

From Essay To Research Paper

And Practical Writing

Rebecca Neufeld

Ma Baojin

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A COLLEGE ENGLISH WRITING COURSE

Vol. I

From Essay to Research Paper

and

Practical Writing

大学英语写作教程

(下册)

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PREFACE

This book is the second volume in a series of two books that take the learner of English from sentence skills to writing the research paper and practical writing. The two books combined form a comprehensive guide to the entire writing process, examining each skill in detail.

The first volume entitled A COLLEGE ENGLISH WRITING COURSE—From Sentence to Paragraph is aimed at the beginning writing student. The task is seen as a step-by-step process beginning with sentence skills to paragraph skills basic to writing in the English language. The second volume, A COLLEGE ENGLISH WRITING COURSE—From Essay to Research Paper and Practical Writing, is aimed at the advanced writing student. The task is also seen as a step-by-step process beginning with less formal writing and moving to more formal writing, examing the skills of writing narration, description, exposition, persuaion, critical essays, and the research paper. Included in the second volume is a unit of practical writing skills. The student will learn basic writing forms for paraphrasing and summarizing, note-taking, and outlining which are important academic skills, as well as letter writing. Each of these skills is valuable to the foreign language learner and will be practical in meeting current and future needs.

Each chapter in both volumes includes detailed description of each skill involved, as well as examples and activities to practise those skills. Examples have been chosen and adapted to have relevance to the Chinese student.

This book provides the basic teaching tool. The instructor should build his curriculum around this text and supplement tasks and instruction according to the needs of his particular students.

It is our hope that these two volumes will provide students and

teachers with clear insight into English composition and will become a valuable part of not only their yearly set of text books, but also a part of their reference library far into the future.

As with any project of this size, we have many people to thank.

We express our gratitude to Miao Pujing, Assistant Dean of the Foreign Languages Department of Henan University, who encouraged us to submit a proposal for this book.

We offer a heartfelt thank to Prof. Qin Yingjun, our editor. We could not have succeeded in our efforts without his patience, wit, and suggestions. We also want to thank the members of the Foreign Affairs Office of Henan University for their help.

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We wish to thank our families and friends for their help and encouragement during our hours of writing.

And, last but not least, we say thank you to our students and colleagues whose response helped us shape these materials to meet their needs.

Rebecca (Becky) Neufeld, M. A., C. C. C. Ma Baojin, M. A.

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Part Three WRITING ESSAYS

Clear writing leads to clear thinking; clear thinking is the basis of clear writing. Perhaps more than any other form of communication, writing holds us responsible for our words and ultimately makes us more thoughtful human beings.

----Ernest Boyer



THINGS WE SHOULD KNOW ABOUT WRITING

Writing is a continuous process, a process of choosing—selecting and rejecting, expanding and compressing, adding, deleting, and rearranging at every stage of the writing process. Learning to write well invovles being aware of the options open to us and the choices we can make. The writing process is actually a series of concerns, one or more of which dominate our writing at any given time. Writing engages the writer in a continuing series of conflicts with himself. During the writing process, ideas spill out onto the paper or remain elusive; they suggest new ways of seeing and understanding, or they seem disconnected and arbitrary. Whether writing is pleasant and exciting or tedious and frustrating depends on the writer, his subject matter, and the writing task at hand. Whatever the case, he should always consider writing as work in progress; that is, it is constantly being changed and improved.

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What Is Writing?

The dictionary defines writing as "relating or communication by forming symbols on a surface with a pen, pencil, or other tool." The key words here are relating or communicating. Written ideas are usually meant to pass on a message. Hennings and Grant, in their book Written Expression in the Language Arts, say that "writing is a way of making thoughts stand still.... It is oral language translated into a more permanent and at times a more structured form." They go on to say that "writing requires the ability to listen, speak, read and think."

Another way of defining writing is that it is thought transformed into a visual form. In other words, writing is a visual expression of ideas. The process of writing begins with an idea, and ideas come from an individual's reaction to events occurring within his environment and from within himself. By restructuring his perception, feelings, and knowledge, an idea is born and this is the substance of writing. Writing is the process of taking an idea from inside of one's head and putting it into a code so that it can be shared with others.

An American writing teacher describes writing as "one of the most complex intellectual and emotional processes a person engages in. "Or, stated another way, writing is plain hard work.

Elizabeth Cowan Neeld quotes Ralph Waldo Emerson's journal from June of 1845. He said, "I go out one day and see the mason and carpenters busy with building a house, and I discover with joy the parallelism between their work and my construction and come home glad to know that I too am a housebuilder."

Building a house and writing have three main characteristics in common. First, when we build and when we write, we make something that was not there when we started. On our university campus, there is

now a new building across the street from the Foreign Languages Department where two years ago there was an empty field of dirt. Similarly, today, before we began writing, this sheet of paper was blank and now it is filled with words. Second, both the builder and writer have many possibilities from which to choose. When a builder decides to build, he could construct a school, a store, a house or an office building, depending on his needs. And if he decides to make a house it could be a big house or a little house. It could have one story or two stories. The house could be shaped like a box or U-shaped or even a square with an open area or patio in the middle. The possibilities are endless. Likewise, when a writer sits down at his desk to write he could write a letter or a note or a book or a scientific report. And if he decided to write a letter, it could be a business letter or a letter to his mother or a love letter. Again, the possibilities are endless.

A third common characteristic of building and writing is that they both follow a process or an order.

A builder of a house begins with an idea. He knows he wants to build a house but his options are infinite so he must gather ideas and consider all of the possibilities. Then, while keeping in mind his finances and the size of the lot, etc., the builder has to make a plan. This design or blueprint tells the builder exactly what materials he needs and how they are to be put together as the house is built. Next, the builder has to order or collect his materials so they are available to the carpenters when they are needed. Now he is finally ready to build the house. When the house is finished, the walls are painted, the curtains are hung, pictures are put on the walls and everything is made perfect for those who will live in the house to move in.

The writer also begins with an idea. He knows what he wants to say but there are many ways to communicate this message so. Like the builder, he must also gather ideas and examine possibilities. Next, the

writer must make a plan—an outline. This plan will keep his writing focused on what he wants to say and show him where he wants to go. The writer must then collect his information. We generally call this step research. He may need to collect data from other people or books or experiments or he may only need to examine his own experience. When the information is gathered, the author is ready to write. Usually the writer revises and changes and rewrites but at some point he must decide his composition is complete. However, at this point there is one more step called revising and editing which makes sure the piece is just exactly as the writer wants it to be when it is received and read by its intended audience.

So what is writing? Writing is a process whereby one records his thoughts and ideas into a visual coded message which can be saved or shared with others. It follows an order and is just plain hard work.

Differences Between Speaking and Writing

Although the same message spoken and written may seem very similar, they are very different. The most obvious difference is that the message is transmitted through different channels. The written message is visual. The message is given only once and the reader can re-read the message if he needs clarification. The writer can use bold print, capitalization, italic printing, quotation marks, underlining, etc. for emphasis. A spoken message is oral/aural. Most of the time the speaker can repeat or reword his message if it needs to be clarified. The speaker can use such techniques as change in vocal pitch or volume, pauses, and gestures for emphasis.

Another difference between speaking and writing is that speaking is a personal interaction while writing is impersonal. The speaker can see his audience face to face and he can make adjustments in his message immediately based on the reaction of his audience. The writer cannot immediately interact with the person who is reading his message. When a person is speaking, his personality plays a role to a much greater extent than the writer's personality plays in his writing. In addition, when the message is spoken, it is sent and received at the same time and the listener can interrupt and ask questions. There is a greater sense of reality in the spoken message than in the written message.

In written language, grammatical rules are more strictly observed whereas in speaking, words are slurred, sounds and words are dropped, sentence fragments are appropriate and various parts of speech can be omitted. When speaking, a person can skip around to other topics and return to a previous subject, hesitate, make false starts and pause. In written language sequencing or order of information are crucial.

When as small children we learn a language, we first learn to listen, then to speak, then to read and finally to write. Writing is the final skill to be acquired. It is also the most difficult of the four language skills. Similarly when one learns a foreign language, although it is not necessarily the last skill to be learned, writing is dependant upon the learner's ability to listen, speak, and read. A student's level of writing will reflect his level in the other skills.

Writing is different from speaking. It requires attention to detail and is very specific. Writing is thought and ideas encoded to be saved and/or shared. To be a good writer requires hard work.

Questions

- 1) How are building a house and writing similar?
- 2) What are the differences between speaking and writing?

* * * * * *

Differences Between Chinese Writing and Western Writing

Many students believe that writing an essay in English is the same as writing an essay in Chinese. So, they write their essays in Chinese and translate them into English and then wonder why their teacher gives them low marks. The fact is that writing in English is different from writing in Chinese and writing well in English is another skill that must be learned.

Many of the differences between Chinese and western writing are rooted in the differences between the two cultures. Therefore it is very important to remember that one is not better than the other but they are different. In order to be able to write well in English, it is important for the Chinese students to become aware of these differences.

It was stated earlier in this book that writing is thought. Therefore, the writing of different cultures will reflect the differences in thought patterns used by those cultures.

It is generally accepted that Chinese thought pattern is circular. The idea is introduced and as the idea is developed or the conversation proceeds, each loop comes closer to the point until the main issue is finally addressed. In the following letter, notice how the author begins talking generally of school, then of how his teacher had loaned him his umbrella and been kind to him, and then the student makes his request, which is really the purpose of the letter.

Dear Teacher,

How are you?

Now I am a college student. College life is quite different from middle school. It is new for me. I am trying to adjust

myself to the new life.

Dear Teacher, when I was at middle school you not only taught me a lot of knowledge, but influenced me in various ways. I am very grateful. You were very kind to me just as kind as a father might be. I still remember once you lent your umbrella to me whereas you were caught in the heavy rain as I learnt later. You were generous to me, too. Once you invited me over for dinner. I'll never forget what you have done for me, and I will keep grateful for what you have done for me.

Dear Teacher, I' m busy with my study. But I am in bad need of an English-Chinese dictionary. I remember you have one. Would you like to let me have it? If you would I will be very thankful.

Best wishes to you.

Yours Sincerely, Li Dong

In contrast, western thought is linear. Westerners are unlikely to spend much time in "small talk" or in setting up a background for the main point. The westerner comes to the point immediately. Western style is more direct. If a western student were writing this letter, it would take this form.

Dear Mr. Jones,

As you know, I am now a student here at Henan University. I am enjoying my Chinese classes very much but I have a problem and I was wondering if you could help me. I am in need of an English-Chinese dictionary and I remember that you have one that you don't use. Would you be willing to lend it to me? I would really appreciate it.

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