A Basic Coursebook of English Writing

英语写作基础教程

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内 容 简 介

本书旨在帮助学生在英语写作方面得到系统的理论指导和训练,以便有效地提高写作能力。全书分为五部分,涵盖了英语写作的基本内容,主要包括选词、造句、段落、篇章和应用文写作。本书采用系统科学的编排方式,内容循序渐进,具有夯实基础、强调实用、注重操练等特点。

本书可作为高等院校学生基础阶段的英语写作教材,也可供各层次的英语学习者使用。对英语教师来说,本书也是颇为有益的参考书。

前　言

英语写作既是培养思辨能力的一种重要手段，也是衡量语言水平最重要的标准之一。根据教育部《大学英语课程教学要求》，大学生应能在半小时内就一般性话题或提纲进行写作，做到内容完整、中心思想明确、用词恰当、语意连贯。

对大学生来说，英语写作在各项基本技能中是最难掌握的，因为它是一种语言输出技能，以语言输入为基础，要求写作者更加丰富、灵活和准确地运用语言知识。此外，由于受到母语思维方式的影响以及不熟悉英语语篇结构的特点等，中国学生在写作时经常出现各类错误。为了帮助学生在英语写作方面得到系统的理论指导和训练，切实提高写作能力，编者根据多年的写作教学经验编写了本书。

本书内容从词到句，从段落到篇章，涵盖了英语写作的基本理论和基础知识。全书以英文撰写，采用科学系统的编排方式，着力突出"语言意识"的培养，让学习者不仅用正确的语言而且用地道的语言来进行写作。本书强调语料的真实性和实用性，其中的示例和练习大部分来自于各类学生在各种环境下产出的习作，让学习者从自己的作文学起，从身边的作文学起。这样不仅能激发学习者对写作的兴趣，而且能达到事半功倍的效果。

本书由周正履主编，西安电子科技大学外国语学院的洪卫、秦枫、邹甜甜老师以及西安培华学院大学英语部的李海芳老师参与了部分章节的编写工作。具体分工为，周正履负责第二部分和附录以及全书的统稿、审校等，洪卫负责第五部分，秦枫负责第三部分，邹甜甜负责第四部分，李海芳负责第一部分。西安电子科技大学外国语学院秦荻辉教授通读了全书并提出了修改意见，美国西密苏里州立大学英语与现代语言系 Kay Siebler 和 Marianne Kunkel 两位教授审阅了书稿，并对全书的语言进行了修改和润色，在此一并表示感谢。还要感谢西安电子科技大学外国语学院杨跃院长、王燕萍副教授，西安电子科技大学出版社阔永红总编和邵汉平编辑对本书的出版给予的支持和帮助。

本书是西安电子科技大学教材建设基金资助的重点项目(编号：A1208)，可作为高等院校学生基础阶段的英语写作教材，也可供各层次的英语学习者使用。书中若有不当或疏漏之处，敬请读者批评指正。

编　者
二〇一五年六月于
西安电子科技大学外国语学院

Contents

Part One

□□□□□□□□□⇨Choice of Words

1 Styles of Words

There are hundreds of thousands of words in the English language, and along with the social and scientific progress, new words appear frequently. The total number of English words, if it could be found out, might be surprisingly large. But generally they fall into four categories according to different levels of formality — formal, standard, colloquial and slang.

Formal words may also be called learned words, or literary words. They are commonly used in formal writing, such as addresses, eulogies, articles for scholarly journals, technical reports, political and legal documents. Many such words contain three or more syllables; most of them are of Greek or Latin origin. They are seldom used in daily conversation, except for special purposes. Some examples are *commence*, *ameliorate*, *terminate*, *lucid* and *altercation*. Formal English avoids contractions and colloquial expressions, and therefore sounds different from the way average people speak. Now, look at the following paragraph:

When you think of the tremendous technological progress we have made, it's amazing how little we have developed in other respects. We may speak contemptuously of the poor old Romans because they relished the orgies of slaughter that went on in their arenas. We may despise them because they mistook these goings on for entertainment. We may forgive them condescendingly because they lived 2000 years ago and obviously knew no better. But are our feelings of superiority really justified? Are we any less

NOTES

blood-thirsty? Why do boxing matches, for instance, attract such universal interest?

This paragraph is, to some degree, difficult to understand partly because of the use of formal words, like *tremendous, contemptuously, relish,* and so on.

A common belief among students is that formality is a virtue. A passage full of unfamiliar words is often admired, while one written in familiar words is regarded as simple and plain. However, as George Orwell put it, "The great enemy of clear language is insincerity," which refers to a pretentious way of writing. As a result, the best policy is to use proper words based on different writing styles.

Standard words are those used by the widest group of speakers and writers. It is popular in college writing, and is often employed in newspapers, textbooks and best-sellers. *Begin* is the standard counterpart of the more formal word *commence, improve* for *ameliorate, end* for *terminate, clear* for *lucid,* and *quarrel* for *altercation.* The following is an example paragraph using standard words.

> Acting is such an over-crowded profession that the only advice that should be given to a young person is "Don't!" But it is useless to try to discourage someone who feels that he must act, although the chances of his becoming famous are slim. The normal way to begin is to go to a drama school. Usually only students who show promise and talent are accepted. Then the young actor or actress takes up work with a theatrical company, usually as an assistant stage manager. This means doing everything that there is to do in the theatre. It is very hard work indeed; the hours are long and the salary is tiny.

The author of this paragraph uses familiar words to convey his ideas. There is no very formal language; therefore, it is easy for the reader to understand. Standard words, like those used in the above paragraph, comply well with the written language and should be paid great attention to in college writing.

There are words which are mainly used in informal cases. They seldom appear in formal writing, and in literary works their main use is to record people's thoughts and dialogues. They are usually short words of one or two syllables and most of them are of Saxon origin (i.e., not borrowed from Greek, Latin, or French). We may call them colloquial words. Contractions, such as *isn't, I'm,* and *he'd,* are typical colloquialisms.

So are the abbreviations of words, such as *exam* for *examination*. Fillers, such as *well, you know, kind of,* and *I mean*, are commonly used in conversations and belong to colloquialisms absolutely. Other examples include *guy* (man), *nuts* (crazy), *make it* (succeed), etc. Colloquial words are often used for a conversational effect, but many good writers may use them for humor or for a relaxed tone.

Slang is a highly colloquial type of language, considered as below the level of standard educated speech, and consisting of either new or established words which are used imaginatively to secure a vivid or comic effect. For example, *cop* is the slang counterpart of the more standard word *policeman*, *split* is the counterpart of *leave*, and *kick the bucket* is the counterpart of *pass away*.

📄 Exercise 1

1.   Consider the following sentences and correct mistakes concerning the styles of words.

(1) About 10 min later, we arrived at the foot of the mountain.

(2) It's as clear as night and day that we must abandon our plan.

(3) I wanna do everything I can to make sure his business succeeds.

(4) She has been on cloud nine ever since she got the new car.

(5) However, the food in the canteen is not as yummy as that in restaurants.

(6) You see, the dog never lies and it may even save people from danger.

(7) Police suspected that the chap staying in the flat above was using heroin.

(8) Car exhaust fumes contain harmful substances, and some of them could even cause people to decease.

(9) Without a moment's contemplation, he jumped into the river to save the drowning girl.

(10) Jimmy decided to join the expedition during his gap year between school and university 'cause he wanted to do something "different".

2.   Find the standard counterparts of the italicized words in the sentences below.

(1) The patients spoke to relatives and friends from behind a glass panel to *minimize* the risk of infection.

(2) A significant number of phone customers are *ditching* their landlines and going

completely wireless.

(3) Our country also faces the *grim* challenge of scarce resources and deteriorating environment.

(4) Automobiles remain the *dominant* mode of transportation for holiday travel, with 94 percent of travelers expected to reach their destination by driving.

(5) As the pace of modern life continues to *quicken*, many people are in the habit of rushing through life.

(6) Their average life expectancy was only 30 years and epidemic diseases were *rampant*, with the result that the population decreased year after year.

(7) About 17 percent of the *respondents* had never had an examination, while 43 percent make sure they get an annual check-up, says the survey.

(8) Two out of three countries in the world face gender *disparities* in primary and secondary education.

(9) Air quality in Bangkok last year was about 15 times worse than the level *deemed* acceptable by the World Health Organization (WHO).

(10) Unknown to most Americans, a surprising number of U.S. cities have drinking water with unhealthy levels of chemicals and *contaminants*.

3. Study the following paragraphs and tell what styles of words they each use.

(1)

Superstars influence millions of people every day. They influence popular fashions and the way people dress. They even influence the products people decide to buy. But increasingly, celebrities are also using their fame to make a positive difference in the world. Celebrities have the ability to bring attention to a cause that the average person cannot. Publicity follows famous people no matter where they go or what they do. For this reason, a celebrity's name often means more to a cause than his or her money.

(2)

We might marvel at the progress made in every field of study, but the methods of testing a person's knowledge and ability remain as primitive as ever they were. It really is extraordinary that after all these years educationists have still failed to devise anything more efficient and reliable than examinations. For all the pious claim that examinations test what you know, it is common knowledge that they more often do the exact opposite.

They may be a good means of testing memory, or the knack of working rapidly under extreme pressure, but they can tell you nothing about a person's true ability and aptitude.

<div align="center">(3)</div>

Mr. President, I can't thank you enough for your generous words and for coming to the opening at all. I mean, after all, you just delayed your own library opening by four years. I congratulate you on your election, and I wish you Godspeed, especially in a new and more hopeful time for peace in the Middle East. I remember the first time I ever heard George W. Bush give a speech in Iowa, and I called a friend of mine and I said: "My God, that guy can beat us. He is a good politician." He has been very kind and generous to my family, and I thank him for that.

2   Lexical Ambiguity

Enriching your vocabulary will greatly increase your reading and listening comprehension, and accelerate your learning in general because you understand more of the language you are exposed to. It is equally true that a large vocabulary facilitates writing.

However, words and meanings do not always form one-to-one correspondences, and the same is true of Chinese and English. The majority of the vocabulary is, in fact, extensively associated with multiple meanings — which is known as "lexical ambiguity". A word like *board* means both a flat piece of wood, and a group of people who manage something together. Likewise, the Chinese character "打" may mean "fight", as in "打架", or "fetch", as in "打开水". The multiple meanings associated with a word can be etymologically associated, but language users do not necessarily have such knowledge. Therefore, it is necessary to use the specific word in the appropriate context.

For example, people may often equate *open* with "开". It is correct in some cases like *open a door*, *open an account*, *open a business*, but an error occurs when it comes to the following sentence:

The first thing I do every day is open the computer and check my email.
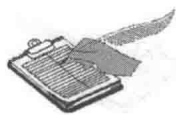
It is obvious that *turn on* should be used instead of *open*. Similar examples include *turn on the light, turn on the TV*, and *turn on the mobile phone*. The opposite is *turn off*, as in *turn off the light, turn off the TV, turn off the computer, turn off the tap, turn off the gas*, and *turn off the power*.

The following list shows more phrases where *open* cannot be used.

开车	drive a car
开会	attend a meeting
开饭店	run a restaurant
开药方	make a prescription
开罚单	give a ticket
开玩笑	play a joke (on)
开眼界	broaden one's horizons

From the above examples, one can see the lexical ambiguity of Chinese, which might be fully demonstrated by "不/没有". It is no exaggeration that dozens of words and expressions are available in English to replace *no/not*. For instance,

anything but	绝不
as expected	不出所料
at a loss	不知道
fail to	未能，没有
far from	远非
free from	没有
instead of	而不
know better than	知道不应该
large or small	无论大小
let alone	更不用说
live up to	不辜负（期望）
miss	没有看到
out of stock	没有存货
rather than	而不
regardless of	不管
reluctant	不愿意
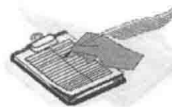
One of the aspects in learning writing is the choice of words, which tends to be overlooked at the university level. To express the meanings within oneself, one needs to have a complex store of words and a large amount of information about them since the right words make statements clear and effective in English writing.

📄 Exercise 2

1.   Correct mistakes in the following sentences.

(1) The first time we met each other was on the day when school opened.

(2) Dogs are our constant friends and have helped us on many occasions.

(3) The Great Wall was built to keep out invaders, and now it has become a popular tourist event.

(4) The wounded have been sent to hospitals nearby to receive treatment and the reason of fire is under research.

(5) He was the first person who subverted my impression of people from Northeastern China.

(6) It was the second time I had taken part in the College Entrance Examination.

(7) In the summer holiday, I went to Suzhou and had a tremendous experience there with my parents.

(8) I recently see a report in the newspaper, saying that more than half students rely on extra tuition to enhance their grades.

(9) A number of studies have found an association between suitable drinking and a relatively lower risk of developing type 2 diabetes.

(10) Parents used to point to Tiger Woods, an American professional golfer, as an example for their kids.

2.   Fill in the blanks with an English word which means "大" in Chinese.

(1) _____ rain and melting snow have swollen the river to its highest level in decades.

(2) This energy-saving lamp has been in _____ demand over the years because of its durable service.

(3) When she arrived at the hotel to check in, Ms. Robinson was surprised to find a _____ suite.
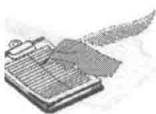
(4) In recent years, more and more people live in nuclear family groups, and the _____ family is in danger of dying out.

(5) In northern Arizona, weather experts predicted _____ wind and blowing snow as drivers got on the road.

(6) In 1846, for the first time, a _____ operation was carried out using ether as an anesthetic.

(7) Experts have warned that overcrowding and shoddy construction in the city could kill tens of thousands if a _____ earthquake struck there.

(8) Six other people were injured when the plane crashed on landing at Cork Airport in _____ fog.

(9) The company nearly folded three years ago because of _____ losses on risky mortgages they purchased.

(10) The _____ majority of top executives at the leading Silicon Valley tech firms are white men.

3. Fill in the blanks according to the Chinese given in parentheses.

(1) Detectives are so far _____ （不知道）to explain the reason for his death.

(2) Despite the greatest efforts possible, the two sides _____ （没有达成一致）on this point.

(3) With a home video set, you can play football, tennis, golf, basketball and other active sports _____ （足不出户）.

(4) As a senior student, you are supposed to _____（知道不应该）just to fool around until the examination time.

(5) The water is so contaminated that in some areas it is unsafe even to touch, _____ （更不用说）use for irrigation or drinking.

(6) She had a great time and _____ （不知不觉）her 24 hours were up in Syracuse.

(7) _____ （不出所料）, the Bulls succeeded in defending its championship.

(8) No country, _____（不论贫富）, would wish to build expensive facilities which might not be used when the Games are over.

(9) Married for a third of a century, the Roberts admitted that their marriage was _____ （并不完美）.

(10) The purpose of this test is to measure students' capacity to learn _____ （而不是）their present achievements.

3 Accurate Words

As Francis Bacon put it, "Writing makes an exact man." Indeed. Effective writing demands the use of concrete and specific words. The more concrete and specific the language is, the more vivid it will be.

3.1 Abstract and concrete terms

Abstract terms refer to ideas or concepts; they have no physical referents. Examples of abstract terms include *love, success, freedom, good, moral, democracy,* and any *-ism (chauvinism, communism, feminism, racism, sexism)*. These terms are fairly common. We understand them — but we really cannot, because their meanings do not remain unchanged.

Take *freedom* for example. The word is familiar enough, but when I say, "I want freedom," what am I talking about? divorce? self-employment? summer vacation? paid-off debts? my own car? looser pants? The meaning of *freedom* will change.

Does this mean we shouldn't use abstract terms? No, we need abstract terms. We need to talk about ideas and concepts, and we need terms that represent them. Abstract terms are useful and necessary when we want to name ideas (as we do in thesis statements and some paragraph topic sentences), but they're not likely to make points clear or interesting by themselves.

Concrete terms refer to objects or events that are available to the senses. Examples of concrete terms include *spoon, table, velvet eye patch, nose ring, green, hot,* and *walking*. Because these terms refer to objects or events we can see or hear or feel or taste or smell, their meanings are pretty stable. If you ask me what I mean by the word *spoon*, I can pick up a spoon and show it to you. [I can't pick up a *freedom* and show it to you, or point to a small *democracy* crawling along a window sill. I can measure *sand* and *oxygen* by weight and volume, but I cannot collect a pound of *responsibility* or a liter of *moral outrage*.]

While abstract terms like *freedom* change meaning with time and circumstances, concrete terms like *spoon* stay pretty much the same. *Spoon* and *hot* and *puppy* mean
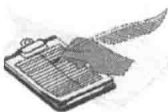
pretty much the same to you now as they did when you were four.

You may think you understand and agree with me when I say, "We all want success." But surely we do not all want the same things. Success means different things to each of us, and you can't be sure of what I mean by that abstract term. On the other hand, if I say "I want a gold Rolex on my wrist and a Mercedes in my driveway," you know exactly what I mean.

3.2   General and specific terms

General terms and specific terms are not opposites, as abstract and concrete terms are; instead, they are the different ends of a range of terms. General terms refer to groups; specific terms refer to individuals — but there is room in between. Let us look at an example.

Furniture is a general term; it includes within it many different items. If I ask you to form an image of furniture, it won't be easy to do. Do you see a department store display room? a dining room? an office? Even if you can produce a distinct image in your mind, how likely is it that another reader will form a very similar image? Furniture is a concrete term (it refers to something we can see and feel), but its meaning is still hard to pin down, because the group is so large.

We can make the group smaller with the less general term, *chair*. This is still pretty general (that is, it still refers to a group rather than an individual), but it is easier to picture a chair than it is to picture furniture.

Shift next to *rocking chair.* The images we form are likely to be fairly similar, and we are all likely to have some similar associations (comfort, relaxation, calm), so this less general or more specific term communicates more clearly than the more general or less specific terms before it.

We can become more and more specific. It can be a *La-Z-Boy rocker-recliner*. It can be a *green velvet La-Z-Boy rocker recliner*. It can be a *lime green velvet La-Z-Boy rocker recliner with a cigarette burn on the left arm.* By the time we get to the last description, we have surely reached the individual, a single chair. Note how easy it is to visualize this chair.

The more you rely on general terms, the more vague and dull your writing is likely to be. As your language becomes more specific, though, your meanings become clearer and your writing becomes more interesting.