

新聞英語寫作範本

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自序

這本書的主要目的，是為新聞系的同學而準備的。目前國內還沒有一本專門從事研討新聞英語寫作的文法範本。國內新聞英語的講授課程幾乎都是以翻譯英文外電為主，而對新聞英語寫作的歷練竟付闕如。

筆者在美國堪州大學新聞研究所讀書的時候，有一門叫做“English Writing IV”的課程，這門課相當於國內的新聞英語，但是在教法上完全不相同。教這門課的老師是卡寧漢博士（Dr. E. L. Callinhan），他和新聞研究所的所長賴許布洛克博士（Dr. J. Lashbrook）有同窗之誼。卡寧漢博士在報館以及南美以美大學 S. M. U. 退休之後，應賴許布洛克博士的邀請，到堪大專門傳授新聞英語寫作的課程。筆者有幸，追隨卡寧漢博士兩年之久，而這本討論新聞英語寫作的範本，也是在兩年的時光中，一點一滴彙集而成。

爲了要客觀和完整。新聞研究所的同學們曾經作了一個調查，在一百個接受調查的報社、雜誌以及廣播電視台的回信中，幾乎有百分之六十以上的人認為目前新聞系的學生應該着重寫作的訓練，而這百分之六十的共同意見是一個新聞系的同學，應該在文法、拼字以及句子的構造這三方面下功夫，否則在他們畢業之後，很難適應新聞性的工作。筆者根據這方面的意見，在卡寧漢博士的指導下，搜集了許多英文寫作的「病例」，這些「病例」，都是日常在報紙、雜誌上看到的，以及在廣播電視中聽到的。有許多「病例」是報章雜誌的編輯們自動寄來的。經過兩年的整理，卡寧漢博士認為這些資料可以作為新聞英語寫作的範本。

筆者回國之後，一直就職於中廣公司，承蒙黎總經理世芬的愛護和鼓勵，使筆者在公餘之暇，把往日的資料重新整理，筆者對正中書局李總經理滌夫先生也至為感謝，沒有他的承諾，這本書很難「問世」，因為目前這類書都不太熱門。當然，筆者也要感謝王大空先生，如果沒有他的「牽引」，筆者也無緣認識滌夫先生。

PREFACE

This book is primarily for young journalists. Most of them will be students in universities and colleges, preparing themselves for journalistic careers. Others will be men and women already at work in some area of journalism.

The purpose of the book is simply to provide study and drill in grammar, spelling and composition for journalism and English students and for practicing journalists who need such study and drill.

The book is planned for flexible use in the journalism program; it will be serviceable in the classroom and laboratory in any number of courses. It will also be helpful in self-instruction.

Most of the examples used in the book to illustrate common errors in grammar, spelling and sentence structure were taken from the columns of various newspapers and magazines and from radio-TV broadcasts.

Several uses for this volume suggest themselves. It may be used in a course in journalistic writing in which the emphasis is on grammar, spelling and composition.

The book is also designed for self-instruction. The practicing journalist should find the book suitable to refresh his knowledge of grammar, word usage and sentence structure. In particular, the young journalist should think of himself as a "continuing student" of English language. Any time which he spends on this book will repay itself handsomely.

The author expresses his appreciation to the many persons whose guidance, suggestions, and services have helped to make possible the completion of this book. First of all, the author is immeasurably indebted to Dr. E. L. Callinhan for his suggestions, criticism, and patience. The author wishes to thank Hostelter for her suggestion on the style of the book and English polishing.

Finally, sincere appreciation is due to Mr. Lee Shih-fen for his continual encouragements in last five years.

Dunley H. Yang

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CHAPTER I

THE JOURNALIST'S CHIEF TOOL—THE SENTENCE

Journalists do not manufacture facts, but they do manufacture sentences which go into building news stories, feature stories, feature articles, editorials and advertisements. Almost anyone can make sentences, but journalists are expected to be experts in such work. Putting words together to make good sentences—sentences that can be read with maximum profit and pleasure—is the basic job of the journalist, and grammar is simply the correct use of words in sentences.

Our logical starting point, then, is a brief overview of what the sentence is and what it is not. Can you tell the difference between a whole sentence and a fragment of a sentence? Can you tell the difference between one sentence and two sentences run together? Fundamental knowledge for the journalist is to know unerringly whether a group of words is a complete sentence; to know the various forms of the sentence; and to know how to avoid errors in sentences and how to keep his sentences varied in form and pleasing to the eye.

WHAT A SENTENCE IS

A sentence is a group of words that expresses a complete thought.

A sentence is made up of words, and words are classified as parts of speech. There are eight parts of speech: nouns, pronouns, adjectives, verbs, adverbs, prepositions, conjunctions and interjections.

Remember that grammar has only two main divisions: the parts of speech and the sentence. The sentence is simply a combination of words (parts of speech) expressing a complete thought. To make sure that you have a thorough knowledge of the sentence in all its variations, it is necessary to review the kinds of words and the relation of each word or group of words to the others in the sentence.

Study these examples of sentences:

Jones shot the fleeing robber.

Dr. Perry Webb will be the principal speaker.

Halt!

SUBJECTS AND PREDICATES

A group of words which expresses a complete thought has two essential parts: a subject and a predicate. The subject of a sentence is what is spoken about. The predicate of a sentence is what is said about the subject.

To test whether a group of words is a sentence or not, find the predicate first. The predicate is a verb, of course. Then ask a question by putting *who* or *what* before the predicate.

Jones shot the fleeing robber.

Shot is the predicate. Who shot? The answer is: Jones shot. Then *Jones* is the subject of the sentence.

To make a second test, repeat to yourself the whole group of words: Jones shot the fleeing robber. Ask yourself, "Does this group of words make sense standing alone?" Since the answer is that it does, you know that this group of words is a complete sentence.

You should recall at this point the difference between the complete subject and the simple (or essential) subject, and the difference between the complete predicate and the simple (or essential) predicate. You need to identify them unerringly if you are to avoid making errors in grammar. Note these sentences and see if you can find the errors, which were made by reporters who could not distinguish between complete subjects and simple subjects.

The Mississippi Southern coach, as well as the players, were elated over the victory.

A group of insurgents in a nearby country are plotting an overthrow of the government.

In the first sentence above, the complete subject is *The Mississippi Southern coach, as well as the players*; the simple subject is *coach*. Since the simple predicate must agree in number with the simple subject, the simple predicate should be *was*, not *were*.

In the second sentence, the complete subject is *A group of insurgents in a nearby country*. The simple subject is *group*, which is a collective noun, and collective nouns may be either singular or plural, depending on the meaning which is to be expressed. If the collective noun refers to the separate individuals composing the group, it is regarded as plural and

takes a plural verb. If the collective noun refers to the persons as acting or thinking as a unit (in unanimity), it is regarded as singular and takes a singular verb. In the sentence you are considering, the *insurgents* are thought of as acting together as a unit, and the singular verb *is* should be used. The error was made because the prepositional phrase contains the plural noun *insurgents*.

Always remember that the simple subject is the essential noun or pronoun, or its equivalent, that tells what or who is spoken about in the sentence, and that the simple predicate is the essential verb or verb phrase which says something about the subject.

A reporter has no difficulty in writing a simple sentence like this: Gerald Smathers is dying. This sentence consists of only the simple subject *Gerald Smathers* and the simple predicate *is dying*. But more words usually are added to both subject and predicate, like this:

The frail, 70-year-old Gerald Smathers, together with his two younger brothers, is dying of malaria in the tropics.

When a writer adds words like this to the simple subject and simple predicate, he may run into grammatical trouble unless he keeps in mind the simple subject and makes the verb agree with it in number. In the sentence above, the simple subject, stripped of all its modifiers (the adjectives *the frail, 70-year-old*), is *Gerald Smathers*. The phrase *together with his two younger brothers* is parenthetical. Hence *is dying* is the correct simple predicate.

The complete subject is the simple subject together with all the words grouped about it which modify it. The complete predicate is the simple predicate and its modifiers. Until you can distinguish unerringly between the complete subject and the simple subject, and between the simple predicate and the complete predicate, you will have difficulty in constructing sentences that are grammatically correct.

KINDS OF SENTENCE ERRORS

There are two common sentence errors that the journalist must avoid making: fragmentary sentences and run-on sentences. The ability to recognize complete sentences is the first step in writing correct sentences.

FRAGMENTARY SENTENCES

Fragmentary sentences are either phrases or dependent clauses which should not stand alone as complete sentences.

A phrase is a group of two or more associated words not containing subject and a predicate.

A phrase does not make a complete statement; it is only a part of a clause or a sentence. A phrase is never a clause, and certainly it is not a sentence.

The following example from a newspaper shows how a reporter made the error of writing a phrase as if it were a sentence:

One body was recovered last night. That of T/Sgt.
William G. Seymour.

The first construction is a sentence. It passes the first sentence test. The verb, or predicate, is *was recovered*. What

was recovered? One body was recovered. *One body* is the complete subject; *body* is the simple subject. The second test proves that the construction is a complete sentence, since the words make sense standing alone. But what about the second group of words, *That of T/Sgt. William G. Seymour?* It contains no verb. As there is no verb, there can be no subject. The construction is only a phrase—a fragmentary sentence. Both the reporter and the copyreader must share the blame for this error's getting into print, but the reporter will be held chiefly responsible.

A clause is a group of related words that form part of a sentence.

A clause must have a subject and a predicate. There are two types of clauses: independent (or principal or main) clauses and dependent (or subordinate) clauses.

Study this sentence from a metropolitan newspaper:

Rex never won a round on the United Press score sheet.

Although he fought on even terms in the first session.

In the first construction, you see that *won* is the verb—the predicate. Who won? Rex won. Is it a complete sentence? Yes, for it makes sense standing alone.

Now test the second construction. The verb is *fought*. Who fought? He fought. The pronoun *He* is the subject. Is it a complete sentence? No, for it does not make complete sense standing alone. It seems to be suspended in air. Apparently it depends on something that has gone before to make complete sense. This group of words is a dependent or subordinate clause punctuated as if it were a complete

sentence—another form of fragmentary sentence. This is an error which the journalist must recognize and avoid.

An independent clause is one which can stand alone. It makes a complete statement or asks a question or gives a command or makes an exclamation. An independent clause, therefore, can stand as a complete sentence, but it may be combined with one or more dependent clauses or with one or more independent clause.

A dependent or subordinate clause does not make complete sense. It cannot stand alone as a sentence. It depends on an independent clause which precedes or follows it for its meaning; it is subordinate to the independent or main clause.

Most editors frown on both forms of the fragmentary sentence and consider it a serious error for a journalist to punctuate either phrases or dependent clauses as if they were complete sentences. An ace reporter or columnist may occasionally be allowed to use a fragmentary sentence, but until you reach top rank on a newspaper staff you should refrain from turning in copy with phrases and clauses used as sentences. Most editors will assume you made the error through ignorance.

Bob Considine, an outstanding reporter and columnist, wrote the following:

Queen Mary stays active and alert in her eighties. Likes a sherry or so before dinner and a cigaret after.

You recognize the second construction as a fragmentary sentence. You may contend that the subject *she* is understood;

however, this is not a complete sentence.

The following is considered to be a complete sentence:

Halt!

This sentence gives a command. Its subject is *You*, understood.

The beginning reporter will do well to use a subject in every sentence he writes, except exclamatory sentences, until he has an established by-line, like Considine. Certainly most editors would not permit such a fragment as the following to appear in their papers:

When Alan started acting it was in radio doing 20 programs a week. Now making "One Woman."

The second construction should read something like this:

Alan is now making a picture titled "One Woman"

Don't forget that the threat of libel hangs constantly over both the reporter and the editor, and libel can be committed in the use of a fragmentary sentence.

Try testing the following two constructions:

The turtle's name is Big Boy. Although it is neither big nor a boy.

RUN-ON SENTENCES

The second type of sentence error is two sentences written as one sentence with only a comma to separate them or with no mark of punctuation between them. The following sentences appeared in a big-city daily:

The Fountain of Youth is not in Florida, it's in Russia. Some Democrats are advancing Eisenhower for the 1952 nomination, however, most Democrats feel that Mr. Truman will be a candidate to succeed himself.

As our estimated landing time approached we began wondering what was going on so I went forward to the crew's quarters.

The type of error committed in the first two examples above is what many English teachers call "the comma blunder." In these two sentences some mark of punctuation other than the comma was needed between the two complete statements.

In the third example not even a comma appears, although a comma before so would not make the construction correct in the eyes of most editors.

The sentence error called "the comma blunder" occurs when a writer runs together two independent clauses or sentences with only a comma between them or without any punctuation mark at all. The comma is not sufficient unless a coordinate conjunction is used to join the two complete statements, thus:

The Fountain of Youth is not in Florida, but it's in Russia.

A better form, however, would be to shorten the sentence by reducing the second clause to a phrase, thus:

The Fountain of Youth is not in Florida but in Russia.

Another correct form would be to use a semicolon between the two statements, thus:

The Fountain of Youth is not in Florida; it's in Russia.

But remember that unless the clauses are rather closely related, it is always correct to make two separate sentences of two complete statements, like this:

The Fountain of Youth is not in Florida. It's in Russia.

To avoid the comma blunder, remember that a comma placed between two independent clauses is not sufficient unless a coordinate conjunction also is used to join the clauses. You are likely, then to commit this error as long as you fail to recognize the coordinate conjunctions. There are six simple coordinate conjunctions commonly used to join two independent clauses. They are early remembered in the following rhyming form:

and, or, nor,
but, yet, for

Note the correct use of a comma before the coordinate conjunction in each of the following sentences:

The tabulations will be made available to any groups wishing to use them, and the council itself will provide the speakers.

In the past we have considered the diversified farm as necessary, but we must look at this idea now in the light of today's conditions.

Commissioner Dirksen abstained from voting on the question, for he had not had time to read the petitions thoroughly.

Most editors recognize one exception to the rule of using a comma before a simple coordinate conjunction that joins two independent clauses: If the clauses make a short compound