A Basic Course in

Writing

英语写作基础教程

丁往道（主编）

吴　冰　钟美荪　郭棲庆　编著

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内容提要

《英语写作基础教程》(A Basic Course in Writing) 主要是为高等学校英语专业一二年级的学生编写的，同时适合师专、广播电视大学、成人高等学校的英语专业使用，也可供英语水平相近的自学者参考。

本书是作者在总结自己几十年丰富的英语写作教学经验，研究近年国内外英语写作教学方法的基础上推出的新作。全书用清晰、浅易的英语介绍了英语写作的基本方法和特点，讲解时提供了较多的例句、例段和范文，其中既有英、美作家的作品，又有中国学生的习作，内容有趣，贴近生活，易于模仿。全书共分8章，分别讲解了选词、造句、段落、摘要、作文、应用文、学术论文的写法以及文稿格式和标点符号的用法。每章都附有练习题，引导学习者循序渐进地提高英语写作的水平。

面向 21 世纪课程教材

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前　言

　　这本《英语写作基础教程》是为高等学校英语专业的学生编写的，同时适合师专、广播电视大学、成人高校的英语专业使用，也可供英语水平相近的自学者参考。

　　在编写过程中，我们力求做到以下几点：

　　一、**实用**。本书各章的内容对学习者都会有实际帮助。从选词造句，到展开段落和组织一篇文章，都提供了一些基本方法。在"应用文"一章中，谈到函件、通知、便条和个人简历等的一般写法，需要时查阅，便可一目了然。书中还涉及文稿格式、题目写法和标点符号用法，这些似乎是小问题，但和文章质量密切相关，书中也有专章讨论。

　　二、**多举范例**。学写作，对基本方法有所了解后，主要靠实践和模仿。本书提供较多的例句、例段和范文，不仅帮助读者理解写作方法，还可供读者模仿。例段和范文中，约有一半选自英、美著作，以便读者领略英、美本国人怎样使用英语；另一半则是中国学生的习作。后者内容有趣、贴近生活、语言浅易而通顺、具有启发性和可模仿性。此外，每章后面都附有一定量的练习，其中也有一些例句和例段。

　　三、**难度适中**。本书的讲解使用简明平易的英语，所选原著的段落和文章也比较浅易。至于用作例子的学生的习作，其难度自然更适合本书读者的英语水平。

　　四、**符合有关大纲的要求**。从实际教学经验来看，本书可以满足写作课的教学要求，关于论文写作的一章便是专供高年级学生写毕业论文时参考的。本书内容也涵盖了广播电视大学和师范高等专科学校英语专业两个教学大纲所规定的项目。

　　下面就如何使用本书提几点看法。

　　本书各章是按照从小到大，即从词、句到段、文的次序来排列的。但这并不表示必须按照这个次序来学习写作。在实际教学中，可以从学写段落开始，穿插或逐步过渡到写文章摘要和整篇作文。在需要时，学写应用文。至于讨论选词和造句的那两章，可随时并反复地翻阅研究。写任何类型的文章，都离不开选词造句，因而这两种能力是极为重要的。但因为选词造句灵活性大、涉及的问题多，只能逐步体会和钻研。关于文稿格式和标点符号一章，可先通读一遍，以取得初步的印象，以后在遇到问题时再仔细查阅。

　　文章写得好或不好，并不只是语言掌握的问题。思想、观点、观察和分析能力、知识和生活体验等等所起的作用也许更大。所以有志提高写作能力的青年朋友，除学习语言外，还应在各方面下功夫。这也就意味着学写作是个很长的过程，不是轻而易举的事。但只要认真努力，坚持不懈，总会不断提高，取得进步。

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编　者

1998年4月

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Chapter *1*

Using Proper Words

1 <u>Types of Words</u>

There are tens of thousands of words in the English language, and along with social and scientific progress, new words appear frequently. The total number of English words, if it could be found out, must be surprisingly large. But we need not be worried about the impossibility of learning all of them, for only a few thousand words are used by ordinary people for ordinary purposes. These are the most useful words, or the *common words*, words that form the core of the English vocabulary. They are the words we must learn and remember.

Apart from the common words, there are words used by people of special professions or fields, on special occasions or for special purposes. Among these are political, legal, scientific, technical, business and literary words. It would be good for us to know some very useful words in various fields, and many of the words related to the field we will work in or be associated with. These words are generally formal, and may be called *formal and technical words*.

There is another type of words: those used by people who are not well educated or by people of special groups, such as people of a particular region or an age group. Some of these words may not be understandable to people in general, and may disappear after a short period of time. Some of them may continue to be used, become acceptable to all people and join the common words. Among these words are slang, jargon, dialectal and obsolete words. They may be called *nonstandard words*. We need to understand them but should avoid using them, unless in special situations.

Here are examples of the first and second kinds of words:

| same | speech | learned | destroy | stiff | try | piece |
| identical | oration | erudite | annihilate | rigid | endeavor | fragment |

In the first row are common words and in the second formal words. It can be seen at a glance that those *common words* are used in everyday conversation and in informal writing like personal letters, diaries and stories. Those in the second row are used only in formal writing like articles, documents, research papers, manuals and in public speaking.

The difference between these two types of words is very important, for their presence or absence has much to do with style. Compare:

I saw a ghost, and I was frightened to death.

I saw an apparition, and it reduced me to a condition of mortal terror.

The first sentence is informal and colloquial, and the second is much more formal, because it contains such formal words as *apparition, reduce, condition, mortal* and *terror*. The two sentences are similar in structure and meaning, so it is the words in them that make them different in style. Of course, people seldom say anything like the second sentence in daily conversation.

As we make progress in our study of English, we certainly learn more and more words. It is a good policy to find a common word of similar meaning when we learn a formal or "big" word.

Below are examples of nonstandard words:

ain't (am not, is not, has not)		jolly (very)	cool (very good)
hot (angry; fast)	deal (agreement)	damn (very)	neat (nice)

Since such words are nonstandard, we need not use them either in speech or in writing.

The following are two paragraphs in which different kinds of words (and different kinds of sentence structures) are used:

When the trolley came it was full. I stopped on the back platform.

"Seats up front," the conductor said. I looked into the car. There were no seats on the left side.

"I'm not going far," I said. "I'll just stand here."...

"Better go up front and get a seat," the conductor said.

"I get off pretty soon," I said. "A couple of blocks."

I got off before we reached the post office.

William Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury*

This is mainly a conversation with a few narrative sentences. All the words are simple common words. They suit the content — something about daily life — very well.

Five score years ago, a great American, in whose symbolic shadow we stand today, signed the Emancipation Proclamation. This momentous decree came as the great beacon light of hope for millions of Negro slaves who had been seared in the flames of withering injustice. It came as the joyous daybreak to end the long night of their captivity.

This paragraph is taken from Martin Luther King, Jr.'s famous speech delivered in 1963. He used many formal words because it was a formal speech. However, there are also many common words in it. This shows that common words are used in all kinds of writing and speech.

2 Choice of Words

When we write on common topics for the general audience, we may achieve accuracy and appropriateness by bearing in mind the following guidelines about the choice of words:

(1) Use common or informal words for general purposes; use formal or nonstandard words only on special occasions or for special purposes;

(2) Use specific and concrete words when giving details; use general or abstract words when making summaries;

(3) Use idiomatic expressions and words in acceptable collocations; avoid combinations that are unidiomatic;

(4) When there are synonyms, choose the word that expresses the meaning most exactly and that suits the content and style.

We have given examples of common, formal and nonstandard words. Here are examples of general and specific words:

General	*Specific*
animal	tiger, horse, fox, cat, mouse, bird, butterfly, insect
laugh	chuckle, guffaw, giggle, roar, smile, grin, beam
big	huge, great, large, vast, immense, enormous, tremendous
scientist	physicist, chemist, biologist, astronomer, geologist, mathematician

Words are general or specific by comparison. *Animal* is general when compared with *tiger, horse*, etc., but *horse* is more general than *steed, stallion*, etc.

Both general and specific words are useful in writing. When we describe or explain things, or when we give details, we should try to use specific or concrete words wherever possible, for they are vivid, exact and interesting; when we summarize or generalize, we may find general or abstract words useful.

General: He has a big house.
Specific: He has a two-storeyed house with four bedrooms, two living-rooms, a dining-room and a kitchen.
General: It is a beautiful park.
Specific: With streams and ponds shaded by willows and bamboos, and small, elegantly-furnished cottages behind piles of rocks, the park is quiet even when there are many visitors in it, and cool when it is hot summer outside.
General: I wasted a lot of time yesterday.
Specific: Yesterday morning it took me a very long time to get to my office because I had got into several traffic jams. Then I waited for half an hour without doing anything for the manager to begin a meeting. In the afternoon I had to go to a public lecture. The speaker talked for two hours but I couldn't make out what his main points were.

If, after giving the above details, we want to summarize, sentences similar to those marked "general" can be used:

> It is really a big house for one family.
> Everyone says it is a beautiful park.
> In short, I wasted a lot of time yesterday.

When we are trying to enlarge our vocabulary and learn to use effective words, we need to pay special attention to concrete and specific words. We usually think of general words first when we write, but we should remember that there are many specific words which are similar in meaning but are more colorful and impressive. They are the words we should make an effort to learn and use.

Idiomatic expressions are those habitually used by native speakers. Foreign learners of English often have difficulty in telling what is not idiomatic from what is, because they have not been brought up in the language, and also because they are likely to use English words in the way they use words of their mother tongue. Word-for-word translation from Chinese into English generally results in unidiomatic expressions. That is something we should be on guard against.

Take for instance the Chinese expression *meiyou guilü*. If literally translated, the English equivalent might be "to have no law." But this phrase would be very unidiomatic if it is used to describe a person's daily life or habits, though the above Chinese expression can be used. Instead, the word *regular* is much better: "he does not live a regular life;" or "he is not a man of regular habits."

Another thing we should learn is what words can be used together, or collocations. Again, collocations in English are often different from collocations in Chinese. We say in Chinese, for instance, *da xue*, while in English the word *snow* is modified not by *big* but by *heavy*.

It is said that English grammar is not too complicated, but the idiomatic use of English words and expressions is quite difficult for foreign learners. We must give special attention to the study of idiomatic English if we want to improve our writing.

3 Synonyms

The English language is very rich in synonyms. This is partly due to the fact that English has over the centuries borrowed or absorbed tens of thousands of words from other languages, mainly Greek, Latin and French. Words of Anglo-Saxon origin are generally colloquial or informal, and they form a great part of the vocabulary that people use daily. Many of the words of Greek, Latin and French origin are formal, learned or "big;" and are mainly used in formal writing or speech.

We should remember that words are only roughly or approximately synonymous. It is

difficult to find two words that have exactly the same meaning, carry the same implication, are used in the same collocation, or have the same stylistic value.

Little and *small* are both common words, and can be called synonyms. But they are slightly different in implication: *little* may imply a feeling of fondness, while *small* is objective. *Small* is often used to modify amount, mistake, number, etc., but *little* is seldom used with these words. Similarly, *big*, *large*, *huge* and *great* are not the same in the degree of emphasis and collocation. *Large* is more emphatic than *big*; *huge* is the most emphatic of the three words. *Great* can be used to modify abstract nouns like courage and wisdom, and persons with special qualities, such as *a great leader*, *a great strategist* and *a great composer*, while the other three words are not used in this way.

Suitable and *appropriate*, *lucky* and *fortunate*, *dangerous* and *hazardous*, *many* and *myriad*, have similar meanings, but are different in style: of each pair the second word is more literary than the first.

Laugh, *smile*, *chuckle* and *giggle* are verbs and nouns with similar meanings, but they denote different ways of laughing. To *laugh* is to smile with sounds of the voice, and to *smile* is to show amusement with an expression of the face without producing any sound of the voice, to *chuckle* is to laugh quietly with a closed mouth, and to *giggle* is to laugh repeatedly in an uncontrolled way, especially when one is amused, nervous or embarrassed. To describe a certain person's smile or laugh on a certain occasion perhaps only one of these words is most suitable.

All this shows that it is important to study useful synonyms and their minute differences, so that we may choose the best word to express an idea. A good dictionary with explanations of synonyms may be helpful.

In understanding the meaning of words, we should avoid equating an English word with a Chinese one. It is hardly possible to find an English word which has exactly the same meaning and implication as a Chinese word. *Book* and *shu*, *strike* and *da*, *land* and *tudi*, *family* and *jia*, are synonymous only in one of their many senses, and are different in others. Take *family* for instance. The word refers to people who are closely related, especially father, mother and their children. It does not refer to the house where a family lives, while the Chinese word *jia* has this meaning. We have to be careful when we use those English words which we think are equivalent to certain Chinese words.

4 <u>Some Good Dictionaries</u>

It is a good habit to keep a dictionary — better more than one dictionary — handy when we write. We should refer to them whenever we are in doubt about the meaning, implication, use or collocation of a word or an expression. This will help us to improve not only our writing, but also our understanding of words and expressions.

When we write, dictionaries with English definitions and explanations may be more

helpful than those with Chinese translations. For English-English dictionaries generally contain examples and illustrations of the uses of words, and notes on usage and differences between synonyms. Moreover, English definitions are often more accurate than Chinese translations. Below are some examples.

In an English-Chinese dictionary the word *advice* is usually translated as *yijian*, and the word *opinion* may also be translated as *yijian*. The same translation may lead us to believe that the two words have the same meaning, but this is not true. Their difference is made obvious in their English definitions: *advice* means "an opinion you give someone about what they should do;" and *opinion* means "your ideas or beliefs about a particular subject." So we give *advice* to a friend who is in trouble or has a problem to solve, and we express our *opinions* on something that is not directly connected with us.

The word *send* is often used in the wrong way because *song* is often given as the Chinese equivalent. Those who do not know the real meaning of the word may write a sentence like "I sent my friend to the station yesterday" when they want to say "I went to see my friend off at the station yesterday." Reading the English definitions of the word may prevent such a mistake, for they are "to tell someone to go somewhere, usually so that they can do something for you there," and "to arrange for something to go or be taken to another place, especially by post." They make it clear that the person who sends someone or something to a place does not go there himself or herself.

There are many good English dictionaries. Here we shall mention a few that are particularly helpful to students who are learning to write English.

Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English This is a dictionary specially compiled for learners, including foreign learners, of English. It contains over 80 000 entries (words and idioms), and all the definitions are written in clear and simple language — only about 2 000 common words are used. Plenty of examples are given to show how words are used. There are 24 colored full-page illustrations showing parts of things and types of actions. Notes on usage, on British and American English, on spoken words and phrases, and on the type of situation in which words are likely to be used, are particularly helpful to foreign learners. Under *but*, for instance, there is this usage note:

> **But** is very frequent in spoken English, where it is often used at the beginning of a sentence: "I read it in a newspaper." "But newspapers aren't always right!"
> **But** is also used in writing, though not usually at the beginning of a sentence.
> **However** is used especially in more formal writing, often with commas before and after it in the middle of a sentence: This has been reported in a newspaper. One must remember, however, that newspapers are not always accurate.

> <u>GRAMMAR</u>
> **But** or **however** is never used in a main clause beside another clause with **although**: Although they're very busy, I think they enjoy it (NOT ... but / however I think they enjoy it). You can begin a clause with but although, or however although: I tried doing

the accounts, but although I know some maths I found it very difficult (=and I know some maths but I still found it difficult).

This usage note is especially helpful to those Chinese students who are likely to use, under the influence of Chinese, *although* and *but* in one sentence. It will certainly do us good to read such notes carefully.

Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English   This is also a good dictionary for foreign learners of English. Definitions of words are written in very simple English, and numerous examples of the meaning and use of words are given. Common structural words, like auxiliary verbs and prepositions, are clearly explained. One special feature of the dictionary is the provision of 25 verb patterns, which are listed and explained with examples in "Notes on the Use of the Dictionary." Verb Pattern 6, for instance, shows the use of a verb followed by a noun or a pronoun and a present participle, such as the following:

He kept	me	waiting.
I found	him	working at his desk.
They left	me	standing outside.
I heard	him	giving orders.

All the verbs in the dictionary are marked with verb patterns, and they help the reader to use verbs correctly.

Collins Cobuild English Language Dictionary   First published in 1987, this is a quite new dictionary. *Cobuild* in the name refers to Collins Birmingham University International Language Database, *Collins* being the name of the company that publishes the dictionary. In size this dictionary is larger than the two mentioned above. Definitions of words are all given in complete sentences with situations, so that the user of the dictionary is shown the use of the word in natural English. Here is an example:

> **nod** /nɒd/, **nods, nodding, nodded. 1** If you **nod, 1.1** you move your head quickly down and up to show that you are answering 'yes' to a question, or to show agreement, understanding, or approval. EG 'Is it true?' She nodded... He nodded his head... I nod in agreement. **1.2** ...

The dictionary gives special explanations of functions of words and phrases. "No kidding," for instance, is explained in this way: "You can say 'no kidding' to emphasize that what you are saying is true and that you are not trying to deceive anyone; an informal expression. EG 'I really like your friends. No kidding. I'll prove it to you.'"

There are marginal notes on whether a noun is countable or uncountable, whether a verb is transitive or intransitive, and on phrasal verbs, synonyms and usage.

Webster's New World Dictionary   It contains nearly 160 000 words, ordinary words and biographical and geographical names being arranged together in alphabetical order.