College Practical English Writing

大学实用英语写作教程

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内容提要

本书以"实用"为编写导向,以"能写符合写作规范的文章"为目的,为学习者提供最基本的英语写作知识和技能。全书由浅入深,共分为7个单元。前4个单元以英语写作中的措辞、句子、段落和篇章为线索,是一般写作的基础部分。后3个单元在前面4个单元的学习基础上分不同的写作目的,分别对总结与读书报告、研究型写作、应用型写作进行讲解和指导,以便不同英语写作基础、不同层次的读者各取所需。本书的适用对象为非英语专业的大学本科生、研究生,以及广大的英语写作爱好者。

大学实用英语写作教程

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前　言

　　众所周知,听、说、读、写是语言学习的四大技能,无论是以英语为母语的学习者,还是以非英语为母语的学习者,英语写作都是必学的课程之一。然而,在目前国内大学的英语教学中,鲜有学校为非英语专业的学生专门开设英语写作课程,相应的教材也较为缺少。鉴于此,我们编写了这本《大学实用英语写作教程》。

　　本教材以"实用"为编写导向,以"能写符合写作规范的文章"为目的,为学习者提供最基本的英语写作知识和技能。全书由浅入深,共分为 7 个单元。前 4 个单元以英语写作中的措辞、句子、段落和篇章为线索,是一般写作的基础部分。后 3 个单元在前面 4 个单元的学习基础上分不同的写作目的,分别对总结与读书报告、研究型写作、应用型写作进行讲解和指导,以便不同英语写作基础、不同层次的读者各取所需。

　　本教材的特点是"简而全"。其"简"体现在全文语言简洁明了,力求使英语写作的初学者看得懂,学得会,写得出。本教材不纠缠于写作理论的分歧,而是注重英语写作实际基本技能的培养,特别注意中英文写作中的不同;其"全"体现在全书不仅介绍了一般写作的基本要求,而且提供了不同写作目的的行文要点和写作指导。

　　本教材的适用对象为非英语专业的大学本科生、研究生,以及广大的英语写作爱好者。

<div align="right">编者</div>

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Unit 1

Diction

Words are the fundamental units of a piece of writing. Proper choices and usages of words are the first and foremost step of good writing.

Diction is the choice and use of words. Learning to write means, at the first step, to choose the right words that can express us most appropriately and accurately. Sometimes we may use the wrong words, but more often the words we use are not grammatically wrong, but inappropriate, inaccurate, unidiomatic or uninteresting. Therefore, diction in writing will not only conform to grammatical regulations, but also with the need of the genre, the reader, the tone and context. A basic knowledge of diction may help in writing. In this unit, the diction of English writing will be discussed in four aspects: meaning of words, levels of words, general and specific words and figures of speech.

1.1　The Meaning of Words

The meaning of a word is comprehensive. It has two aspects: **denotative and connotative**.

A word's denotation is its literal meaning, that is, the basic meaning of a word; its definition can be found in the dictionary and is independent of a particular context. The denotative meaning of the word is more often used in the basic writing, for it is easy for the learners in the beginning of writing. For example, the word *dog* is defined in the dictionary as "a common four-legged flesh-eating animal, esp. any of the many varieties used by man as a companion or for hunting, working, guarding, etc."

However, as the evolvement and social change of language, the denotative meaning of word is dramatically becoming more and more vitalized and deeper in

meaning. In the case of the word *dog*, its connotative meaning is not limited to animal. The other examples like, *country*, *nation*, *state and land* have more or less the same denotative meaning and may all be translated into *guojia* in Chinese, but their connotations are quite different. Connotation is a term used to describe the cultural meanings attached to it. In short, connotation is the feeling or idea suggested by a word. The connotative meanings show people's emotions and attitudes towards what the word or phrase refers to. For example, the word *gold* has the denotative meaning of "a valuable soft yellow metal that is a simple substance(element) used for making coins, jewelry, etc." while its connotative meanings may be "preciousness, wealth, or value, even kindness, gentleness in behavior, like in the phrase, *a heart of gold*, *as good as gold ...."*

In terms of the meaning of words, Chinese students should be on guard against taking the Chinese equivalent or translation of an English word as its exact meaning, or understanding the meaning of an English word from its Chinese equivalent or translation. Please see the following dialogue between a salesperson and buyer:

—Do you like the skirt of this style? It's our new arrival.

—No, I'm afraid I don't like it because it is too *fancy*.

In this dialogue, *fancy* means *hua*（花）in Chinese, but surely the English equivalent of *hua*（花）is not *flower* in this situation. Here *hua* means there are too much ornamentals and the color is too bright. More examples are *dragon* and *long*（龙）, *man* and *nanren*（男人）, *land* and *tudi*（土地）, *strike* and *da*（打）, *family* and *jia*（家）, etc. It is true that the Chinese equivalents of many English words express their true meanings, but very often an English word has no exact Chinese equivalent and it has to be translated in different ways in different contexts. Being the English writing learner, it is important to find out how it is defined in English in a dictionary with English explanations and examples. Chinese translations are not always reliable, and sometimes they are misleading.

Another point that English writing learners of Chinese students should pay attention to is the word collocation, i.e., what words can be used together. We should realize that the collocations in English are often different from those in

Chinese. We should not take it for granted to collocate the English words literally in Chinese way. For instance, the English idiomatic equivalent of Chinese expression *dayu*（大雨）is *heavy* rain instead of its literal translation as *big rain*. Both *slim* chance and *fat* chance mean a remote possibility although *slim* and *fat* means oppositely. A *wise guy* differs from a *wise man* although a *guy* is a *man*. In English, a *wise guy* is a derogatory expression while a *wise man* often used as a commendatory term; and also it is hard to explain why *fill in a form* means the same as *fill out of a form* although *in* and *out* is a pair of antonym. It seems crazy and irrational for the English learners that we make a watch start working by *wind up a watch* while we end our speech by *wind up a speech*!

Based on the above examples, one point should be kept in mind, that is, language is irrational, and English is completely different from our mother tongue—Chinese. We English learners must give special attention to the study of idiomatic English before we can improve our English writing skill.

1.2　The Levels of Words

Words have different levels. From the view point of a stylist, words can be divided into three types: **formal, common, and colloquial**.

Here are three paragraphs, please examine and discuss the levels of words in them.

Paragraph 1

Within this "biolinguistics" perspective, the core problem is the study of particular I-languages, including the initial state from which they derive. A thesis that might be entertained is that this inquiry is privileged in that it is presupposed, if only tacitly, in every other approach to language: sociolinguistic, comparative, literary, etc. That seems reasonable, in fact almost inescapable; and a close examination of actual work will show, I think, that the thesis is adopted even when that is vociferously denied.

Paragraph 2

"This is a good part here," I said. "Where it says *Your friendship over the years has meant an awful lot to me, more than I can say because I'm not good at saying things like that*." I found myself nodding in agreement. "That must have made you feel good, didn't it?"

Paragraph 3

It was Sean's first actual job, and he was real happy about it. He figured in two or three months he'd have enough money to buy exactly the kind of guitar he wanted. Mom and Dad were proud of him, and well, OK, he's my big brother, and he's always pulling these dumb things on me. But, well, I was proud of him too.

All examples above contain only 3 sentences. But the levels of the words are quite different. In paragraph 1, sentences are quite long and involved, and there are many formal words, such as *biolinguistics*, *privileged*, *presupposed*, *sociolinguistic*, *inescapable*, *vociferously*. Long sentences and formal words are needed here in order to discuss or explain a question in a certain professional field in a theoretically clear and accurate way. Many formal words contain three or more syllables and most of them are of Greek or Latin origin. Formal words mainly appear in formal writing, such as academic works, political and legal documents.

Comparatively, it is much easier to understand paragraph 2 and paragraph 3. The sentences are all short and all words used are common with the exceptions of one formal word *agreement* and colloquial expression like *awful lot* in the former and a very colloquial expression like *pulling these dumb things on me* in the latter. The extracted paragraph 2 is the conversation between a passenger and a taxi driver, so many common words with occasional colloquial expression are suitable. Paragraph 3 is a statement by a sister who is introducing her brother. The very colloquial expression applied vividly presents the intimate relation between sister and brother.

Common or colloquial words are usually short with one or two syllables and most of them are of Anglo-Saxon origin. They are mainly used in daily life in common situation.

To sum up, there are three levels of words, with the formal words and colloquial words on the two ends and common words stand in the middle. Common words are good for all kinds of writing; formal words are as a rule seldom used in informal writing, while colloquial words are seldom used in formal writing, unless for some special purposes.

1.3 General and Specific Words

General words denote large classes, categories, or broad areas, such as *human*, *plant*, *animal*. Specific words indicate individual objects, actions, or qualities that compose classes, categories, or areas. For instance, the word *professionals* is more general than *scientists*, *doctors*, *engineers*, *teachers*, etc., all of which are more specific. But *scientists* may be called a general word when compared with *physicists* or *chemists* which, in turn, is more general than *biochemists*. Hence, the so-called general and specific words are relatively comparative.

Although both general and specific words are useful, students learning to write should make an effort to master and use specific words wherever possible because specific words help make the writing clear, interesting and vivid. Let's compare the following words and sentences:

> *Question* 1. How many specific words can you find out to replace
> the general word *good*?

General   **Specific**

good (kind, diligent, generous, honest, hard-working, helpful, selfless, brave, honorable, moral, sympathetic, clever, warm-hearted…)

> *Question* 2. How many specific words can you find out to replace
> the general word *laugh*?

General	Specific

laugh (smile, smirk, chortle, giggle, titter, snigger, chuckle, beam, grin, guffaw, roar...)

Discuss: Rewrite the following sentences which contain the general word with specific words. Which sentence is better? And why?

General Students do many interesting things after classes.

Specific Example 1: Students play basketball and football after classes.

Example 2: Every morning and afternoon the sports fields are alive with energetic students. Football, basketball, volleyball, badminton, track training and gymnastics are all in full swing.

Your sentences: _____.

_____.

General He lives in a big house.

Specific Example 1: He lives in a huge house.

Example 2: He lives in a three-storeyed house with eight bedrooms, four living-rooms, two dinning-rooms and two kitchens.

Your sentences: _____.

_____.

From the above examples, it is easy to see that the specific words go along with detail descriptions. Specific words are much more colorful and concrete than general ones because readers seem to experience the same—to see, to smell, to hear, to feel or to sense.

On the other hand, if we have to summarize, sentences similar to those marked with *general* can be used:

① Generally, students do many interesting things after classes.

② In short, he lives in a big house.

1.4　Figures of Speech

Words can be used either literally or figuratively. Words used in their original meanings or surface meanings are used literally. In order to suggest more impressive and effective effect, words can be used in extended or deeper meanings, i.e. used figuratively. See the following examples:

O my love's *like* a red, red rose. (Simile)

Knowledge *is* sea. (Metaphor)

He must have been spoilt from the *cradle*. (Metonymy)

More *hands* are needed at the moment. (Synecdoche)

The sun kissed the green fields. (Personification)

Thanks *a million*. (Hyperbole)

He *passed away* yesterday. (Euphemism)

Drunk drivers *put the quart before the hearse*. (Pun)

There is the *sound of silence*. (Oxymoron)

Sally started *giggling*. (Onomatopoeia)

We *shall fight* on the beaches, we *shall fight* on the landing grounds, we *shall fight* in the fields and in the streets, we *shall fight* in the hills. (Parallelism)

Using words figuratively is called figures of speech. There are various ways of using words figuratively, such as simile, metaphor, analogy, metonymy, personification, onomatopoeia, irony, paradox, oxymoron, euphemism, pun, alliteration and so on. In this part, simile, metaphor will be briefly introduced.

1.4.1　Simile

Simile is a comparison between two different things. The comparison often indicated by the words *as* or *like* connects the two distinctive things. There are other connecting words, such as, *as if*, *as though*, *as...as*, *similar to*, etc. For instance:

She spoke hurriedly, as if her heart had leaped into her throat at the boy's words.

The old man's hair is as white as snow.

In the above examples, although the subjects compared belong to different categories, each pair has its similarity: hurry for the first sentence and color for the second. The discrepancy between the two subjects compared makes their similarity more striking and impressive.

1.4.2 Metaphor

Similarly, like simile, metaphor is also a comparison between two different subjects. Differently, if simile connects the two distinctive subjects by the equation A *is like* B, metaphor works in the equation A *is* B, with no word to indicate the comparison. The metaphorical comparison is implied. So, metaphor sometimes is called "condensed simile". Please compare:

Simile	Metaphor
Jack fought like a lion.	Jack was a lion.
Time is like money.	Time is money.
The parks of our city are like human lungs.	
	The parks are the lungs of our city.
He is like a wolf in sheep's clothing.	
	He is a wolf in sheep's clothing.

Metaphor works not only in the form of "A is B", but also in other forms. For instance:

The *picture* of those poor people's lives was *carved* so sharply in his heart that he could never forget it.

The street *faded* into a country road with *deserted* houses by it.

He followed her *sheepishly*.

As shown in these sentences, besides "to be" structure, other parts of speech such as nouns, verbs, and adverbs can also be used as metaphors.

The proper application of a metaphor or a simile will polish your writing. A metaphor or a simile has to be fresh to be effective. If a simile or a metaphor has been worn out through constant use, it will become dull and decline to be cliché. For example, the words *core* and *leg* in phrases like *the core of the problem*, *the leg of a table* must have been metaphors when they were first used, but now, both of them are only used literally.

Exercise 1

Practice 1 *Choose the more suitable word from the two words in brackets in the following sentences, and give reasons for your choice.*

(1) Many people here have got other income _____ (besides, except) their wages.

(2) The internal situation of a country usually _____ (effects, affects) its foreign policy.

(3) A large _____ (amount, number) of cement was used for this project.

(4) There will be _____ (farther, further) changes in the itinerary.

(5) She spent _____ (less, fewer) time preparing her lessons than before.

(6) Many beautiful paintings were _____ (hung, hanged) on the wall.

(7) He tried _____ (hard, hardly) but failed to finish his work in time.

(8) What the minister has said _____ (implies, infers) that there will be a change in the economic policy.

(9) He _____ (lay, laid) his pen on the desk and began reading.

(10) She treats the orphan _____ (as, like) her own son.

Practice 2 *The following words are rather general in meaning, think of words that are more specific.*

walk   look at   cry

tree   animal   wind

rain   big   laugh

practice 3   *Read the following passage carefully and then answer the*
                 questions.

These words all come from Old English or Anglo-Saxon English, the core of our language. Usually short and direct, these are words we still use today for the things that really matter to us.

Another flood of new vocabulary occurred in 1066, when the Normans conquered England. The country now had three languages: French for the nobles, Latin for the churches and English for the common people.

Danish scholar Otto Jespersen wrote in 1905, "The English language would not have been what it is if the English had not been for centuries great respecters of the liberties of each individual and if everybody had not been free to strike out new paths for himself."

I like that idea. Consider that the same cultural soil producing the English language also nourished the great principles of freedom and rights of man in the modern world. The first shoots sprang up in England, and they grew stronger in America. The English-speaking peoples have defeated all efforts to build fences around their language.

Questions: (1) Is the style of the passage formal or colloquial?

           (2) Give examples of the formal words and expressions in the passage.

           (3) What figures of speech are used? Give examples.

Unit 2

Correct and Effective Sentence

Words constitute sentences. Each piece of writing is made up of sentences. From the perspective of syntax, all sentences are derived from four patterns: simple, compound, complex, compound-complex.

To write sentences well means to write both correctly and effectively. In this unit, sentence structure patterns, punctuations and capitalization, common errors in sentence and effective sentences will be discussed.

2.1 Sentence Structure Patterns

English sentences can be divided into different types according to different aspects.

In terms of usages, there are declarative, interrogative, imperative, and exclamatory sentences. A declarative sentence makes an assertion or a statement. An interrogative sentence asks a question. An imperative sentence expresses a command or a request. An exclamatory sentence expresses a strong feeling or emotion, such as joy, surprise, sadness and so on.

Rhetorically, sentences are classified as loose, periodic or balanced. A loose sentence puts the main idea before all supplementary information, in other words, it puts first things first. The reverse arrangement of loose sentence makes a periodic sentence: the main idea is expressed at or near the end of it, and it is not grammatically complete until the end is reached.

Structurally, there are four types of sentences: simple, compound, complex and compound-complex. A simple sentence has only one subject and one predicate-verb, but it may contain more than one object, attribute or adverbial. A sentence which contains two or more independent clauses jointed by