硕士博士研究生英语系列教程

中科院研究生英语教学改革与学科建设系列教材

中国科学院
研究生英语写作教程

主审 连 先
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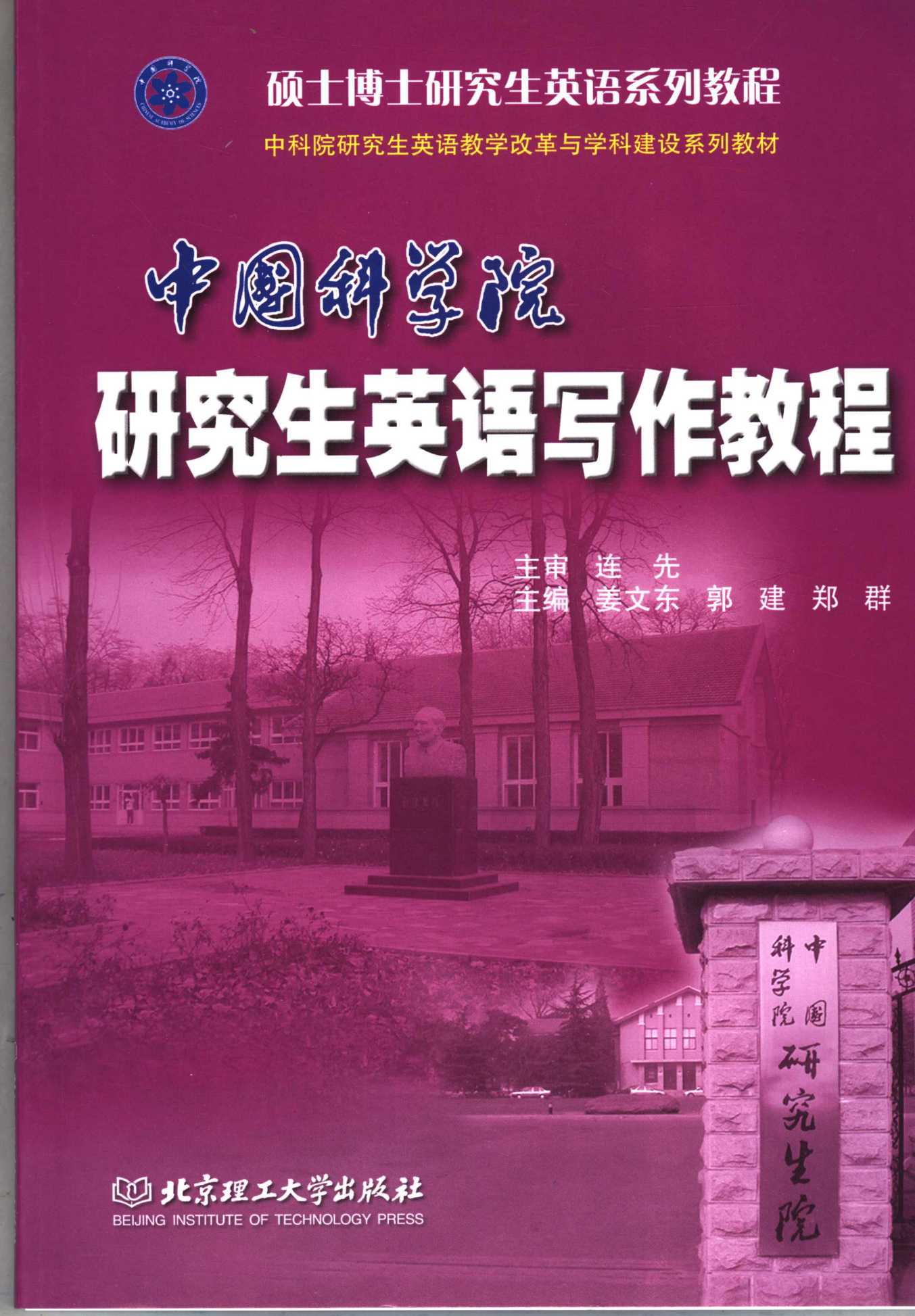

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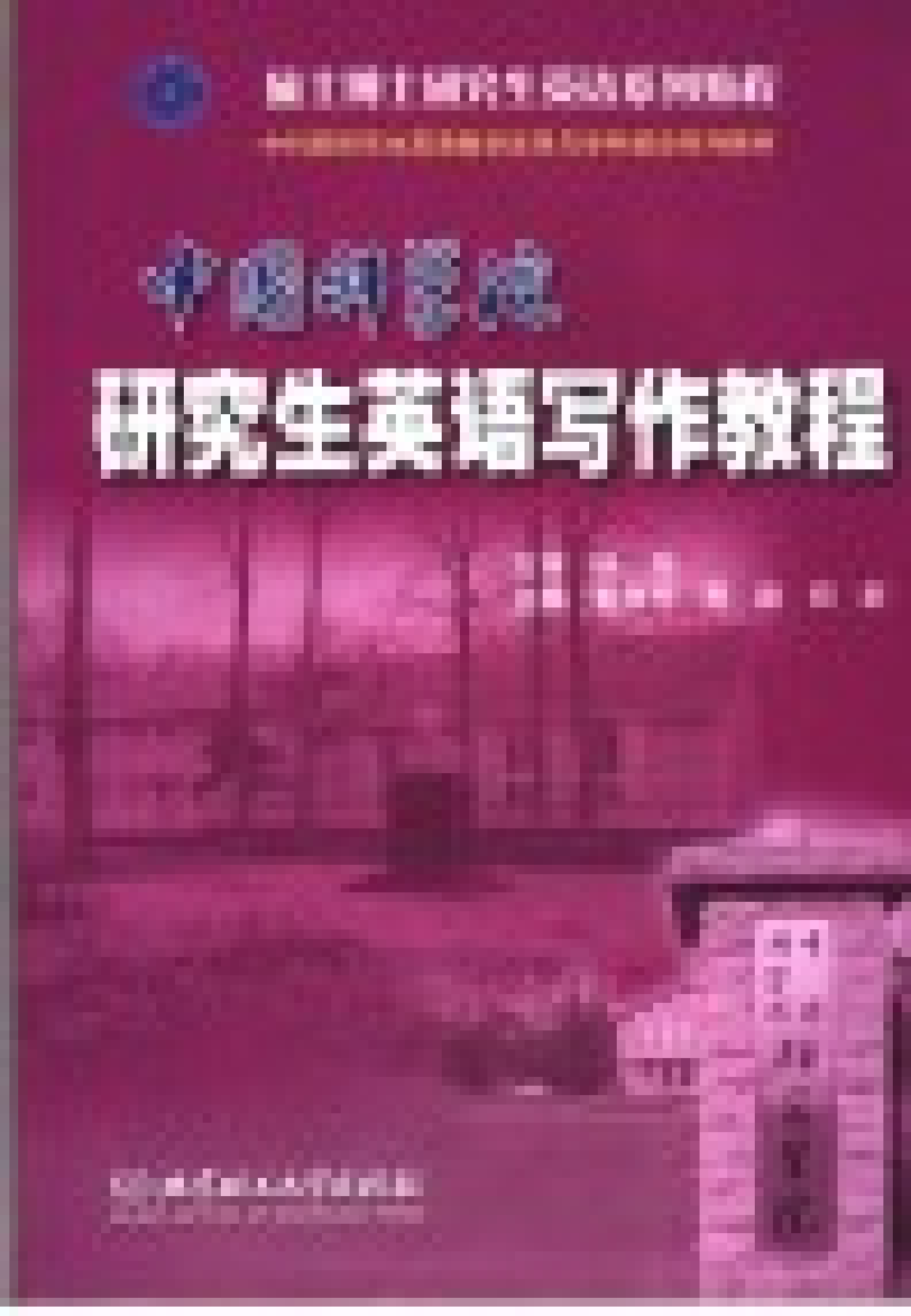

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北京理工大学出版社
BEIJING INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY PRESS

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图书在版编目(CIP)数据

中国科学院研究生英语写作教程/姜文东,郭建,郑群主编. —北京:北京理工大学出版社,2006.8
(硕士博士研究生英语系列教程)
ISBN 7-5640-0674-9

Ⅰ. 中…　Ⅱ. ①姜…②郭…③郑…　Ⅲ. 英语-写作-研究生-教材　Ⅳ. H315

中国版本图书馆 CIP 数据核字(2006)第 039998 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 / chiefeditor@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×1092 毫米　1/16
印　　张 / 14
字　　数 / 289 千字
版　　次 / 2006 年 8 月第 1 版　2006 年 8 月第 1 次印刷
印　　数 / 1~6000 册　　责任校对 / 郑兴玉
定　　价 / 18.00 元　　责任印制 / 李绍英

图书出现印装质量问题，本社负责调换

前言

随着对外交流机会的增多，写作的重要性日趋凸显。而写作能力作为一种产出能力（productive skill），无论对于教师还是学生都是比较棘手的任务。为了给教师提供一本比较系统的英语写作教材，同时帮助研究生阶段的英语学习者提高英语写作技能，我们精心编写了这本《中国科学院研究生英语写作教程》（A Writing Course for Graduate Students in CAS）。

此书以篇章写作为主，兼顾单句表达，共分六章。第一章为基础写作技能，包括措辞、语法、标点符号和修辞手法。第二章为句子写作，包括基本句型、句子扩展、句式变化和常见错误。第三章为段落写作，包括定义、写作原则和结构。第四章为六种不同体裁的写作，包括描写文、论说文等。第五章为学术论文写作。第六章为实用文体写作。此外，本书还提供了20篇范文供学生参考。

本教程的显著特点体现在以下几个方面：

一是针对性。本教程的编写充分考虑了中科院研究生的特点，并融合了作者的写作教学经验，如学术论文写作一章详细讲解了摘要和开题报告的写作方法，以求对学生在撰写论文时有所帮助。

二是实用性。本教程在讲解后还配有针对性练习，使学生能够巩固所学的技能，避免常见错误，更好地掌握英语写作技巧。

三是系统性。本书自成体系，涵盖了从句子写作到各种体裁的写作方法以及应注意的问题。该书不仅可作为中科院研究生英语写作教材，也可供其他院校研究生和同等程度读者使用，同时也可为从事写作教学的教师提供参考。

四是创新性。除了讲解中分析的精彩篇章，书后附有的范文为学习者提供了丰富的语言素材，以利学生模仿。

值得指出的是，语言学习不同于其他课程，有其自身的规律。英语写作能力需要知识的积累和技能的训练，需要一个熟能生巧的过程。因此，编者衷心希望读者在使用本教材的同时，能够进行大量的阅读、模仿和记忆，保证足够的语言输入（input）。这样，才会有高质量的产出（output），进而有效地提高写作能力。

本书在编写过程中曾参阅国内外多种教材，包括网上的一些写作材料，书后附有参考书目，收录了编者参阅的国内外出版物及网站。另外，本书的编写也得到外语系领导的关心与支持，李晓棣教授为本书提出了宝贵建议，连先教授在百忙之中审阅了书稿，在此一并表示感谢。

囿于编者的学识和水平，虽经努力，疏漏之处难免，尚祈专家读者不吝指正。

编　者

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Chapter One

Basic Writing Skills

1.1 Diction

Diction is the choice and use of words. Using words correctly is one thing; using words effectively or appropriately is quite another. Every time you write or speak you choose from thousands and thousands of words that make up the English language. In the spoken medium, diction is often imprecise, but we can clarify or emphasize our meaning with the help of facial expression, bodily gesture, tone of voice, and the like. In the written medium, however, we do have the leisure to search for a precise word, and we are not available to the reader who may want or need more specific information than our words supply. Generally speaking, the written medium requires that words we choose be as exact, as specific, and as unequivocal as we can make them. Consulting a thesaurus or a dictionary that discriminates the meanings of synonyms will frequently yield the word that conveys our intended meaning precisely. So in the course of writing, we should weigh our words because the study of diction is an essential part of a writing course.

1.1.1 Levels of words

From a stylistic point of view, English words can be divided into three general categories: **standard, nonstandard** and **substandard**. They are defined and subdivided as follows:

Categories	Definitions	Levels
Standard English	English generally accepted	Formal Common Colloquial

to be continued

Categories	Definitions	Levels
Nonstandard English	Used only by special groups of people, not part of the standard vocabulary	Slang Dialect
Substandard English	Widely used, not in the speech or the writing of educated people	Illiteracies

1) Formal words

Formal words may also be called learned words, or literary words, or "big" words. They mainly appear in scholarly articles, official documents, formal letters, and scientific writing. Most of them have been borrowed from Latin, French, and Greek. They are seldom used in daily conversation, except for special occasions such as the court.

Our age is retrospective. It builds the sepulchers of the fathers. It writes biographies, histories, and criticism. The foregoing generations beheld God and nature face to face; we, through their eyes. Why should not we also enjoy an original relation to the universe? Why should not we have a poetry and philosophy of insight and not of tradition, and a religion by revelation to us, and not the history of theirs? Embosomed for a season in nature, whose floods of life stream around and through us, and invite us, by the powers they supply, to action proportioned to nature. Why should we grope among the dry bones of the past, or put the living generation into masquerade out of its faded wardrobe? The sun shines today also. There is more wool and flax in the fields. There are new lands, new men, new thoughts. Let us demand our own works and laws and worship.

In this paragraph there are quite a few formal or learned words, such as **retrospective, foregoing, beheld, revelation, embosomed,** and **worship**. There are also long sentences. Long sentences and formal words are appropriate here because the paragraph, which discusses a complex question, needs them to be theoretically clear and exact.

2) Common words

In English, a great part of the total vocabulary consists of words which are common to the speech of educated and uneducated speakers alike. These words are the basic elements of the language. They are indispensable to everyday communication and appear in all kinds of writing. They are called **common words**. For example:

When I was a kid, and reading every fiction book in the local library, I used to wonder exactly how the future would happen. By that I don't mean what the future would be *like* — science fiction already told me that — but rather how we'd actually get there. Science fiction books seemed to agree, for example, that in the future there would be no money — all transactions would be made via identity cards and centralized computers. But that seemed dubious to me: how, I wondered, are you going to get everybody to give up money in the first place?

In this paragraph, except one or two colloquial words like **kid**, and one or two formal words like **transactions** and **dubious**, all the other words are commonly used words. The sentences are short and simple. Such vocabulary and sentence structure fit the content of the paragraph, as it describes the thoughts of a child.

3) Colloquial words

A much broader category of informal expressions is the category of colloquial language. Colloquial words are used mainly in informal speaking and writing, but they must be carefully limited in composition of a serious nature. The following are typical colloquial words: **guy, exam, math, sure, a kid, kind of** and **a lot of**.

4) Slang words

Slang words are highly colloquial and widely used in very informal conversation. They are particularly popular with high school and college students. Most slang words and phrases usually pass out of use quickly. The following slang words will serve to make clear what slang is: **broke** (no money), **cuckoo** (crazy), **dumbbell** (stupid person), **lousy** (bad). Sometimes, if the slangs can't be used appropriately, they will make the speakers or writers sound offensive or funny.

On hearing that his grandfather had kicked the bucket, we felt sad and sent him an e-mail letter to express our sympathies.

The use of "kicked the bucket" doesn't really sound sympathies at all. So you should be careful in using slangs.

5) Dialectal words

Dialectal words are specific to certain areas of the country, but have not gained wide acceptance. For example:

We have coffee, tea, milk, or **tonic** (a beverage). (New England dialect)

6) Illiteracies

Illiteracies occur for the most part in the speech of the uneducated. They are ungrammatical expressions usually not listed in the dictionary. For example:

We ain't coming. (We are not coming.)

When you write, you should remember to suit your diction to the occasion. Formal words mainly appear in formal writing, and seldom in informal writing; common words can be used in all kinds of writing; colloquial words are mainly used in informal writing, and seldom used in formal writing unless for some special purpose or effect. As a foreign language learner, your best choice will be common words and should avoid "big words", colloquial words, slang words, dialectal words and illiteracies. Furthermore, the style of your writing should be consistent.

1.1.2 General and specific words

Specific words identify individual items in a group (*grape, orange, apple*), while general words relate to an overall group (*fruit*). Specific and general are also relative terms, since a word may be specific compared with one word, and general compared with another. *Professionals*, for instance, is more general than *scientists, doctors, teachers, lawyers, journalists*, etc. But *scientists* may be called a general word when compared with *physicists* or *chemists*, which, in turn, is more general than *biochemists*.

To gain exactness and clarity in your writing, try to use specific rather than general words. Specific words help to make writing clear, exact, vivid and striking, for they are more informative and expressive than general words. Compare each head word with the more specific words listed below:

General words	Specific words
boat	liner, yacht, cruiser, canoe, speedboat
laugh	smile, beam, grin, giggle, chuckle, snigger, titter
walk	drag, stroll, stride, stagger, limp, stumble, trot, tiptoe
beverage	tea, coffee, milk, yogurt, fruit juice, beer, wine, cold beverage
plant	tree, pine, evergreen, bush, vegetable, herb, flower, grass, weed
sport	team sport, running, fishing, hunting, racing, ice sport, aquatic sports

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It is easy to see that the specific words are much more concrete and colorful than the general ones; they seem to make the reader see, hear, or feel what the writer wishes to describe.

The words you choose should enable your reader to create a clear image of what you are discussing. Using specific words should go along with providing details, and then there will be effective and impressive writing. Examine each of the following sentences:

1) A car was parked in the street.
2) Some children stood anxiously at the counter.
3) A man was standing at the corner.

Can you get a clear mental picture from each sentence? Do the words give you the details you need? The problem with these sentences is the use of general words. Examine the following sentences and see if you can create clearer images:

1) A shiny red Mercury convertible was parked against the pavement.
2) Four little mischievous children in ragged blue jeans stood with their dirty faces pressed against the candy counter.
3) A tall, thin farmer in faded trousers and a battered straw hat was leaning against the mailbox on the corner of Main Street and First Avenue.

Note: Abstract and general words enable us to express ideas. Specific words enable us to define entities. Both types of words are indispensable, and the accomplished writer can take advantage of both — move back and forth between the language of ideas and the language of specific and concrete descriptions.

1.2 Grammar

1.2.1 Subject-verb agreement

The fundamental rule of **subject-verb agreement** is that verbs must agree with, or match, their subjects. For example:

1) The roast chicken tastes like duck. (singular subject and verb)
2) The vegetables taste fresh. (plural subject and verb)

There are several types of subject-verb agreement:

1) Indefinite pronouns

Indefinite pronouns, such as **everyone** and **everybody**, may be used as plural forms by some

writers, but in standard English they are always singular — and followed by a singular verb. For example:

1) Everyone associated with the project is proud to be part of the effort.
2) Someone has to be responsible.

Don't be confused by phrases that come between the subject pronoun and its verb phrases that may contain plural words.

Each of the project partners is responsible for writing a chapter summary.

2) All, some

Verbs that accompany pronouns such as **all** and **some** will be determined by whether the pronoun is referring to something that is **countable** or not. For example:

1) Some of the students in the cafeteria have voted already.
2) Some of the grain was ruined by the flood.

3) None

None is usually regarded as singular, but it can be used as a plural form.

None of the representatives has indicated how he or she will vote.
***Or*:** None of the representatives have indicated how they will vote.

4) Fractional expressions

With fractional expressions (fractions or decimal equivalents), the verbal forms will be determined by what is being measured: whether it is **countable** or **uncountable**.

1) Two-fifths of the **grain** is ruined.
2) One-half of the **students** were convinced that there would be no final exams this year.

5) Together with, along with, and **as well as**

Phrases, such as **together with**, **along with**, and **as well as,** seem to join subjects, but they do not work the same as the word "**and**": they are not conjunctions. For example:

1) Some of the hay in the barn, as well as some major pieces of farm equipment, was ruined in the flood.
2) The major spending bill before Congress, together with some other bills that are awaiting action, is going to cost taxpayers plenty.

6) Either, neither

In formal writing, when **either** or **neither** appears as a subject alone (without using **or** or **nor**), they are singular. This is true even though the subject seems to be two things. For example:

Neither of these choices appears to be satisfactory.

When **either** or **neither** acts as correlative conjunction, the subject that is closer to the verb determines the form of the verb. For example:

1) Neither the principal nor the teachers are at fault.
2) Either the employees or the manager has to be responsible for the year-end festival.
3) Has either the president or his aides been in touch with you?

7) Expletive construction

When a sentence begins with an **expletive construction** (**there is**, **there are**, **here is**, etc.), the subject (which determines the form of the verb) comes after the verb. For example:

1) There are several explanations for the Civil War.
2) If the management team takes this attitude, there is very little latitude for negotiation.

1.2.2 Pronoun-antecedent agreement

A pronoun usually refers to or replaces a noun or a pronoun previously mentioned and the previously mentioned noun or pronoun is called antecedent. A pronoun and its antecedent should agree in number (*singular or plural*), person (*first*, *second*, *or third*), and gender (*masculine*, *feminine*, or *neuter*).

1) Indefinite pronouns as antecedents

The indefinite pronoun antecedents such as ***anyone***, ***anybody***, ***anything***, ***each***, ***everyone***, ***everybody***, ***everything***, ***someone***, ***somebody***, ***no one***, ***nothing*** and ***nobody*** are always singular. The following examples are the errors that the students make in their writing assignments:

Wrong: If anybody happen to call while I am out of the office please have them leave a message for me.
Correct: If anybody happens to call while I am out of the office please have him or her leave a message for me.

***Wrong*:** Each customer is expected to know exactly what **they** are getting before **they** sign on the document.

***Correct*:** Each customer is expected to know exactly what **he or she** is getting before signing on the document.

Indefinite pronouns such as ***all, any, most, none***, and ***some*** can take either singular or plural pronouns, depending on their meaning in the sentence.

Some of the customers complain that **they** are not happy with the way **they** have been treated in that restaurant.

Some of the food served in that restaurant is left over from the day before, so **it** tastes stale.

2) Antecedents joined by conjunctions

When antecedents are joined by conjunctions such as ***or, nor, either … or, neither … nor, both … and, not only … but also***, the pronoun agrees with the antecedent which is closer.

Neither Professor John Smith **nor** Professor Mary Allhouse has come to pick up **her** ticket for the party yet.

3) Collective noun antecedents

Collective noun antecedents such as ***family, team, jury, audience, class, association***, and ***committee*** use a singular pronoun when they act as a unit and use a plural pronoun when they refer to individual members.

The Board of Directors is confident of **its** plan to increase the company's market share by 20% by the end of the year.

The Board of Directors couldn't reach an agreement among **themselves** whether **they** should implement the plan to increase the company's market share by 20% by the end of the year.

1.2.3 Pronoun reference

Clear pronoun reference, namely, to which noun or pronoun a pronoun refers to, is also very important. Unclear and ambiguous pronoun reference can be confusing to readers. For example:

Wrong: Jane told Mary that **she** was right about the new student in their school.
(Who was right? The antecedent of "she" could be either "Jane" or "Mary", thus the ambiguity occurs.)
Correct: Jane told Mary, "**You** were right about the new student in our school."
Or: Jane told Mary, "**I** was right about the new student in our school."

1) Remain consistent in using pronouns

Remember that if you're referring to *you*, or *we*, or *I*, or *one*, try to remain **consistently** within the same case.

***Wrong*:** In Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, **we** find the narrator to be one of the few successful characters in terms of moral development. However, even the narrator, **you** soon realize, is seriously flawed.
***Correct*:** In Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, **we** find the narrator to be one of the few successful characters in terms of moral development. However, even the narrator, **we** soon realize, is seriously flawed.

2) Avoid ambiguous pronoun references

When a pronoun refers to more than one possible antecedent, the reference is ambiguous.

***Wrong*:** John walked with Bob because **he** did not know where the college's bookstore was.
(The antecedent of **"he"** could be either "John" or "Bob".)
***Correct*:** John didn't know where the bookstore was, so Bob walked with him.

3) Avoid vague pronoun references

Pronouns like *this, that, which*, and *it*, can be confusing if the antecedents they refer to are not made clear.

***Wrong*:** The movie *Titanic* is about man and nature, the rich and the poor, and the love story between a young man and a young woman. I like **this** enormously.
(Does *this* refer to the movie or its different themes?)
***Correct*:** The movie *Titanic* is about man and nature, the rich and the poor, and the love story between a young man and a young woman. I like **it** enormously.
***Or*:** The movie *Titanic* is about man and nature, the rich and the poor, and the love story between a young man and a young woman. I like **this** mixture of themes in a movie enormously.

4) Left-out pronouns

Another problem some students have is leaving out a pronoun necessary to complete a sentence. In some languages, you may leave out a subject pronoun if the subject is clear. In English, the subject pronoun can never be left out.

Here are examples of sentences with pronouns incorrectly left out.

1) Is important to find a regular place to study every night. (**"It"** is left out at the beginning of the sentence)
2) It is cold outside, and that is why is necessary to dress warmly. (**"it"** is left out after "why")
3) Check your brakes to make sure are good enough for the trip. (**"they"** is left out after "sure")

1.3 Mechanics

1.3.1 Capitalization

The rules of capitalization are quite extensive and depend somewhat on the context in which the words are used. The basic rules of capitalization are:

(1) to begin a sentence (including every quoted sentence), an outline or a table of contents.

Because human nature is seldom as simple as it appears, hasty judgments are therefore often wrong.

(2) to capitalize the first word of a direct quotation.

He said, "My trip to Mount Tai was interesting but tiring."

If a quoted sentence is broken into two parts and put in two pairs of quotation marks, the second part does not begin with a capital letter unless the first word of it is a proper noun or an adjective derived from a proper noun:

"My trip to Mount Tai," he said, "was interesting but tiring."

When the quotation is not full in meaning, no capitalization is needed.

They said they were "very hospitable."

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