

The Guide and Practice of English Writing

英语

写作指导



实践手册

◇主编 侯天真

 北京理工大学出版社
BEIJING INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY PRESS

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英语写作指导与实践手册

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图书在版编目 (CIP) 数据

英语写作指导与实践手册 / 侯天真主编. —北京: 北京理工大学出版社, 2005.9

ISBN 7-5640-0615-3

I. 英… II. 侯… III. 英语—写作—自学参考资料
IV. H315

中国版本图书馆 CIP 数据核字 (2005) 第 103869 号

出版发行 / 北京理工大学出版社

社 址 / 北京市海淀区中关村南大街 5 号

邮 编 / 100081

电 话 / (010)68914775(办公室) 68944990(批销中心) 68911084(读者服务部)

网 址 / <http://www.bitpress.com.cn>

电子邮箱 / chiefedit@bitpress.com.cn

经 销 / 全国各地新华书店

印 刷 / 北京圣瑞伦印刷厂

开 本 / 787 毫米 × 960 毫米 1/16

印 张 / 23.25

字 数 / 410 千字

版 次 / 2005 年 9 月第 1 版 2005 年 9 月第 1 次印刷

印 数 / 1 ~ 5000 册

定 价 / 38.00 元

责任校对 / 张 宏

责任印制 / 王 军

图书出现印装质量问题, 本社负责调换

前 言

当前国家英语课程改革对英语语言教学理论和实践提出了更高的要求。我国从事英语写作教学研究队伍也在逐渐壮大。很多英语教师深切体会到英语写作在整个英语学习中的重要作用,特别是通过写作过程教学法的应用,我们进一步认识到,写作实践不仅能使学生习得语用规则、了解不同的语言与文化差异,还能使学生通过写作过程有条理地组织他们学过的语言知识,创造性地应用语言技能,切实提高书面运用语言的能力。

为便于学生在写作实践中学习和查找并掌握这些内容,我们编写了《英语写作指导与实践手册》这本教材。本教材汇集了大量写作知识和例句,还编入一些写作实践活动指导。本书第一部分全部是英文讲解,适用于英语专业学生用原文去理解、掌握写作的不同体裁、语言形式和语篇结构,也为他们提供了灵活多样的语言技巧,扩大了语言选择思路。第二部分是相应的汉语解释,便于公共外语或其他英语学习者参考。

全书内容包括最基本的选词、段落发展、基本写作类型到实际生活中常用的各种类别的实用文。所选内容主要来源于原文写作类书籍和因特网。内容广泛、新颖,有助于学生熟悉和了解各类语体特点,查找常用的写作语言知识,提高书面交际能力。集体编写此书是我们的一次尝试,难免存在许多不足之处,我们诚挚地希望英语界同行,对本书提出宝贵意见和建议。

编 者

2005年8月

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Part I: English Version

Unit One

Choice of Words

A master of language knows what words really mean, and where they come from; knows when to use big, important words and when to use the shorter, equally important simple ones. The study of words, of their origins and shifting meaning, can tell us a great deal about these questions. It is estimated that the average Englishman today has a vocabulary range from 12,000 to 13,000 words. It is good to make your vocabulary as complete as you can, but a great deal can be said and written with a vocabulary of no more than 10,000 words. A foreign language student learning writing should learn how to control and command over the words he really knows. As a saying goes "A good carpenter is not distinguished by the number of his tools, but by the craftsmanship with which he uses them". So a good writer is not measured by the extent of his vocabulary, but by his skill in finding words that drive home his point firmly and exactly. So it can follow that a good student who learns foreign language writing should be defined by his or her choice of words that will be most useful and most often used in order to express himself appropriately and flexibly.

I. The Right Usage of Words

Anyone who wishes to become a good writer should endeavor, before he allows himself to be tempted by the more showy qualities, to be direct, simple, brief, vigorous and lucid.

The great H. W. Fowler got it right almost 100 years ago:

Prefer the familiar word to the far-fetched.

Prefer the concrete word to the abstract.

Prefer the single word to the circumlocution.

Prefer the short word to the long.

Prefer the Saxon word to the Romance.

This general principle may be translated into practical rules in the domain of vocabulary as follows:

1. Prefer the Familiar Word to the Far-fetched, for the familiar are more likely to be readily understood.

Reform converses with possibilities, *perchance* with impossibilities; but here is a sacred fact. — Emerson. (perhaps)

The din of the stall-holders crying their wares, of donkey-boys and porters clearing a way for themselves by shouting vigorously, and the would-be *purchasers* arguing and bargaining is continuous and makes you dizzy. — Advanced English. (buyers)

Witchcraft has been put a stop to by Act of Parliament; but the mysterious relations which it *emblemized* still continue. — Carlyle. (symbolized)

It will only have itself to thank if future disaster rewards its *nescience* of the conditions of successful warfare. — Outlook. (ignorance)

Continual vigilance is imperative on the public to ensure. . . — Times. (We must be ever on the watch)

"I have no particular business at L - - -," said he, "I was merely going *thither* to pass a day or two." — Borrow. (there)

The shop-keepers speak in slow, measured tones, and the buyers, overwhelmed by the *sepulchral* atmosphere. . . — Advanced English. (atmosphere of death)

2. Prefer the Concrete Word to the Abstract

Use words with a precise meaning rather than those that are vague, for they will obviously serve better to make your meaning clear and they are more likely to have a precise meaning. The reason for preferring the concrete to the abstract is clear. Your purpose must be to make your meaning plain. Now, if, as we have seen, even such concrete words as *ship*, *gold* and *money* have a penumbra of uncertainty round them, an incomparably larger one surrounds all abstract words. If you use an abstract word when you might use a concrete one you are handicapping yourself in your task, difficult enough in any case, of making yourself understood.

Unless these wagons can be moved the position will soon be reached where there will be no more wagons to be filled. (Unless these wagons can be moved there will soon be no more wagons to be filled. . .)

The general poverty of explanation as to the diction of particular phrases seemed to point in the same direction. — Cambridge University Reporter. (It was perhaps owing to this also that the diction of particular phrases was often so badly explained)

An elementary condition of a sound discussion is a frank recognition of the gulf severing two sets of facts. — Times. (There can be no sound discussion where the gulf sev-

ering two sets of facts is not frankly recognized)

The signs of the times point to the necessity of the modification of the system of administration. — Times. (It is becoming clear that the administrative system must be modified)

No year passes now without evidence of the truth of the statement that the work of government is becoming increasingly difficult. — Spectator. (Every year shows again how true it is that. . .)

The first private conference relating to the question of the convocation of representatives of the nation took place yesterday. — Times (on national representation)

There seems to have been an absence of attempt at conciliation between rival sects. — Daily Telegraph. (The sects seem never even to have tried mutual conciliation)

3. Prefer the Single Word to the Circumlocution.

Use no more words than are necessary to express your meaning. For if you use more you are likely to obscure it and to tire your reader. In particular do not use superfluous adjectives and adverbs and do not use roundabout phrases where single words would serve, e. g.

Inaccuracies were *in many* cases due to cramped methods of writing. — Cambridge University Reporter. (often)

Few candidates showed a thorough knowledge of the text of I Kings, and *in many cases the answers* lacked care. — Ibid. (many answers)

The matter will remain in abeyance until the Bishop has had time to become more fully acquainted with the diocese, and to ascertain which part of the city will be most desirable for *residential purposes*. — Times. (his residence)

M. Witte is *taking active measures for the prompt preparation of material for the study of the question of the execution of the Imperial Ukase dealing with reforms*. — Times. (actively collecting all information that may be needed before the Tsar's reform Ukase can be executed)

The Russian Government is at last face to face with the greatest crisis of the war, *in the shape of the fact that* the Siberian railway is no longer capable. . . — Spectator. (for) or (:)

Mr. J - - O - - has *been made the recipient of* a silver medal. — Guernsey Advertiser. (received)

His industry, perseverance and determination ultimately brought him *a rich harvest*. (a great success)

4. Prefer the Short Word to the Long.

"Short words are as good as long ones, and short, old words — like sun and grass and home — are the best of all. More small words than you might think can meet your needs with a strength, grace and charm that large words don't have. Big words can bog down: One may have to read them three or four times to make out what they mean. Small words are the ones we seem to have known from the time we were born, like the hearth fire that warms the home. Short words are bright like sparks that glow in the night, moist like the sea that laps the shore, sharp like the blade of a knife, hot like salt tears that scald the cheek, quick like moths that flit from flame to flame, and terse like the dart and sting of a bee."

— Richard Lederer

On the left side are some phrases that use three, four, five, even six words where fewer (on the right) will do:

I came to the realization that — I realized that

She is of the opinion that — She thinks that

The quotation is supportive of — The quotation supports

Concerning the matter — About

During the course of — During

For the period of a week — For a week

In the event that — If

In the process of — During, while

Regardless of the fact that — Although

Due to the fact that — Because

The fact that — That

Inasmuch as — Since

If the case was such that — If

It is often the case that — Often

In all cases — Always

I made contact with — I called, saw, phoned, wrote, emailed

At that point in time — Then

At this point in time — Now

Prior to — Before

Some other examples to show the power of short words:

One of the most important reforms mentioned in the rescript *is the unification of the*

organization of the judicial institutions and the guarantee for all the tribunals of the independence necessary for securing to all classes of the community equality before the law. — Times. (is that of the Courts, which need a uniform system, and the independence! without which it is impossible for all men to be equal before the law)

I merely desired to point out *the principal reason which I believe exists for the great exaggeration which is occasionally to be observed in the estimate of the importance of the contradiction between current Religion and current Science put forward by thinkers of reputation*. — Balfour. (why, in my opinion, some well-known thinkers make out the contradiction between current Religion and current Science to be so much more important than it is)

— Sir, will you permit me to *homologate* all you say today regarding that selfish minority of motorists who... — Times. (agree with)

On the Berlin Bourse today the prospect of a general strike was cheerfully *envisaged*. — Times. (faced)

The very act of stepping on this soil, in breathing this air of Hiroshima, was for me a far greater adventure than any trip or any reportorial *assignment* I'd previously taken. — Advanced English. (task)

I see that small group of *villainous* man, who plan, organize — Advanced English. (evil)

5. Prefer the Saxon Word to the Romance.

Believe it or not, more Saxon (Germanic) words are familiar to English-speaking people than those based on words from Romance languages like French and Italian. The English language has developed from an **Anglo-Saxon** base of common words:

- 1) Household words: bower, yard, stool, floor
- 2) Parts of the body: hand, foot, arm, eye, ear, chin, heart, bone
- 3) Common animals: horse, mare, sheep, lamb, deer, swine, hen, dog, bear
- 4) natural elements: land, mead, meadow, field, ford, earth, wood, hedge, hill, sun, moon, day, month, year
- 5) Other words: black, long, fresh, swift, glad, many, young (adj.); drive, abide, choose, climb, step, burst, know, sleep, weave, think, deal, wound, buy, gather (verbs), etc.

The vocabulary of English is the largest of any language. Even with many borrowings the heart of the language remains the Anglo-Saxon of Old English. Only about 5,000 or so words from this period have remained unchanged but they include the basic building

blocks of the language: they are the back stone of the English language. Grafted onto this basic stock was a wealth of contributions to produce, what many people believe, is the richest of the world's languages.

Shakespeare once said "Brevity is the soul of wit". In foreign language writing, students should learn to choose words carefully, and beware of the thesaurus, check the dictionary. And skip pretentious words; there's nothing wrong with big words, but you'll get your point across in a straightforward manner if you use direct, precise language.

Try to be familiar with the following pairs of words:

Instead of . . .	Consider	Instead of . . .	Consider
accede to	grant, allow	accompany	go with
accomplish	do, achieve	accordingly	so, therefore
accumulate	gather, get, have	additional	more, added, other
additionally	and, also	adjacent to	close to, near, next to
administer	manage	advantageous	useful, helpful
advise	tell, recommend	afforded	given
aggregate	total	allocate	give, divide, set aside
alter	change	alteration	change
alternative	other, other choice	anticipate	expect
append	attach	apprise	tell, inform
approximately	about, almost, roughly, around	ascertain	find out, learn, determine
assist	help	assistance	help
attain	reach, become	attempt (verb)	try
biannually	twice a year	calculate	work out, figure
category	kind, class, group	cease	end, stop
cognizant of	aware of, know	commence	begin, start
commencement	beginning, start	commitment	promise
communicate	write, tell, talk	compensation	pay, payment
complete (verb)	finish, fill out	comply with	follow, meet
component	part	comprise	consist of, contain
conceal	hide	concept	idea
concerning	about, on, for	concur	agree
consequence	result	consequently	so, therefore
consolidate	combine, join	constitute	make up
construct	build, make	contiguous to	next to, bordering on
currently	now (or cut it)	customary	usual

decrease (verb)	reduce, lower	deem	consider, think, treat as
defer	delay, put off	demise	death
demonstrate	show, prove	depart	go, leave
designate	appoint, name, choose, set	desire	wish, want
desist	stop	detain	hold
diminish	lessen, reduce	discontinue	stop
disseminate	send out, distribute	donate	give
duration	time, rest	effectuate	carry out, bring about
elapse	pass	elucidate	explain, clarify
employ	use	employment	work, job
encounter	meet, face, run into	endeavor (verb)	try
ensure	make sure	entitled to	has a right to
enumerate	list, name	equivalent	equal, the same
evince	show	exclude	leave out
exhibit (verb)	have, show	expedite	hasten, speed up
expend	spend	expenditure	payment, expense, cost
expiration	end	facilitate	make easier, help
following	after	formulate	work out, devise
forward (verb)	send	frequently	often
furnish	give, provide	hence	so, therefore
however	but	identical	same
illustrate	show	impact (verb)	affect, influence
implement	carry out, begin, start, create, set up	inception	start, beginning
indicate	say, show, suggest	indication	sign
individual (noun)	person	inform	tell
initial	first	initiate	begin, start, set up
inquire	ask	institute	begin, start, set up
interrogate	question	locate	find, place
magnitude	size	maintain	keep, continue, support
manner	way	maximum	most, largest, greatest
modification	change	modify	change
necessitate	require	necessity	need, requirement
notification	notice	notwithstanding	despite
numerous	many	objective (noun)	goal, aim

obligate	bind, compel, require	obligation	debt, duty, responsibility
observe	see, watch, follow, obey	obtain	get
obviate	avoid	occasion (verb)	cause
occur	happen	ongoing	continuing, active
opt for	choose	optimum	best
option	choice	parameter	limit, boundary, guideline, condition
participate	take part	per annum	a year
personnel	people, staff	peruse	read with care, review
per year	a year	place (verb)	put
portion	part	possess	have, own
preclude	prevent	preferable	best, better, preferred
premises	place, property	prescribed	set, required
present (verb)	give	previous	earlier, last, past
previously	before, earlier	principal	main, chief
prior	earlier	proceed	go, go ahead
procure	buy, get	promulgate	make, issue, pass
provide	give, send	provided that	if
purchase (verb)	buy	pursuant to	under
receive	get	regarding	about, on, for
reimburse	repay, pay back	remainder	rest
render	make, give	represents	is, makes up, stands for
request (verb)	ask	requisite (adjective)	needed, required
reside	live	respond	answer, reply
responsible for	causes, has charge of	retain	keep
selection	choice	Semiannually	twice a year
similar to	like	Solely	only
specified	named, set out	submit	present, send, offer
subsequent	later	subsequently	later, afterwards, then
sufficient	enough	summon	send for, call
terminate	end, stop	thus	so
transmit	send	transpire	happen
utilize	use	visualize	think of, imagine

In addition to using appropriate words to convey your ideas, you will want to think about the voice and style in which you present your ideas. Think about your reader and

the most convincing approach to that reader as you put your ideas into writing. Present those ideas as persuasively as possible.

Exercise 1

Replace the italicized words with simple, everyday words or expressions:

1. The *pungent* odour of sulfuretted hydrogen resembles that of rotten eggs. ()
2. As you approach it, a tinkling and banging and clashing begins to *impinge* on your ear. ()
3. I cannot recall when I have had such a *sumptuous* Thanksgiving feast. ()
4. The cactus has adapted to survive in an *arid* environment. ()
5. When Edward VII *abdicated* the British throne to marry the woman he loved, he surprised the entire world. ()
6. Although we were *encompassed* by enemy forces, we were cheerful for we were well stocked and could withstand a siege until our allies joined us. ()
7. The police noticed some *discrepancies* in his description of the crime and did not believe him. ()
8. The 1906 San Francisco earthquake was a *catastrophe* that destroyed most of the city. ()
9. Deep in her book, Nancy was *oblivious* to the noisy squabbles of her brother and his friends. ()
10. Times of economic hardship inevitably encourage the *proliferation* of countless get-rich-quick schemes. ()
11. Freddy was so overwhelmed by the *profusion* of choices on the menu that he knocked over his wine glass and soaked his host. ()
12. For many years an unheralded research, Barbara McClintock gained international *renown* when she won the Nobel Prize in Physiology and Medicine. ()
13. Because we were running out of time, the lecturer had to *abbreviate* her speech. ()
14. On the castle battlements, an *apparition* materialized and spoke to Hamlet, warning him of his uncle's treachery. ()
15. Mark refused to *concede* that she was right. ()

Exercise 2

Simplify the structure:

1. We will file the appropriate papers *in the event* that we are unable to meet the deadline.
2. *Due to the fact that* the guest of honor is ill, the party is being postponed until next Saturday.
3. Rarely should the doctor *give a patient an estimate of how many months or years he or she will live*.
4. The administrative secretary *is responsible for monitoring and balancing* the budgets for travel and contract services.
5. *There is another module that tells the story of Charles Darwin* and introduces the theory of evolution.
6. *Thermography, which is* a new method of breast cancer detection, records heat patterns on black and white or color-coded film.
7. *The town of New Harmony, located in Indiana*, was founded as a utopian community.
8. *Susan's stylish jeans, made of leather*, were too warm for our climate.
9. *When visitors come to visit her*, she just stares at the wall.
10. In Biology 10A *you will be assigned a faculty tutor who will be available to assign you eight taped modules and help you clarify any information on the tapes*.

II. Language Style Versus Word Style

Many people have difficulty developing an effective style, however, because they think that a good style is either a magical gift that one acquires at birth or the result of learning a set of infinitely complex rules. Neither of these impressions is correct. Style is a matter of decisions — bad or good — that can be made about every word one uses; style is therefore something that one can think rationally about, and something that one can learn. What one learns, however, is not merely a collection of arbitrary rules (though rules are of considerable importance); it is, instead, the habit of making conscious choices according to rational principles.

1. Style in FL writing

Understanding formal and informal styles.

A familiar analogy to compare our language to our clothes in this respect may help us understand the language style better: for formal occasions we dress up; for informal occasions we dress down, suiting our dress to the situation. The analogy is still valid, but in an age which seems to be rejecting formalism, our ideas of what is appropriate for formal oc-

casions are beginning to change. Although we still recognize a formal situation, we treat it with more freedom than formerly, both in our dress and in our language. Much serious writing is cast in informal English these days, rather than in the stricter usage of formal English. Sometimes they have not a clear division between them.

Formal English is now chiefly reserved for serious newspapers, textbooks, scholarly work, formal lectures, official documents, speeches by important people and legal and other official documents designed to be impressive. They are fancier than conversational English: They may include archaic or legalistic expressions; they will admit of no slang or contractions. Their grammar is traditional, their sentences long.

A familiar sample of formal English:

We hold those truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal; that their Creator endows them with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed; that, whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or abolish it, and to institute new government, laying its foundation on such principles, and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness.

— The Declaration of Independence

The following is a personal letter from Dr. Samuel Johnson to Lord Chesterfield, who had denied Johnson's earlier request for financial help at the beginning of Johnson's writing career:

Seven years, my lord, have now passed since I waited in your outward rooms or was repulsed from your door; during which time I have been pushing on my work through difficulties, of which it is useless to complain, and have brought it at last to the verge of publication, without one act of assistance, one word of encouragement, or one smile of favor. Such treatment I did not expect, for I never had a patron before...

Is not a patron, my Lord, one who looks with unconcern on a man struggling for life in the water, and when he has reached ground encumbers him with help? The notice, which you have been pleased to take of my labors, had it been early, had been better kind. But it has been delayed till I am indifferent, and cannot enjoy it; till I am solitary, and cannot impart it; till I am known, and do not want it.

I hope it is not very cynical asperity not to confess obligations where no benefit has