

商务英语系列教材

BUSINESS ENGLISH

商务 英语

写作

1

Basic Writing

总主编 虞苏美

主 编 张春柏
编 者 刘 森 陈茂庆
叶 晟



高等教育出版社

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图书在版编目(CIP)数据

商务英语写作.1/张春柏主编. —北京:高等教育出版社,2000.8

ISBN 7-04-008679-4

I.商... II.张... III.商务-英语-写作

IV. H315

中国版本图书馆 CIP 数据核字(2000)第 65095 号

责任编辑 周俊华 **特约编辑** 盛伯贤 赵 宏 **责任印制** 蔡敏燕
封面设计 李 颖 乐嘉敏 **版式设计** 李 颖 杨歆颖

书 名 商务英语写作(第1册)
主 编 张春柏

出版发行 高等教育出版社

社 址 北京市东城区沙滩后街55号

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排 版 南京理工排版校对公司

印 刷 商务印书馆上海印刷股份有限公司

开 本 787×960 1/16

印 张 19.25

字 数 310 000

版 次 2000年8月第1版

印 次 2000年8月第1次

定 价 20.00元

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前 言

《商务英语写作》为商务英语系列教材之一。本套教材共计2册。第1册为“基础英语写作”，这几乎是所有英语学习者的必修课。该册的内容涵盖选词、造句、段落的写作以及各类体裁文章的写作。第2册为“商务英语写作”，适用于学商务英语的学生。该册分为两大部分：一部分为商务文件的写作，包括一般的商务信函，如推销信、询问信、订货信、投诉信等；另一部分为公司内部的报告和合同等，其中合同部分有一些英汉对照的样本，供学生学习参考。本套教材配有丰富多样的练习。

由于商务活动多种多样，商务英语写作内容也相当繁杂，因而本教材无法涵盖其所有，限于篇幅，只能择要讲述。有一点需要说明的是，在使用本教材时，教师最好根据课时安排和学生的具体情况有所取舍，有些部分只能浅尝辄止。例如合同部分，如要学生较好地掌握，恐怕就要花更多的时间了。因此本书将这方面的内容安排得相对较少。一门商务英语写作的课程，如能让学生较好地掌握一般商务书信的写作并对其他体裁的格式和语言要点能有所了解，就算达到目的了。

本教材可供普通高等学校、高等职业学校、高等专科学校以及成人高等学校商务英语专业的学生使用，亦可用作爱好英语的非商务英语专业学生的自学课本。

由于编写时间仓促，编者的水平有限，本书讹误之处一定不少，因此我们恳切希望有关专家和读者不吝指教，以便在再版时改进。

编 者

于华东师范大学

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Lesson One

Use of Words



1. Types of Words

There are more than forty thousand words in the English language. No one knows or uses so many words. Normally people only use common words. Such words are what we should learn first.

1.1 Formal and Informal words

Words can be **formal** or **informal** in style. Words of different styles are used on different occasions for different purposes.

Formal words are those which are used on formal occasions. For example;

(1a) Would you please *inform* me of the possibility that the *terms* we mention will enable you to *expedite* the shipment two weeks ahead of schedule?

This is a typical, formal business English sentence, and the words *inform*, *terms*, and *expedite* are formal words.

Informal words are those which are used in informal situations, such as in conversations between close friends or family members. In such situations, Example (1a) can be expressed like this;

(1b) Could you *tell* me *if* you can *send* the goods by sea two weeks ahead of time according to our terms?

In Example (1b), words like *tell*, *if*, and *send* are rather informal. Informal words are often colloquial words.

It is important to note that some words are neutral because they are neither very formal nor very informal. As a matter of fact, there are different degrees of formality. Certain words can be used in both formal and informal situations.



Words like *know*, *whether*, *able*, and *ship*, for example, are neutral. Therefore Example (1b) can be expressed as:

(1c) Is it possible for us to *know whether* you are *able* to *ship* the goods two weeks ahead of time according to our terms?

Generally speaking, formal words are typically “big” words which are borrowed from Latin, Greek, French, and other languages; and informal words are typically of native “English” in origin, although they may not always be so. The following are just a few examples:

	Formal Words	Informal Words
Nouns	construction intention remarks	building aim words
Verbs	utter investigate inform	say look into tell
Adjectives	prosperous tremendous sincere	rich big true

Note that *building* is more informal than *construction*, so is *tell* in relation to *inform*. That, however, does not mean that they are used only in informal situations or contexts.

Here are more examples. Pay attention to the italicized words:

(2a) He *claimed*: “This dish is the most delicious one.”

(He is probably a gourmet.)

(2b) He *said*: “This dish is the most delicious one.”

(We cannot tell who he is. He is probably just a diner.)

(3a) The president made an *oration* yesterday.

(It is a formal and solemn public speech.)

(3b) He gave a *talk* yesterday.

(It is quite informal.)

1.2 General and specific words

Words can be **general** or **specific**. **General** words are used to show general ideas, while **specific** words provide more detailed and precise information about what they refer to.

In the following we can see how ideas or objects can be expressed by either general or specific words:

	General	Specific
Nouns	tree fruit profession	oak, pine, cypress, poplar apple, banana, pear, grape, orange teacher, policeman, doctor, tailor
Verbs	take kill go	capture, seize, grasp, grip, clasp shoot, slay, stab, poison, strangle walk, stroll, saunter, step, pace, run
Adjectives	good red big	honest, responsible, correct, efficient pink, crimson, carmine, scarlet large, huge, enormous, tremendous
Adverbs	well	satisfactorily, thoroughly, correctly, clearly

It is easy to see that the specific words on the right are much more concrete and vivid than the general ones on the left. But that does not mean that general words are useless. When we want to give a general picture of something or an event, for instance, we normally use general words; but if we want to draw a detailed picture of something or an event in order to impress the readers, specific words are preferred. For example:

(4a) John *entered* the classroom.

(4b) John *ran into* the classroom.

These sentences are both good sentences, depending on the writer's purposes in particular situations. If we just want to tell the reader that John came into the classroom, Example (4a) is good enough. If, however, we want to tell the reader that he came into the classroom in a hurry — probably when the bell was



ringing, then Example (4b) is preferred.

Examine the following pairs of sentences:

(5a) He *put* the book on the desk.

(It does not matter how he did it.)

(5b) He *threw* the book on the desk.

(We know how he did it and can guess that he was probably angry.)

(6a) I saw Mary enter a *house*.

(It is not important what kind of house it was.)

(6b) I saw Mary enter a *bungalow*.

(We can visualize the house.)

(7a) *Scientists* report seeing snow leopards which were believed to be extinct years ago in the Himalayas.

(It is not important to know what kind of scientists they are.)

(7b) *Biologists* report seeing snow leopards which were believed to be extinct years ago in the Himalayas.

(We are told what kind of scientists they are.)

(8a) She is *laughing*.

(We just know she is happy.)

(8b) She is *giggling*.

(We know the exact way in which she laughs.)

From these examples we can see that general words and specific words serve different purposes. General words just tell us what happens without focusing on the details, whereas specific words focus on the manner in which something is done. In other words, specific words are more accurate and vivid.



2. Use of Proper Words in Proper Places

Many people try to commit to memory as many words as possible because they think that they will be able to write good English if they have a large vocabulary. In writing, they tend to use big, pompous words which they have just picked up in their reading. The resulting compositions, of course, often sound very strange, because many words are out of place.

J. Swift, a great writer, once emphasised the idea that the true definition

of style is proper words in proper places. We have seen that words can be formal, informal or neutral, and that they can be general or specific. All these words are good words as long as they are used properly. If, on the other hand, they are used improperly, the sentences we write cannot be good English ones. Such faulty sentences may be due to the following reasons.

2.1 Use of formal words in informal situations and vice versa

Use of formal words in informal situations and vice versa will make sentences sound ridiculous. Let us look at the following examples:

(1) —Hi, Rose!

—Hi, Jack! How about coming to my home tomorrow? I'll *extend a warm welcome* to you. ①

It is evident that it is a dialogue between two close friends. The expression *extend a warm welcome* is too formal to be used on such an informal occasion. In this dialogue, *You are welcome*, would be more appropriate.

(2a) We will *give* you a discount of 3 percent if you *give* us *money* for the goods in 15 days.

If this sentence were in a formal business letter, the informal words *give* and *money* would make it sound a bit too casual. They should be replaced by more formal words like *offer* and *payment*:

(2b) We are happy to *offer* you a discount of 3 percent on the total value when *payment* is received within 15 days of *delivery*.

2.2 Misuse of general or specific words

We have shown that words can be general or specific, and that general words focus on the main idea whereas specific ones on details. Unfortunately, some learners of English tend to use general words where specific words are required, and vice versa. Let us look at the following example:

(3a) I am very happy because I have met a *person*.

When we read Example (3a), we might wonder why the narrator feels happy, because it does not tell us what kind of person he met. The meaning

① Starred sentences are considered incorrect or improper ones.



will be clearer if the general word *person* is replaced by a more specific term:

(3b) I am very happy because I have met an *old friend whom I haven't seen for years*.

On the other hand, general words may be more desirable if we only want to draw a general picture. For example:

(4) In arranging business meetings with *people* outside the company, it is often wise to confirm in person or by telephone.

(5) We should protect wild *animals*.

Here in Example (4), the writer uses the general word *people* since it is not necessary to say what kind of people it refers to. As a matter of fact, the writer is referring to all business associates outside the company. Similarly, in Example (5) the writer uses *animals* instead of *pandas* or *tigers*, which would exclude other animals.

2.3 Use of ambiguous words

Needless to say, words themselves are not ambiguous, but they may give rise to ambiguity or confusion if they are not used properly. For example:

(6a) He told my father that *he* was wrong.

We cannot figure out who was wrong from this sentence, since the second *he* can refer either to the subject of the main clause or its object, i. e. *my father*. So the sentence has two possible interpretations, depending on the context of situation:

(6b) He *admitted that he* was wrong and told it to my father.

(6c) He pointed out that *my father* was wrong.

Let us look at another example:

(7a) Tom asked Mike when *he* should come to *his* house.

We may be confused as to who should come to whose house. Its meaning will be clear if it is changed into:

(7b) Tom asked Mike when *he* should come to *Mike's* house.

In short, it is important that we use proper words in proper places. In doing so, we must keep it in mind that which words are proper is determined not by the words themselves, but by the situation, context, or the writer's

purpose.

3. Further Tips for the Choice of Words

Having discussed the importance of using proper words in proper places, we should now try to answer the question: “How should we use words properly?” In general, there are three basic “rules” in the choice of words.

3.1 Be accurate

The first rule for the use of “proper words in proper places” is to be accurate, which means that we should use words which express exactly what we mean.

3.1.1 The “translation method”

When writing compositions, many Chinese students formulate Chinese sentences first, and then translate them word for word into English. This often results in extremely unnatural or even incorrect sentences. The English word *crowded*, for instance, can be translated into “拥挤” in Chinese. So, since we often say “交通很拥挤” in Chinese, Chinese students tend to write sentences like:

(1a) The traffic is very *crowded*.

This sentence is incorrect because *crowded* and *traffic* normally do not go together in English. If we want to use the word *crowded*, we will have to say:

(1b) The road is very *crowded*.

If we want to keep *the traffic*, then we will have to say:

(1c) The traffic is *heavy*.

Take another example:

(2a) Every student went to see the film yesterday *besides* me, because I was ill.

The writer thought the word *besides* was equal to the Chinese phrase “除了”, but he did not know *besides* means “as well as” or “in addition to”. If we want to express the meaning “but not” or “not including”, then the word *except*



will have to be used:

(2b) Every student went to see the film yesterday *except* me, because I was ill.

(3a) *Although* she is very young, *but* she knows a lot.

This is a very typical Chinglish (Chinese English) sentence, because in Chinese “虽然” and “但是” are a correlative coordinator, whereas in English *although* and *but* are mutually exclusive — we can use either of them, but not both:

(3b) She is very young, *but* she knows a lot.

(3c) *Although* she is very young, she knows a lot.

To avoid such mistakes, we should try to learn more about English grammar and to think in English. When we are expressing an idea in English, we should try to forget Chinese and ask ourselves “How do English or American people normally express the idea?” instead of formulating a Chinese sentence first and translating it into English.

3.1.2 Scope of meanings

To be accurate in writing, we should be aware that many English words have at least two or more meanings. Let us take the English word *fresh* for example:

(4a) You can buy *fresh* fruits and vegetables in the market.

(not spoiled in taste)

(4b) He bathed and put on *fresh* clothes.

(clean, unused)

(4c) She always seems *fresh*, however much work she's done.

(healthy and vigorous)

From these examples, we can see that the meaning of the word *fresh* varies from sentence to sentence. Here are more examples.

(5a) He forced a *passage* through the crowd.

(a narrow way, opening)

(5b) He was too poor to afford the *passage*, and so he will have to work his *passage* by doing jobs on the ship.

(the cost of a long journey by ship or aircraft)

(5c) The old bridge is not strong enough to allow the *passage* of heavy vehi-