

# 21世纪硕士生英语系列教程

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English Series for  
Postgraduates of  
21st Century

# 写作

Writing

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哈尔滨工程大学出版社



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English Series for Postgraduates of 21st Century

21 世纪硕士生英语系列教程



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Writing

写 作

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## 内 容 简 介

《21 世纪硕士生英语系列教程》是为满足硕士生英语教学的需求而编写的。该教程主要以硕士生为主要对象, 同时也兼顾其他具有中高级英语程度的读者的需要。

本教程突出实用性, 同时又具有科学性和系统性。各分册皆以提高能力为主要目标, 同时又注意英语知识、英语国家文化的传播, 是读者提高实用英语能力的难得的教材。全套教材分为精读、泛读(上、下)、写作、听力、测试六个分册。

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# 使用说明

本教程为《21 世纪硕士生英语系列教程》中的《写作》教程。

1992 年国家教委颁布了《非英语专业研究生英语教学大纲》，我国的研究生教学从此进入了一个崭新的时期。随着国家经济的不断发展，社会对人才的培养不断提出新的要求。英语教学的任务是使学生在听、说、读、写、译几方面全面发展。而学生的普遍情况是阅读能力较强，相比之下，写作能力很弱。为了弥补这方面的不足，哈尔滨工程大学外语系几位有多年教学经验的教师编写了这本《写作》教程。教程编写合理，材料新，适合非英语专业研究生作为教材使用。目前互联网迅速发展，电子邮件这一方式为越来越多的人所使用，为了适应这一形势，本教程特设一章教读者如何写电子邮件。

本教程分为两个部分。第一部分为基础训练部分，详细讲述选词、造句、组织段落、篇章等方面的技巧。内容详尽，材料新颖。教师可以根据需要选用，写作基本功较差的学生可以自学这部分内容。

第二部分为应用文部分。在对广大学生的实际要求进行广泛调查后，教材选择了十二种不同题材的应用文。详细介绍了各种应用文的特点，写作步骤，注意事项等。在吸收了其他教材的优点的基础上，本书除了特设一章教学生如何写电子邮件外，还专门用一章来讲授如何填写表格，力求使内容实用，有特色。

本教程在编写的过程中得到哈尔滨工程大学外语系孙守奎教授和其他老师的大力协助，在此表示衷心的感谢。参加本书编写工作人员的分工如下：

郑玉荣(哈尔滨工程大学)：负责编写第一部分一至五章，第二部分第十二章，附录一至四；吕宝萍(哈尔滨理工大学)：负责编写第二部分一至二章；王欣(哈尔滨工程大学)：负责编写第二部分三至五章；孙达丹(哈尔滨工程大学)：负责编写第二部分六至八章；郑军(哈尔滨工程大学)：负责编写第二部分九至十一章。

虽然我们力求把这本书编得适合广大研究生们的需要，但由于水平有限，遗漏、错误仍在所难免，望使用者不吝指正。

编者

2003 年 5 月

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# Introduction

It is an ambitious job to prepare a writing course book, for writing is very difficult to teach. For one thing, writing is an extremely complicated process. It is a no easy task even for the native speakers, let alone for foreigners. In the United States, recent reports have pointed a worrisome problem: many young people coming out of elementary and high school can't write clear English. Educators have noted that a number of college applicants who score well on entrance exams turn out surprisingly poor essays, term papers and other writing assignments after admission. Their communication skills are faulty. They have a weak grasp of grammar, punctuation, syntax and spelling. They can't put their ideas on paper so that they come out clearly. Their sentences are long and messy. They can't come to the point. You can't believe that the following sentences come from the term papers written by native speakers in one of the American leading universities:

*Everyone has to think of themselves in this doggie world regardless of whether is rich or poor, educated or illiterate, their soul person is to serve societies needs.*

*It is really to bad when kids learn how to get a grade the easy way like learning how to take a test, or like I always saw when I was in school was teacher pets. In their want to do good they are extremely eager to use and support any new method without thoroughly examination the method.*

People wonder what happened to the students' writing skills. In fact, all sorts of reasons may attribute to such poor performances due to the complication of writing process. We won't discuss it here since it is beyond the scope of this book.

For another, writing is difficult to teach because it is a practical skill. Actually, it is rather learned, not taught. In this case, theories won't help much. What is needed is practice—the writing process itself. It is just like learning to drive a car. You can never grasp this skill if you always sit aside and watch what others are doing, or only study the theoretical knowledge—the structure of a car. You have to try doing it yourself. One of the reasons for our Chinese students' poor performance at writing is surely the lack of practice. Teachers tend to talk too much without giving students the chances to practise. Another factor, which is always unavoidable, is that Chinese students, as foreign language learners, are often influenced by their native language in the writing process. This kind of struggle between two languages can be clearly seen from the following examples:

*1. I studied hard, the glasses on my nose became thicker than before. But the result I got made me not know whether to laugh or cry.*

*2 . To meet the demand of the career in the future , I have decided to cultivate qualities of a qualified centric youth .*

*3 . Thinking about the life in primary school , I found that there was nothing I needed to thinking , parents and teachers thought everything .*

Nevertheless, even though we emphasize that writing is a practical skill, it is definitely helpful for our learners to gain some knowledge of the general skills commonly used in writing and the norms in writing specific kind of essays. In Part One, some advice will be given on the general skills in writing. In Part Two, attention is paid to the ten different kinds of writing in daily life. These ten kinds of essays are described in great details, plus some exercises from which you may choose.



# Part One Basic Writing Skills

## Chapter One

### The Elements of Good Writing

We have all adored the talents of the great writers. Writing is an art. Professional writers are artists in the way they use words. We may never achieve their mastery, but there is no reason why we can't improve our writing. However, first we must know the elements of good writing. They are:

1. Clarity
2. Conciseness
3. Directness
4. Simplicity
5. Variety

Let's discuss these one at a time.

#### Clarity

Good writing is clear writing. It's plain. No one should have trouble figuring out what you're trying to say. A sentence should have immediate impact on any reader of reasonable intelligence. Don't fall into the fallacy that a good writing should be in fancy language—full of ornate sentences, flowery words or obscure expressions. Remember, the purpose of writing is to communicate. Everyday communication has no need for embroidery. When you finish a thought, ask yourself: "Is it clear? Did I say what I meant to say?" If the answer is an honest yes, you are on the way to becoming a good writer.

#### Conciseness

Some writing is like forgetting to turn off the water tap. There is more than what is needed. One meaning is repeatedly stated. The best writing is concise; it says what it has to say and then stops. A frequent fault in our students' writing is overproduction. These writers rattle on when they've come to the end of their ideas. Loading extra baggage on a sentence does nothing for the thought but only creates boredom and confusion to the readers. Here are some sentences that need great surgery:

1. *The house was on a wooded hill with trees surrounding it on all sides.*
2. *A gourmet is a someone who likes fine foods and wines and is considered an expert in judging the quality of meat and fish dishes as well as desserts whether served in restaurants or the home.*
3. *Bicycle riding is becoming quite popular because it's cheap, it doesn't pollute the air and there is a lot of good exercises to be derived from this sport.*

Now let's try the sentences this way:

1. *The house on the hill was surrounded by trees.*
2. *A gourmet enjoys fine foods and wines and is an expert on their quality.*
3. *Bicycle riding is popular because it's cheap, non-polluting and good exercise.*

## **Directness**

Good writers are direct and to the point. Understanding suffers when true meaning is wrapped in flowery languages. Elegance may be all right for engraved invitations, but not for common, everyday communication. Besides, direct speech and writing cuts down the chances for misunderstandings that can lead to ill feelings, wrong actions or harmful delays. When ideas are muffled in a fog of fancy words and phrases, the reader is likely to become confused and impatient.

A classic example of roundabout, fuzzy language was given by Ron Ziegler when he was press secretary to former president Richard M. Nixon. Asked by a reporter whether a batch of Watergate tape recordings was still intact, Ziegler replied:

*I would feel that most the conversations that took place in those areas of the White House that did have the recording system would in almost their entirety be in existence but the special prosecutor, the court, and I think, the American people are sufficiently familiar with the recording system to know where the recording devices existed and to know the situation in terms of the recording but I feel, although the process has not been undertaken yet in preparation of the materials to abide by the court decision, really, what the answer to that question is.*

Mr. Zierger, of course, was trying to say, "I don't know." For his drawn-out effort, he won the "gobbledygook" category of the "Doublespeak Awards" given by the National Council of Teachers of English.

Resist the urge to pile on unneeded words. If two words will do, why try for ten? Say what you have to say and then move on to another idea.

## **Simplicity**

Simplicity is the essence of good writing. Avoid long, complex explanations when



simple ones will do. Ideas can often be broken down into their simplest parts for clearer understanding. By simple writing, I do not mean simplistic writing. Obviously, some topics require more complex treatment than others. But it is also true that much writing is so filled with flowery rhetoric that the reader is often left puzzled and uncomprehending. "What is he/she trying to say?" one asks. What, for example, is one expected to make out of this sentence:

*With respect to their function of teaching the student in the average range, American public elementary schools have an enormously broad curriculum.*

This sentence, which was taken from a book on public affairs, can be understood after some thinking, but why should thinking be necessary? The same thing could have been written much more simply and in fewer words. The authors apparently meant that American students are exposed to a broad curriculum. Another tip: stay away from high-sounding phrases like *interpersonal relationships* (*the way people get along*), *dialogue* (*conversation*) and *at this point in time* (*now*). This kind of jargon muddies up communication instead of improving it.

Simplicity, and thus better understanding, can be achieved if you follow these rules:

1. Use familiar, everyday words.
2. Keep most sentences short.
3. Use one idea to a sentence.
4. Depend mostly on the straight declarative sentence, making sure there are a subject and predicate in the right order.
5. Don't write more than you have to.
6. Read over sentences to be sure they make sense.
7. Avoid jargon, that special language of school administrators, businessmen, social workers, law officers and other specialists. Write plain words.

## Variety

If variety is the spice of life. It is also one of the main ingredients in good writing. Variety means getting an interesting mix of words, expressions, phrases and terms. It likewise means using metaphors, similes and emphasis where needed. Variety calls for the avoidance of repetition. In short, variety means not being dull.

Don't repeat the same words over and over again. Let's say that you used the word "quarrel", in your first paragraph. The theme of your article, report or story requires you to convey the same idea several times again. Instead of depending on that word, think of acceptable substitutes such as "disagree, fight, clash, dispute, differ, argue". You may be able to draw some from your own word stock, or you may find them in a dictionary, say a thesaurus.

Variety can also be created with sentences. Throw in long ones, short ones and some in between. The sample paragraph lacks variety. Most sentences are about the same

length and follow a similar structural pattern: subject/verb/modifiers.

### **Original Passage**

Biologists have been studying the balance of nature at Isle Royale National Park. It is an unusual experiment. The park contains 210 square miles of wilderness. Scientists can study animal relationships there. The animals are not disturbed by man or other animals. Moose arrived on the island early this century. They probably came by swimming from the Canadian shore. The moose multiplied because they had no predators. They literally ate themselves out of house and home. They could not leave the island. They starved. They died in large numbers. A fire in 1936 nearly eliminated the browsing food moose eat. It was a disaster. The fire, in turn, opened large areas for new growth. The new growth was just the right diet for the huge animals. The herd grew. It outgrew its supply of good again. A severe winter in 1948 – 1949 caused an ice bridge to form. It bridged the Minnesota mainland to Isle Royale. A small pack of Eastern Timber wolves ventured across the ice. They found the island and the moose. Wolves are the only natural predators of moose. Scientists have watched the moose population grow and thrive. The moose population dwindles. The wolves of the island are controlled. It includes a relatively small geographical area. Scientists can keep actual head counts. They can study the moose-wolf balance in detail. The balance of nature theory has proven itself accurate. What a lesson for man to learnt! One scientific observer said, "The island's uniqueness lies in its complex yet simple system of natural processes... In such a system a delicate balance is struck in which no one animal or organism is more important than another. And man's part? We must leave this balance to natural law, observing but not manipulating."

### **Revised to Include Sentence Variety**

For the past fifty years biologists have been studying the balance of nature by means of a unique experiment conducted in the self-contained laboratory called Isle Royal National Park. The park, an island consisting of 210 square miles of wilderness, affords scientists the opportunity to observe animal relationships in an environment completely undisturbed by man. Sometime early in this century, moose arrived on the island, probably by swimming from the Canadian shore. Proliferating without predators, the moose herds by the early 1930's ate themselves out of house and home. Limited by the boundaries of the island, they starved, dying in large numbers. A disastrous fire in 1936 nearly eliminated the browsing food moose eat; but in turn, the fire opened large areas for new growth, just the right diet for the huge animals. So the herd grew. Again it outgrew the supply of food. Then, in 1948 – 1949, the severe winter caused an ice bridge to form from the Minnesota mainland to Isle Royale. By chance, a small pack of Eastern Timber wolves ventured across the ice, found the island, and found the moose. Wolves are the only natural predators of moose. In the course of the next several decades, scientists have watched the wolf population grow and thrive until the moose population dwindles. Then the wolves die from the lack of food, and the moose population increases. As a result of the controlled environment of the island and the relatively small geographical area involved, scientists can keep actual head counts



*and study the moose-wolf balance in detail. The balance of nature theory has, in the decades of study there, proven itself accurate. What a lesson for man to learn! As one scientific observer said of the park. "The island's uniqueness lies in its complex yet simple system of natural processes... In such a system delicate balance is struck in which no one animal or organism is more important than another. And man's part? We must leave this balance to natural law, observing but not manipulating."*

The revision above includes sentences which vary both in length and in structure. They vary in length from four words to thirty words. Interestingly, the longest and shortest sentences appear next to one another. The result is a significant emphasis on the idea in the short sentence. The sentences also vary in structure from simple sentence to compound-complex sentence. As for modifiers, the revised paragraph includes a wide variety: single word modifiers, phrase modifiers, and clause modifiers. For another, the revised sentences begin in different ways: with prepositional phrases, with participial phrases, with subjects, with transitional words and phrases, with relative pronouns, and with introductory clauses.

Variety and interest also are enhanced with the proper use of idiomatic expressions, rather than stiff, formal ones.

You really can't be a good writer unless you are aware of the world around you. You can enlarge your vocabulary and improve your powers of expression by reading. Read newspapers, magazines and books of different kinds. Popular magazines and books will provide you with examples of "new" styles of writing. Periodicals like *Newsweek*, *New York Times* are written by professionals who are today-oriented, both as to style and content. Learn from them.

A number of the points discussed in this chapter will be covered in more detail later on.

# Chapter Two

## Using Words Effectively

The word “playboy” may be taken as a compliment by one man and as an insult by another. A person may be unemployed because of economic circumstances over which he has no control. Or he may just not like to work. Therefore, the term unemployment may not be the right one for both cases. Words, the main spring of language, represent one of the hardest tasks for the writer. Words convey meaning. Finding the right word is a never-ending challenge. Words must transmit clear, exact meaning. They must get your ideas across to the readers. One of the most unforgivable of writing sins is to confuse the readers with vague, fuzzy language. To bring your writing into clear, sharp focus, here are some guidelines in the use of words.

1. Use Concrete Words Instead of General Ones.
2. Make sure the word is the right one for the idea.
3. Use familiar words.
4. Don't use more words than you need.
5. Use words for color.

### Use Concrete Words Instead of General Ones

If someone tells you that he saw a “good football game”, he isn't telling you much. “Good” in what sense? Was it well played? Did the favorite team win at last? Was there a lot of spectacular good shooting? In brief, what are the specifics?

Words with exact meaning offer much more to the reader than general ones. Cottage is a better term than house, Chevrolet than car, fifty years than a long time, orange than fruit, comedy than play, two-car collision than accident. Do you see the reason? The first choice is concrete; it creates an instant image for the reader. Cottage depicts a kind of house. Chevrolet identifies the auto and says something about the likely income of the owner, just as “Lincoln” would. By relying on a precise term, your writing comes alive, providing instant identifications. Here are some comparisons. You can surely tell which is better in the sense of concision.

crime	burglary
sound	cry
garment	shirt
emotional	enraged
magazine	China Daily
scholar	anthropologist



doctor  
foreigner

surgeon  
Italian

Is there any doubt that the second is superior? It has a sharper focus. It tells you more. Successful writing depends on furnishing the reading with clear images. Leave no doubts as to what you mean. Of course, generalizations can't always be avoided, but skip around them whenever you can. You may find the following news report shocking because the writer offered us readers as many details as possible—with concrete words.

*UEBERLINGEN, Germany—A Russian passenger airliner collided late last night with a Boeing 757 cargo plane over southern Germany, exploding in a fireball and apparently killing all 71 people aboard both planes, the police said.*

*About 50 children and teenagers under 18 were aboard the Russian Tupolev 154 airliner involved in the mid-air collision, the duty manager at Moscow's Domodedovo airport told Reuters news agency today. "All in all, there were about 50 children, including eight aged up to 12 years old," Stanislav Borolof said.*

*An official at the airport had earlier said just eight children were among the passengers, as under Russian airline rules, all those aged over 12 are registered as adults. The dead also included Canadian Brant Campioni, the copilot of the cargo plane, officials said.*

*The Russian Tupolev Tu-154 operated by Bashkirian Airlines, and the Boeing 757 crashed into one another at 11:43 pm over the state of Baden-Wurttemberg in southwest Germany. German officials at the news conference today said the air traffic controllers had told the Russian plane three times to lower its altitude to avoid a collision, but there was no response. They said the Boeing had made efforts to avoid the accident. There were no immediate reports of casualties on the ground. (excerpt from The Toronto Star, Tuesday, July 2, 2002)*

## **Make Sure the Word Is the Right One for the Idea**

There probably isn't an author alive who hasn't, at one time or another, struggled over a word, the right word. A great deal depends on your subject matter. If you are writing an article about economic conditions, then certain economic terms may be required, such as recession, slump, buying power, inventories markup, profit margin, layoff, inflation and tax shelter. If the topic is higher education, such expressions as semester, admissions, humanities, tenure and grade point average are in order.

If you write something for children, the words like pony, bunny, puppy, mum, dad are preferable to the words horse, rabbit, dog, mother and father.

## **Use Familiar Words**

Most people feel comfortable in old, familiar clothes. It's pleasurable to put on a worn jacket, a soft pair of shoes or a favorite pair of jeans. It's the same with words. Communication comes easier when the reader is dealing with familiar words. He or she relates to them. The bigger the store of such words you have, the more effective writer

you will be. Of course, you should always broaden your vocabulary, but don't take the risk of experiment unfamiliar, uncertain words on the readers.

## Don't Use More Words Than You Need

Overweight people often take steps to correct their condition by dieting or exercising. A lot of writing is overweight and correction follows the same principle of self-correction. Find the fat in your writing and remove it—even if it is painful.

Here's a sample of descriptive words that serve no need:

hairy ape	wealthy millionaire
hard cement	dirty cesspool
poor beggar	lethal bullet
dead corpse	fast jetliner
scaly fish	round wheel
unreal mirage	first-year freshman

The above adjectives belabor the obvious. Why use extra words? If you are not careful, you may find yourself writing "She was making dinner in the kitchen." Where else?

There are other redundancies that frequently turn up. Do you write "9:00 PM in the morning" or "white snow was falling"? Phrases like these are quite popular among many people trying to communicate.

Besides the remove of extra adjectives, there are other shortcuts to cut down on wordiness without sacrificing meaning. Leave out unneeded words. One of them is the redundant categories. For example:

*During the period of time, the membrane area became pink in color and shiny in appearance.*

*(During the period, the membrane became pink and shiny.)*

Sometimes, when we eliminate the category, we must change an adjective into an adverb:

*The holes must be aligned in an accurate way.*

*(The holes must be aligned accurately.)*

Sometimes we must change an adjective modifying a deleted category into a noun:

*The educational process and public recreational activities are the responsibilities of the county government.*

*(The county is responsible for education and public recreation.)*

Repetition also accounts for word wastage. However, repetition is necessary if it makes the thought more understandable, as in this example:

*He decided to be a movie critic because he thought the movie was an exciting and changing art form.*

On the opposite end of the scale are these needless repetitions:

*He was charged with murder and murder is a serious crime.*

*The walk in the fresh air cleared his head and enabled him to think more clearly.*



*When molten metal is immersed in water it produces steam when it is soaked.*

*Since plastic is a tough substance, it is hard to bend it.*

*California in the gold rush days was a wild and woody place to be living in.*

In each case, the underlined part of the sentence could be taken away with no loss of meaning. Think of this the next time you edit your manuscript. Actually, eliminating wordiness presents a no small challenge to most writers. The following two paragraphs illustrate in the revision an effective elimination of wordiness.

#### **Original Passage**

*Do we want continuing increased property taxes? Do we want to ignore drug-pushers and users? Do we want a "yes" man representing us in Congress? To answer "no" to these questions is to vote for Jerraid Kinsingtonne. Here's why.*

*When Republican incumbent Rodney Brollette urged local authorities to provide tax incentives to lure businesses into our community, he ignored the cry from private citizens that they would pay with increased property taxes. Democratic candidate Jerraid Kinsingtonne spoke on their behalf, but no one in the Republican-controlled Council listened. Now, strapped with property tax bills double last year's rate, citizens know who they need to support. When Kinsingtonne pleaded their case, he wasn't a candidate. Now he is.*

#### **Revised to Eliminate Wordiness**

*Shall we increase property taxes? Ignore drug-pushers? Elect a "yes" man for Congress? To answer "no" is to vote for Jerraid Kinsingtonne. Here's why.*

*When Republican incumbent Rodney Brollette fought for tax incentives to lure businesses here, he ignored Kinsingtonne's plea that private citizens would pay with increased property taxes. Now, strapped with tax bills double last year's rate, citizens know who they need to support.*

The revision above eliminates words, phrases, even whole sentences. As you compare the two passages, you will see that no ideas are omitted, but the revision gives the main idea greater emphasis. To reduce nearly 120 words to just over 60 words, the writer used phrases and clauses to combine ideas into single sentences. He used strong nouns and verbs to eliminate the need for modifiers. As a result of eliminating wordiness, the writer has secondarily improved his sentence variety.

### **Use Words for Color**

Color and human interest are what make writing interesting. Some words are drab, while others have zest and sparkle. They give a lift to what otherwise might be a run-of-the-mill piece. Words themselves can't make a basically dull subject come radiant, but they can add a little luster. Many of the color words are colloquial or slang. Don't be afraid of them for that reason. If you can handle them to good advantage, they can certainly make your writing colorful and vivid.