



普通高等教育“十五”国家级规划教材

英语学术论文 写作

Writing
English Research Papers
A Handbook for English Majors

主审 秦秀白

主编 刘涛波



高等教育出版社
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The Authors

June 2004

Introduction

A research paper may be a term paper for a university course, a published article in a journal, and a thesis or a dissertation as a partial requirement for a university degree. It is usually a lengthy documented report that focuses upon an academic topic and it is intended to inform the audience in the relevant field about the research topic, purpose, methods, results (findings), conclusions, and recommendations.

A research paper expresses the author's understanding of the topic based on experiments, facts, data and analysis. It is objective rather than subjective although the author's personal values, insights, and experiences have a great influence on the whole process.

A research paper is usually made up of the following parts:

1. Title page
2. Acknowledgements (optional)
3. Outline (optional)
4. Abstract
5. The text of the paper (introduction, body, and conclusion)
6. Notes (optional)
7. Works Cited
8. Appendix (optional)

The Chinese undergraduate students who major in English are comparatively weak when undertaking academic research and writing. Some are virtually ignorant of the basic rules and standards of writing academic research papers. It is with this in mind that the authors venture to write this handbook to help Chinese students of English to familiarize themselves with the basic steps, skills and techniques in writing a research paper. Emphasis is placed on explaining the accepted practice in the MLA (Modern Language Association) style and on illustrating the formats of citation and documentation. More specifically, this handbook consists of the following parts:

Chapter I, Negotiating a Topic, introduces some of the most popular ways and techniques among the students to work out a topic.

Chapter II, Narrowing Down the Research Topic, elucidates frequently

used techniques for narrowing down a research topic.

Chapter III, Taking Notes, explains ways to evaluate sources, to take notes and to write different types of notes. It also introduces academic ways to avoid plagiarism.

Chapter IV, Writing the Paper, expounds standard ways to write a thesis statement, an outline, the introduction, the body and the conclusion.

Chapter V, Documenting Sources: In-text Citation and Content Notes, explains in detail how to use in-text citation and when and how to use content notes.

Chapter VI, Documenting Sources: Works Cited, expounds the MLA style for Works Cited.

Chapter VII, Writing Abstracts, Appendices and Acknowledgements, describes the elements in an abstract, appendix and acknowledgements.

Chapter VIII, Alternative Documentation Styles, introduces the Chicago style and the APA (American Psychological Association) style in documenting sources.

This handbook also includes some common abbreviations, abbreviations of literary works and a sample paper in the MLA style.

The book is the result of the authors' ten years of experience in teaching academic research and writing to undergraduates, postgraduates and MA students. It has been tried and repeatedly revised at the School of Foreign Languages at Southwest China Normal University, Henan Normal University, Shanxi Normal University, Guizhou Normal University, Ningbo University, Yunnan Educational College, Xichang Teacher's College, South China University of Technology, and Shaoguan College.

It was the joint efforts of both the editor-in-chief and the authors that have brought about the publication of the book, but each individual was assigned with a specific chapter or chapters. More specifically, Liu Jianbo designed the framework, and wrote the Introduction, Chapters VI and VII, and the Appendices. He also designed the Index and wrote the sample research paper. Xiao Jinyin wrote Chapters IV and VIII, Chen Hong, Chapters I and II, Gao Xiaofang, Chapter III, and Huang Dongfang, Chapter V.

Readers are kindly reminded that, due to the length constraints, some typesets in this book (such as double space and indentation) are not strictly in accordance with the guidelines. We apologize for any inconveniences this may bring about.

.....Table of Contents

Introduction



Chapter 1 Negotiating a Topic.....1

- 1.1 Following Personal Interests 2
- 1.2 Talking with Other People 2
- 1.3 Brainstorming 3
- 1.4 Reading Source Materials 3
 - 1.4.1 Encyclopedias 3
 - 1.4.2 Books 5
 - 1.4.3 Periodical Indexes 13
 - 1.4.4 Internet Resources 13



Chapter 2 Narrowing Down the Research Topic.....15

- 2.1 Considering the Audience 15
- 2.2 Working Out a Preliminary Thesis 16
- 2.3 Considering the Available Source Materials 17



Chapter 3 Taking Notes.....20

- 3.1 Evaluation of Sources 21
- 3.2 Content of Notes 22
- 3.3 Tips on Note-taking 23
 - 3.3.1 Documenting Sources 23
 - 3.3.2 Being Thorough and Concise 23
 - 3.3.3 Putting One Item on One Card 23
 - 3.3.4 A Sample Note 24
- 3.4 Types of Notes 24
 - 3.4.1 Direct Quotation Notes 25
 - 3.4.2 Paraphrase Notes 25
 - 3.4.3 Summary Notes 26
 - 3.4.4 Combination Notes 26
- 3.5 Taking Notes on Computers 27
- 3.6 Avoiding Plagiarism 27

3.6.1	Forms of Plagiarism	28
3.6.2	Tips on Avoiding Plagiarism	28



Chapter 4 Writing the Paper • • • • • 31

4.1	Developing a Thesis Statement	31
4.2	Working Out an Outline	32
4.2.1	Types of Outline Symbols	33
4.2.2	Types of Outlines	34
4.2.3	Sample Outlines	35
4.3	Producing a First Draft	37
4.3.1	Writing the Introduction	38
4.3.2	Writing the Body	45
4.3.3	Writing the Conclusion	51
4.4	Revising	56
4.5	Preparing the Final Draft	58



Chapter 5 Documenting Sources: In-text Citation and Content Notes • • 61

5.1	In-text Citation	62
5.1.1	General Guidelines	62
5.1.2	Citing Two or More Authors	64
5.1.3	Citing Multiple Works by the Same Author	66
5.1.4	Citing Titles of Works	67
5.1.5	Citing Indirect Sources	68
5.1.6	Citing Two or More Works in a Parenthetical Reference	69
5.1.7	Citing Volume and Page Numbers	69
5.1.8	Using Ellipsis and Square Brackets ..	70
5.1.9	Citing Literary Works	75
5.2	Using Content Notes	80



Chapter 6 Documenting Sources: Works Cited • • • • • 88

6.1	General Guidelines	88
6.1.1	Author	89
6.1.2	Title	91

6.1.3	Place of Publication	91
6.1.4	Publisher's Name	92
6.1.5	Page Number(s)	94
6.2	Works Cited Format	95
6.2.1	Books	95
6.2.2	Periodicals	115
6.2.3	Newspapers	118
6.2.4	Miscellaneous Sources	120
6.2.5	Electronic Publications	124
6.3	Sample Works Cited	129



Chapter 7 Writing Abstracts, Appendices and Acknowledgements • • • 134

7.1	Abstracts	134
7.2	Appendices	138
7.3	Acknowledgements	141



Chapter 8 Alternative Documentation Styles • • • • • 143

8.1	The APA Style Documentation	144
8.1.1	Author-Year System	144
8.1.2	APA Reference Guidelines	148
8.1.3	A Sample References List	151
8.2	The Chicago Style Documentation	152
8.2.1	Note Numbers	152
8.2.2	Note Form	153
8.2.3	Endnotes and Footnotes	155
8.2.4	Sample First Note References	155

Appendices • • • • • 158

Appendix A	158
Appendix B	165

Works Cited • • • • • 171

Index • • • • • 177

Chapter

1



NEGOTIATING A TOPIC

An advisor sometimes assigns topics to his or her students. When he or she assigns a topic, he or she has already decided on the possibility and feasibility of undertaking such a research project. He or she has also taken into account the students' interest in and understanding of the topic. What the students need to do is to demonstrate their understanding and mastery of this subject, and to finish the research independently. The advisor's topic usually has close links with what is covered in class. Therefore, the students' notes, textbooks, key readings and bibliography, and the teachers' ideas and contributions in the related fields are helpful.

Most advisors encourage students to work out their own topics. To negotiate a topic, the student must first locate a good research subject, and then resorts to one or a combination of the following exercises: following personal interests, talking with other people, brainstorming and reading source materials.

.....▶ 1.1

Following Personal Interests

Interest is the best teacher. Therefore, the student should focus on what he or she is interested in and would like to make a further study on when deciding on a research topic. If he or she is not interested in a topic, he or she may perform poorly.

Even if the student has chosen an interesting and promising topic, he or she may not maintain interest for long. More often than not, many students do not even know what they are interested in. In this case, they should choose something that seems to promise them real value, something that they have always wanted to learn more about. The students will write best on a subject they are interested in; and their sense of satisfaction and achievement will certainly be greater. The more they probe into the topic, the more they will find the topic interesting, the deeper understanding they will gain, and the better they will write.

.....▶ 1.2

Talking with Other People

As the Chinese saying goes, "One evening's conversation with a gentleman is worth more than ten years' study." A good research topic may come from a talk with fellow students, instructors or friends. Something said might trigger an idea for a promising research topic.

Students often influence each other. They can share their ideas both inside and outside of class. This kind of peer influence often gives the students facilitative feedback. As they talk with each other, ideas are given and questions are asked, which result in elaboration and collaboration through interaction.

..... ► 1.3

Brainstorming

Brainstorming is a state of mind when one is hit with some inspiration or ideas. It is usually unrestrained and spontaneous. It is a process of free association, a way of developing ideas by listing everything one can think of about a subject. Students may brainstorm by themselves, or with their advisors, teachers or friends. While brainstorming, they need only to jot down the ideas that pop into their minds even if some may look like junk. At this stage, it is unnecessary to consider linguistic aspects such as spelling, diction and grammar.

..... ► 1.4

Reading Source Materials

A good library usually contains excellent sources for finding a topic. Students may turn to the following for ideas.

► **1.4.1 Encyclopedias**

General encyclopedias such as *Encyclopaedia Britannica* and *Encyclopedia Americana* cover practically all subjects. Specialized encyclopedias such as *Encyclopedia of World Art*, *Encyclopedia of Biological Science*, *Encyclopedia of Education*, *Encyclopedia of World Literature in the 20th Century*, and *Encyclopedia of Psychology* include only subjects in their related areas. Entries in encyclopedias are usually arranged alphabetically. The articles are generally excellent, authoritative summaries and discussions, written by carefully chosen experts in their fields.

An encyclopedia article is useful in selecting a subject and a topic. It can also suggest possible bibliography sources and examples.

The following is an excerpt from *An Encyclopedia of Language* about linear and non-linear phonology:

7.1 Linear and non-linear phonology

The notion that the phonological representation of an utterance consists of a string of discrete segments is not the whole truth. A number of other units, consisting of strings of segments of different sizes, need to be recognised for a variety of purposes. The units we shall consider here are the following:

- (i) Syllable;
- (ii) Word;
- (iii) Stress-group;
- (iv) Foot;
- (v) Tone-group.

Units (i), (ii), (iii) and (v) form a hierarchy: a tone-group consists of an integral number of stress-groups, a stress-group of an integral number of words, a word of an integral number of syllables, and a syllable of an integral number of segments. These units have a particularly important role to play in and (ii) are the domains over which phonotactic constraints operate (see section 8 below).

Unit (iv), the foot, fits in in a rather different manner: a tone-group consists of an integral number of feet, and a foot of an integral number of syllables. However, the foot does not relate in a simple fashion to words and stress-groups (see section 7.5 below). The foot is an important unit in determining the rhythmic properties of utterances.

Every approach to phonology has paid some attention to these larger units, although in some theories this attention has been piecemeal, making no reference to the hierarchical relations between the units. In such theories the accent has been upon the study of linear strings of segments, and any larger units have been regarded as secondary. Such approaches may be referred to as LINEAR approaches to phonology. Views in which the larger units are a primary and integral part of the phonological theory are then referred to NON-LINEAR. Van der Hulst and Smith (1982) and Durand (1986) contain some useful discussion of several approaches within non-linear phonology, while Hogg and McCully (1987) provide a clear introduction to many of the essential concepts.

The above example provides readers with basic information and classic references about two phonetic terms: linear and non-linear phonology.

It must be pointed out, however, that encyclopedia articles are only broad introductions. Books and journal articles are more specific and up-to-date. Therefore, encyclopedias serve only to familiarize students with fundamental facts and basic concepts.

► **1.4.2 Books**

Books are among the best sources in which to discover a topic for research. However, faced with a library of literature, students are often at a loss and wonder how they can find anything useful for their research. They should always remember that they are only trying to find materials for their topics. This means that it is unnecessary, and virtually impossible to take the time to read the entire book. Therefore, what they need to do is to skim a book's introduction, contents, index and a few chapters in order to see whether this book is appropriate to their own interests. They should use those books which might be enlightening so as to get an overview of the topic.



Table of Contents

The table of contents of a book outlines the major subject areas and enables the readers to find under what headings a certain topic is discussed. Usually, only a particular chapter is useful to the student's research. e.g.

Preface by Halliday	F7
王宗炎序	F8
导读	F11
Preface	F27
Acknowledgements	F28
List of Abbreviations	F29

Chapter 1 The Background to Current Second Language Acquisition Research 1

1.1 The Goals of Second Language Research	1
1.2 The Scope of This Book	5
1.3 Early Second Language Acquisition Research	8

Chapter 2 Sequences in Second Language Acquisition 25

2.1 Grammatical Morphemes	25
2.2 Negation and the Learner's Language System	36
2.3 Explanations for Stages of Second Language Acquisition	43
2.4 The Concept of Stage	45
2.5 Syntactic Aspects of Grammatical Morpheme and Negation Research	46
2.6 Observational Data in Second Language Acquisition Research	47

Chapter 3 The Input Hypothesis Model 51

3.1 The Five Hypothesis	51
3.2 Krashen's Evidence for the Input Hypothesis	55
3.3 Evidence for the Other Hypotheses	63
3.4 Models in Second Language Acquisition Research	65

Chapter 4 Pidgins, Creoles, and Variation 69

4.1 Pidginisation and Acculturation	69
4.2 Creoles and Second Language Acquisition	78
4.3 Second Language Acquisition and Variation	82
4.4 L2 Use and L2 Learning	89

Chapter 5 The Multidimensional Model and the Teachability Hypothesis 93

5.1 Orders of Acquisition in German	93
-------------------------------------	----

5.2	Extensions to the Original Multidimensional Model Research	98
5.3	The Linguistic Basis for the Multidimensional Model	102
5.4	The Processing Rationale for the Multidimensional Model	106
5.5	Methodological Issues	107
5.6	General Implications of Psychological Processing Models	108

Chapter 6 Learning and Communication Strategies 113

6.1	Learning Strategies	113
6.2	Communication and Compensatory Strategies	119
6.3	Methodological Issues in Strategies Research	131
6.4	Linguistics and Strategies Research	134

Chapter 7 Relative Clauses: Beyond Phrase Structure Syntax 138

7.1	Relative Clauses and the Accessibility Hierarchy	140
7.2	Relative Clauses and Psychological Processing	147
7.3	The L2 Acquisition of Relative Clauses and Linguistics	150
7.4	Comprehension and Experiments in SLA Research	152

Chapter 8 Principles and Parameters Syntax 156

8.1	Some Concepts of Principles and Parameters Theory: X-bar Syntax	156
8.2	The Pro-drop Parameter and the Inflection Phrase	160
8.3	Binding Theory	172
8.4	The Head-direction Parameter (Principal Branching Direction)	187
8.5	Syntax and SLA Research	198

Chapter 9 The Universal Grammar Model and Second Language Acquisition 200

9.1	The Universal Grammar of Model of Language Acquisition	200
9.2	Access to UG and Subjacency in L2 Learners	212
9.3	Access to UG and German Word Order	227
9.4	Evidence in UG-related Research and Grammaticality Judgements	237
9.5	UG and Multi-competence	242

Chapter 10 Cognitive Approaches to Second Language Acquisition Research 246

10.1	Anderson's ACT* Model	246
10.2	Temporal Variables	250
10.3	Information Processing	253

10.4 MacWhinney's Competition Model	256
10.5 Plans and Goals	262
10.6 Other Features of Cognitive Theories	264
10.7 Methodology	266
10.8 The Linguistic Background	267
10.9 Linguistics and Second Language Acquisition	269
Activities	271 *
References	283
Index	309
文库索引	310
F6	

(Cook F5-F6)

The readers may get a clear picture of the content and the system of the whole book at a brief glance at the table of contents. If a student is interested in universal grammar, for example, he or she can go directly to Chapter Nine for further information.

Branching



Branching is a visual way of generating ideas that can show logical relations between and among ideas. One can draw a tree with the stems, limbs, and twigs and put the topic in the stem, then put the ideas to the limbs or twigs according to their relations. One usually starts branching by putting the topic in the middle and draws a circle or a rectangle around it.

Related ideas are written in the circles or in the rectangles that are linked by lines. These ideas are the primary branches or the limbs. Facts, figures and details are added to the cluster as twigs,