

STRATEGIES FOR ORDINARY AND TECHNICAL ENGLISH WRITING

普通与科技英语写作技巧

人民教育出版社



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前 言

科技英语写作有其自身明显的特征，但它是在普通英语写作基础上派生而来，而且不断发展的。这本《普通与科技英语写作技巧》是为了适应新世纪的需求而编写的。

本书的特点就在于它不仅能够提高读者普通英语写作的能力，而且在普通英语写作的基础上，有助于读者了解、熟悉、掌握现代科技英语写作的技巧，从而学会如何从事科技英语的写作。本书照顾到了文理兼顾的需求。

在取材方面，所选文章题材广泛、语言规范、文体特色突出、科普文章占有一定的比例。

针对每一种写作方法，书中还配备了大量不同类型的练习，供读者从事写作实践。书后还配有练习答案，供读者参考。

全书分为九章。除了从“谴词”到文章的写作之外，在最后三章中对一些应用文的写作方法也在不同程度上进行了介绍与说明。

限于编者的水平和经验，书中疏漏及不妥之处，欢迎广大读者批评指正。

编 者

2000.1.1.

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Chapter I DICTION

When you write, diction requires careful attention. Poor word choice results in ineffective writing that resists interpretation and frustrates readers.

The following are strategies for finding the best words: make sure the words you use mean what you think they do, so that inaccurate or imprecise words will not distort your messages; inject vigor into your writing by cutting out the words that don't serve a purpose, so that every word in the document advances your meaning; present reality and attract reader's attention by using direct expressions and fresh effective language, so that you will serve your readers and your purpose best.

1. Toward effective diction

Effective diction stems from selecting terms that are concrete and specific, using simple and familiar words, and avoiding imprecise words and overstatement.

(1) Nontechnical writing

You can sharpen your meaning by using specific words, and make your writing informative by selecting concrete words.

A. General and specific words

General words name broad classes of things. If you say *tree* to your classmates, one may think of an oak, another of a poplar, and a third of a willow. *Pine*, on the other hand, triggers images of a tall tree with thin sharp leaves that do not drop off in winter, found especially in colder parts of the world. When you have a choice, always pick the more specific term. The more specific the term, the more specific the image is to the reader's mind.

The more specific your words, the sharper your meaning.

General	instrument
	musical instrument
	percussion instrument
	drum
Specific	bass drum
	small bass drum

To make words specific, you can use exact names, lively verbs, modifiers before nouns, and words that relate to the five senses.

General	She likes painting.
Specific	Elizabeth likes painting.
General	Tom looked at her in surprise.
Specific	Tom gaped at her in surprise.
General	A girl is peeling potatoes.
Specific	A chubby, five-year-old girl is peeling potatoes.
General	That boy is a student.
Specific	That tall, lanky boy is a student.

Notice how the picture becomes more vivid as we move to greater levels of specificity.

General	He was a typical 17-year-old young man with a typical teen-ager's enthusiasm for life.
Specific	John Smith played tennis and cricket and enjoyed any sport on TV. Tall and lanky with an ever-present grin, he had a wonderful sense of humor and was gaining an appreciation of girls. He loved fiddling with computers and often fixed problems with our town-planning consultancy's computer system.
General	Switches can control many different things.
Specific	Small switches control lamps and radio sets because these do not take a large current. Larger switches control electric fires. Other switches can control electric motors.

Specific words make readers see, hear, or feel what an author describes, and the details going along with the specific words make the writing vivid and effective.

However, *general* and *specific* are relative terms. The words *building* and *gun* are more general than the words *apartment* and *rifle*, respectively, but more specific than *structure* and *weapon*.

In some cases, you may also wish to generalize for the sake of diplomacy. Instead of writing exact names such as Tom, Rose and John quarrelled with each other, you might prefer to generalize: Some students quarrelled. The second version makes the point without accusing anyone in particular.

General words are also needed in classification and definition. We could not classify a *horse* without mentioning *animal* or define a *lake* without using the general word *water*. Sometimes, even in narration and description, general words are as suitable as specific words.

For example: After taking an exam, Mary felt exhausted, and therefore she got on the bus which would *take* her home.

Whether the bus raced or moved slowly is irrelevant to the main point of our story. The general word *take* here is all that is required, since our focus is not on the motion.

B. Concrete and abstract words

Concrete words name or describe the things that we can perceive with one or more of our five senses. A thing is concrete if we can feel it, hear it, taste it, smell it, or see it. If it's abstract, we can't do any of these things. *Glass* is a concrete term, as are *chocolate*, *wood*, *sugar*, *coal*, *radio*, and *Dallas*. On the other hand, *happiness*, *enthusiasm*, *information*, *authority* and *beauty* are abstract terms. Abstract words name qualities, concepts, or feelings whose exact meaning has to be nailed down by concrete words.

Concrete words create precise, vivid, mental images and therefore help convey a clear message. The images that abstract words evoke differ from person to person. Look at the following examples:

Abstract: There is a beautiful view here.

Concrete: There are snow-capped mountains, a wilderness of