



郝钦海 编著

# 英语写作的 文体与修辞

*The Rhetoric and Style of English Writing*



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**The Rhetoric and Style of  
English Writing**  
**英语写作的文体与修辞**



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## The Rhetoric and Style of English Writing

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# 前 言

在多年从事英语写作教学的实践中，我们常常感到随着学生英语水平的不断提高，困扰他们英语写作的主要问题不再是表面上的语法问题，对他们来说，用英语写作最大的问题在于掌握的语言材料不够丰富，运用语言材料的能力还不够纯熟，因此，还不能用英语将思考的问题表达清楚。有些基础较好的学生能写出没有重大语病的文章，但是读他们的文章，总感到缺少英语味道。无论从文章的结构安排，还是到语言的遣词造句，总摆脱不了母语文化思维的影响。学生对如何改进自己的英语作文常常觉得非常困惑，无从下手。

我们认为，学生对英语语篇、文体与修辞方面知识的欠缺是制约他们提高写作水平的重要因素之一。作为教师，我们应该根据学生的实际需要，给予有效的指导，以提高他们英语写作的文体与修辞意识，使他们能较快地掌握英语写作谋篇与遣词造句的技巧。针对这种情况，本书将写作技巧和英语文体与修辞知识融为一体，旨在提高学生的谋篇和遣词造句能力，从而解决长期困扰他们的难题。

本书的主要特点：

一、先进的理念和新颖的角度。本书以当代语言学、文体学和写作修辞学的理论为指导，借鉴和吸收了此领域的部分研究成果，并与写作技巧紧密结合起来，同时采取灵活的方式，引导学生在更高的层次上，从文体和修辞的角度，领悟英语写作的要领，进而掌握写作技巧。

二、循序渐进、重点突出。本书循序渐进、由浅入深，从基础的遣词和造句能力入手，进而挖掘段落和篇章层次上的英语文体和修辞特点，

从普通英语写作到学术和商务写作，环环紧扣，合为一体。同时，每个章节自有特点，重点突出，自成体系。

三、语料充分地道、模仿性强。为提高学生的英语语篇、文体和修辞意识，本文选编了大量的英文原文作为范文和例句，可供学生学习和欣赏，同时有助于培养学生正确的英语语感。

四、同时兼顾学术性和实用性。本书即是一本学术论著，同时也可作为英语学习者的辅导书。它包含了英语写文体与修辞知识的研究成果，可为大学生、研究生以及英语自学者提供写作指导，适用范围广泛。

全书共分八章，首先是英语写作概述，第二、三、四、五、六章分别介绍英语措词、造句、段落和篇章层次上的写文体与修辞知识。第七、八章分别介绍英语学术写作和实用商务英语写作的技巧和知识。为了帮助读者更好地理解 and 掌握书中有关的概念和技巧，每个章节后面都附有思考和练习题。

在编写过程中，本人得到了多方面的支持与帮助。2005年至2006年，作为学术访问者，我有幸在英国剑桥大学进行学术研究。在此期间，阅读了大量的有关著作，旁听了相关课程，收集了一些最新资料，并将一些笔记和资料整理成书。在此，要特别感谢剑桥大学的霍金教授、艾利盛女士和苏珊女士的大力帮助。

本书得到首都经济贸易大学精品教材项目的资助。最后要感谢我的家人和朋友，他们的默默奉献和支持，是我写作的动力和源泉。

望读者多提宝贵意见！

郝钦海

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

The language of the culture, which largely means its written language, defines what we know and do as a human community. Language is not the world, but in a way it's more important because language alone allows us to make sense of the world. Without language all our science, technology, and philosophy and most of our art would instantly go dark. Language is so closely bound up with our everyday experience that we seldom stop to think of the roles it plays. In a well-known passage in his *lives of the English Poets*, Dr. Johnson says that 'language is the dress of thought', and it has become commonplace to quote this in support of the view that conscious thought is behind all language, and language is primarily used to 'dress up' thoughts and send them on their way: give substance to thoughts. We are often told that language exists for the expression of thoughts or ideas. It was what made us human, what we were born for.

Writing is a very important means of communication for us to express our ideas and thought. It is also an indispensable skill for most desirable jobs, and good writing helps you succeed in them. You don't have to believe this lofty claim to improve your writing. Do it for purely practical reasons, but don't be surprised to find your life and thinking changed as well.

However, it is usually a problem for us, English learners, to express our ideas appropriately with the language in a natural, proper and standard way, especially in our written work. So this book is intended to highlight the different aspects of English writing by dealing with the languages at word level,

sentence level and textual level, resulting in the good understanding of English writing as well as the specific features of English language.

## **1.1.The nature of writing**

Writing is a two way process of communication. Like all communication it is not just a way of recording information; it involves both the sending and the receiving of information and it is a way of communication with other people. Good writers picture their readers and try to appeal to them directly. Readers in turn read between the lines, to get a sense of the person “talking” to them, almost as if they were listening to actual speech.

In all forms of communication there are a number of constants, features that we have to pay attention to if we are going to get our message across effectively. Participants need to be aware of the situation in which they are trying to communicate. This involves: people, subject matter, time and place, and purpose.

There are two and more people involved in the communication. We have to think about how well we know our audience and so how informal we can afford to be, as well as how much we can take for granted about their knowledge and language skills. Awareness of audience is very important in writing, which involves audience that is unknown and unseen. Whether this audience consists of one reader (for a letter) or several million readers (for a newspaper), the writer still has to keep the audience in mind.

Besides we have to choose the right language to deal with the subject matter we are discussing. The subject matter we are writing about has important effects on the language we use. We need to be precise, and to use the correct terminology required by the subject. On the other hand, we have to try not to use language that is too difficult for our audience; to confuse or irritate them with jargon; or to offend them by being too blunt or too coy. We also need to avoid excessive use of clichés.

The actual setting in which we are communicating can affect the way in which we do so. On different occasions the way in which we address and the language we use are different. Time and place affect the language we use and

the messages we give to each other. We need to be aware of this, especially of how particular situations and institutions tend to determine what we feel we can and cannot say and write.

Every communication has a purpose, and many have more than one. It is important to keep our purpose in mind if we wish to communicate effectively. Is it to inform, to enquire, to interact, to influence, to regulate, to entertain, to record, or some combination of these? Being aware of our purpose can help us decide our overall approach and select the most suitable vocabulary, sentence structures, and style.

## 1.2. A good writer

It follows that a good first step to become a good writer is to become an attentive reader yourself. Reading with your eyes open to style allows you to see how other writers achieved an effective result, and this is an essential step toward developing into a good writer yourself. It helps to notice choices other writers have made, so that when you are reading over something you've written or trying out variations on a phrase in your head you'll have a better sense of what worked for them and therefore may work for you.

Just as good speakers are aware of the effect that their words are having and can modify what they say accordingly, so too good writers are aware of their readers. Different situations may call for different approaches. Writing a formal report for a business client has completely different requirements to a text message to a friend.

Good writers think about who their readers are. They are able to recognize the sort of communication that is required, understand what their readers' expectations of that communication will be and adapt their approach accordingly.

So focus on our readers' needs and concerns. Provide the information that we think our audience will need to know. Focus on what they want to know. Include information about what our readers can expect and how it will affect their daily lives. Because the readers of a document are often unseen and unknown, it can sometimes be difficult to satisfy their requirements completely. However, an awareness of the existence and expectations of readers will usu-

ally go a long way towards pleasing most of the people most of the time, even if we cannot please all of the people all of the time.

Being aware of the reader is a key to good writing, but there are also other factors to take into account. In order to produce effective writing, the writer has to be able to deploy a range of language skills: a wide vocabulary enables the writer to select exactly the right word for the occasion; an understanding of the basic rules of spelling and grammar helps the writer to set out the message clearly and with no opportunity for misunderstanding; an awareness of the traps that writers can fall into helps to avoid using words that might irritate, confuse or enrage the reader. All of this constitutes the writer's competency.

A good writer also needs to understand about the process of writing. The best results are rarely achieved simply by picking up a pen and keeping going to the end of the page. It will pay dividends to think about some of the techniques that can help to create good writing: how to set about writing a document in a methodical way, how to arrange what we have to say in the most effective manner, and what tricks we can use to make sure that our readers remain engaged and entertained from start to finish.

Finally, we have seen that a good writer has to adapt to the particular requirements of the situation. This means that a good writer will be familiar with the conventions surrounding a range of different types of writing that he/she may have to face in the real world, and what the requirements of each type of writing are.

There are, therefore, a number of different elements that go into becoming a good writer. However, as a useful summary of the criteria for good writing, you can memorize the five Cs. These are simple and easily remembered criteria of good writing. Put simply, good writing should be:

**Correct** writing involves making sure that we write according to the rules of standard English.

**Consistent** writing involves making decisions about how we are going to present information and sticking to these decisions throughout the document.

**Clear** writing involves making sure that our writing can be understood by the people who will read it. This involves using words that will be understood, and presenting information in a straightforward structure so that our readers know what is going on.

**Complete** writing involves presenting all of the relevant information, including explanations of anything that might be unclear.

**Concise** writing involves getting to the point quickly and not wasting our readers' time with irrelevant information.

Paying attention to the five Cs will keep us in good shape whatever it is that we are writing. We shall have cause to remind ourselves about them at various occasions in this book.

### 1.3. Good writing

Good writing expresses a clear point, is tightly structured, grammatically and syntactically correct, substantive, and interesting.

**To express a clear point** means to convey the writer's main idea or—in the case of descriptive writing—the significance of the object, place or person described; in other words, an attentive reader should be able to grasp the writer's purpose.

**To be tightly structured**, writing should contain logical or associative connections and transitions which clearly express the relationship of the ideas described.

**To be grammatically and syntactically correct**, writing should adhere to the rules of Standard English, including proper punctuation and spelling. If writers choose to use unconventional syntax, they should be able to justify their choices.

**To be substantive**, writing should convey the impression that the writer is informed about the subject. The writer need not be an authority on the subject but should demonstrate awareness of its significance and its implications within a specified context. Informed writing might include any or all of the following: citations of authorities, experiential evidence, discussion of debatable issues related to it, and relevant questions it raises.

**To be interesting**, writing should engage its readers through original insights and precise, unclipped language expressed in a "human" voice. It should demonstrate the writer's awareness of the specific audience for whom she or he is writing (the audience's degree of knowledge of the subject as well as its age, ethnic background, gender, and assumptions).

# Chapter 2

## Diction

### 2.1. A world of words

Words are the basic units writers work with. When we talk about people who are good writers, we sometimes say that they are ‘good with words’ or that they ‘have a way with words’. So one of the most important qualities for a writer is a decent stock of words to draw on.

Broadly speaking, there are two kinds of words: those we can choose and those we cannot choose.

#### **Words we cannot choose**

The words we cannot choose are words such as *the*, *of*, *and*, *to*, *a*, *in*, *that*, *it*, *I* and *was*. These are the nuts and bolts of language, the ‘grammatical’ words everyone is so familiar with that nobody even notices them. They make up most of the language we use. (In fact, it has been estimated that the ten words mentioned account for about a quarter of everything we write and say.) They occur all the time in everyday use, and people rarely have problems with them, but it is not possible to say very much just using these words.

#### **Words we can choose**

However, there are other words that name and describe things and actions, and provide the ‘content’ in language. These words occur less frequently in everyday situations. It is possible to speak English perfectly well without using many of them at all, and we might need to look some of them up in a dictionary to check the meaning. It is a command of these sorts of words

that gives us a good vocabulary. Although we don't need to use these words when we write, the bigger our stock of words is, the more things we can achieve.

The two types of words might be compared to the mortar and stones used for building a wall. The stones might vary in size and shape, and some builders might use a lot of small stones where others might choose a few larger ones, but whatever their size and shape they need to be fitted together with skill, and it is the mortar of 'grammatical' words that binds them together.

Many of the words that we can choose have a particular register. They are used in some types of writing but are not suitable for other types. When we are thinking about using a word, it is important that we have a clear picture of the register of the word. Is the word going to make our writing sound stuffy? Or light-hearted? Or old-fashioned?

Words grow out of life and history. Some knock around for centuries, changing as the world changes. Other words, just as interesting and often more lively, seem to have been invented yesterday. Here are some examples: *Sepia* was once a kind of ink obtained from cuttlefish, then a brownish color resembling this ink, then a brownish print produced by an early photographic process. Decades later the word became the title of a popular magazine for African Americans. Spanish, French, and English *silo* (from Latin *sirus*, which was based on an earlier Greek original) meant an underground pit for storing grain and fodder until above-ground silos became common at the end of the progressive nineteenth century. But when people needed a name for underground storage cylinders for guided missiles, *silo* won out, regaining some of its subterranean resonance. A *fuzzy elevator* is run by a computer that guesses how many people are waiting on a given floor. A *cross functional* employee's job has been stretched to cover for a colleague laid off in a spasm of corporate *downsizing*.

Many English words echo thousands of years of human history, offering endless shades of meaning and color. The more you know about the history, weight, and meaning of words the more words you'll get right. Believe Mark Twain: "*The difference between the right word and the almost-right word is the difference between lightning and a lightning bug.*"



## 2.2. Types of diction in writing

Your **diction**, the exact words you choose and the settings in which you use them, means a great deal to the success of your writing. While your language should be appropriate to the situation, that generally still leaves plenty of room for variety. Skillful writers mix general and particular, abstract and concrete, long and short, learned and commonplace, connotative and neutral words to administer a series of small but telling surprises. Readers stay interested because they don't know exactly what's coming next.

### Formal and informal words

English offers a huge range of language choices suited to various audiences and subjects. At its stuffiest, **formal English** features an elevated diction appropriate for special purposes, such as convention speeches, commencement addresses, and liturgical solemnities. In formal English, opponents are *dastardly*; “goodbye” may be *godspeed*; and church services are *liturgical solemnities*. But formal English can also sound exactly the right note in serious circumstances. Consider Franklin Roosevelt's characterization of the bombing of Pearl Harbor as “a date which will live in infamy,” not ordinary language, but perfect as a measured response to the onset of war. **Informal** or **colloquial English** is the diction of everyday speech. Contractions are okay, as are shortened forms like TV and L.A. for Los Angeles. People get *hitched*; lovers get *ditched* because somebody *snitched*. Still more informal are slang and dialect words like *into* in “She's into Yoga” (slang) and regionalisms like *you' ns* (dialect).

Certain words are generally used in formal writing, such as legal documents or academic essays, whereas others are restricted to more informal writing such as personal letters or e-mails. In the table below, the words in the left-hand column would be appropriate in more formal writing, whereas those in the right-hand column would be more appropriate for informal writing:

Formal words	neutral words	informal words
appropriate	steel	pinch
circumspect	cautious	cagey