

北京大学英语系教材系列

北大 英文写作教程

〔美〕黛安娜·M. 考夫曼 编著 Diane M. Coffman

A Peking University Coursebook on
English Exposition Writing



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北京大学英语系教材系列·英语专业适用

A Peking University Coursebook on English Exposition Writing
北大英文写作教程

[美]黛安娜·M.考夫曼 编著
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This book is dedicated to the hardworking and devoted students of China, who have captured my heart and opened my eyes and mind.

(On behalf of her beloved students , who graciously contributed their writings , Ms . Coffman is donating a portion of the proceeds from the sale of this book to the China Charities Federation for educational advancement in China .)

Preface(前言)

With over five thousand years of history replete with conflict and struggle to sustain life, yet stalwart in dedication to family and commitment to purpose, wrapped in hearts so pure in intent, China is an enigma. Only until recently have more than just a few outsiders had the opportunity to experience this mysterious land. However, traveling China's vast terrain and studying its incredible history do not provide the true picture of the charming and magnificent place that is China. What makes China beautiful is her people.

As a Foreign Expert and teacher in China, teaching at Peking University, Tsinghua University, the National Judges College, and South China University of Technology, I have had the opportunity to share ideas and feelings with, be challenged by, and learn from, the remarkable young people of China. What has impressed me most is not their intellectual ability—which is impressive—but their optimism and sense of humor, particularly in light of the struggles they endure. These are the people to tell about China. Their anecdotal glimpses of life provide the real story of what is China.

My students have written essays about life in China to fulfill the writing assignments in my English Writing class. By reading their essays, I have gained new insights into the culture of China. Seeing China through my students' eyes has given me a new perspective as a foreigner in China, and also as a human being on this earth. I thought I was the teacher; yet through them I became an Unexpected Student.

From me they learned the essential techniques and components of good exposition writing, as outlined in this book. From them I learned about their ancient and modern cultures, their views on the outside world, their sensitive feelings on life, their dreams, their struggles, and their triumphs. I think I received the better education.

A Peking University Coursebook on English Exposition Writing is an ESL (English as a Second Language) textbook on college exposition writing. However, it is more than that. In addition to providing excellent examples of exposition writing, this book provides a look at China through the pure hearts, hope-filled eyes, and brilliant minds of China's greatest asset—her students.

By Diane M. Coffman
(Foreign Expert, Peking University
and Associate, Brigham Young
University China Teachers Program)

Introduction(简介)

A Peking University Coursebook on English Exposition Writing focuses on exposition writing for ESL (English as a Second Language) writing courses. It discusses the techniques and components of good exposition writing and illustrates them through examples written by students at China's top university, Peking University. The selection of examples used in this book is intended to provide topics of interest to students while demonstrating good writing.

It is assumed that the reader already has an understanding of good English grammar and sentence and paragraph structure. If not, many textbooks can be used to review these areas of writing. Once that is done, a more detailed look can be made into the techniques used for exposition writing and the components that make up a good exposition essay.

One element of good exposition writing is having a thorough understanding of other writing types. This is important because other writing types may be combined with exposition writing to clarify the purpose of the essay. For example, if the exposition essay's purpose is to compare and contrast two similar items, e.g., the cultural differences between China and the United States, then Definition writing may be used to define the abstract nature of the word "culture", Description writing may be used to give a sensory description of certain aspects of each cul-

ture, Illustration writing may be used to show poignant examples of comparison, Narration writing may be used to chronicle a series of events in the process of the comparison, and Persuasion writing may be used to convince the reader of the contrasts between the two cultures. *A Peking University Coursebook on English Exposition Writing* takes a look at these other writing types, separately and in combination, to provide the student with a better understanding of these building blocks for exposition writing. Because many of the book's selected writing examples combine writing types, the layout is presented by topic. An index is provided at the back of the book indicating the writing types used.

The Purpose of Exposition Writing

Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, Tenth Edition, defines exposition writing as "writing designed to convey information or explain what is difficult to understand." Therefore, the main purpose of Exposition Writing is to **explain***; to increase the reader's knowledge on a subject; to help the reader better understand a concept or process. Although other writing types may be combined to add greater dimension and purpose to the essay, the underlying premise is still to explain something to the reader in a clear and logical manner.

Exposition writing is perhaps the type of writing most frequently used by a student, a scientist, or a professional. An exposition essay explains or explores something, such as the process of making a machine, the causes of a natural or social phenomenon, the planning of a project, or the solution to a problem. It mainly deals with processes

* 文中这样的字体表示作者的强调。——编者注

and relationships, and may explain how something is made, how it is used, how it may change, how it effects or compares with something else, its nature, its classification, or its significance in history.¹

To become better at writing exposition essays, a student should understand and apply the essential techniques and components of good exposition writing.

Essential Techniques of Exposition Writing

The essential techniques for good Exposition Writing are:

- * Recognize the importance of style and word choice
- * Remember rules for good sentences and paragraphs
- * Use transition words and phrases
- * Understand the “Building Blocks” writing types
- * Use critical thinking in reading and writing
- * Have a strong thesis statement
- * Select the internal structure of the essay
- * Follow the steps of the writing process
- * Follow rules for document structure

Essential Components of Exposition Writing

The essential components for good Exposition Writing are:

- * A meaningful TITLE
- * A focused INTRODUCTION section
- * A thorough DEVELOPMENT section
 - With a logical Internal Structure
- * A summarizing CONCLUSION section
- * Cited REFERENCES (if sources are used)

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Part I Essential Techniques of Exposition Writing (英文写作的基本技法)

1. Recognize the Importance of Style and Word Choice (文体与遣词)

What is writing style? Basically, it is the author's voice presented through words. Therefore, the choice of vocabulary, order of words within a sentence, and emphasis through punctuation can affect the style of the essay. These elements set the tone and should reflect the author's purpose for writing the essay, and should consider the reader, or audience, of the essay.

The author's purpose—In addition to explaining, the author's purpose in writing an essay may be to inform, to persuade, to describe, to illustrate, to define, to analyze, or to entertain. No matter what the author's purpose may be, there is one important purpose in college essay writing: to demonstrate how well the student thinks and understands the material. In college essay writing, the writer needs to show clear, logical thinking, not just present a "good idea."²

The audience—Who is going to read the essay? What is his or her educational and language level? What message is he or she to receive from reading the essay? What words are best suited to convey the message to the reader? These questions should be answered by the writ-

er when planning to write an essay. After all, what is the point of writing, if it isn't to be read?

When selecting words to use in an essay it is important to remember the four levels of Diction³:

- 1) **Formal**—Highly educated audience: ceremonial, scholarly or technical purpose.
- 2) **Standard**—Educated audience: college papers, mass publications, business communications, and many other writing purposes.
- 3) **Informal**—General audience: spoken rather than written situations, personal letters, conversational and entertaining purposes.
- 4) **Slang**—Specific audience: used to enhance the writing through dialogue essential to the character, such as in novels; or to build connections between members of a specific group or generation.

In exposition writing, a Standard level is most commonly used, with occasional uses of Formal or Informal depending on the nature of the writing. Slang should seldom, if ever, be used for exposition writing unless the essay is about slang language. It is also important to note that Formal writing does not mean the most formal word should be used; i. e., multi-syllabic, Latin-form, or pretentious. The best approach is to use the word that conveys the most accurate meaning. Exposition writing, even when technical in nature, should use common language for its primary word choice. Following are some examples of common wording, which are recommended instead of the pretentious wording.

Pretentious Wording

in regards to
utilize
elucidate
prior to
because of the fact that
of the opinion
ascertain
commence

Common Wording

concerning; about
use
explain
before
because
believe
find out
begin

Eloquent versus Practical Style

Eloquent writing style uses abstract words, similes and metaphors. Practical writing style uses words that are concrete and specific. Because much of exposition writing is academic, a practical writing style is preferred. How can you tell if you are using a practical style? A good rule to follow is:

RULE: Descriptive words and phrases should be accurate; and the word choice should be Standard/Common language; and the sentence structure should follow the standard word order of:

Subject → Predicate

Adjective → Object

Adverb → Verb

and

The Subject Noun should be able to actually do what the Verb says.

* Example of Eloquent Style: *As the hungry mountain daffodils drank the mother's milk of newly fallen dew upon the earth's*

barren soil, they reached their arms upward and turned their yellow faces to the nurturing sun, whilst dancing in the cool breezes from the ocean below.

Why is this example eloquent in style? Well, daffodils, which are flowers, do not really drink and they do not have arms and faces and they do not dance; mother's milk is not an accurate descriptive phrase for dew—the moisture that condensates in the air at night; *whilst* is the poetic (not common language) form of the word while.

* Practical Style: The mountain daffodils absorbed needed moisture from the recent dewfall. They grew in the warm sunlight while swaying in the ocean's cool breezes.

* Another example of Eloquent Style: *The moon hung like a silvery ball over the mountains majestic, its glow bathing all within its grasp in a shimmering light.*

Why is this eloquent? The verb "hung" is an eloquent description of the moon's action—the moon orbits and it shines but it doesn't really hang and it doesn't have hands to grasp. Also, the sentence structure used is eloquent because the adjective "majestic" is placed after the object it modifies—"mountains." Practical writing style uses standard sentence structuring which places the adjective before the word it modifies, i. e., majestic mountains.

* Practical Style: The snow-capped mountains shimmered in the light of the full moon.

Why is the word "majestic" replaced with "snow-capped"? So the reader knows what it was that shimmered in the moon's light. The word "majestic" is not specific enough for practical style. Words such as *wonderful, beautiful, lovely, superb, awful, ugly, different,*

better, something, sometimes, and phrases such as *a lot of* and *a few*, are general and vague; they can be perceived differently by each reader and are, therefore, abstract. Practical style requires the use of specific, concrete words. For example, instead of writing "The weather today is beautiful," write "The weather today is clear and crisp." Be specific. When using adjectives (descriptive words) in writing, ask yourself, "Why is the Object . . . (your choice of adjective)?" In this case, "Why is the weather beautiful? Because it is clear and crisp." If you can answer why, then use those words instead of your first choice of adjective.⁴

【Exercises】

Improve the following sentences by identifying any general or abstract words or phrases and replacing them with specific words:

- 1) After the crazy party, the boys' dormitory was unsanitary.
- 2) The basketball team won a lot of games last season.
- 3) The situation called for quick action by the rescue crew.
- 4) Something in the air of the room reminded me of my grandmother's house.
- 5) Although the girl was meek as a lamb, she presented her speech superbly.

Frugal Use of Words

In exposition writing the writer needs to be frugal when choosing words. The fewer the words used to make your point the better. Treat each word as if it will cost you money to use it. Spend wisely. Strunk and White said it best:

"Vigorous writing is concise. A sentence should contain no