

高等学校研究生英语规划教材



实用英语

写作教程

PRACTICAL ENGLISH WRITING

From Sentence to Paragraph

From Paragraph to Essay

From Practical to Academic

高桂珍 王慧莉◎主编



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高等学校研究生英语规划教材

Practical English Writing

实用英语写作教程

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关于《实用英语写作教程》的说明

随着各层次、各类型研究生英语教学改革和高层次大学英语教学的迅速开展,英语写作课和英语写作教材也面临着越来越高的要求,《实用英语写作教程》则是为了适应这一新的形势而编写的。目的是帮助广大学生进一步提高学术和实用英语写作能力。

本教材具有以下特点:

1. 在编写中吸收我们多年来在研究生、高层次大学英语教学和教材编写中积累的丰富经验,同时充分采纳国内外先进的英语写作教学理论和方法,力求有所继承又有所创新,使本教材成为具有实用性、创新性的新一代高层次英语写作教材。

2. 本教材由学术性和应用性两大文体作文组成。涵盖各种题材、各种形式;囊括了自大学英语、硕士生至博士生的全部教学过程。各个章节目的明确,相互衔接,系统性强。同时,考虑到学生入学的英语起点不一,英语教学目的和要求也不尽相同,因此各章节又相对独立,以利于教师在教学中根据实际情况灵活使用,既可以选择部分章节作为起点教材或后续教材,也可以使用全书。

3. 本教材务求内容新颖,知识点全面。在每一章节里,选文和内容编写根据作文的规律,由浅入深地排列。同时,按照写作的知识点,以选文及样文为例,加以简要评述和知识点归纳。这些评述和知识点组合起来,就是完整的、实在的、高效的写作方法的指导。

在这一指导下,学生以本书提供的大量练习为出发点,通过由句子、段落至文章的循序渐进的强化训练,从而历经一个从模仿到独立创作的全过程。

希望《实用英语写作教程》能给广大学生以创作的启迪,培养英语思维模式,写出地道的好文章。

大连理工大学外国语学院研究生英语教学部

2004年8月

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Chapter One

Sentence Writing

A sentence is a group of words that express a complete thought and constitute a completed grammatical structure. Sentence is the basic unit for all written communication and the ability to produce good – quality sentences is the basis of effective writing. However, most student writers have problem producing satisfactory sentences. This has greatly affected the effective communication of their ideas and feelings. In this chapter, we will discuss some common problems with student writers and provide some advice on how to make sentences more efficient.

1. Common grammatical mistakes in sentences

1.1 Run – on sentences and comma splices

1.1.1 Run – on sentences

A run – on sentence occurs when two or more independent clauses are presented as one sentence, with no punctuation between the two clauses that run together. Here are some examples of run – on sentences and some suggested revisions:

Run – on: The great interest in professional football has inspired several football novels among them are *North Dallas Forty* and *Semi – Tough*.

Revision: The great interest in professional football has inspired several football novels. Among them are *North Dallas Forty* and *Semi – Tough*.

Run – on: Exams are over and I still feel tense and nervous.

Revision: Exams are over; however, I still feel tense and nervous.

Run – on: We came around the corner and saw that a crowd had gathered and there was some kind of trouble and the police were trying to stop it.

Revision: As we came around the corner, we saw a crowd gathered. Apparently there was some kind of trouble that the police were trying to stop.

Run – on: Computer experts refer to Moor’s Law it says that the speed of personal

computers doubles every eighteen months.

Revision: Computer experts refer to Moor's Law, which says that the speed of personal computers doubles every eighteen months.

Tips on correcting run-on sentences

You can correct a run-on sentence by making the two independent clauses into separate sentences, by joining the two independent clauses with a semicolon or a comma and a coordinating conjunction to make a compound sentence, or by making one clause a dependent clause.

1.1.2 Comma Splices

Connecting sentences or independent clauses with a comma rather than separating them into two sentences or joining them with a conjunction or a semicolon is called a comma splice. Here are some typical examples of comma splices and the suggested revisions:

Comma Splice: Last night Bob broke his arm and lost his car keys, he could not drive himself to the emergency room.

Revision: Last night when Bob broke his arm, he lost his car keys and therefore could not drive himself to the emergency room.

Comma splice: Edinburgh is a fascinating city, it has witnessed many dramatic and romantic events: Mary, Queen of Scots, had her home in Holyrood Palace, Bonnie Prince Charlie enchanted the Edinburgh ladies during his brief stay there.

Revision: Edinburgh is a fascinating city, which has witnessed many dramatic and romantic events: Mary, Queen of Scots, had her home in Holyrood Palace; Bonnie Prince Charlie enchanted the Edinburgh ladies during his brief stay there.

Comma splice: She felt her way along the fence, a twig lashed her face, then she heard heavy footsteps moving behind her.

Revision: As she felt her way along the fence, a twig lashed her face. Then she heard heavy footsteps moving behind her.

Note that there are certain transitional connectives that seem to be conjunctions but are actually adverbs. When these words are misused as conjunctions, it may result in run-on sentences or comma splices. Following are some adverbs likely to be misused: then; therefore; however; moreover; also; nevertheless; besides; accordingly.

Run-on: He paused at a wayside snack bar for a cup of tea then he settled down to a further long stretch of continuous driving.

Revision: He paused at a wayside snack bar for a cup of tea and then settled down

to a further long stretch of continuous driving.

Comma Splice: Several textile firms have to close down, therefore there was widespread unemployment in these areas.

Revision: Several textile firms have to close down; therefore there was widespread unemployment in these areas.

Tips on correcting comma splices

To correct comma splice, you can replace the comma with a period or join the independent clauses by using a comma plus a conjunction, a semicolon, or a semicolon plus a transitional connective (such as however).

Exercise I

Correct the following sentences that are run-on, or contain comma splices.

- 1) I tried my best I could not do my homework.
- 2) The student stayed up all night she fell asleep in class.
- 3) Kepler's Law explains the motion of the planets around the sun most astronomy students master the concepts early in their studies.
- 4) The tenants sent many letters to the landlord about the lack of heat, he did not reply.
- 5) One theory is that dinosaurs vanished about 65 million years ago an asteroid crashed into the earth.
- 6) I took lots of vitamin C however, I still came down with the flu.
- 7) The sky was bright blue with a few white clouds in it, it was a beautiful day for the picnic.
- 8) We were short of money, therefore we decided not to eat on the weekends.
- 9) My car wouldn't start this morning, the battery was dead.
- 10) It rained all day, parts of the highway were flooded.

1.2 Dangling Modifiers

A dangling modifier is a word, phrase, or clause that does not modify any element in a sentence. A dangling modifier can appear in any part of a sentence, but most frequently, it occurs at the beginning of a sentence. When the beginning clause doesn't go with the subject in the main clause, it is said to be a dangled one. Dangling modifiers can be corrected by adding proper subjects to the main clauses or by clarifying the wording of the sentence.

Here are some fairly typical examples of dangling modifiers and the suggested revi-

sions:

Dangling Modifier: While drying her hair, the clock radio suddenly began blasting.

Revision: While Jenny was drying her hair, the clock radio suddenly began blasting.

Dangling Modifier: When hiring employees, their appearance and attitude are an employer's main concern.

Revision: When hiring employees, the employer mainly concerns about their appearance and attitude.

Dangling Modifier: After having argued all morning, a decision was reached.

Revision: After having argued all morning, we reached a conclusion.

Dangling Modifier: As a teenager, school became boring and homework a drag.

Revision: As a teenager, Peter found school boring and homework a drag.

Notice that the students' preference for using abstract subjects and passive voice may increase the likelihood of dangling modifiers, as is shown in the second and third sentences. In each of these cases, if the writer had used a personal subject for the sentence or started out naming the person who was acting, he or she probably would not have gotten into the dangling modifier trouble.

Tips on avoiding dangling modifiers

To avoid dangling modifiers, you should pay special attention that the opening phrase agrees with the subject of the sentence. Beginning the main clause with a concrete sentence subject is a good way to avoid dangling modifiers. It is less likely to attach an unsuitable modifier to a concrete subject than to an abstract one.

Exercise II

Rewrite the following sentence, correcting the dangling modifiers.

- 1) To succeed in today's business world, a college degree is necessary.
- 2) Living in a remote country village, many forms of entertainment are inaccessible to us.
- 3) Having missed classes for a month, my grades were in jeopardy.
- 4) Before attending the lecture, dinner would have to be eaten.
- 5) Standing by the window, the park opposite our house is in full view.
- 6) Flying over the Rockies, the mountains were snow-covered and cloudless.
- 7) When only three years old, my father took me to a circus.
- 8) To swim properly, each stroke should be timed.

1.3 Inconsistency in subject, person, number, tense, mood or voice

Sometimes the inexperienced student writers switch from one subject, person, number, tense, mood or voice to another out of habit or carelessness. Such unnecessary shifts will lead to awkward or ineffective sentences. Following are some examples of the unnecessary shifts and the suggested revisions.

1.3.1 Shifts in personal pronoun and number

Inconsistent: Studies have shown that one is subject to increased risk for heart attack if you lead a sedentary life. (shifts from third – person pronoun to second person)

Revised: Studies have shown that people are subject to increased risk for heart attack if they lead sedentary lives.

Inconsistent: When one tries hard enough, you can achieve almost anything. (shifts from the third person “one” to the second person “you”)

Revised: When one tries hard enough, he can achieve almost anything.

Inconsistent: All the speakers invited to the conference had a good reputation. (shifts from plural to singular noun)

Revised: All the speakers invited to the conference had good reputations.

Inconsistent: If all we do in life is complaining, then you shouldn't be surprised if no one likes you. (Notice that the use of the indefinite “you” to refer to people in general has caused the inconsistency in person in the sentence, and also reflected the lack of the sense of audience.)

Revised: If all one does in life is complaining, then he shouldn't be surprised if no one likes him.

1.3.2 Shifts in verb tenses

A verb tense established the time of the action of a piece of writing. A change in tense indicates a change in time. Shifting between different tenses unnecessarily or illogically can confuse and distract readers.

Inconsistent: For years I have been attending summer camp and enjoyed every minute of it.

Revised: For years I have been attending summer camp and enjoying every minute of it.

Inconsistent: The requirements for graduation will be changed next year. The

change will have affected only next year's first-year-college students; it does not affect students already matriculated. (shifts from future to future present perfect to present tense.)

Revised: The requirements for graduation will be changed next year. The change will affect only next year's first-year-college students; it will not affect students already matriculated.

1.3.3 Shifts in mood

There are three sets of mood in English: indicative, imperative and subjunctive mood. Verbs in the indicative mood make statements and ask questions. (She sings well. Are you a student?) Verbs in the imperative mood give orders and offer advice. (Close the window.) Verbs in the subjunctive mood express wishes, conditions, or statements contrary to the fact. (If only they were here.) We should avoid making unnecessary shifts from one mood to another.

Inconsistent: Pay your taxes and you should be honest. (shifts from the imperative mood to the indicative.)

Revised: Pay your taxes and be honest.

Inconsistent: If the test were too easy, it is not a challenge. (shifts from the subjunctive mood to the indicative)

Revised: If the test were too easy, it would not be a challenge.

1.3.4 Shifts in subjects

Inconsistent: After I finally discovered the tools, the dismantling of the engine began. (shifts from "I" to "dismantling")

Revised: After I finally discovered the tools, I dismantled the engine.

Inconsistent: He was beaten and robbed, and then they left him to die in the gutter. (shifts from "he" to "they")

Revised: He was beaten, robbed, and left to die in the gutter.

1.3.5 Shifts in voice

Inconsistent: The Japanese army was being fought in the Pacific Ocean while the Allies defeated the German army at Normandy. (shifts from passive to active voice)

Revised: The Japanese army fought in the Pacific Ocean while the Allies defeated the German army at Normandy.

Inconsistent: Although concert violinists often play violins made by Antonio Stradivari, those instruments are rarely owned by the musicians. (shifts from active to passive)

voice)

Revised: Although concert violinists often play violins made by Antonio Stradivari, they rarely own those instruments.

Occasionally, in order to maintain consistency in subject, we have to make a shift between the active and passive voice, as the following example shows.

The campaign workers labored tirelessly for their candidate and were rewarded with her election. (The shift from the active voice keeps the focus on the original subject – campaign workers.)

Exercise III

Rewrite the following sentences to eliminate the unnecessary shifts.

- 1) Jenny requested a raise and asked that she be transferred.
- 2) Drive slowly on snowy roads and you should keep the car in lower gears than usual.
- 3) The teacher left the classroom after the lecture was finished.
- 4) Many secretaries are poorly paid, even though a secretary does important work.
- 5) Smoke billowed from the windows as people run in every direction.
- 6) Remember to proofread your paper and you should submit it on time as well.
- 7) I try to take good care of my car, for when one does not, they usually pay a big price.
- 8) Everyone must live according to your income.
- 9) John worked hard for three years, and then a job was given to him that let him use his special talent.
- 10) If life weren't so demanding and time wasn't so brief, many people will change their job.
- 11) I love going to the beach early in the morning because you can see the dolphins jumping in the waves.

Exercise IV Rewrite the following passage, eliminating the unnecessary shifts.

Much more college students work today than ever before. One needs a job to pay tuition. Working many hours makes it difficult for a student to keep abreast of course-work. Though sympathetic to their economic realities, they must continue to set high standards and they should require regular attendance.

1.4 Sentence Fragments

A fragment is only part of a sentence. It may be a word, a phrase, or a clause. Not

all sentence fragments are to be avoided. Some written dialogues often contain grammatically incomplete sentences. Exclamations as well as questions and their answers are also often written in fragments. Occasionally professional writers deliberately use fragments to get the readers' attention. But quite often the fragments found in students' papers are written out of carelessness and generally considered to be unacceptable. They should be corrected after careful proofreading.

1.4.1 Clause fragments

Fragment: He finally decided to leave school. Because he was utterly bored with his work and was failing all his courses.

Revision: He finally decided to leave school because he was utterly bored with his work and was failing all his courses.

Fragment: Sam received all kinds of junk mails. Then complained to the post office. Eventually, some of the mails stopped.

Revision: Sam received all kinds of junk mails, then he complained to the post office and eventually, some of the mails stopped.

1.4.2 Prepositional or verbal phrase fragments

Fragment: You might think people would resent such a talkative boy, but they do not. The reason being Steve's poise and appearance.

Revision: You might think people would resent such a talkative boy, but because of Steve's poise and appearance, they do not.

Fragment: He talked for fifty minutes without taking his eyes off his notes. Apparently not noticing that half the class was asleep.

Revision: He talked for fifty minutes without taking his eyes off his notes. Apparently he did not notice that half the class was asleep.

Fragment: The man who talked for an hour not realizing everyone was bored.

Revision: The man talked for an hour, not realizing everyone was bored.

Tips on correcting sentence fragments:

A sentence fragments can be corrected by

- 1) joining it to another sentence
- 2) supplying a subject and a predicate.

1.4.3 Added - detail Fragments

This kind of fragments lack a subject and a verb. They often begin with one of the following words: also, except, including, especially, namely, for example, such as.

Added – detail fragments can be corrected by

1) attaching the fragment to the complete thought that precedes it;

Fragment: He usually goes to school on foot. Except on rainy days.

Revision: He usually goes to school on foot, except on rainy days.

2) adding a subject and a verb to the fragment to make it a complete sentence;

Fragment: The class often starts late. For example, yesterday at a quarter past nine instead of at nine sharp.

Revision: The class often starts late. For example, yesterday it began at a quarter past nine instead of at nine sharp.

3) changing words if necessary to make the fragment part of a sentence.

Fragment: Tom had worked at many jobs. Among them teaching, accounting, and printing.

Revision: Among the many jobs Tom had worked at were teaching, accounting and printing.

Exercise V

Revise the following sentence fragments:

1) Not only rich men become President in America. For example, Lincoln.

2) The skunk – ape, which is a foul – smelling animal.

3) For some people, life is only boring or painful. Especially if the person has no purpose, no goal in life.

4) To protect shipping and keep the gulf open to international oil traffic. The United States, Britain and France all have war – ships patrolling these increasingly turbulent waters.

5) He took courses in humanities. Such as French literature and Russian novel.

6) He failed a number of courses before he earned his degree. Among them, English, Economics and General Biology.

7) He marched down the street protected by a dainty rose – pink nylon – covered umbrella. This being the only one he could find in the stand.

2. Typical Weak and Ineffective Sentences

Quite often, sentences written by the inexperienced student writers are grammatically correct but ineffective and confusing to the readers. These sentences can be classified into ambiguous, Chinglish, and wordy sentences.

2.1 Ambiguity

If a sentence is written in such a way that it can be interpreted in two or more ways, it can be called an ambiguous sentence. Ambiguous sentence is likely to confuse the reader and make your writing less effective; therefore, they need to be avoided upon careful edition and proofreading.

2.1.1 Ambiguity caused by vague pronoun reference

A pronoun replaces noun in a sentence. Substituting pronouns in place of nouns enable writers to avoid using the same word repeatedly and to add variety to a sentence. However, if used improperly, pronouns may lead to confusion and ambiguity. To avoid ambiguous pronoun reference, you need to

- make each pronoun refer to a single antecedent;
- keep pronouns and antecedents close together;
- check uses of “this”, “that”, “which”, and “it” for clarity;
- avoid the indefinite use of “you”.

2.1.1.1 Making sure a pronoun refers to a single antecedent

Ambiguous: Many people like to entertain their friends in small restaurants, especially when they are cheerful and friendly. (The pronoun “they” can refer to either friends or restaurants.)

Revised: Many people like to entertain their friends in small restaurants, especially in cheerful and friendly ones.

Ambiguous: Mary told Ann she was not going. (The pronoun “she” can refer to either Mary or Ann)

Revised: Mary told Ann, “I am not going.”

2.1.1.2 Keeping pronouns and antecedents close together

Ambiguous: When you meet the officials at the Olympic games, you will be impressed by them.

Revised: You will be impressed by the officials at the Olympic games.

Ambiguous: There is a difference between the athletes of today and those of a generation ago. Most of them are bigger and stronger.

Revised: Most of the athletes today are bigger and stronger than those of a generation ago.

2.1.1.3 Checking uses of “this” and “that” for clarity

Sometimes writers use “this” or “that” to refer to an idea or circumstance de-