metacognitive Knowledge	Conditional	Topic affects organization	10
14	Metacognitive Knowledge	Declarative	Diff/sim between countries	9
15	Metacognitive Regulation	Planning	Graphic organizer	8

15, as students produced fewer comments in fewer areas. Within metacognitive regulation, students' self-reported control of monitoring and evaluating increased from Weeks 8–15, but they appeared to decrease slightly in terms of planning. Interestingly, by Week 15, the LLM students developed awareness in all six categories, with the exception of one student (Aashna), who never articulated any planning capabilities.

Beyond these six categories in which the participants developed awareness, I also highlight specific sub-categories in which learners reported that awareness. Table 4 shows the 15 most frequently mentioned areas/codes of metacognition that appeared throughout the dataset. Specifically, Table 4 showcases the total number of comments that the students made within each metacognition sub-category when discussing the office memo during the semi-structured interviews and modified stimulated recall sessions.

As shown, the most frequently recurring comments made by the participants pertained to discussing their metacognitive knowledge. Such comments accounted for 12 of the top 15 categories mentioned. Within this category of metacognitive knowledge, comments related to students' declarative and conditional knowledge constituted the most-mentioned subdomains (five for declarative and five for the conditional subdomain, respectively), as students frequently discussed both what they knew about the office memo and when/why certain factors related to the genre might subsequently affect their writing. Apart from these subdomains, in examining the individual code categories, five of the top 15 codes were related to some aspect of the office memo's audience (e.g., declarative knowledge of the audience, conditional knowledge of how the audience affects language). Specific examples of these codes are described in the next section.

4.2. RQ2: Similarities and differences between individual developmental trajectories

Now that an overview of the six participants has been presented, I turn to a more fine-grained analysis of two learners, Aashna and Paul, as breakout case studies. While it would be interesting to showcase all six LLM students' development in detail, space limitations do not allow such elaboration. Thus, Aashna and Paul's cases were selected because they are of particular interest. As shown earlier in Tables 1 and 3, not only do Aashna and Paul vary in terms of individual characteristics (e.g., age, prior education, work experiences), but they also represent the two students who explicitly expressed the least and the greatest amount of genre awareness.

4.2.1. Aashna

Aashna entered Hutz's LLM program after completing her law degree in India. During her legal education, her experiences mostly involved legal writing for testing purposes, which consisted primarily of memorizing specific Indian law statutes and then describing or restating them verbatim. Aashna did have several experiences writing for law review journals (scholarly work in which writers often summarize multiple laws or rulings and argue a specific point of view in attempts to summarize or persuade readers a law should be changed). Aashna stated she had no prior experiences with office memos. This was reflected in our pre-course interview, as when prompted to answer genre-related questions, Aashna could provide few comments (see Table 5 to view Aashna's developmental trajectory). Two declarative comments concerned understanding the memo's purpose and audience:

> *Excerpt 1.* [Its purpose is] to communicate essential legal information across the office.
> *Excerpt 2.* [It's for] the associates, partners, or even administrative staff.

Table 5
Aashna's Development of Metacognitive Genre Awareness.

	Pre-course	Week 8	Week 15
Comments produced (#)	4	19	24
Metacognitive Knowledge	• *Declarative* o Audience o Purpose	• *Declarative* o Audience o Org o Purpose • *Procedural* o Org • *Conditional* o Audience affects content o Audience affects lang o Memo section affects lang	• *Declarative* o Audience o Org o Purpose • *Procedural* o Integrating cases o Org • *Conditional* o Audience affects content o Audience affects lang o Memo section affects lang
Metacognitive Regulation		• *Monitoring* o Audience and lang	• *Monitoring* o Audience and lang • *Evaluating* o Formatting o Lang o Org

Note. Diff/Sim = Differences/Similarities; Lang = language; Org = organization.

When further questioned about the memo though, Aashna was unable to answer:

Excerpt 3. I have no idea [*laughs*]. Brutally honest—I don't know.

After completing her first memo, Aashna's genre awareness had expanded in new directions. In terms of declarative awareness, she was now able to discuss the general organization of the memo:

Excerpt 4. A general structure is that you start off with the Facts of the case. . . The next phase is generally the Question Presented and like the Short Answer.

Additionally, Aashna could explain procedurally how she would go about doing so in a memo:

Excerpt 5. I did a little bit more thorough research [on the topic] first. . . then I just followed the general structure [*referring to the organizational structure of presenting Questions Presented, Short Answer,* etc.] and kind of understanding where to expand and where to be concise.

She could also express conditional knowledge about how the audience might affect facets of the memo, such as the content, and how the section of the memo itself might affect language use:

Excerpt 6. If it's the first office memo they just sent to you, then the facts might be longer because you're introducing everything. . . If it's the second memo, then if I were a senior attorney…you may not include them all. . . maybe just explain 'Okay. This is where we are.'

Excerpt 7. [*Referring to the memo's Conclusion section*]: The language there is a little bit more decisive, a little bit more definite compared to the language above that [in the Discussion section] because that's more like an analysis of what's happened.

While Aashna showed budding awareness in all components of metacognitive knowledge, during the stimulated recall she did not explicitly articulate planning or evaluating in relation to her writing performance. For instance, when I inquired as to whether she did any planning before writing her memo, Aashna replied "um, no, not really," stating she simply sat down and started writing. Likewise, when asked to evaluate her performance on the first memo, Aashna replied:

Excerpt 8. [*Referring to the professor*]: I'm hoping that I've met his expectations? [*laughs*]

Aashna did show some ability to monitor while composing, as she recalled specific instances. She described that while writing, she thought about her audience (senior attorneys) and the language they would understand:

Table 6
Paul's Development of Metacognitive Genre Awareness.

	Pre-course	Week 8	Week 15
Comments produced (#)	3	31	32
Metacognitive Knowledge	• *Declarative* o Audience o Lang o Purpose	• *Declarative* o Audience o Audience's expectations o Diff/sim between countries o Lang o Org o Purpose • *Procedural* o Org o Lang o Performing task the same as in home country • *Conditional* o Audience affects content o Audience affects lang	• *Declarative* o Audience o Audience's expectations o Diff/sim between countries o Lang o Org o Purpose • *Procedural* o Integrating cases • *Conditional* o Audience affects content o Audience affects lang
Metacognitive Regulation		• *Planning* o Graphic organizer o Outlining • *Monitoring* o Purpose • *Evaluating* o Audience's expectations o Content o Planning	• *Planning* o Outlining • *Monitoring* o Audience o Audience and content o Audience and lang • *Evaluating* o Audience's expectations o Content o Lang o Org o Planning

Note. Diff/Sim = Differences/Similarities; Lang = language; Org = organization.

Excerpt 9. I was writing the word '*contracts claim, contracts claim*' too many times in my office memo, and I just wanted a substitute because it was sounding repetitive. Then the word '*assumpsit*' popped up—that's basically a contracts claim. I don't need to explain it in an office memo that's going to a senior attorney because they will know what it means.

By Week 15, Aashna developed even more genre awareness. Notably, she developed new procedural knowledge about how to research and integrate cases into her writing:

Excerpt 10. I just generally follow the chronological order [of the court cases by date]. For example, I also open up the case brief and the important cases, which are there. That kind of gives you an idea of what is exactly being said. Then you can connect it to the full reading of the case.

Beyond procedural knowledge, she also developed in terms of evaluating (something she was unable to express in Week 8), as she now could reflect on her writing performance. Specifically, Aashna evaluated her second memo compared to her first memo in formatting, language use, and organization:

Excerpt 11. Just the formatting of how the memo should look is better in the second one. . . [And] like the Short Answer and the Question is better in the second one than the first one. I think it's more concise in the second one. And the conclusion is more concise. . . I've become slightly more efficient.

Excerpt 12. Compared to the first memo I wrote, in the second one my structure was much better.

By Week 15, Aashna exhibited development in all facets of the metacognition model with the sole exception of planning, which she again stated she did not do.

4.2.2. Paul

After completing law school in Germany, Paul served as a research assistant for a law school professor for three years, where he gained extensive experience in conducting legal research. As a research assistant, Paul supported a professor in the area of comparative law (i.e., studying similarities/differences in countries' legal systems), and he did this by examining legal cases, statutes, and law journal articles. However, like Aashna, Paul stated he was never exposed to office memos. Thus, before the course, he possessed minimal awareness of the genre (see Table 6 for an overview of Paul's development) although he did display declarative knowledge of the memo's audience, purpose, and the types of language a writer might use:

Excerpt 13. [It's] like a suggestion for your employer…

Excerpt 14. [It discusses] how a legal dispute should be solved.

Excerpt 15. The language used for legal briefs or your documents is much more formalistic and has certain terms that are not used in everyday language.

By Week 8, Paul produced more comments than any other student, and he made remarks that corresponded to every section of the metacognition model. In terms of declarative knowledge, Paul expressed new awareness of the memo's organization, the audience's expectations, and key differences and similarities of office memos between countries:

Excerpt 16. The office memo is so formalistic in its structure. . . the Facts. . . the Questions and Short Answers.

Excerpt 17. The expectations [are] that a senior attorney expects you to. . . just 'state the law. Don't overdo it.'

Excerpt 18. Taking into account I didn't really know what an office memo was in the beginning. . . I think I figured out it is similar to something you would write to your senior attorney in German to figure out. . . how likely it is for a plan to succeed in court.

Because Paul made such connections, he could explain how (procedurally) one should organize a memo, how to use appropriate language, and how he followed his intuition by performing the task the same as he would in Germany:

Excerpt 19. I followed [the generic structure] in so far that I took like the Facts question and the Discussion and Conclusion section in that order. . . but then [you need to consider] the question 'What will our courts do?'

Excerpt 20. I would never write 'in my opinion' or 'I think that.'. . . I would refrain from it and be like most neutral in a way. . . It's not me, a person, who is stating an opinion, but rather like a document telling you about the facts and the rules of it. I just did it how I would do it in Germany, I think.

Apart from declarative and procedural knowledge, Paul illustrated new conditional knowledge of the genre. This consisted of discussing how the audience affects both language use and content:

Excerpt 21. If the audience was the clients. . . you would have to write it a little bit more from a layman's perspective and to explain something small compared if you write for a senior attorney who's familiar with all the basic concepts.

Excerpt 22. [You need to] get all the arguments from the other side as well and to find all the cases that are not supporting your claim. And that also affects how you should write a memo.

In terms of regulating his writing, Paul engaged in planning for his first memo by using both a graphic organizer and by outlining:

Excerpt 23. I used this table. . . with all the cases and noted the specific features of it. And then I read all the cases and made some notes on them—so to figure out are they following this specific instruction, approach, and how are they different.

Excerpt 24. And then I started with, basically outlining it on the piece of paper before starting to write it down. Then I had a basic structure of it.

While composing, too, Paul demonstrated that he engaged in monitoring. He recalled that while writing his memo's Discussion section, he actively thought about the genre's purpose and how he needed to illustrate the law and apply it to the facts of the case.

Pointing to a specific passage in his memo, he explained how this caused him to insert new content:

> *Excerpt 25.* So I came up with the rule and said [to myself]: 'You need a specific structure'. . . And usually, I would just argue everything that I can to support that 'this is a specific instruction because that is our client.' But I tried I think. . . to look down at some points. . . I say [in my memo on p. 7] that: '*Even though it might be specific instruction, it is unimportant in this case because it is not the course for the damages that they*'. . . [etc.].

In terms of evaluating his performance, Paul was also quite reflective. He reflected on his own planning, his content/legal analysis, and the audience's expectations:

> *Excerpt 26.* I think I should outline more that I have my notes and my structure and the cases under it and really have gone more thoroughly through all the cases.
> *Excerpt 27.* The most troubles I had. . . my mindset is more like finding the best arguments for the clients without. . . like. . . obviously bending the law [*laughs*]. I pretty much interpreted everything most favorably from the clients' perspective, if I think about it.
> *Excerpt 28.* Maybe that's something Professor XXX will tell me—that I'm not impartial enough.

By Week 15, Paul again produced the greatest number of comments of all the LLM students, and he displayed a range of metacognitive knowledge. In particular, he appeared to develop new awareness in terms of procedurally discussing how he researched/integrated cases into writing a memo:

> *Excerpt 29.* I usually look first at what court it is. And then sometimes they have a summary in the beginning—sometimes by Westlaw [*a legal database*] themselves provided together with a quick overview. Then I would I'll skim over the facts. But the first time I read it, I go over it in more detail then highlight parts that are really necessary [to integrate].

Moreover, Paul cogently discussed how he engaged in using his genre awareness for monitoring. For example, Paul considered his audience (a senior attorney), and he actively recalled thinking of the knowledge this attorney would possess and how that would affect his memo's content. This caused Paul to remove content in his memo since he felt his audience was experienced and would be familiar with certain details:

> *Excerpt 30.* When writing, my main audience that I had in mind was a senior attorney.
> [In the memo itself], I discussed a large concept of contracts that is very familiar to any attorney, so I shortened that paragraph quite significantly. . . That would be in on page 3. . . with the first paragraph starting with '*However, in the case the contract is ambiguous*'. . . This is something that applies to all contracts.

Beyond monitoring, Paul showcased new awareness in terms of evaluating aspects his performance. Two new ways in which he did this were by critically reflecting on his second memo's organization along with his language use when compared to his first memo:

> *Excerpt 31.* I had a much easier time organizing it because it was naturally from the question [i.e., *the Questions Presented section*] that you can divide it up to those specific groups. It was to me a bit easier to find a structure to it.
> *Excerpt 32.* I think. . . I did a better job in being a bit more impartial.

Although Paul possessed little knowledge of the office memo early on, by Week 15 he was one of the strongest students and was highly capable of vocalizing his genre awareness.

5. Discussion

In L2 writing research, metacognition theory has been adopted relatively infrequently as a lens for examining the development of genre awareness. However, the current study, like those before it, showcased its potential in this regard. RQ1 examined the extent to which six LLM students collectively developed awareness of the office memo genre. Notably, although few learners entered the legal writing classroom context with existing awareness of the memo, by Week 15 of the course, the students had developed awareness that spanned multiple dimensions. Despite this, as was shown in Table 4, most of the awareness students reported pertained to discussing their metacognitive knowledge, and in particular, their declarative knowledge of different facets of the genre, as five of the top 15 codes fell into this category. Conversely, few of the students' comments focused on procedural knowledge (of how) and/or regulatory functions such as monitoring. This finding perhaps reflects Berkenkotter et al.'s (1988) assertion that when it comes to learning, declarative knowledge likely precedes procedural knowledge in the developmental sequence. In the current study, this was clearly observed, as can be seen in Table 3 at the group level. Although students consistently produced more comments pertaining to their declarative knowledge, the total number of procedural comments they produced increased across all three data collection time points (i.e., from 4, to 20, to 27 comments).

Despite such developmental trends observed in the group-level data, a careful examination also clearly revealed that students' awareness did not always develop uniformly. Thus, RQ2 took a closer look at the developmental sequences of two students. Interestingly, both LLM students appeared to start at relatively similar places in terms of their pre-course awareness of the genre. Importantly, too, the legal research and writing course represented the only course in the learners' LLM program in which they received explicit instruction in writing the target genre. Despite this, students' trajectories differed substantially over the 15 weeks. For example, by Week 8 Aashna and Paul self-reported a number of developments, yet Paul was clearly able to exhibit a greater, more complex metacognitive awareness of the genre. This was apparent in his ability to discuss his metacognitive knowledge and his ability to report how he used that awareness in regulating his writing performance. Though Paul showed impressive regulatory abilities, conversely, Aashna was unable to explicitly discuss how she used her awareness for planning and evaluating her own writing.

Additionally, although Aashna appeared to develop some critical evaluation skills by the end of the course, the nature of her evaluations often involved relatively superficial elements of the genre (e.g., related to formatting), whereas Paul critically evaluated his writing in terms of the content he integrated and the merits and persuasiveness of his arguments (see Excerpts 27 and 28).

There are a number of potential explanations for the two students' varied developmental paths. One possible explanation is related to the types of experiences each individual had prior to joining the LLM program. Aashna, who was 23 years old at the time of the study, was fresh out of law school and possessed legal writing experiences that were mostly testing-oriented. Paul possessed these same experiences, but he also possessed three years of experience through a research assistantship in which he was exposed to a variety of legal genres as a part of his daily work, including cases, statutes, and law journal articles. As studies by Myhill (2005) and others have suggested, these additional experiences with related genres (although not specifically with the target genre) may have aided Paul's ability to more readily build genre awareness.

This issue of experience also perhaps is closely tied to another potential factor in explaining the learners' paths: transferability. Tardy (2006) has noted that the prior genres students are exposed to may be impactful in influencing development, especially if they are easily transferrable. The legal reading and writing that Aashna engaged in were primarily for testing purposes, and her reading/writing tasks often came down to memorizing law statues and restating them. For Paul, although he had never been exposed to an office memo, he seemed to have relatively little trouble in transferring his genre knowledge from different legal genres he had encountered as a research assistant. Crucially, while the type of testing-oriented writing Aashna engaged in is not easily comparable or transferrable to the type of writing required in an office memo (see Oates et al., 2018), the types of tasks that Paul had engaged in seemed more conducive. On occasion, Paul also made explicit reference to this issue of transferability. One instance came in which he discussed the differences/similarities of the U.S. office memo with other types of legal writing in Germany, stating: "I think I figured out it is similar to something you would write to your senior attorney in German…" (Excerpt 18). He was thus able to rely on this transferability, as he expressed in the comment: "I just did it how I would do it in Germany, I think" (Excerpt 20). While Paul readily made such comments when discussing his genre awareness, Aashna never indicated that she drew upon prior experiences or transferred any existing knowledge when writing.

The findings of the current study suggest that despite receiving the same input in the classroom, students will likely follow different trajectories when it comes to developing genre awareness, even if many of these students appear to be at relatively similar starting points with respect to their existing awareness of the target genre. Research by Tardy (2005, 2009), Gao (2012), and others has also suggested similar sentiments, showing that acquiring genre awareness can be a highly idiosyncratic process of gradual accumulation. Thus, for teachers especially, it may be critical to perform needs analyses that not only seek to understand students' prior experiences with composing the target genre, but also needs analyses that include questions that seek to understand students' general literacy surrounding related genres. As this study and others have shown, students who have some experience with related genres may encounter fewer issues when attempting to apply or transfer that knowledge accordingly. Conversely, teachers may wish to take special note of those learners who possess either limited or no experiences with related genres, as such learners may end up requiring more instructional support and scaffolding.

Also for practitioners, it is important to note that while some students may develop awareness rather quickly within one respective area, others may not (e.g., Negretti & Kuteeva, 2011; Yeh, 2015). Thus, it may be beneficial for teachers to assess their students' developing genre awareness intermittently throughout a course. This could be accomplished either formally (through a questionnaire and/or graded homework assignment) or informally (through one-on-one meetings with students), in which the teacher asks learners to respond to specific questions about the target genre (see Appendix A for examples). After receiving these responses, teachers can then pool these data and use them as a barometer for understanding general trends among their learners, along with where individual students may require attention.

For researchers, it is noteworthy that all of the participants in the study developed conditional knowledge that was relatively complex in nature. As discussed earlier, five of the 15 most frequently recurring comments students made pertained to different types of conditional awareness (e.g., awareness of how the audience affects content, how the section of the memo affects one's language use). Therefore, it is important to compare such findings to prior studies that have adopted metacognition theory for exploring learners' development of genre awareness. In Negretti and Kuteeva's (2011) study, which examined preservice teachers' development of awareness surrounding academic research articles, all of their study participants developed declarative and procedural knowledge, yet few developed conditional knowledge. When these findings are compared to that of the current study, it is unclear as to why such differences occurred. One possibility may be related to differences in the two studies' designs. Negretti and Kuteeva's study lasted only three weeks while the current study spanned 15 weeks. Thus, it is plausible that if different types of knowledge do develop along a relative continuum (as suggested by Berkenkotter et al., 1988), conditional knowledge may take more time to develop. This could also explain why so many LLM students exhibited this awareness eight weeks into the study.

Another potential explanation for why all of the LLM students developed conditional knowledge is that perhaps there is something unique about the legal context and the office memo genre itself when compared to the academic research articles that were learned by the students in Negretti and Kuteeva's study. Legal writing scholars have repeatedly noted the rhetorical complexity and depth of skills that are required to write an office memo (e.g., Chew & Pryal, 2016; Oates et al., 2018; Piccard, 2017). Thus, perhaps certain features of this legal genre naturally evoke or require learners to develop different types of conditional awareness in order to compose it. Unfortunately, because of the types of data collected in the current study, this can only be speculated.

6. Conclusion

This study responded to calls to investigate the development of L2 learners' genre awareness by adopting metacognition theory.

Importantly, this study expanded research into non-applied linguistics/EAP contexts, and into an under-researched domain involving a professional legal genre. Although the current study provided numerous insights, it is not without its limitations. For one, the use of stimulated recalls that immediately followed the LLM students' composing of their memos would have been ideal, as this may have afforded more robust insights into writers' metacognitive regulation. Notably, other concurrent methods such as think-aloud protocols have great potential for providing insights into learners' regulatory functions when engaging in writing tasks. As mentioned though, due to the extended nature of the office memo assignment and the busy schedules of the participants, this logistically was not possible. Therefore, researchers may wish to integrate stimulated recalls or think-alouds into future studies in order to better understand writers' metacognitive genre awareness, and particularly, how learners actively use their awareness when planning, monitoring, and evaluating their own performance.

Finally, the current study highlighted key differences in the types of awareness that emerged among the focal LLM students and among learners in prior studies that have adopted metacognition theory as a lens. However, as noted, based on the current study's design, it is unclear as to why such differences emerged. Therefore, future researchers should further investigate this line of inquiry. Specifically, scholars may wish to track either the same or different groups of students as they learn to write genres in two different contexts. By doing so, this may shed light on whether certain types of knowledge emerge when engaging with different genres, along with insights regarding the speed and sequencing with which this development occurs. Thus, I close with a call for future studies to explore the development of genre awareness in and across a myriad of contexts.

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The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Appendix A

Semi-Structured Interview and Modified Stimulated Recall Questions[1]

1. What is the purpose of writing an office memo? Why would someone write one?
2. Who reads office memos (who is the audience)?
3. Do you think that the audience affects how you write the memo?
   a. If so, can you give me a specific example?
   b. **Was there a time you thought about the audience while writing and you changed or added something because you were thinking about them?**
      i. **If so, can you give me an example from your memo?**
      ii. **What if the audience changed? Would that change your memo at all?**
4. Tell me about the structure/organization of an office memo. Is there a general structure?
   a. How would you go about writing/organizing an office memo?
   b. **Did you use/change your office memo structure from the example Professor XXX provided you? (Why/why not)?**
5. **Professor XXX gave you specific cases to use for this office memo assignment. I want you to tell me about using them in your writing, specifically:**
   a. **How did the cases Professor XXX selected compare to those you found in your research?**
      i. **Was there a lot of overlap? Was anything different? If so, what?**
   b. **Since the beginning of the class, did you learn anything new about researching or integrating cases into your writing?**
      i. **If so, can you give me an example from your office memo?**
6. **Take me back to before you started writing your office memo. Did you do any planning before writing?**
   a. **If so, what did you do?**
7. Do you think the readers who read an office memo have any expectations?
   a. If so, what are those expectations?
   b. **In your memo, do you think you met those expectations? Why/why not?**
8. Can you tell me anything about the language that is used in an office memo? Describe it.
   a. Does it ever change when you are writing, or does it always stay the same?
   b. **If it changes, can you give me an example from your office memo?**

[1] Bold font indicates stimulated recall questions that were posed during sessions #2–3 only.

9. If you have written an office memo before:
   a. What is the easiest part of writing an office memo for you? The most difficult?
10. **What was the easiest part of writing the office memo for you? The most difficult?**
11. **Last question: Reflect on the beginning of the class to now: What new information have you learned about creating an office memo? It can be anything.**

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