

高校英文写作教材系列



石坚 帅培天 主编

# 英语论文写作

## English Essay Writing

第二版



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高校英文写作教材系列

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石坚 帅培天 主编

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# 前 言

从事高校英语写作教学及研究多年,一直心仪能有一整套供师生从低年级到高年级使用的写作教材。这套教材应包括基础英语写作、英语应用文写作和高级阶段的英语论文写作。作为基础阶段的教材,应从句子到段落,再到篇章,帮助学生打下坚实的英文写作基础;应用文写作则为增强学生应用英语进行交际的能力添砖加瓦;论文写作应从普通论文讲起,再到学术论文,初步培养学生从事学术研究、撰写学术文章的能力。这套教材,可分阶段教材自成体系,但从知识和技能的讲解及训练规划上讲,应循序渐进,具有系统性。这套教材应有很好的可操作性,理论的讲解和技巧的介绍应深入浅出、环环相扣,且能及时和准确地得到操练,转化为学生的“知识”。这套教材,既然是英文教材,就必须使学生在使用过程中感到自始至终沉浸在英美语言文化的浓重氛围之中,逐步脱离汉语母语的影响,养成新的写作习惯,写出道地的英语文章。让中国学生把英语文章写得真正像英美人士所写,并非易事,但正因为此,一套好的英语写作教材,更应把东西方思维模式、行为方式、生活习惯等对各自语言和语言的应用的影响说得使人信服。这样的写作教材,让人心仪,也给人以创作的冲动。《英语论文写作》正是这种创作冲动的产物。该书的主要对象是大学本科高年级学生,对其他英文学习和工作者而言,不乏为一部指导性的专著。这部专著/教材除努力体现上述愿望外,有以下几个特点:

1. 全书用第一人称写成,充分体现了人文精神,让使用者以平等的身份参与问题讨论,增强写作地道英语论文的信心。
2. 一些写作理论和技巧,从课文阐述转到了练习之中,从而减轻了说教式的讲解带给读者的枯燥感;同时,读者通过练习去探索,提取某种理论或技巧,会兴致勃勃,因为接下来的是一种成就感。
3. 在学会使用图书馆的章节里,直接用计算机时代美国先进的图书馆为例,给读者树立了一个很高的目标,这一点,相信每一位科研工作者或准备从事科研者都不会有异议。

编 者

2005年1月

## 第二版前言

很难相信,一部教学的书可以十年、二十年不变;没有想到,《英语论文写作》这本书刚一问世,我们便有了修订的打算。两年中,我们注意观察英语专业和大学英语教学的教学改革,留意同学们在英语学习过程中的新的要求和需要,不停地寻找、研读新的教学科研成果,思量着去充实、完善这本已经不薄的教材,给读者多一分帮助,少一点含糊。这次修订,大节上增加了CBE参考文献规范和论文写作技巧的介绍,优化了提纲格式,置换了作用欠佳的范文;细节上严密了可能给读者留下疑问的阐述,力求传达作者不断深化的对理论和语言现象“所以然”的认识,包括对标点符号运用情况的变迁与倾向的探讨。

在新版面世之际,谨以此向读者作个说明。

编者

2007年1月

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# Chapter One

## An Overview of the Essay

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### I

#### What Is an Essay?

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An essay is “a short literary composition on a particular theme or subject” (*Random House Dictionary*). In *Webster’s Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*, it is defined as “an analytic or interpretative literary composition usually dealing with its subject from a limited or personal point of view; something resembling such a composition.” The two dictionaries have told us that basically, an essay is a composition on a certain topic, and with a point of view. It is always analytic or interpretative. It is also called a theme, especially when referring to the student’s essay.

An essay is written about one topic or one main idea, just as a paragraph is. The main idea of the essay is expressed in a thesis statement, which is much like the topic sentence in a paragraph. However, the topic of an essay is bigger and more complex than that of a paragraph. A well-written thesis statement not only pinpoints the main idea or topic, but also indicates the major subdivisions of the topic. In other words, it tells both the writer and the reader what the essay is driving home, and what major points are planned to help.

### **I** The Basic Structure of an Essay

An essay has three main parts: an introduction, a body, and a conclusion. The introduction



presents the thesis statement and catches the reader's interest. Introductions can vary in length. For a brief essay of 300 to 500 words, a paragraph will be enough. Longer essays sometimes contain introductions of two or more paragraphs. The thesis statement is usually placed at the end of the introductory paragraph, or at the end of the last paragraph of the introduction. Although it is acceptable to place it in other locations, many writers recommend that the thesis statement conclude the introduction so that it can lead in naturally to the body of the essay.

To analyze in detail, the introduction has two parts: general statements, and a thesis statement. The following chart can well describe the functions of the two parts.

Introduction		
Item	General Statements	The Thesis Statement
Function	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. introduce the topic of the essay</li> <li>2. give background information on the topic</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. states the main topic</li> <li>2. lists the subdivisions/subtopics</li> <li>3. indicates the organization of the entire paper</li> </ol>

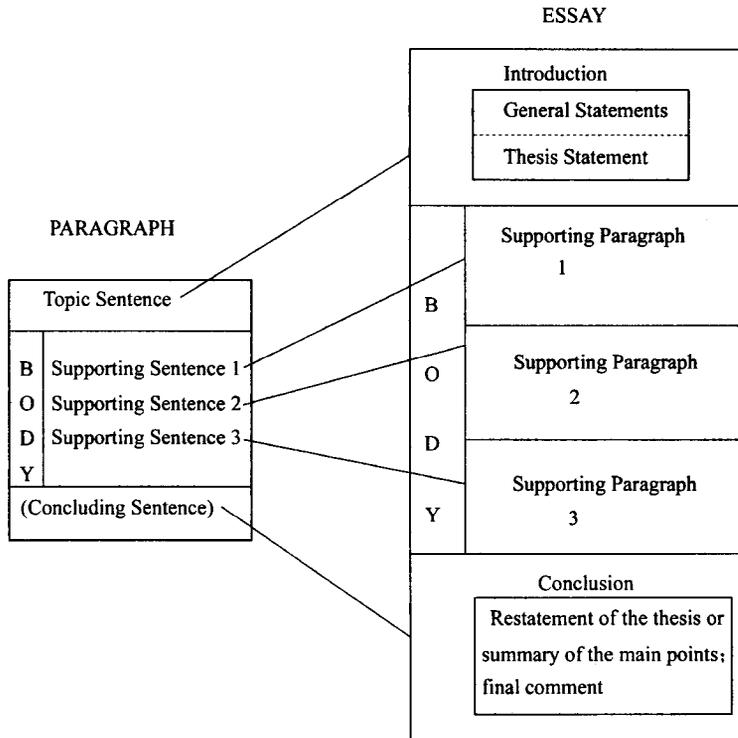
A skillful writer will start his introduction with a very general comment about the subject of the essay so as to attract the reader's attention and to give the background information on the topic. Each subsequent sentence in the introduction becomes more specific than the previous one and finally leads into or brings forth the thesis statement.

The body is the longest part of the essay. It usually consists of one or more paragraphs, and its purpose is to develop and expand upon the thesis statement. Each body paragraph develops a subdivision of the topic, so the number of paragraphs in the body is usually decided by the number of subdivisions indicated in the thesis statement. The body paragraphs are like the supporting sentences of a paragraph. They can be arranged by chronological order or by order of importance, just as the supporting sentences in a paragraph. And the ways of organization are very often suggested in the thesis statement by the order of subdivision listing.

The conclusion of the essay is usually stated in the last paragraph. It may consume more than one paragraph in a long essay as in the case of introductions. The conclusion in an essay, like the concluding sentence in a paragraph, is a summary or review of the main points discussed in the body, or a restatement of the main topic/thesis. Moreover, a skillful writer would think that besides having a strong and effective message to the reader by taking the last opportunity to make the point, it is wise to add a final comment on the subject to urge the reader to take a certain course of action. The following chart can well describe the functions of the conclusion.

Conclusion			
Item	a transitional signal	a summary of the main points or a restatement of the thesis in different words	a final comment on the subject
Function	to tell the reader we are going to wind up the essay	to remind the reader the main idea or main points	to urge the reader to take a certain course of action

In actual reading, we may occasionally find an essay that departs slightly from this three-part structure. For example, an introduction may consist of only one sentence or start with a question. The conclusion may be a one-sentence paragraph or several paragraphs. We may even find essays in which the thesis is implied rather than directly stated. In any case, we can recognize the basic three-part structure and the functions of each part in such essays. We can see that writing an essay is essentially the same as writing a paragraph; an essay is just longer. This is decided by the same purpose of writing a paragraph or an essay. In both writings, the writer is to express some certain idea. To get this idea clearly explained, he follows the same way to organize his material just because of the restriction of the English thought pattern. The chart below shows us how the parts of a paragraph correspond to the parts of an essay.





## 2 Essays in Different Types of Writing

Different types of writing are required for different purposes. In general, we can divide writing into four kinds: narration, description, exposition, and argumentation. Since argumentation is actually exposition with the additional purpose of convincing and persuading, in some writing books, writings are classified as narration, description and exposition.

### 1) Narration and the Narrative Essay

*Narration* tells what happened. It tells a story. It is the kind of writing we find in novels, short stories, and biographies. In actual writing, the account of events often goes with *description*, and sometimes, with other kinds of writing.

There are two kinds of narration. One is an exact account of what happened. The purpose of this kind of narration is to re-create or retell the experience. In such a narrative, facts are the most important things, and they are required to be stated correctly and in a good chronological order. We call it a *factual narrative*.

Another is a story told to make a point, and therefore, is regarded as a *personal essay* or a *personal narrative*, or a *narrative essay*. The writer of this form of narrative deals with personal experience and expresses a personal attitude toward the subject, but the emphasis changes from stating facts or recreating experiences to explaining the effect they have. In other words, the personal essay focuses on a central idea or theme observed in a series of events or as some emotional response to a particular incident. This kind of narration demands different organizational skills of the writer. Instead of presenting a story arranged step by step in time, the writer focuses on some generalization or conclusion. His purpose is to *talk about* or *comment on*, not *re-create* or *retell* the experience.

Although their subject matter is virtually unrestricted, most contemporary narrative essays do display similarities in form and style. Characterized by first-person pronouns (I, we) and a tone that is usually relaxed, informal, genial, somewhat amused, and conversational, they reflect the writer's personality. Especially in newspapers and magazines, the essay is often mildly satirical, poking gentle fun at the subject matter.

Less flexible in form than the factual autobiographical narrative, the personal essay focuses on an opening generalization or conclusion about the subject. Usually this focusing statement appears in the first or second sentence of the opening paragraph. Not only does it introduce the theme, but it establishes the tone of the essay and indicates the writer's attitude toward the subject. The following statements can tell us how these ends are achieved.

Surely nothing in the astonishing scheme of life can have nonplussed Nature so much as the fact that none of the females of any of the species she created really cared very much for the male as such.

—James Thurber

In this beginning statement, Thurber introduces his subject and theme, the universal indifference of females toward males. In addition, this sentence establishes the tongue-in-cheek tone that is sustained throughout the essay. The words “astonishing” and “nonplussed” contribute to this end, as does the ironic suggestion that this indifference is not what Nature intended.

There is a book out called *Dog Training Made Easy* and it was sent to me the other day by the publisher, who rightly guessed that it would catch my eye. I like to read books on dog training.

—E. B. White

Here again, in his opening statement the writer introduces his subject and establishes his sympathetic point of view toward it. The first-person pronouns and the commonplace vocabulary help to establish a conversational, familiar tone, too.

I'm wild about walking. . . .

—Leo Rosten

In this succinct statement, Rosten introduces his subject—walking, and establishes his enthusiasm for it by using the word *wild*. To make ourselves aware of how one word can make a difference in tone and point of view, we may try substituting different adjectives for *wild*. “I'm *fond* of walking,” for instance, has a markedly different tone.

From these examples, we can see that the opening statement acts as a direction pointer and a barometer; it sets off the personal essay in a particular direction and indicates its climate or the writer's attitude toward the subject—sympathetic, sardonic, hostile, or amused. Sustained throughout the paper, this attitude supplies the second characteristic necessary to the personal essay: focus, or unity. In the following personal essay, the opening statement provides the subject and the focus of the essay—kids who carry around blaring radios. The essay then maintains coherence and unity because the author's further comments are only concerned with this one subject.

### Making a Statement with Blaring Boxes

Russell Baker

One of the things poor kids in a lot of cities like to do is walk around carrying a big machine they call a “box.” The box plays music through a radio and sometimes, in the fancier models, through cassette machinery.



It almost always plays this music very loudly. Sometimes you can hear the box coming a block or two away. It drives a lot of people crazy. These people say that the box makes noise, not music.

How you feel about this depends on your definition of music.

★ If your idea of music is being hounded through the streets by the amplifiers from a rock concert in Madison Square Garden, if your idea of music is a subway collision followed by the screams of the injured, the box stuff is music.

There is some question whether kids who tote this machinery think they are bringing music to the masses or doing something more sinister, like giving the world an ice pick in the eardrum.

Having been a kid once myself, I can see how a boy with a box could find it hard to resist full volume after he realized it drove a lot of people crazy.

There is also the theory that the kid with a box is making a statement.

Is there anybody who isn't making a statement these days?

A man throws away his flannel suit and starts wearing denim, he's making a statement. Somebody throws a flower pot off the Empire State Building and bashes in a car roof on Fifth Avenue, he's making a statement. A kid gets a box and walks the streets driving a lot of people crazy—sure, he's making a statement.

But what does this statement say?

The answer to that question is another question: Who cares? Not the kid, that's for sure. If you fight your way through the wall of oncoming music and get inside, right there in the center where the music originates, and you look the kid right in the eye and scream, "Kid, I know you're making a statement, but I don't know what it is, so could you articulate it more precisely?"—If you do that, what happens?

The kid looks at you as if you're a lunatic. "You crazy, man?" he asks.

★ And with good reason. Here is the kid, having a perfectly good time listening to his music, showing everybody he owns this beautiful, complicated, enviable hunk of electronic hardware, making girls' mouths water with desire to caress that fabulous machinery and driving a lot of people crazy at the same time.

And here is this character—some nut?—asking him this asinine grown-up question about what he is trying to state. It has probably never occurred to the kid that he is trying to state anything, any more than it ever occurred to him as a baby that he was making a statement when he dumped the creamed spinach on the floor.

When he dumped the spinach, he was making a mess first and if there was a statement added, let somebody else decode it.

When he goes strolling with his box at maximum blare he is grooving in musical ruts that satisfy something inexplicable in his central nervous system. To put it simply, he is enjoying himself.

Baker establishes the casual tone in the opening sentence with his use of the slang term for radio, *box*, then maintains the "slangy" tone throughout the essay, using such words as "kid," "sure," and "nut." Baker also uses two other devices popular with writers of personal essays: the use of short rhetorical questions (those not requiring an answer) as in "Who cares?" and hyperbole (exaggeration). For example, he discusses the "box stuff" as music in Paragraph 4 (marked with an asterisk) and describes the effect of the box on girls

in Paragraph 13 (marked with an asterisk). He also occasionally addresses readers directly, which adds life to the essay. The final sentence completes the discussion; it closes off the essay.

Like Baker's, most personal essays are light in tone and subject matter. They deal with the minor, petty joys and discomforts of human existence; weighty problems deserve a more formal and serious treatment. Writing a personal essay should be fun; we need not worry about explaining difficult concepts or relationships. But we must keep in mind that two ingredients are essential: an opening statement and brief narrative examples.

## 2) Description and the Descriptive Essay

*Description* tells how something looks or feels or sounds. It talks about such features as size, shape, color, sound, smell or taste. A good description is filled with details that help to create a dominant impression, and it always has a focus.

There are two basic forms of description: factual and personal.

*Factual description* is designed to furnish information—usually about physical appearance of some person, place, or thing—objectively and clearly. In other words, it presents the subject not as it seems to the writer alone, but as it exists to any objective observer. Organized spatially, it is usually serious, factual, and formal in tone, using simple, specific language and short sentences, while avoiding personal pronouns.

*Personal description* presents the writer's impression of some place or thing to interest and inform the reader. It follows the principle of describing things as they are to the writer. In the process of describing, the writer may reveal much about his own reactions, responses, impressions, and feelings about the thing he sees, hears, smells, tastes, or feels. This description often begins with a focusing statement of the dominant feature of what is described, and then proceeds according to some spatial plan of organization, which includes an indication of the point of view or position of the writer. To convey feelings strongly and evocatively, *personal description* should have rich details, precisely chosen words and varied sentence structures.

The following outline borrowed from *The Writing Commitment, Third Edition* can well help us see what the differences between the two types of description are, once the purpose is decided.

	<b>Factual</b>	<b>Personal</b>
<b>Purpose</b>	To present information	To present an impression
<b>Approach</b>	Objective, dispassionate	Subjective, interpretative
<b>Appeal</b>	To reason	To the senses
<b>Tone</b>	Matter-of-fact	Emotional
<b>Coverage</b>	Complete, exact	Selective, some facts



Language	Simple, clear	Rich, suggestive
Uses	Writing in science, industry, government, professions, business	Novels, short stories, poems, personal narratives, some essays

Moreover, decided by the differences shown in the outline, factual and personal descriptions are organized in different ways. With the purpose to make a point, *personal description* usually takes a *three-part structure* with an introduction, a body, and a conclusion, which is the basic format of an essay. Partly because of this, *personal description* belongs to essay writing and takes the name of *descriptive essay*.

Among factual descriptions, there is one we name a process description. In describing how to do something, a writer presents not only the steps factually, but his personal idea so as to make the reader pleased to follow. Such a factual description takes the three-part structure as an essay, and it is commonly accepted as a form of *expository writing*.

### 3) Exposition and the Expository Essay

*Exposition* is the writing that explains something to inform. It often answers the questions *what*, *how*, and *why* to make the reader understand the process, relationship, cause and effect, and nature and significance of things.

To make the reader receive the message clearly, there are four commonly used methods or organizational patterns: *process description*, *classification*, *definition*, and *analysis*. The first three are relatively objective, while the last needs more logical reasoning.

Obviously, exposition belongs to essay writing, and takes the *three-part structure* of the essay. Logical arrangement, and distinctive explanation are the most important qualities of a good expository essay.

Unlike the relatively loose quality of narrative and descriptive essays, which permits much variety and individuality in shaping their paragraphs, being generally more tightly constructed is the nature of paragraphs in expository papers, like that of expository forms themselves. The length and content of expository paragraphs may vary in books, magazines, and newspapers, but there is evidence that each of them is a recognizable unit of discourse, containing a sequence of sentences closely related in structure and meaning. The main or subject idea, or theme may be expressed implicitly or explicitly; in the latter case, the subject idea generally takes the form of a topic sentence. Other sentences explain, develop, prove, illustrate, or expand on the topic sentence. All these sentences are linked by structural or formal signals that unify the paragraph and provide continuity to the information expressed in it.

A. L. Becke's research indicates that an expository paragraph consists of three components: topic (or subject), restriction, and illustration. Becker's "restriction" is a