普通高等教育“十一五”国家级规划教材

How to Write a Dissertation in English

英语学位论文写作教程

黄国文　M. Ghadessy　编著

高等教育出版社
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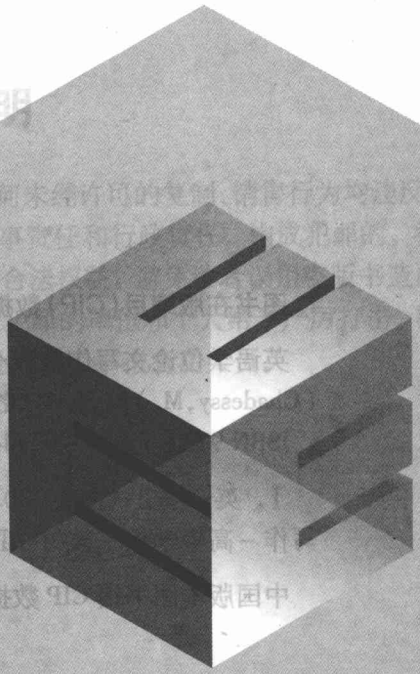

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总 序

随着全球化进程的加速发展，文化全球化和经济全球化的深入推进，高等教育，特别是英语专业教育在新的历史转型期的文化交融层面越来越肩负着举足轻重的社会责任。因此，为了培养具有扎实的英语基本功、相关的专业知识和文化知识、较强的英语综合应用能力和创新思维的人才，为不断深入的大学英语教学改革培养和提供师资，而且立足于中国语境，用全球化的理念和视角进行教材设计，我们策划了“高等院校英语专业立体化系列教材”。

实现这一具有时代意义的战略任务需要广大英语专业教师树立执着的敬业精神，制订科学的、高水平的、切合实际的英语专业教学大纲，编写出版能充分体现大纲要求的有关课程（必修和选修）的配套教材，以及开发为课堂教学和学生自主化学习服务的、与新型电子化教学仪器设备配套的教学软件系统。由高等教育出版社策划并陆续出版的“高等院校英语专业立体化系列教材”作为“普通高等教育‘十一五’国家级规划教材”，就是为实现英语专业教学改革这一历史任务服务的。

为实现以上目的和任务，本系列教材注重以下方面：

1. 注重培养学生的跨文化交际能力和文化鉴赏与批判能力。在教材设计时体现“全球视野，中国视角”的理念。这就是说，本系列教材在保持各门课程的思想性和批判性的优良传统外，既向学生提供西方文化背景知识，也引导学生鉴赏和学习我国的优秀文化传统。要让学生在多元文化的背景下，熟悉掌握中外文化的共同点和差异。在这个基础上，培养学生的鉴别和比较能力，启发和诱导学生进行创新思维。

2.科学安排，系统设计。经过多年来对教学模式改革的探讨，我国英语专业教学已总结出良性的教学规律，一般将4年的教学过程分为两个阶段，即：基础阶段（一年级和二年级）和高年级阶段（三年级和四年级）。按照此教学规律，本系列教材分为基础阶段教材和高年级阶段教材，同时悉心设计基础阶段和高年级阶段的衔接。基础阶段教材的主要任务是传授英语基础知识，对学生进行全面的、严格的基本技能训练，培养学生实际运用语言的能力、良好的学风和正确的学习方法，为进入高年级学习打下扎实的专业基础。高年级阶段教材的主要任务是在继续打好语言基础的同时，学习英语专业知识和相关专业知识，进一步扩大知识面，增强对文化差异的敏感性，提高综合运用英语进行交际的能力。同时，根据《高等学校英语专业英语教学大纲》的课程设置，本系列教材将课程分为英语专业技能课、英语专业知识课和相关专业知识课三种类型。全面培养学生的语言能力、思维能力、终生学习能力，拓宽学生的知识面，同时帮助学生树立正确的人生观和价值观。

3.时代性。这不仅表现在的选材方面能反映当代人民的生活内容，更主要的在于对它的“立体化”要求。21世纪的教材不再拘泥于传统的纸质教材，而是能培养学生多元识读能力(multiliteracy)的基于多媒体（multimedia）的多模态(multimodality)教材。本系列教材在建设传统纸质教材的同时启动建设一个开放性、超文本化的网络系列课程，构建全国英语专业英语自主学习体系，使优秀教学资源共享，充分体现“以人为本”的教学理念。这一举措也反映了由于当前英语专业招生人数的不断扩大，英语专业的传统教学模式已不能满足当前专业教学的需要。本系列教材采用立体化配套，将各种多媒体手段运用到教学中来，这是英语专业教学

发展的需要，也将为我国英语专业教学改革和发展作出重大贡献。

4.可教性。在编写过程中，反复强调教材的可教性。在选材上，讲究趣味性，让学生喜欢学。在内容安排上，力争让学生在较少的课时内学到该学的内容，从而体现当代先进的模块化教学思想。在习题设计上，做到有针对性、形式丰富，并便于教师和学生课内课外操作。充分体现教学过程以学生为中心的教学理念，通过教师与学生互动、学生之间互动的教学活动，把语言、文学、文化、翻译等方面的教学内容转化成为学生能掌握的技能和知识，着力培养学生分析问题和解决问题的能力，传授基本研究方法，增强学生的研究意识和问题意识，同时提高学生的学术素养，提升学生综合素质。

5．适用性。本系列教材集中全国著名大学的一批专家编写，凝聚了他们多年教学经验的精华，体现了我国英语专业教学的最新理念和先进水平。入选系列教材的初稿均在不同重点高校教学中使用过至少三轮以上，深受学生喜爱，能够真正反映当前英语专业教学改革的思路和教学的实际情况。

综上，本系列教材反映了当代新的教学理念。为此，编委会也做出了大量努力。一方面，编写工作中强调协同性。在编写策划层面，出版社与编委会之间、编委会与编写者之间反复协商，制订计划，讨论样章；在使用者层面，充分考虑到师生之间以及学生之间的互动和协作。另一方面，教材致力于构建良好的英语学习平台，为学生的自主性学习、独立思考和创新思维创造条件，同时向作为教学各个环节的咨询者、组织者、监督者的教师提供指导。

多年以来英语专业教材，特别是专业高年级教材的出版比较零散，一直没有相对配套完整的系列教材。我们深信本系列教材的出版对于推动英语专业的教学改革和建设，对于进一步提高英语专业人才的培养质量将起到积极的作用。同时，我们衷心希望听取广大师生的意见和建议，使本系列教材的出版日臻完善。

“高等院校英语专业立体化系列教材”编委会

2007年10月

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Preface

We use language in different contexts or situations in every culture. When we talk to children, our language is different from what we use when we talk to adults. A letter to a close friend has a different form and content compared to a letter of application for a job. In other words, the context or situation demands a different selection of words, grammatical structures, and discourse patterns for the purposes of communication. Technically we can say that we are choosing a *register* or a functional variety suitable for the situation concerned.

It is appropriate at this stage to distinguish a *register* from a *genre* that is also used to refer to functional varieties. A register refers to the language used in the *context of situation* whereas a genre is the use of language in the *context of culture*. The former is concrete, i.e. what we experience, what we hear, what we see, while the latter is abstract, i.e. the set of ideas that are permissible and organized in the culture for the purpose of communication. Thompson (2004: 42) equates genre with register plus purpose.

Seen in the context of the above discussion, we can consider academic writing as a variety of language that has a specific function or purpose. The aim of this book is to describe, discuss, and exemplify this writing for undergraduate and postgraduate students in tertiary institutes of education. Academic writing is a skill that has to be acquired through hard work by all college and university students. How this can be achieved is the subject matter of the following chapters.

This book is designed for students of English who need to write a BA or MA dissertation at the end of their university studies. It can be used as either an instructional text or a reference book. Although our target readers are Chinese university undergraduates of English, we believe that this book is also useful for BA and MA students of English and Linguistics / Applied Linguistics in other institutes of tertiary education.

In terms of genre type, a dissertation or a thesis is an example of academic writing, which is very popular in the academic community. Our purpose of writing this textbook is to show the student how research is undertaken and how the writing of the dissertation begins and ends. Assuming that the nature of this writing is based on research, a fundamental component, we address issues which concern both conducting the research and writing the dissertation.

The organization of the book is as follows: Chapters 1, 2 and 3 are the preliminaries which deal with the general topics of writing a dissertation, different types of academic writing, and the research paradigms, which lay the foundation for the discussion of the topics in the following chapters. Chapters 4 to 7 discuss the research component, including primary and secondary

research. Chapters 8 to 11 are concerned with the writing itself: the elements of a dissertation, the organization of ideas, writing and revising, and avoiding plagiarism. The last three chapters, i.e. Chapters 12 to 14, address issues concerning the preparation of the final copy, documentation of the sources cited in the body of the dissertation, and submission and evaluation of the dissertation. The organization of the book reflects a step-by-step approach to doing academic research and to writing a dissertation.

This book is based on our experiences of teaching both English as a general subject and academic writing as a course in a number of universities in China. In 2004 we, together with Professor Zhang Meifang, completed a booklet entitled *How to Write a Research Paper* (《英语学术论文写作》), which was published by Chongqing University Press. The organization of that book is centred on the number of macro-elements of structure of a research paper, while the organization of the present book is based on both conducting research and writing the report on it. It presents a linear approach on how to do research and analyze and write the final report or dissertation. Although both books are concerned with academic writing, they address the same phenomenon from different perspectives and thus are complementary. We strongly suggest that readers use these two books together to improve their research and academic writing skills.

The project of writing this book was initiated by Dr Huang Guowen, who also produced the first draft. Dr Mohsen Ghadessy was responsible for revising the first draft and improving the language of presentation. This is the third book that we have worked on together, the other two books being *How to Write a Research Paper* (《英语学术论文写作》, Chongqing University Press, 2004) and *Functional Discourse Analysis* (《功能语篇分析》, Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, 2006). We would like to thank those (especially our students) who have helped us, either directly or indirectly, in the writing of this book. As you will see later, we take examples from our students writings to illustrate important points in academic writing. (All examples from these sources have been slightly modified to make them consistent with the editorial conventions used in this book.) We are also grateful to Dr Ke Zou for providing his unpublished paper as an example of academic writing (see Appendix 2). We would also like to thank Dr R. S. Ghadessy for reading the final manuscript of the present book and making some valuable editorial suggestions. Finally, we would like to thank the following authors whose writings we have cited in the body of the text:

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Chapter 1

Defining the Dissertation

1.1 Introductory remarks

This chapter deals with some basic ideas concerning the writing of a dissertation, which is submitted to your university as a partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts (BA) or the degree of Master of Arts (MA). In the course of your studies at the university, you will be required to write different types of papers. For example, at the end of an academic semester or term, you may be asked to write a term paper, a library paper, a review article, or a book review in order to demonstrate that you have learned the necessary skills of a general academic ability in the subject taught during the semester.

The purpose of this chapter is to distinguish between a number of terms and to discuss the difference between a summary of information and an academic evaluation of said piece of information. The process of writing a dissertation will also be briefly discussed, with the purpose of identifying the various steps involved.

1.2 Thesis, dissertation, paper

Many students and young researchers are often confused with terms such as *thesis*, *dissertation*, *paper*, *article*, and *essay* because they can all be translated into *lun wen* (论文)

in Chinese. In this book, the word dissertation is used to refer to "a long essay that you do as part of a degree or other qualification" (*Cobuild English-Chinese Dictionary*, p. 540) that you are studying for — that is, a BA or an MA. The term thesis, by contrast, is used to refer to "a long piece of writing, based on your own ideas and research, that you do as part of a university degree, especially a PhD" (*Cobuild English-Chinese Dictionary*, p. 2034). Thus, if the essay is a part of a BA or MA degree, we call it a *dissertation*; if it is a part of a PhD degree we call it a *thesis* (note that *thesis* has another meaning in a different context, which you will come across in Section 6.2 in Chapter 6). On the other hand, if you write an essay for a certain course during your university studies, we call it a *paper*. As a result, you have different terms for different pieces of writing that you do during your university studies: a BA dissertation, an MA dissertation, a PhD thesis, a term paper. Note that these three terms, i.e. *dissertation*, *thesis*, *paper* are all called *lun wen* (学士论文，硕士论文，博士论文，学期论文) in Chinese. The other terms, i.e. *essay*, *article*, which are general terms, can also be used to mean *lun wen* in Chinese.

The distinction between *thesis* and *dissertation* made here is in line with the British educational tradition. It must be pointed out that in the United States of America, the use of these two terms is the other way round, i.e. *thesis* is used to mean a BA *lun wen* (学士论文) or MA *lun wen* (硕士论文) and *dissertation* to mean a PhD *lun wen* (博士论文). You may prefer the American way of using these two terms; however, you should be consistent so that you are not confusing yourself or others.

If we follow the distinctions made here, then *He is writing a thesis*. is to be understood as "他正在写博士论文" while *He is writing a dissertation*. as "他正在写本科论文" or "他正在写硕士论文". On the other hand, *He is writing a paper*. can be generally understood as "他正在写论文", and this is not to be interpreted as "他正在写博士论文" or "他正在写硕士论文" or "他正在写本科论文".

Although we make the distinction between a *thesis* and a *dissertation* on the one hand and *thesis/dissertation* and *paper* on the other hand, it must be emphasized that in terms of the macrostructures and the ways of doing research they have many things in common, and the process of writing a research paper is more or less the same as that of writing a dissertation or a thesis. The major difference between them lies at the level of originality. If something you write is a term paper, the teacher will expect little or no originality on your part. By contrast, if you are writing a PhD thesis, you will be expected to have original ideas and/or original research methodology.

1.3 Summary and evaluation of information

As a piece of academic writing, a term paper or a research article can aim at summarizing other people's studies in the field and presenting the ideas or arguments put forward by other scholars. By contrast, a dissertation or a thesis requires more than an acknowledgement of existing studies; it must involve a critical evaluation of research information and this is where the originality of the study lies.

If your main task is to summarize existing studies in the field, you are simply expected to present to the reader what you have read, how much you have understood, and the way you have organized all the information that you have reviewed. You are not expected to critically evaluate these previous studies. However, if you are expected to evaluate the research information, you must show your ability not just in understanding the information but also in commenting on other people's work in a scholarly way. You have to consider not just the *what* factor but also the *how* and *why* factors, in which case your research will often involve comparison and/or contrast. Generally speaking, presenting a summary of information is easier than writing an evaluation of research information, and the latter usually includes the former, but not the other way round.

Here is an example. A book review can be a summary of information or both a summary of information and an evaluation of the book. If you just inform the reader what has been presented in the book, it is merely a summary; by contrast, if you not only summarize what has been written but also evaluate the author's ideas by saying why certain points can or cannot be accepted, then you are evaluating the work as well.

In most cases, a dissertation involves both summarizing and evaluating other people's studies in the field. This is part of the work that is called *literature review* (see Chapter 5). Only when we know what has been done by others can we find a way to make our work original and interesting.

1.4 The process of writing a dissertation

Writing a dissertation is going through a process of doing research. There are a

number of important steps in this process which can be divided into three groups: (1) prewriting, (2) writing, and (3) editing and completion.

In the prewriting group, we can have the following steps:

- Managing your time
- Locating your interest
- Selecting a topic
- Familiarizing yourself with the research background
- Discovering existing studies and ideas
- Reading the relevant literature
- Taking notes
- Discovering questions and problems
- Focusing on your research
- Preparing a preliminary bibliography
- Formulating the thesis statement
- Asking the research question
- Identifying the appropriate research method
- Looking for theoretical support
- Collecting data
- Doing experiments and statistical analysis
- Conducting interviews and surveys

In the writing group, we can have the following steps:

- Identifying the macrostructure of the dissertation
- Knowing how to write the abstract
- Discovering major elements of the dissertation
- Organizing ideas
- Learning how to quote, summarize and paraphrase
- Classifying types of outline
- Creating the final plan
- Developing the first draft
- Revising the first draft
- Learning how to avoid plagiarism

And finally in editing and completion we have:

- Formatting the final draft
- Checking the details
- Avoiding silly mistakes

- Preparing the final documentation notes
- Preparing the references and the appendix

These steps will be discussed in detail in Chapters 4 to 13. The last chapter in this book, i.e. Chapter 14, is concerned with the submission of your dissertation and the evaluation of your work, which is also part of the whole process of writing a dissertation.

After you go through the research process once, it will be much easier to go through it a second time and gradually you will become more familiar with the overall procedure. As a university student, you are taught the steps involved in this demanding process as it is typically expected from people who have received tertiary education with a university degree. During your university life you are likely to experience both the hardship and the pleasure of doing academic research.

Although the essential steps in the research process illustrated in this book may seem rather straightforward and easy, this is not necessarily the case. Generally speaking, the research process always requires a kind of yo-yo approach, which is defined by Sorenson (2005: 7) as follows:

> Rather than completing one step of the research/writing process and moving neatly onto the next step, you will find that you confront problems that cause you either to go back to a previous step or to think ahead to the next step.

Suppose that you have gone through a number of steps but then realize that you need to elaborate more on a previous step or previous steps. In this case you are recommended to retrace your steps and consider how to improve your previous efforts. You may want to rethink certain points, to read more on the subject or reread certain things that you have read before, and/or to rewrite certain sections or paragraphs, until you are happy with what you have done. All this will involve going backward and forward similar to the movement of a yo-yo, and this process continues until you have finalized your dissertation.

1.5 Summary

In this chapter we have defined the terms *dissertation*, *thesis* and *paper* and differentiated

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