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• 高等院校英语专业教材 •

A COLLEGE COURSE
IN ADVANCED WRITING

高级英语

写作教程

• 马红军 主编
毛卓亮

ENGLISH COMPOSE

新颖
灵活
权威
经典

中国对外翻译出版公司

高等院校英语专业

高级英语写作教程

**A College Course
in Advanced Writing**

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前 言

《高级英语写作教程》是为大学英语专业学生编写的英语写作课教材，内容涵盖高级英语写作技能的各个环节。2000年4月颁发的《高等学校英语专业英语教学大纲》明确规定，写作为英语专业技能必修课程之一，其目的在于培养学生的英语写作能力。现有的英语写作教科书虽种类繁多，但专门为英语专业学生编写的高起点教材并不多见，本书正是在以新的教学大纲为依据，充分考虑英语专业学生特殊需要的基础上编写的。本教程的体例编排及侧重点与传统的高校英语写作教材有所不同。几点说明如下：

一、教学内容

本教程分十章，共由四部分组成，各部分相互配合，各章循序渐进，形成一个比较完整的体系。前三章集中讨论选词炼句及段落组织技巧，旨在激发学生兴趣，开阔思路，使其初步了解基本写作技能；第四至第七章讲解段落与篇章写作步骤，包括描写文、记叙文、说明文和议论文等；第八和第九章分别介绍摘要及学术论文写作方法，其中第九章为本书核心章节，也是英语专业学生较难掌握的写作技能；针对学生实际需求，第十章专门介绍诸如读书报告、书评、随堂小论文、个人简历及求职信等实用性写作技能。章节编排顺序为单词、句子、段落、篇章、论文、专业写作技能，内容由浅入深、环环相扣。每一写作技能均有详细的讲解和具体的写作步骤，并辅以充足的例证。上述安排完全符合《高等学校英语专业英语教学大纲》的要求，即“教学内容的安排可从如何用词和句子结构入手，进而过渡到掌握段落写作技巧、篇章布局和短文写作。如有条件，还应进一步训练学生掌握各种文体及其篇章结构，如描写文、记叙文、说明文和议论文等。”

二、教学要点

尽管写作为英语专业技能必修课，但各校教学周课时数和学生水平不尽相同。本书一至六章可于本科二年级下半学期开设，以每周两课时、每学期十八周实际授课时间计算，大体以每三周一章的进度完成教程前两部分的教学。第七至第十章适合在三年级上半学期开设，由于第九章内容多且难度大，至少应占用不

少于十周二十课时，也可将其中的论文写作部分并入四年级上半学期开设的学术论文写作课。鉴于各章教学要点及内容含量不同，授课教师可根据具体情况掌握教学进度，适当增加或压缩某部分内容的讲授时间。另外，由于各章的内容之间有着密切的内在联系且各自独立，教师亦可根据自己的教学安排或学生水平适当调整各章的先后顺序，甚至可以打破原有的编排结构，进行横向教学。

三、练习

除第十章外，每章后都附有精心编选的练习，既富有新意且形式活泼，亦具备相当的挑战性，因而非常适合学生的口味。教师可在每章结束后集中安排布置，也可随讲随练。书后备有练习参考答案，供学生对照检查。第四至第七章后的写作练习（Working Activities）供教师选用。

四、学生习作

本书第四至第七章收录了学生优秀习作三十余篇，它们均出自使用本教材的学生之手。教师可选择个别习作进行讲评，或者组织课堂讨论。

为确保语言规范，书内大部分例句及短文均引自原版写作教材，全书英文手稿及学生习作均经外国专家 David Kerbel 先生润色校订。由于篇幅所限，本书并未逐一注明所引例句的详细出处，读者可参阅书后列出的参考书目。书后附录为文学术语汇编及索引，供学生查阅。

本教材参考了国外原版写作教材四十余种，已在英语系二、三年级连续试用五年，经过不断总结和完善，并在广泛征求教师和学生意见的基础上历经数次修订而成。作者相信，通过学习本教程和自身的努力，广大在校学生和自学者将能够掌握基本写作技巧，进一步提高应用写作能力。

编者
2002年9月
于南开大学

Contents

| | | |
|----------|------------------------------------|-----------|
| 1 | CHOOSING RIGHT WORDS | 1 |
| 1.1 | General and Specific Words | 1 |
| 1.2 | Denotation and Connotation | 3 |
| 1.3 | Figurative Language | 4 |
| 1.4 | Levels of Diction | 5 |
| | Exercises | 11 |
| 2 | SHAPING EFFECTIVE SENTENCES | 17 |
| 2.1 | Sentence Variety | 17 |
| 2.1.1 | Varying sentence length | 17 |
| 2.1.2 | Varying sentence structure | 20 |
| 2.1.3 | Varying sentence beginnings | 20 |
| 2.2 | Impressive Sentences | 21 |
| 2.2.1 | Using strong verbs | 21 |
| 2.2.2 | Using right voice | 22 |
| 2.2.3 | Using repetition | 23 |
| 2.2.4 | Using inverted order | 24 |
| 2.3 | Sentence Emphasis | 25 |
| 2.3.1 | Periodic sentences | 25 |
| 2.3.2 | Cumulative sentences | 25 |
| 2.3.3 | Climactic sentences | 26 |
| 2.3.4 | Antithetical sentences | 26 |
| 2.3.5 | Short sentences | 27 |
| 2.3.6 | The dash | 27 |
| 2.4 | Concise Sentences | 28 |
| 2.4.1 | Wordiness | 28 |
| 2.4.2 | Needless repetition | 29 |
| 2.4.3 | Redundancy | 29 |
| 2.4.4 | Buzzwords | 29 |
| 2.4.5 | Pretentious language | 30 |
| | Exercises | 31 |
| 3 | UNDERSTANDING PARAGRAPHS | 38 |
| 3.1 | Paragraph Structure | 38 |
| 3.1.1 | Topic sentence | 39 |
| 3.1.2 | Supporting sentences | 44 |

| | | |
|----------|---------------------------------------|-----------|
| 3.1.3 | Concluding sentence | 47 |
| 3.2 | Paragraph Unity | 47 |
| 3.3 | Paragraph Coherence | 49 |
| 3.3.1 | Transitional words and phrases | 50 |
| 3.3.2 | Repeated key words and phrases | 51 |
| 3.3.3 | Parallel structure | 52 |
| 3.4 | Paragraph Development | 53 |
| 3.4.1 | Examples and details | 53 |
| 3.4.2 | Comparison and contrast | 54 |
| 3.4.3 | Analogy | 55 |
| 3.4.4 | Classification | 55 |
| 3.4.5 | Cause and effect | 56 |
| 3.4.6 | Process | 56 |
| 3.4.7 | Space order | 57 |
| 3.4.8 | Question-answer order | 57 |
| 3.4.9 | Order of importance | 57 |
| | Exercises | 58 |
| 4 | WRITING DESCRIPTIVE PARAGRAPHS | 65 |
| 4.1 | About a Person | 65 |
| 4.2 | About an Object | 71 |
| 4.3 | About a Place | 75 |
| 4.4 | More Practice on Description | 79 |
| 4.4.1 | About an unusual person | 79 |
| 4.4.2 | About a room | 79 |
| 4.4.3 | About an animal | 80 |
| | Student Practice Paragraphs | 81 |
| | Exercises | 85 |
| | Writing Activities | 88 |
| 5 | WRITING NARRATIVE PARAGRAPHS | 89 |
| 5.1 | Framework of a Narrative | 89 |
| 5.1.1 | Point of view | 89 |
| 5.1.2 | Dialogue | 90 |
| 5.1.3 | Setting | 91 |
| 5.1.4 | Order of events | 93 |
| 5.2 | About an Experience | 93 |
| 5.3 | About an Activity | 99 |
| | Student Practice Paragraphs | 106 |
| | Exercises | 109 |
| | Writing Activities | 110 |

| | | |
|----------|--|------------|
| 6 | WRITING OTHER TYPES OF PARAGRAPHS | 111 |
| 6.1 | Example Paragraph | 111 |
| 6.2 | Process Paragraph | 112 |
| 6.3 | Comparison Paragraph | 114 |
| 6.4 | Cause-Effect Paragraph | 115 |
| 6.5 | Definition Paragraph | 116 |
| 6.6 | Opinion Paragraph | 117 |
| | Student Practice Paragraphs | 118 |
| | Exercises | 121 |
| | Writing Activities | 122 |
| 7 | WRITING BEYOND THE PARAGRAPH | 123 |
| 7.1 | Thesis Statement | 124 |
| 7.2 | Outline | 129 |
| 7.3 | Introduction | 132 |
| 7.4 | Body Paragraphs | 134 |
| 7.5 | Conclusion | 135 |
| 7.6 | Revision of First Draft | 136 |
| | Student Practice Papers | 137 |
| | Exercises | 139 |
| | Writing Activities | 140 |
| 8 | WRITING A SUMMARY | 141 |
| 8.1 | Summarizing Paragraphs | 141 |
| 8.2 | Summarizing Longer Pieces | 145 |
| | Exercises | 152 |
| 9 | WRITING ABOUT LITERATURE | 157 |
| 9.1 | The Elements of Literature | 157 |
| 9.1.1 | Plot | 158 |
| 9.1.2 | Narrator and point of view | 158 |
| 9.1.3 | Characterization | 160 |
| 9.1.4 | Setting | 160 |
| 9.1.5 | Symbols | 162 |
| 9.1.6 | Language and style | 162 |
| 9.1.7 | Theme | 165 |
| 9.1.8 | Some literary devices and terms | 166 |
| 9.2 | Literal Versus Analytical Reading | 168 |
| 9.2.1 | Denotation versus connotation | 168 |
| 9.2.2 | Paraphrase and summary versus analysis | 169 |
| 9.2.3 | Context and analysis | 170 |
| 9.2.4 | Symbolism and analysis | 171 |

| | | |
|-----------|---|------------|
| 9.2.5 | Imagery and analysis | 173 |
| 9.2.6 | Structure and totality of a work | 175 |
| 9.3 | Writing a Literary Interpretation | 177 |
| 9.3.1 | Theme idea | 177 |
| 9.3.2 | Examples of defining theme idea | 178 |
| 9.3.3 | Solidity of content | 179 |
| 9.3.4 | Poor mixture of summary and analysis | 182 |
| 9.3.5 | The scissors and paste approach | 183 |
| 9.3.6 | Identification of a pattern in a text | 184 |
| 9.3.7 | Five basic steps | 190 |
| 9.3.8 | A practical demonstration | 191 |
| 9.4 | Writing a Research Paper | 201 |
| 9.5 | Format for Documenting Sources | 209 |
| 9.5.1 | Using explanatory notes | 209 |
| 9.5.2 | In-text citations | 210 |
| 9.5.3 | A sample list | 213 |
| 9.6 | Writing Logical Argument | 217 |
| 9.6.1 | Persuasion and argument | 217 |
| 9.6.2 | Induction | 217 |
| 9.6.3 | Deduction | 218 |
| 9.6.4 | Arguing from authority, testimony | 219 |
| 9.6.5 | Building a good argument | 219 |
| 9.6.6 | Avoiding fallacies | 221 |
| 9.7 | Questions Often Asked about Research Papers | 223 |
| | A Sample Research Paper | 231 |
| | Exercises | 241 |
| 10 | WRITING FOR SPECIAL PURPOSES | 246 |
| 10.1 | Book Report | 246 |
| 10.2 | Book Review | 248 |
| 10.3 | In-Class Papers | 260 |
| 10.4 | Job Applications | 264 |
| 10.4.1 | Résumés | 264 |
| 10.4.2 | Letters of application | 266 |
| | A GLOSSARY OF LITERARY TERMS | 269 |
| | ANSWERS TO SELECTED EXERCISES | 287 |
| | INDEX | 305 |
| | BIBLIOGRAPHY | 310 |

1 CHOOSING RIGHT WORDS

The *New York Times* once reported the result of a poll in which “a random sample of Americans were asked about their views of abortion in several different ways.” The first question was phrased this way: “Do you think there should be such an amendment to the Constitution prohibiting abortions, or shouldn’t there be such an amendment?” The respondents were solidly opposed—62 percent—to such an amendment. But when the question read, “Do you believe there should be an amendment to the Constitution protecting the life of the unborn child, or shouldn’t there be such an amendment?” Fully one-third of those who opposed the amendment when it was presented as “prohibiting abortions” supported it when it was presented as “protecting the life of the unborn child.” As the headline concluded, “Wording Makes A Big Difference.”

Writing, after all, is made up of words. The wording in writing is crucial. The right word in the right place at the right moment can greatly influence the readers and help them understand the message quickly and easily. We will begin the discussion of word choice with an artificial device, simply for purposes of demonstration. Below is the opening paragraph from an advertisement announcing a set of finely printed books, and we’ve put into it word choices that the writer who crafted the message might have considered. Each word choice in parentheses contains the word the writer used and other possible choices:

If you have ever (thought about, considered, dreamed of) owning (lovely, beautiful, good-looking) custom-bound books, but have hesitated to pay the (outrageous, very high, spiraling) prices asked for such (publications, tomes, books), here is (exciting, earth-shaking, wonderful, super) news. The Easton Press is (pleased, happy, proud, proud as punch) to announce a (major, stupendous, groovy) publishing event: *Masterpieces of American Literature*.

If you have problems in word choice, the following discussion of the dimensions involved in word choice will help you become a more sensitive and more inventive wordsmith.

1.1 General and Specific Words

Good writers help their readers follow the meaning by balancing *general* words—those that refer to groups or classes of things—with *specific* words—those that refer to individual things. One kind of general words, *abstraction*, are words or phrases that refer to qualities or ideas, things we cannot perceive through our five senses. Specific words are often *concrete* words; they name things we can see, hear, touch, taste, or smell.

| | | |
|--------------|-----------|---|
| GENERAL | SPECIFIC | MORE SPECIFIC |
| food | fast food | pizza |
| place | city | New York City |
| ABSTRACT | CONCRETE | MORE CONCRETE |
| art | painting | van Gogh's <i>Starry Night</i> |
| cold weather | icicles | fifteen-inch icicles hanging from the eaves of our dormitory |

A good way to see the difference between abstract and concrete terms is to pair the two in sentences like the following:

Happiness is a cancelled 8:00 class on a cold, rainy morning.

Luxury is the smell of leather upholstery in a new Ferrari.

Panic is realizing that next Wednesday's test is this Wednesday.

In each of these sentences, the quality of the abstract word is made real by the concrete and familiar example.

Often, writers tend to use too many abstract or general words, leaving their writing drab and lifeless. As you select words to fit your context, be as specific and concrete as you can. For example, instead of the word "bad," consider using a more precise adjective.

bad children: rowdy, rude, ungrateful, selfish, perverse

bad meat: tough, tainted, overcooked, contaminated

bad planks: rotten, warped, scorched, knotty, termite-eaten

When you think you need to use the general word *sound* or *noise*, try to think up other strong, specific words, such as *rustle*, *sizzle*, *whizz*, *whoosh*, *rattle*, *scream*, *bellow*, or *whisper*. Note how the italicized specific words help make the following two paragraphs effective.

Sure signs of a new day are the sounds in the kitchen as breakfast is prepared. The high *sigh* of the gas just before it *whooshes* into flame and settles into a *whispering hum* blends with the *gurgling* of the water for the morning coffee. Soon the *gloop*, *gloop* of the coffee sets up a *perky beat*. Then it mingles the *crackle* of creamy butter on a hot skillet and the *shush* of an egg as it meets this fierce foe. Ribbons of bacon start to *sizzle* in the *spitting* grease. The *soft rustle* of plastic as bread is removed from its wrapper floats on the air and seems to form part of the atmosphere. The can opener *whirs*, and the orange juice concentrate drops with a *splat* into the blender, which *whizzes* together the orange cylinder and splashed-in water. For minutes after the blending stops, tiny effervescing bubbles *fizz*.

The January wind has a hundred voices. It can *scream*, it can *bellow*, it can *whisper*, and it can *sing a lullaby*. It can *roar* through the leafless oaks and *shout* down the hillside, and it can *murmur* in the white pines rooted among the granite ledges where lichen makes strange hieroglyphics. It can *whistle* down the chimney and set the

hearth-flames to dancing. On a sunny day it can pause in a sheltered spot and *breathe* a promise of spring and violets. In the cold of a lonely night it can *rattle* the sash and stay there *muttering* of ice and snow-banks and deep-frozen ponds.

Specific words tell the reader that you are a definite, purposeful individual. Vague generalities imply that you are unsure of yourself. If you write:

It is considered that a fair percentage of the samples received from one of our suppliers during the preceding months contained a contaminant.

you are giving the reader at least four opportunities to wonder whether you really know much about the topic:

1. "It is considered" Who has voiced the opinion?
2. "a fair percentage" How many?
3. "one of our suppliers" Who? One in how many?
4. "contained a contaminant" What contaminant? In how strong a concentration?

All these generalities can be avoided in a more specific sentence, which tells the reader that you know exactly what you are talking about:

We estimate that 60% of the samples received from Ramsort Chemicals last June were contaminated with 0.5% to 0.8% mercuric chloride.

However, writing that is full of specifics can also be tedious and hard to follow if the main point is made unclear or lost amid a flood of extraneous details. Strong writing must usually provide readers with both a general idea and specific examples or details to develop the main point.

GENERAL: Much of a Cuban's day is spent for waiting.

SPECIFIC: Much of a Cuban's day is spent for waiting. People wait for taxis, for buses, for newspapers, for ice creams, for cakes, for restaurants, for movies, for picture postcards.

1.2 Denotation and Connotation

Denotation of a word refers to its literal meaning as found in the dictionary. *Connotation* refers to what a word implies or suggests. According to the dictionary, the word *snake* denotes "any of a wide variety of limbless reptiles with an elongate, scaly body, lidless eyes, and a tapering tail." For some people the word *snake* may connote treachery or evil, and for others, wisdom or healing. Mistakes in denotation are bound to occur as we try out new words. A student who writes "The party managed to diverge my thoughts from the hard work ahead" is confusing *divert* and *diverge* but is on the way to learning to use both. To avoid mistakes in denotation, pay careful attention to the way words are used in context, and check your dictionary when you are unsure of meaning.

Words with similar literal meaning may have connotations that vary widely. *Hushed*, *quiet*, *still*, *mute*, *speechless*, *tomblike* all mean *silent*. But the first three words have positive connotations suggesting *peacefulness* while the rest have negative connotations suggesting *eeriness*. *House* and *home* roughly mean the same, but a contractor who advertises “We don’t build houses, we build homes” obviously counts on the positive connotations of *home* to boost sales. And a boy student would not walk up to his date and tell her that her perfume has an exotic odor. *Odor* is more neutral than a word like *stench*, but is still slightly negative; *fragrance*, though, carries a positive connotation.

The words we choose as we write also show our attitude toward our subject. For example, we might write, “The skinny woman slinked in,” or “The slender girl glided in.” Each of these sentences could describe the same event, but each shows a different attitude on the part of the writer.

In writing, we must always pay attention to both the literal and the suggestive meanings of the words we use. Otherwise our words may clash, as the words do in the sentence below:

The speaker manipulated the members of the audience by presenting the evidence to refute their arguments.

“Manipulate” denotes “deviousness” on the part of the speaker, but “refute” has the connotation of “reasonably proving something false.” The two words do not fit well together. To correct the clash of meanings, words with more compatible denotations and connotations should be used:

The speaker convinced the members of the audience by presenting the evidence to refute their arguments.

The speaker manipulated the members of the audience by presenting only the evidence that would disprove their arguments.

1.3 Figurative Language

Writers use figurative language to draw a comparison between two things that are essentially different but alike in some underlying and surprising way. By making comparisons writers not only help their readers understand what is being said, but they also add vigor to their prose. The two chief figures of speech are simile and metaphor. *Similes* use “like” or “as” to compare two things. *Metaphors* imply a comparison without using “like” or “as.”

SIMILE: For a diligent student, failing to pass the final exam is like a sudden death.

SIMILE: A person who gains knowledge but fails to put it into practice is like someone who ploughs a field but does not sow it.

SIMILE: I was forced to go to my first dance with my first blind date, whose hair was even shorter than mine and who danced like a trained bear.

METAPHOR: Karen was a Fourth of July firecracker, exploding out of the house after doing her chores.

METAPHOR: A child's mind is a bank—whatever you put in, you get back in ten years with interest.

METAPHOR: This book is a passport into exotic, untrodden lands.

Vivid comparisons do add life to writing, but overused, worn-out comparisons or figures of speech should be avoided. Such worn-out expressions are called *clichés*. They were fresh and striking at one time but through overuse have become faded like old photographs. Clichés like “cradle of civilization,” “few and far between,” “as busy as a bee” should be replaced with fresh figures of speech. If you cannot think of a fresh simile or metaphor, use specific words.

CLICHE: Some changes are violent, while others creep slowly like snails.

FRESH METAPHOR: Some changes are violent, while others creep slowly like sorghum syrup.

CLICHE: One club member spoke for almost half an hour, making a mountain out of a molehill.

FRESH METAPHOR: One club member spoke for almost half an hour, making a house cat into a raging lion.

SPECIFIC WORDS: One club member spoke for almost half an hour, making a minute problem into a potential catastrophe.

What figurative language does is not only clarify ideas for the readers, that is, give them images, but also add a new dimension to their thoughts without their having to spell it out. The sports section of local papers is often filled with figurative language, because sports writers are always looking for new ways to convey old ideas. The figurative headlines below all mean “Team A Beats Team B,” but they convey a sense of the drama or the margin of the victory.

Raiders *Pillage* Jets

Cowboys *Whip* Tigers

Tigers *Claw* Bears

Jets *Blast* Dolphins

Lakers *Drown* Trojans

Thunder *Withers* Mayflower

1.4 Levels of Diction

Different levels of *diction* (word choice) include the slang that may be appropriate in a letter to a friend, the formal language expected in a legal document and the technical terms demanded by a scientific report. For instance, in a formal business letter you might refer to *inner fortitude*, but in a conversation with friends you might even say *guts*. But when you are writing outside such special contexts, you should use the general English vocabulary, the language that is neither too casual to convey serious concern nor too stiff to express feeling.

SLANG (INFORMAL)

guts

wheels

mug

gross

GENERAL

inner strength

car

face

offensive

FORMAL

inner fortitude

automobile

visage

odious

| | | |
|-------------|-----------|-------------|
| threads | clothes | attire |
| specs | glasses | spectacles |
| rip off | steal | expropriate |
| big-mouthed | talkative | voluble |
| wasted | exhausted | debilitated |

In your dictionary, you will find special usage labels for words or particular definitions of words that differ from the general English vocabulary, the unlabeled words. Here is a sampling of labels frequently used, each of them found in two or more college dictionaries:

| WORD | USAGE LABEL | MEANING |
|-------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------|
| unalienable | <i>Archaic, Obsolete</i> | inalienable |
| lift | <i>Informal, Colloquial</i> | plagiarize |
| nowheres | <i>Nonstandard, Colloquial</i> | nowhere |
| nerd | <i>Slang</i> | an ineffectual person |
| copper | <i>Slang</i> | police officer |

The classification of usage is often difficult and controversial because our language is constantly changing. Good writers try to choose the words, whatever their labels, that fit the audience and the occasion, informal or formal. However, since most of the writing you do in college—literary papers, essays—will be formal, you should generally avoid words and expressions labeled “informal,” “colloquial,” or “slang” in a dictionary. Also, be especially careful to avoid mixing informal and formal writing in the same work.

COLLOQUIAL: My mother was kidding herself to figure she could dance.

FORMAL: My mother was fooling herself to believe she could dance.

SLANG: The heat came and busted every head they could finger.

FORMAL: The police came and arrested every drug user they could identify.

MIXED: According to Philip Larsen’s report, two thousand people willingly shell out twenty dollars a year to belong to the Marilyn Monroe Fan Club. For that amount they’re considered dues-paying members and are entitled to receive the latest word on the club’s publications, on the going price for Marilyn Monroe playing cards or jigsaw puzzles, and on the annual get-together at her graveside.

CONSISTENT: According to Philip Larsen’s report, two thousand members of the Marilyn Monroe Fan Club willingly pay twenty dollars a year to learn about the club’s latest publications, the cost for a set of Marilyn Monroe playing cards or for a Marilyn Monroe jigsaw puzzles, and the annual gathering at her graveside.

MIXED: The journalists who contend that the efficiency of our courts will lead to the total elimination of the jury system are nuts.

CONSISTENT: The journalists who contend that the efficiency of our courts will lead to the total elimination of the jury system are wrong.

In English writing, certain little words cause big problems. Here are some practical suggestions about their use.

- **Use of *I***

Many students struggle with the problem of how to refer to themselves in their papers. Some writing, including personal essays, descriptive essays, diaries, letters, and other informal assignments, is rather relaxed, and you should use *I* to refer to yourself in these. To do otherwise would be indirect and unnatural. In the sentences below (from a student's personal essay), the use of *I* seems the natural choice.

In spite of the fact that I have lived in a large city all my life, I have always yearned to be part of a community. I found such a group when I moved to Baoding to attend college, where I not only became a part of the college community, but also joined a local table tennis club.

Had the student used the more impersonal *one* or the expression *the writer* to refer to himself or herself, this passage would have lost its energy, its intimacy.

The use of *I* should be avoided, however, if the focus of the sentence does not *need* to be the writer. Unnecessary reference to yourself only misleads the reader about the content of the passage. Instead of focusing on *I*, bring forward the real subject of your sentence. Note the difference in emphasis in the following sentences.

POOR: *I* think that the beach is most beautiful in the winter when the sand is damp and musty and the sky is hazy.

BETTER: *The beach* is most beautiful in the winter when the sand is damp and musty and the sky is hazy.

There is no need for the writer's presence in the statement. The reader assumes that all assertions not attributed to another source are statements made by the writer, ones that the writer will then support.

- **Use of *one***

One is less personal than *I* and more general. But tedious repetition of *one* can wear on the nerves:

The writer of this essay argues that whenever one tries to correct one's own writing, one finds oneself in a difficult position.

Contemporary usage calls for the simple use of *I* over *one*, when you intend to refer to yourself alone. *One* or *the writer of this essay* can get very stuffy; on the other hand, unnecessary reference to yourself makes the writing disagreeable in another way. Be as direct as you can in your choice of pronouns, and weigh the relative importance of each questionable pronoun.

- **Use of *you***

Another stickler is the use of *you*. In friendly conversations people often use *you* to mean

people. To use *you* in such general sense may be too informal for essays written in college. Unless you are deliberately addressing the reader, you may wish to avoid the generalized use of *you*. Try to use *people* instead, or whatever word you mean by the general term. Whenever *you* is not essential to the meaning of the sentence, replace it with the real subject.

TOO INFORMAL: When you try to define Existentialism, you realize that there are no definite tenets you can outline.

FORMAL: Because Existentialism has no definite tenets, it is hard to define.

TOO INFORMAL: You attend college assuming you can get a good job when you graduate, but that is not always the case.

FORMAL: Students attend college assuming they can get a good job when they graduate, but that is not always the case.

• Use of contractions

Contractions, such as *don't* for *do not*, lend an informal quality to writing. They are not necessarily to be avoided altogether in the essays you write, but their overuse should be checked since they affect the tone of your writing. Some writers feel that contractions should not be used in formal papers, but many contemporary writers use contractions without their interfering with the tone. Even book reviews and editorials in newspapers now contain contractions, once considered too informal. In fact, there are times it would seem most natural to use a contracted form. For instance, suppose you wrote the following sentence: *Isn't* it unfair to a dog to lock it up all day in an apartment? The sentence would sound less natural if the contraction were replaced with *Is it not*.

All the dimensions discussed above are at work, whether we think about them or not, in everything we write. The advertisement we cited at the beginning of this chapter, when it was put into print, read like this:

If you have ever dreamed of owning beautiful custom-bound books, but have hesitated to pay the very high prices asked for such books, here is wonderful news.

The Easton Press is proud to announce a major publishing event. . .

The figurative “dreamed of” was chosen over the literal “thought about” and “considered.” Books that are “good-looking” are perhaps too ordinary, like the word itself, and “lovely books” sounds too sweet. Prices that are “spiraling” will continue to go up; prices that are “outrageous” are too high; “very high prices” seems more factual and neutral. “Publications,” “tomes,” and “books” all refer to things that are published, but “publications” is too general, covering magazines and brochures as well as books, and the word “tomes” connotes large, even dull books; therefore, the most neutral word “books” was chosen. The figurative “earth-shaking” seems too forceful; “exciting” and “super” have roughly the same denotations as “wonderful,” but they sound less warm than “wonderful.” “Proud,” “pleased,” and “happy” share a common positive meaning, but “proud” is more specific, suggesting justifiable happiness; though “proud as