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21 世纪高校英语专业基础课系列教材

# 英语写作教程

南开大学外国语学院英语系教材编写组 编

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21 世纪高校英语专业基础课系列教材

# 英语写作教程

## A Guide to English Writing

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南开大学出版社  
天 津

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## 前 言

我们谨将南开大学英语系集体智慧的结晶——《21 世纪高校英语专业基础课系列教材》奉献给广大的学生,奉献给崭新的 21 世纪。

这套教材是 2000 年教育部批准实施的《高等学校英语专业英语教学大纲》颁布后,国内出版的第一套英语专业基础课系列教材,共计 8 种,分两次出齐,包括:

- 1.《英语口语教程》
- 2.《英语阅读教程》(一、二)
- 3.《英语听力教程》(一、二)(含学生用书与教师用书)
- 4.《英语翻译教程》
- 5.《英语口译教程》
- 6.《英语写作教程》
- 7.《基础英语教程》(一~四)(含学生用书与教师用书)
- 8.《高级英语教程》(一、二)(含学生用书与教师用书)

新世纪的教材应该有新世纪的特点。我们在教材编写中努力做到:全面贯彻新《大纲》,立足培养具有扎实的英语语言基础和广博的文化知识的复合型英语人才;反映当代科技、文化的最新成就;反映教学内容和课程体系改革的最新成果;在教材内容和体系上有明显特色。

系列教材编写工作难度大,时间紧,要求高。参加编写工作的所有教师兢兢业业,一丝不苟,历冬寒夏暑,始成此书。

我们倾全系之力编写这套教材,因为我们知道:我们正在为新世纪奉献自己的微薄之力。我们倾全系之力编写这套教材,因为我们相信:新世纪需要这样的教材。

这套教材得到了南开大学各级领导,尤其是学校教材建设委员会的关心和支持,并被列为教材重点建设项目;这套教材还得到了南开大学出版社的大力支持和帮助。

我们真诚地感谢所有关心、支持、帮助我们的朋友,我们真诚地欢迎批评和建议。

编者

2001 年 9 月  
于南开大学

## 本书特色

我们力图编出一本集知识性、实用性和趣味性为一体的教材,以适合大学英语专业本科写作课程教学,同时也适用于有志提高自身英语写作水平的非英语专业和广大的英语爱好者。

本书特色如下:

本书的选材力图涉及面广,尽量做到包含一个国家的社会生活、文学、文化、教育、科技、新闻等各方面的题材,语言地道,符合英语国家人民的语言习惯,措辞准确,用字优美,可作为学生模仿的范文;同时,也培养学生综合文化素质。材料主要来源于外国人编写的书籍、外文报刊杂志等,适当选取有中国特色的材料。

本教程打破绝大多数写作书从局部到整体的思路,即从如何用词和句子结构入手,要求学生进行模仿,然后过渡到掌握段落写作技巧、篇章布局和段落写作,最后才涉及到训练学生掌握不同的文体和篇章结构。这样一来,学生先入为主的是各个具体的技巧和知识,好比先掌握的是支离破碎的细节,先见到一棵棵树木,然后才过渡到整体,才见到整个森林。在这个过程中,有的学生会迷失了航线,拣了芝麻丢了西瓜,只着眼于用词和句式的变化而忽略了文章的篇章结构。为弥补此不足,本书在编排上采取从整体到局部的方法,即从篇章的整体结构入手,首先引导学生学习、领略短文写作的整体构思及其组织、发展的方法和技巧,再教给他们句子和用词的多样化。同时,在内容上做到前后呼应,有一定的交叉和重叠,使学生能牢固地掌握所学知识。

教程在提供了全面的写作知识的同时,在各部分穿插了有针对性的语法讲解和练习,为学生写作能力的迅速提高给予了充分的保证。

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## **Part One**

### **AN OVERVIEW OF THE ESSAY**

**This part will discuss :**

- **the general structure of an essay**
- **the writing process**
  - planning the essay**
  - outlining the essay**
  - drafting the essay**
  - revising the essay**
- **the principles of good essays**
  - the thesis statement**
  - the opening paragraph**
  - the concluding paragraph**

## Unit One

### GETTING A BASIC IDEA OF THE ESSAY

#### 1. WHAT IS AN ESSAY?

What, exactly, is an essay? According to *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*, an essay is a short piece of writing by a student as part of a course of study. It also means a short piece of writing giving someone's ideas about politics, society, etc. We may also say that an essay is a number of paragraphs grouped together to state and support a controlling idea called thesis. In an essay, the thesis is fully treated. The thesis statement appears in the introductory paragraph and is then developed in the body (supporting paragraphs, or middle paragraphs) that follows. Usually topic sentences and supporting evidence are provided in the supporting paragraphs. Finally, the concluding paragraph recalls the introductory paragraph, and briefly summarizes the main points of the essay.

#### 2. WHY WRITE ESSAYS?

Essays may have various forms, and contents in practical writing. A term paper will be, in all aspects, quite different from a thoughtful magazine article. Nevertheless, they all require the mastering of the basic essay structure. This writing skill first of all helps you with your courses and your B. A. paper. In addition, after you leave college, this skill will certainly be helpful in all career-related writing, from academic papers to reports of analysis required by your boss in your future work, or any other forms of writing that may be related to your work. Further, the material-sorting-and-organizing process of essay writing will train you to develop a habit of sound and logical reasoning, which will definitely benefit you when you make sound decisions not only in school but also in your career, no matter you have realized it or not.

#### 3. THE BASIC STRUCTURE OF AN ESSAY

The following is a diagram of the components of an essay. It may serve as a guide when you are writing an essay.

##### ***Introductory Paragraph***

Introduction

Thesis statement

Development plan

Supporting Points 1, 2, 3

The **introduction** attracts the reader's interest. Then the **thesis statement** expresses the main point to be advanced in the essay. The subsequent development plan lists all the points that support the thesis. These points are presented in the order in which they are to be discussed in the paper.

### ***Middle Paragraphs***

#### ***First Supporting Paragraph***

Topic sentence (point 1)

Specific evidence

The **topic sentence** advances the first supporting point for the thesis, and the **specific evidence** in the rest of the paragraph develops that first point.

#### ***Second Supporting Paragraph***

Topic sentence (point 2)

Specific evidence

The **topic sentence** advances the second supporting point for the thesis, and the **specific evidence** in the rest of paragraph develops that second point.

#### ***Third Supporting Paragraph***

Topic sentence (point 3)

Specific evidence

The **topic sentence** advances the third supporting point for the thesis, and the specific evidence in the rest of the paragraph develops that third point.

#### ***Concluding Paragraph***

Summary, Conclusion,  
or Both

A **summary** is a brief restatement of the thesis and its main points. A **conclusion** is a final thought or two stemming from the subject of the essay.

### **A Sample Essay**

Here is a sample essay that serves to illustrate all the components of an essay as listed in the diagram and the relationship between them.

#### **My Job in an Apple Plant**

1 In the course of working my way through school, I have taken many jobs I would rather forget. I have spent nine hours a day lifting heavy automobile and truck batteries off the end of an assembly belt. I have risked the loss of eyes and fingers working a punch press in a textile factory. I have served as a ward aide in a mental hospital, helping care for brain-damaged men who would break into violent fits at unexpected moments. But none of these jobs was as dreadful as my job in an apple plant. The work was physically hard; the pay was poor; and, most of all, the working conditions were dismal.

2 First of all, the job made enormous demands on my strength and energy. For ten hours a night, I took cartons that rolled down a metal track and stacked them onto wooden skids in a tractor-trailer. Each carton contained twelve heavy cans or bottles of apple juice. A carton shot down the track about every fifteen seconds. I once figured out that I was lifting an average of twelve tons of apple juice every night. When a truck was almost filled, I or my partner had to drag fourteen bulky wooden skids into the empty trailer nearby and then set up added sections of the

heavy metal track so that we could start routing cartons to the back of the empty van. While one of us did that, the other preformed the stacking work of two men.

3 I would not have minded the difficulty of the work so much if the pay had not been so poor. I was paid the minimum wage of that time, two dollars an hour, plus the minimum of a quarter extra for working the night shift. Because of the low salary, I felt compelled to get as much overtime pay as possible. Everything over eight hours a night was time-and-a-half, so I typically worked twelve hours a night. On Friday I would sometimes work straight through until Saturday at noon-eighteen hours. I averaged over sixty hours a week but did not take home much more than \$100.

4 But even more than the low pay, what upset me about my apple plant job was the working conditions. Our humorless supervisor cared only about his production record for each night and tried to keep the assembly line moving at a breakneck pace. During work I was limited to two ten-minute breaks and an unpaid half hour for lunch. Most of my time was spent outside on the truck loading dock in near-zero-degree temperatures. The steel floors of the trucks were like ice; the quickly penetrating cold made my feet feel like stone. I had no shared interests with the man I loaded cartons with, and so I had to work without companionship on the job. And after the production line shut down and most people left, I had to spend two hours alone scrubbing clean the apple vats, which were coated with a sticky residue.

5 I stayed on the job for five months, all the while hating the difficulty of the work, the poor money, and the conditions under which I worked. By the time I quit, I was determined never to do such degrading work again.

This sample essay is a good illustration of a standard short essay you are most likely required to write as a college student. It is composed of a one-paragraph introduction, a three-paragraph body, and a one-paragraph conclusion. You can find out the roles of these paragraphs by referring to the diagram and by answering the following questions.

#### **Questions and ideas for discussion:**

- 1) Identify the introductory paragraph, the middle paragraphs and the concluding paragraph in the essay.
- 2) Discuss how the author tries to attract the reader's attention and interest. Identify the thesis statement. Does the author state his supporting points here? What are they?
- 3) Underline the topic sentence in each middle paragraph. Does it contain a point to be developed in the rest of the paragraph? Read the supporting details carefully and discuss if they are directly related and in support of the point advanced by the topic sentence.
- 4) Do you find, in the concluding paragraph, a restatement of the thesis of the essay and a summary of all the main points mentioned in the middle paragraph?

## Unit Two

### THE WRITING PROCESS

#### 1. PLANNING THE ESSAY

Of course, before you start to write your essay, you need to do some preparation work first, that is, a good and sufficient planning. The more work you do at this stage, the less work you will have later, at the stages of drafting and revising. Generally speaking, the planning process consists of the steps of identifying your purpose and audience, gathering material, and deciding on a thesis. When all these steps are completed, you have already done half of your essay-writing work.

##### Step One

###### Identifying your purpose and audience

Before you start to write, you need to define your purpose and audience. Otherwise, you will be at a loss and may stare blankly at your blank paper or keyboard, not sure of how to start; or you may plunge happily ahead, only to discover that you have misunderstood your writing task.

###### 1) Defining Your Purpose

Generally speaking, the purposes of writing are: to explain, to persuade, and to share ideas and experience. The first one leads to **expository writing**, the second to **persuasive writing**, and the third to **personal writing** (that is, narration and description). The understanding of purpose and audience will influence the choice of form and methods of development, the relationship to the reader, and the choice of language and style.

###### Expository Writing

An essay is expository if its main purpose is to provide information, to explain how something works or how something is done, or to explain the meaning of concepts, historical events, works of art, and so on. In other words, the emphasis of the writing is on the subject itself, rather than on the audience, on the author, or on the interaction between author and audience.

###### Sample Paragraph

###### Purpose: To Explain

Knowing what is stolen and where it is stolen from does not answer the most basic question about shoplifting: why do people steal? According to a security guard for Sears, the reason is not need: "In all the time I've worked here, and of all the arrests I've made, and I've made over 400 arrests, not once, not once was it out of need." Most shoplifters who are caught have more than enough money with them to pay for the item and many have credit cards as well. So why do they steal? According to Bill Cheung at Eaton's, the peak seasons for shoplifting are September and January-February, when new school terms begin. Presumably, at the beginning of the term, students look at the clothes or toys their

peers have and want them. Children and adolescents, it seems, shoplift to fit in.

This paragraph illustrates the principal features of much expository writing. The author explains reasons of stealing. He presents his information and analysis as objectively as possible, quoting the issue-related persons. Thus, he keeps the focus on his subject, not on his opinions about the subject or on his own personality.

### **Persuasive Writing**

Central to all argumentative writing is to convince readers of the soundness of your opinion about your subject and further persuade them to share your attitudes and beliefs or to act on your part. To achieve this goal, it is important to make strong appeals to the reader. The emphasis in argumentative writing is on the reader.

### **Sample Paragraph**

Purpose: to Change Opinion or Behavior

Contrary to the popular view, most shoplifters do not steal because they are poor. A longtime security guard fore Sears, who has arrested more than 400 shoplifters, points out that "not once" had the person stolen out of need. Shoplifters usually have more than enough money with them to pay for the stolen goods, and they often have credit cards as well. They may tell themselves that the stores are so rich they will not miss this little eraser/tube of lipstick/make-up case/radio/stereo/jacket. But it is not the stores that pay; honest customers pay through higher prices. There is thus no reason to be lenient with shoplifters. They are as guilty of theft as the person who steals a wallet from a locker room or a tape deck from a car, and should be treated accordingly. If we turn a blind eye to shoplifting, we are not only condoning a crime, but also sentencing ourselves to pay the penalty.

Here the author's purpose is to persuade readers to change their attitude, and possibly their behavior, towards shoplifters. In contrast to the neutral language of the expository paragraph, the author uses emotionally charged words and phrases (honest, guilty, lenient, condoning, sentencing), which draws readers' attention to the author's intention, that is, he wants them to adopt this attitude.

### **Narration and Description**

Personal writing provides you with the chance to discover what you think and how you feel about ideas and experiences, and to share these discoveries with others. Your subject can cover what you have experienced or your reactions to the world around you. The writing can be the serious business of revealing your innermost thoughts and feelings and you can also present yourself in a free style, ranging from comic to tragic, satiric to romantic, serious to playful.

## **Sample Paragraph**

Purpose: to Share Personal Experience

I was thirteen at the time, in a new school, and desperate to make friends. For the first few weeks, everyone ignored me. Not that all my classmates were friends with each other. At lunch hour and after school they divided into groups and alternately ignored and insulted each other. I was afraid that if I didn't make friends soon, they would stop ignoring and start insulting me. So one day, I followed a gang of five or six into the mall at lunch. As they straggled through Eaton's, I kept several feet behind, stopping every now and then to gaze intently at leather briefcases or umbrellas so they wouldn't think I was being pushy. When they clustered around the jewelry counter, I ducked down the next row. And there in front of me were bags and bags of candy, ready for Halloween. Without thinking, I grabbed one and stuffed it under my jacket.

The author of this piece invites us to share his isolation, fear, and desire to belong that lead to his shoplifting a bag of candy. The story carries us along and makes us "witnesses" the events. Even though we may disapprove of the theft, we are drawn into the author's own experience.

The above three samples may well drive us to think, when we are in the writing situation, about the question: "what is my purpose?" You may have a variety of purposes to choose one from when you are in a specific writing situation. If you wanted to write an article on private cars for a general interest newspaper, for instance, you could choose to explain the advantages or disadvantages that can be foreseen of private cars, to argue for or against the promotion of private cars, or to share with the reader your own adventures of driving a new private car. In many situations, however, the purpose is given or implied. Nevertheless, it is always full of challenge to write to meet different purposes on the same topic.

## **2) Defining Your Audience**

Defining your purpose is the first step in writing; the second is defining your audience. Your writing style, like your talking style, changes with your audience, who determines how much information you have to prepare, and how you present it, for instance, in a formal or an informal way. Generally speaking, you may ask yourself: Who will read this article? Readers who already know a great deal about that subject or those who know nothing at all? This will help you get a general sense of your reader's needs and expectations and further help you communicate more effectively.

## **Step Two**

### **1) Gathering Material**

Good material is very important to an author. If there isn't enough good material to work with, the writing will be weak in content.

## **2) Brainstorming**

In the process of brainstorming, spontaneous responses to a specific subject rush into your mind. Just allow your mind loose of your reign—any ideas, examples, experiences, questions, memories, or feelings can be jotted down. Put a key word of each, including your subject, on a piece of paper. Then, with so many things in hand, you can easily find a fresh angle on your subject or choose material of special interest to your readers. This step will assure you of sufficient things to say in your article. If you were preparing for a report on the good side and bad side of owning private cars, for example, you might end up with a brainstorming diagram like this:

### **Private cars**

#### **Advantages:**

- 1) safe: avoiding crowded bicycles, taking on strong protection;
- 2) comfortable: feeling good;
- 3) convenient: saving time, no more rush for bus, coming home any time;
- 4) improving the quality of life: driving to wherever you want, a symbol of modern life;

#### **Disadvantages:**

- 1) high costs: parking, fuel, insurance, and taxes;
- 2) road accidents: bad road condition, irresponsible drivers;
- 3) pollution: lung cancer, heart disease, and other diseases related to pollution;
- 4) land occupation: smaller space for other purposes;

After that, you may just choose one point and write continuously on it for about ten minutes or until you have given enough details. Sum up what you have written in a sentence. And then you can move on to another point.

## **3) Asking Discovering Questions**

When you are beating your brains to think of a topic, ask yourself, “What interests me most?” “Am I familiar with this subject?” “Do I have enough information about this subject?” Actually, plenty of things and events around us can be written on. However, find out the one that most interests you or is likely to arouse the reader’s attention. If you have already got a very general subject at hand, be sure to specify it. You cannot write on a very big subject such as “memory”. Try to narrow it down to a specific one so that you can properly control the range of the essay and your essay may be more impressive than otherwise. Now that you have got your topic, everything related to that topic—your personal experience, your knowledge and your viewpoints—will be useful to you and can be used in your essay.

Suppose you are going to write on “private cars”. If nothing special comes to your mind that can immediately help to form a thesis, you may first focus on “an unpleasant memory”, for an unpleasant memory has much more possibility in arousing the reader’s curiosity than a pleasant one. Next, you may continue to limit the choice to one on the



road. Finally, this can be even more restricted to a car accident you were involved in when you were having a busy day. At this stage, the subject is focused enough for a short essay. But how did the accident happen? Who was injured? What are the possible causes for the accident? What has resulted from it? What attitude do you want to express toward the accident? What do you want to explore further through this experience? By answering these questions you may be clear of the kind of information that you are likely to use in a certain situation.

#### **4) Finding a Thesis**

The last thing to do after you have gathered ideas and information about your subject is to find a thesis, i. e. a focus. In this step, you decide what to include and what to leave out. To give a focus to your writing, you should make everything center around one or more aspects of your subject. A short article is fit for discussion in detail one aspect of the subject in detail. But if you are allowed to write a longer one, it is possible to discuss more aspects in it. Suppose, for example, your subject is "private cars in China" and your purpose is to explain some thing of this subject. In a short article, you can focus on the advantages or disadvantages brought by private cars; while in a longer one, you can also explain why private cars are getting so popular in China and why people are still hesitating to have one. However, if you intend to argue that there are already enough cars on the road, it is good to describe your personal experience, a car accident as was mentioned previously, in the essay as strong supporting evidence.

Now, write down your thesis at the top of your paper. It will remind you to keep going on the "main road" and not to go astray while you are writing your first draft.

## **2. OUTLINING THE ESSAY**

An outline presents to you a clear map of the main divisions of your paper and the relationships among major points, minor points, and details. Making an outline thus helps you to classify your materials and plan the structure of your essay and the process of your writing in it. A good outline contains a well-formulated thesis, major supporting points with relevant evidence and a conclusion. Once the thesis is defined, you may subdivide the controlling idea into smaller points; each should be parallel to the others and is to be further developed in a single paragraph. Then relevant and sufficient evidence for points is to be supplied. In an outline, Roman numerals, capital letters and Arabic numerals can be used when needed.

#### **A sample outline form**

Thesis: Because of the increasing number of problems brought about by private cars, manufacturing and selling more and more private cars should not be encouraged in present China.

- I. Unbearable high cost
  - a. Unreasonable parking fee
  - b. Increasing fuel charge