

上海市高等学校教育高地英语项目

英语语言学与教学丛书·写作教程系列

丛书主编 ◎ 蔡龙权

# 语法写作

A Writing Course  
on Sentence Skills

明建平◎编著

上海科学技术出版社

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# Foreword

Writing, as Francis Bacon says, makes one precise. This precision not only refers to what is overtly called speech, an entity right in front of one's naked eyes, but also to what stays covert, thinking, an ability of mind to breed out thoughts and to transfer them into linear words. It is not uncommon for one to be able to write in its general sense, but it is of particular difference if one wants to write precisely along with specific contents.

By content we are reminded of form, the coupled term opposite to and yet indicative of content, and together they relate our discussion to the two sides of writing and the coherence between content and form in achieving the intended effect. It goes beyond doubt that content is of prime importance since it is content that participants are most interested in and therefore is sincerely meant in delivery of communication. By contrast, form acts as an instrument that helps present content, resulting, as is commonly perceived, in a *status quo* secondary to content. Such a relation upholds that content determines form.

While content changes from discipline to discipline, it is expected that there are as many forms to follow suit but as a matter of fact not every content is well matched a form. This is not because writers are unable to concoct enough forms for various contents, but because it does not appear necessary when scientific inquiries are intended to reach at length an ultimate simplification by means of groups of categorical classifications. Generally, therefore, there are five types of writing: daily, journalistic, documentary, creative, and scientific.

To accomplish the coherence between content and form in writing involves such skills as wording and paragraphing, to put it another way, the arrangement of words, sentences, and the whole text. These skills look, in the first place of learning, especially in learning a foreign language, more linguistic than conceptual, for they have a lot to do with spelling, grammar, and fixed expression. Upon a second thought and with deep investigation, it is exposed that many failures in attaining these skills lie in erroneous or improper conceptualization with respect to cohering content and form. Accordingly, to learn to write has two implicitly interactive parts— speech and thought.

Then it is no longer necessary to ask the question “Which should be learned first”; rather it is significant to point out that to relate conceptualization to the learning of grammar and diction may do good to writing as a whole in which a form is selected by certain content and in return affects the representation of that content. The concern at issue is the sensibility to discover the relation and the sense to make use of the mind work, thinking.

But thinking without keeping good terms with content will be labor lost. Therefore, it is sufficiently meaningful to note the worth of reading as an adequate aid to writing. When the opinion that writing ability is not learned may sound going to extremes, the huge unknowing intake of resourceful information and the vast witting imitation of verified exemplifications help lay the foundation of one's own voluntary writing upon request. Apparently thoughts come in unrelenting reaction to what is found intriguing; forms are shaped up after frequent contact with disciplined reading. On the other hand, practice in writing plays an indispensable role. It reinforces what is newly picked up, accommodates what is unfamiliar, exposes

what remains for remediation, and directs what goes for polishing. Consequently, writing ability is further made up via reading and practicing.

I therefore recommend this set of books on writing to those who are interested in learning and teaching how to write in English at college level. These books are written by those who have had years of experience in teaching and researching writing and therefore know a lot about approaches to successful writing in terms of content-form coherence. The four books are internally chained up, with *A Writing Course on Sentence Skills* and *A Course on Practical Writing* intended for freshmen, *A Writing Course on Paragraph and Essay Development* and *A Course on Academic Writing* for sophomores, all being designed to help learners build up the fundamental skills concerning different contents in different forms so that they will find themselves better prepared to further their writing in use at the time of their junior and senior life.

So to write, my recommendation is made without reservation.

Dr. Cai Longquan  
Professor and Dean  
Foreign Languages College  
Shanghai Normal University  
July 16, 2007

## *Preface*

This book is aimed at the reader of English majors. It mainly addresses the topic of English sentence skills, which comprise of sentence extension and combination techniques, correction methods of five common errors, the use of punctuation in sentence combination, extension, and error correction, and finally diction.

There are two main distinguishing features in this book: first, it tries to apply the three different approaches of grammar, rhetoric, and even logic to English sentence writing; second, it tries to teach the readers to learn sentence writing in the context of paragraph.

From Unit One to Unit Six, the book mainly discusses sentence extension and combination skills. Unit One establishes six criteria for sentence classification. Six criteria for sentence classification are: the role of a sentence in the paragraph, the extent of abstraction, different communicative functions, grammatical structure, emphasis or the location of the essential information in a sentence, the length of a sentence. Understanding these methods of classification is crucial in writing effective sentences. Unit Two discusses different communicative functions of four major syntactic classes, with further classification and their applications in paragraph. It especially explores the logical applications of statements or declarative sentences in sentence and paragraph writing. Unit Three discusses the sentence extension in broad and narrow senses: the narrow one is sentence expansion based on basic sentence patterns; the broad one is expansion through coordination and subordination. It starts with the narrow sense and ends with the broad one. Unit Four first illustrates the different effects between loose and periodic sentences, then discusses definition of and recognition issues on periodic sentences, as well as methods of conversion from loose to periodic, and finally the mixed use of loose, periodic, and balanced sentences. Unit Five addresses five main issues: the criteria for the best sentence combination, nine methods in sentence combination, logical problems in sentence combination, when and where to use short and long sentences, and the problem of uniform length sentences. This unit puts forwards three criteria, which also serve as the three steps, and illustrates how the three criteria are applied in real situations. Unit Six discusses ways to avoid subject-first sentences, that is, sentence variety through non-subject-first sentences, for the major weaknesses of over-use of subject-first sentences are childish and monotonous.

From Unit Seven to Unit Ten, the book discusses the five common errors, namely, run-on sentences, fragmentary sentences, faulty parallelism, dangling modifiers and misplaced modifiers. In Unit Seven, after discussing the definition and two types of run-on sentences, the book proposes five major methods of correction, thus making the correction more systematic. Meanwhile, it also discusses the legitimate run-on sentences. In Unit Eight, a distinction is made between acceptable (or legitimate) and unacceptable (illegitimate) sentence fragments. Apart from illustrating how to correct the five major types of fragments, it also shows the uses of legitimate, particularly intentional fragments. Unit Nine starts with the meaning of parallelism with an understanding that the so-called “faulty” parallelism is actually the result of using

parallelism in a wrong way. Only with a good knowledge of parallelism can students learn the ways of correction better. In the same way, Unit Ten addresses the topic of modification and modifiers first, with the understanding that both misplaced and dangling modifiers are caused by the misuse of the grammatical, as well as the rhetorical, technique of modification. Then, it puts forwards the rules for correction.

Unit Eleven makes students familiar with the different levels of diction: formal and informal, abstract and concrete, and general and specific. Also, students need to be able to understand the connotative as well as the denotative meanings of words, to prune the prose of wordiness and redundancy, and to be alert to slang, cliché, jargon or pretentious expressions. Unit Twelve systematically discusses nearly every aspect of the use of the major punctuation marks: comma, period, question mark, exclamation mark, semicolons, colons, hyphens, dashes, parentheses, and quotation marks. Sufficient amount of exercise is provided to guarantee a good command of the rules of using all the punctuation marks mentioned.

### **Acknowledgements**

First of all, I extend my sincere and hearty thanks to Professor Cai Longquan, Dean of the Foreign Languages College, Shanghai Normal University. Without his invaluable aids and guidance, I would have no such a favorable opportunity and no such a strong desire to have the book written in the present form and then have it published. In my experience, his help always comes in time and in abundance. Under his leadership and overall planning, the book, one of the whole series of textbooks in writing, finally takes shape in printing.

Secondly, I am very much grateful to Mr. Peng Jiangjie, the editor of Shanghai Scientific & Technical Publishers, for his painstaking efforts in planning and editing the book, for his constant and patient communication with me during the revising stage, and for his tactical and very encouraging suggestions to me.

Thirdly, I want to express my appreciation to the following professors: Xu Hua, Chen Ruowei, and Wang Danbing. We work together to fulfill the task of a series of textbooks in writing. With their collaboration and remarks, I felt a sense of responsibility so that I could get started and finish my share of the work.

Fourthly, I wish to voice my gratitude to my students in the Basic Writing Course for the past seven years, who actually “collaborated” with me in writing the textbook in class. Without them, it would be unthinkable that I could accumulate the teaching materials and finish writing this book. Their questions and suggestions, expectations and earnest eyes are all the encouragements to me.

Finally, and undoubtedly, my thanks should also go to my family. Though being far away from me and unable to provide any direct assistance, they are always there, ready to offer any help. That is enough.

Ming Jianping  
June 15, 2007  
Shanghai



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# *Unit One*

## **Classification of Sentences**

The sentence is the basic working tool for a writer because it expresses a complete thought of the writer and because it plays an indispensable role in our life. Everyday when we make a judgment like “John is none the happier for his wealth.” or ask a question like “Can you swim to the other side of the river?” or give an order like “Don’t walk on the grass.” or utter an exclamation like “What a beautiful day!” we actually use sentences for different purposes. In speaking or casual writing, we might produce information without careful consideration of the types of sentences we are using.

Look at the following examples:

Peg entered the room. Lisa was in the room. Lisa lay on his couch. She appeared to be asleep. Lisa’s hair was long and it nearly touched the floor. On Lisa’s stomach was her cat. Its name was Tikky.

Teachers play an important role in education. Their social status should be improved. But in the past they have seldom enjoyed such a status, though they have deserved it.

The paragraphs cited above consist of a group of short sentences. The same is true to the following ones:

There were two mourners. They were stricken but not too much. They were waiting in the garden of the vicarage. It was before lunch. They were waiting to be summoned to lunch. Arthur Prime had a look on his face. She was moved to call the look an intention rather than an expression. The intention was to feel something or other.

She watched the girls. They were the girls she had grown up with. She had seen them marry, get homes and have children. No man ever called on her steadily. By now the children of the other girls had been calling her “aunties” for several years. At the same time the girls’ mothers told them in bright voices about how popular Aunt Minnie had been as a girl.

However, in writing, we consciously use different types of sentences to express ourselves effectively. By using some sentence skills, we can improve those previously mentioned paragraphs as follows:

- When Peg entered the room, Lisa, with her long hair nearly touching the floor and her cat, Tikky, on her stomach, appeared to be asleep on his couch. (Long and periodic)
- Teachers play such an important role in education that their social status should be improved, the status they have always deserved but seldom enjoyed in the past. (Long and balanced)
- The pair of mourners, sufficiently stricken, were in the garden of the vicarage

together, before luncheon, waiting to be summoned to the meal, and Arthur Prime had still in his face the intention, she was moved to call it, rather than the expression, of feeling something or other. (From *Paste* by Henry James)

- She watched the girls with whom she had grown up as they married and got homes and had children, but no man ever called on her steadily until the children of the other girls had been calling her “aunty” for several years, the while their mothers told them in bright voices about how popular Aunt Minnie had been as a girl.

(From *Dry September* by William Faulkner)

The sentence skills we have used are sentence combination skills, specifically, subordination and coordination, which we will explain in detail later in the following units. According to Ling Jianguo, the sentence is the basic unit of study in grammar and rhetoric. “In both oral and written composition, the making of good sentence is vital to correct and effective expression.”

Look at the following example from *Gone with the Wind* by Margaret Mitchell when she describes Scarlet for the first time:

Scarlet O’Hara was not beautiful, but men seldom realized it when caught by her charm as the Tarlatan twins were. (Compound sentence) In her face were too sharply blended the delicate features of her mother, a Coast aristocrat of French descent, and the heavy ones of her florid Irish father. (Simple but periodic sentence) But it was an arresting face, pointed of chin, square of jaw. (Simple and loose sentence) Her eyes were pale green without a touch of hazel, starred with bristly black lashes and slightly tilted at he ends. (Simple and loose sentence) Above them, her thick black brows slanted upward, cutting a startling oblique line in her magnolia-white skin—that skin so prized by Southern women and so carefully guarded with bonnets, veil and mittens against hot Georgia suns. (Simple and loose sentence)

The author, skillfully using one compound sentence and four simple sentences, which are sometimes loose and sometimes periodic, presents a vivid portrait of Scarlett.

Bacon, while alternating long and short sentences in his *Essays*, uses carefully balanced phrases to elaborate as well as control his ideas as follows:

Studies serve for delight, for ornament, and for ability. (Short) Their chief use for delight is in privateness and retiring; for ornament, it is in discourse; and for ability, is in the judgment and disposition of business. (Long) Fro expert men can execute, and perhaps judge of particulars, one by one; but the general counsels, and the plots and marshalling of affairs, come best from those that are learned. (Long) To spend too much time in studies is sloth; to use them too much for ornament, is affectation; to make judgment wholly by their rules, is the humor of a scholar. (Long) They perfect nature, and are perfected by experience; for natural abilities are like natural plants, that need proyning by study; and studies themselves do give forth directions too much at large, except they be bounded in by experience. (Long) (From *Of Studies* by Francis Bacon)

Therefore, sentence skills are important, but in order to use these skills, we must be familiar with different types of sentences because sentence skills are essentially the conversion of one type of sentence into another.

## 1.1 Topic Sentences, Supporting Sentences, and Concluding Sentences

According to the role a sentence plays in the paragraph, sentences can be classified into topic sentence or orienting sentence, supporting sentence, and concluding sentence.

Look at the following example from Bacon:

Abeunt studia in mores [Studies pass into and influence manners]. Nay, there is no ston'd or impediment in the wit but may be wrought out by fit studies; like as diseases of the body may have appropriate exercises. (Topic sentence) Bowling is good for the stone and reins; shooting for the lungs and breast; gentle walking for the stomach; riding for the head; and like. So if a man's wit be wandering, let him study the mathematics; for in demonstrations, if his wit be called away never so little, he must begin again. If his wit be not apt to distinguish or find differences, let him study the Schoolmen; for they are cymini sectores[splitters of hairs]. If he be not apt to beat over matters, and to call up one thing to prove and illustrate another, let him study the lawyers' cases. So every defect of the mind may have a special receipt. (Concluding sentence)

(From *Of Studies* by Francis Bacon)

In Bacon's paragraph cited above, the second sentence and the last one serve as topic sentence and the concluding sentence respectively, and in between are the supporting sentences.

Look at another example:

1) Fear is often a most useful emotion. (Topic sentence) 2) When you become frightened, many physical changes occur within your body. 3) Your heartbeat and responses quicken; your pupils dilate and admit more light. 4) Large quantities of energy-producing adrenaline are poured into your bloodstream; confronted with a fire or an impending accident, fear can fuel life-saving fight 5) Similarly, when the danger is psychological rather than physical, fear can force you to take self-protective measures. 6) It is only when fear is disproportionate to the danger at hand that it becomes a problem. (Concluding sentence)

(From *What Are You Afraid of?* by Daniel A. Sugarman)

In the paragraph cited above, the first sentence is the topic sentence that expresses the central idea of the paragraph, the last sentence the concluding sentence that ends the paragraph while giving us a sense of completeness, and the sentences in between supporting sentences.

Another example:

Thomas Jefferson was a man of many talents. He was an expert in agriculture, archaeology, and medicine. He was an architect and his architecture design influenced throughout America. He was constantly producing devices for making the tasks of ordinary life easier to perform. He was above all a good and tireless writer. When the time came to write the Declaration of Independence for the newly founded United States of America, the task of writing it was his.

Obviously, the first sentence is the topic sentence and those that follow are supporting

sentences that explain the topic sentence.

## 1.2 General (Abstract) Sentences and Specific (Concrete) Sentences

According to the extent of abstraction, sentences in a context can be classified into general and specific sentences. This is particularly true to statements.

Please compare the following two sentences:

- Garage sales reflect the times we live in.
- Garage sales circulate goods during periods of high inflation and high unemployment.
- Late marriages are creating a different kind of American family life.
- Because marriage is often postponed to accommodate careers, Americans are creating a new kind of family in which parents are old enough to be their children's grandparents.

Note that a kind of musical instrument as well as one requirement is specified.

Please compare the sentences as follows:

- Abortion is a **very complex issue**.
- Abortion is **wrong** because of the irresponsibility it allows.
- Abortion laws in our state **discriminate against the poor**.

According to Alan Maley, it is possible for us to make a general sentence more specific by using more specific terms or complicating "the simple architecture of the English sentence."

- The dog bit the man.
- The mad dog that belonged to the lovely, young girl in the red hat bit the crazy old man sitting on the park bench.
- The mad, pedigree sheepdog which belonged to the lovely, young girl in the red hat ferociously bit the crazy old man sitting on the park bench just as he was starting to eat his sandwiches.

Likewise, we can make a similar sentence more specific as follows:

- The man bit the dog.
- The crazy, hungry, old man sitting on the park bench ferociously bit the mad, pedigree sheepdog that belonged to the lovely, young girl in the red hat just as it was starting to eat his sandwiches.

Note that the sentences are progressively becoming specific.

Generally speaking, topic sentences or concluding sentences are more general than supporting sentences as in the following examples:

The language of mathematics is a language of signs and symbols. (Topic Sentence) Some of the best known symbols of mathematics are the Arabic numerals 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 0, the signs of addition, subtraction, multiplication, division and equality. (Developers)

As you can see in the first paragraph, the signs and symbols are specified in the supporting sentences.

More importantly, concrete words can be used to express abstract or general thoughts. Let us compare the following two paragraphs:

Original:

The tramp walked down the street. Along the way, he saw a dog. Then he saw a car going past. It just missed a young boy who was crossing the street. He stepped into a puddle and then turned around and went away. (General)

Improved:

The frail, elderly tramp hobbled down the side-walk, his white hair waving in the breeze. Along the way, he noticed a black-and-white beagle pup waddling in the damp grass by the curb, which barked at him and scampered away. No sooner did he snort at the dog in disgust than he heard the car horn blaring and saw a red Benz sedan roaring towards a blond boy who, in blue denims, unexpectedly dashed into the street. As the speeding driver swerved, the car narrowly missed the child. Distracted by the near accident, the tramp stepped into a large mud puddle, drowning his shoes in muck; disheartened and trembling, he turned around and plodded slowly toward a house in the distance. (Specific and concrete)

From the two paragraphs, we can see that without concrete sentences, what had been a shocking sight may not be visualized.

### 1.3 Statements, Questions, Commands, and Exclamations

According to different communicative functions, sentences may be divided into four major syntactic classes: statements, questions, commands, and exclamations.

Statements

- Water is necessary for all living things
- Snakes are uncommon in Europe.

Questions

- What do you propose to do at the weekend?
- By whom is the book written?

Commands

- Don't walk on the grass.
- Please don't telephone after 10 p.m.

Exclamations

- What a shame!
- If only I knew her name!

As we can see, statements are used to convey information, questions demand information, commands give instructions, and exclamations express strong emotions. (Cheng Liping)

Look at the following examples:

1) Can you use purposeful daydreaming to shape your own future? 2) Why not try? 3) Here is how those who believe in creative daydreaming recommend going about it. 4)



Choose a time when you can be alone and undisturbed. 5) Close your eyes, to permit your imagination to soar more freely. 6) Many people find that they get best results by pretending that they are sitting before a large screen. 7) They project the desired image of themselves onto that screen. (From *Daydream a Little* by Eugene Raudsepp)

With the paragraph mainly intending to instruct people how to daydream, the author uses a variety of sentences to do so. The first two questions serve as the opening, followed by a combination of commands and statements. Consequently, the paragraph is more arresting.

The following paragraph illustrates how powerful the use of a variety of functional types of sentences, particularly a series of questions, can be.

What treaty that the whites have kept has the red man broken? Not one. What treaty that the white men ever made with us have they kept? Not one. When I was a boy, the Sioux owned the world; the sun rose and set on their land; they set ten thousand men to battle. Where are the warriors today? Who slew? Where are our lands? Who owns them?

Notice how the effective use of different types of functional sentences contributes to the accusation of the white men by the red. The questions that originally demand information are now powerful indictment since the answers to them are so obvious.

## 1.4 Simple Sentences, Compound Sentences, Complex Sentences, and Compound-complex Sentences

According to grammatical structure, sentences fall into one of the following types: simple sentences, compound sentences, complex sentences, and compound-complex sentences.

### 1.4.1 Simple Sentences

According to Bobing, simple sentences have only one subject-verb combination as follows:

- Studies serve for delight, for ornament, and for ability.
- It was an arresting face, pointed of chin, square of jaw.
- The change of motion is proportional to the motive force impressed.

But sometimes, the subject is omitted as follows:

- Read not to contradict and confute; nor to believe and take for granted; nor to find talk and discourse; but to weigh and consider.

### 1.4.2 Compound Sentences

A compound sentence is made up of two or more equally important simple sentences, which are often joined by coordinating conjunctions.

- In Plato's opinion man was made for philosophy; in Bacon's opinion philosophy was made for man.
- One man draws out the wire, another straightens it, a third cuts it, and a fourth points it,

a fifth grinds it at the top for receiving the head; to make the head requires two or three distinct operations; to put it on is a peculiar business, to whiten the pins is another; it is even a trade by itself to put tem into the paper; and the important business of making a pin is, in this manner, divided into about eighteen distinct operations.

- Crafty men contemn studies, simple men admire them, and wise men use them; for they teach not their own use; but that is a wisdom without them, and above them, won by observation.

### 1.4.3 Complex Sentences

A complex sentence is made up of one independent clause and at least one dependent clause.

- Revenge is a kind of wild justice; which the more man's nature runs to, the more ought law to weed it out.
- Every body continues in its state of rest, or of uniform motion in a right line, unless it is compelled to change that state by forces impressed upon it.
- Democracy has, therefore, two excesses to avoid—the spirit of inequality, which leads to aristocracy or monarchy, and the spirit of extreme equality, which leads to despotic power, as the latter is completed by conquest.

As you can see, in a complex sentence, the writer emphasizes the information in the main clause.

### 1.4.4 Compound-complex Sentences

A compound-complex sentence is a compound sentence in which at least a complex sentence is embedded. Obviously, by using compound-complex sentences, the writer can express more complex or delicate meanings.

- Men fear death, as children fear to go in the dark; and as that natural dear in children is increased with tales, so is the other.
- If you are sent damaged goods, the store must replace the items, or it must issue a full refund.
- If you are to communicate properly, your thoughts must be clear and correct; thoughts are wasted when language is muddled.

### 1.4.5 Effects of Different Grammatical Types

The writer's awareness of using a variety of grammatically different sentences is essential to successful writing as each type of sentence has its particular effect in the context.

Please compare the following writings.

#### *Example 1*

Original: Peas are harvested in the spring. They cannot tolerate hot weather. Pumpkins need hot weather to mature. They are harvested in the fall.

First, let's use compound sentences to improve the writing as follows:

Improved version 1: Peas are harvested in the spring and they cannot tolerate hot weather, but pumpkins need hot weather to mature and they are harvested in the fall.