ACADEMIC WRITING SKILLS FOR
THE GRADUATE OF ENGLISH

英语专业研究生
学术写作技巧

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PREFACE

For many years I have struggled to write a book that addresses the needs for the graduate in Chinese academic setting, one that is systematic, specified and practical. The book *Academic Writing Skills for the Graduate of English* is purposed for that and it will convenience both the teacher and the graduate in mastering and manipulating the English academic writing skills. I hope this book will help students fill those gaps they may have identified and that it will also help students become successful academic writers.

This book represents the synthesis of what I have learned over the years about illustrating the processes and strategies of writing to my students. Delightedly enough, the majority of these students succeeded in subsequent courses throughout their academic career, especially for their final theses. Consequently I intend to share the materials I have developed with our colleagues across the country.

FEATURES OF THE BOOK

This book adds some contents to academic writing skills, which are the followings:

1. A New Chapter on Writing an Abstract
2. A New Chapter on Writing Literature Review
3. A New Chapter on Writing Introduction
4. A New Chapter on Writing Body
5. A New Chapter on Writing Conclusion
6. A New Chapter on English Grammar in detail
7. A New Chapter on Punctuation in detail
8. A New Chapter on Mechanics
9. A New Chapter on Documentation, with guidance on writing academic papers mainly using MLA, APA documentation styles.
10. Emphasis on Academic Writing.

Some writing textbooks only focus on personal tasks which tend to include writing assignments that do not appeal to adult learners and do not provide students with the thinking and writing skills essential to succeed in subsequent college course. I believe the best way to prepare students for academic writing is to equip them with academic writing stkills and to condition them to write correctly by giving them academic writing tasks designed for mastering the skills to effect their writings. This will advance their reading and thinking levels and move them from less difficult to more difficult academic writing tasks through the course of the academic term.

This is not to say that I do not value personal writing, but I have developed academic assignments that require students to incorporate their own ideas, opinions, experiences, and observations. With the skills related to academic writing, students should be prepared to handle any writing tasks they encounter.

11. In-depth Skills of Each Step in the Writing Process

Academic Writing Skills for the Graduate of English is written for students who do not have a complete sense of written English and therefore need very specific, concrete tools to work with. I have found that many of inexperienced writers do not have the skills or confidence that would allow them to become creative and inspired writers. I believe *Academic Writing Skills for the Graduat of English* can teach these students the writing and thinking skills to help them become productive and successful.

12. Unique Designs

This book includes chapters that explain the critical thinking steps which are often omitted in graduate writings. Mainly the book is designed in two parts: the academic paper writing and the working on sentences. For the former, I have paid more attention to the essential knowledge that ESL graduates often meet with when they are writing academic papers to guarantee their writings correctly by means of learning the basic skills that they have acquired sufficiently beforehand. I have systemized the writing steps required for academic work, detailed in each step and coupled with examples and exercises if necessary. I have also described some techniques that graduates will find helpful as they begin their development as critical thinkers and writers. For the latter I purpose to clarify the wring basics which are essential to ensure the graduate to shy away from making mistakes that they are usually unaware of and to lay a solid foundation for them with sizable exercises. I have also complemented the revision, editing and proofreading before formulating to make them into a whole as an academic writing.

13. Plentiful Examples

Academic Writing Skills for the Graduate of English includes many examples, giving realistic models to the students who will use the book. These examples include answers to questions and many drafts of writings as they move through the very rough early attempts to the finished final products.

14. Plentiful Exercises that Emphasize Error Correction.

The book is also equipped with a large multitude of exercises geared toward both individual and group work. These exercises are available throughout the book and are designed as materials for discussion and in – class practices, whose aim is to strengthen the grammar rules and usages of the English language and inspire students to apply these exercises to their own writing.

On the other hand, I do attempt to provide instructions and exercises on every aspect of grammar. Also I concentrate on the major errors that interfere with their academic writing. In addition to specifying grammar rules, I have provided an explanation of each rule so that students can find and correct errors in their writing. I have also tried to help students master or internalize the skills of editing and proofreading. They often make more grammar and usage mistakes as they are struggling to articulate more complex ideas.

15. Specifications of Details in Each Step

In the academic paper writing, I have concretized each step in formulating an academic paper, so that graduates can be conscious of and follow it. I maximize the requirements of each step in formulating the academic paper, from the settlement of the thesis statement to the conclusion, including the transitional parts. They are particularly beneficial for ESL students who want to achieve degrees; in the working on sentences, I systemize the grammar and usages to ensure that ESL students can master the framework of the basics in order that they can lay a stable foundation for the next step. I specify the needs that students often encounter in their writings, such as dangling modifiers, run-ons, and so

it goes.

In a word, in each chapter, I have incorporated much more than any writer could use in one paper. I provide various approaches and alternatives to each step to allow instructor's discretion.

CONTENTS

PART ONE   ACADEMIC LANGUAGE AND STYLE

Academic writing is a kind of formal writing. The main objective of academic writing is to *inform* rather than *entertain*. Both academic writers and academic readers rush for useful information they are looking for. It should not appear verbose-inclusion of words more than required. Academic writing is often described as complex and abstract. This is partly due to the subject matter of the writing; however, it is also due to the language itself. Three characteristics that can create complexity in academic writing are the frequent use of the *passive voice*, *nominalization* and *extended nominal* (or noun) *groups*. Learning to use these structures in your own writing is an important part of becoming a sophisticated writer at university.

Writers seeking to better their academic writing techniques should concentrate their efforts on the following three key aspects:

1. Strong writing: Thinking precedes writing. Good writers spend time distilling information from their sources and reviewing major points before creating their work. Strong academic writing begins with solid planning.

2. Excellent grammar: Learn the major and minor points of grammar in detail. You can improve your writing skills by spending time practising writing. English grammar can be specific and complex, but strong writers command the major points after many years of study and practice.

3. Consistent stylistic approach: The MLA is commonly used in English classes, while APA is for psychology and science. Here we will insist on American Psychological Association (APA) as most educational institutions prefer APA. Academic writing demands the use of standardized English. Standardized English would mean avoidance of slang, clichés, colloquialism, contractions, personal tones, and the like.

Academic writing is factual in the sense that the writer should avoid flowery language through the use of figures of speech. Academic writers need to take special care to avoid the use of hyperbole and euphemism. Hyperboles and Euphemisms, if used in academic writing, misinform the readers as they do not provide literal or denotative meaning of the statements. Research papers are some of the examples where the use of academic writing is inevitable. In brief, academic writing is 'structured research' written by 'scholars' for other scholars. Academic writing addresses topic-based 'research questions' of interest to anyone who is seeking factually-based, objectively-presented information on a particular topic. The objective of academic writing is the creation of 'new

knowledge' via (a) a review of *what is currently known about a given topic* (b) as the foundation for *the author's new views or perspectives on the topic.*

The most important thing is to keep your writing precise and concise and to make sure that you can get your ideas over in a comprehensible form. A wide range of vocabulary is of course important, but you must use the right words. And precise ones are often better than longer ones.

When writing an academic paper, the writer has to pay attention to the aspects of language and style. The language for being too 'chatty', 'colloquial' or 'informal' may be criticized and the style is 'not academic enough.' A different battery of problems, on the other hand, may lead to suggestions that the writing is 'verbose', 'obscure' or 'dense.' These comments throwing some light on academic language and style should be: formality, objectivity, preciseness and conciseness, and variety.

1. Features of Academic Writing

Academic writing in English is linear, which means it has one central point or theme with every part contributing to the main line of argument, without digressions or repetitions. Its objective is to inform rather than entertain. As well it is in the standard written form of the language. There are six main features of academic writing that are often discussed. Academic writing is to some extent: complex, formal, objective, explicit, hedged, original and responsible.

1.1 Complexity

Written language is relatively more complex than spoken language. Written language has longer words, it is lexically denser and has a more varied vocabulary. It uses more noun–based phrases than verb–based phrases. Written texts are shorter and the language has more grammatical complexity, including more subordinate clauses and more passives.

1.2 Formality

Written academic English should be formal. It avoids colloquialisms and slang, which may be ephemeral and subject to local and social variations. Formal language is more precise and stable, and therefore more suitable for the expression of complex ideas and the development of reasoned argumentation. In academic writing, the formal or neutral alternative is normally preferred. Further, it has impersonal tone which can he achieved by avoidance of intimacy words such as 'you' or 'I', but rather use 'he', 'she', 'researcher', and so on.

The following advices will help the writer to make appropriate vocabulary choices:

1.2.1   Avoid colloquialisms and idioms

Colloquial/Idiomatic   Her paper made a tremendous contribution to the field.

Formal/Neutral   Her paper made a major contribution to the field.

Colloquial/Idiomatic   The community managed to scratch a living from the poor soil.

Formal/Neutral   The community managed to survive by farming the poor soil.

Colloquial/Idiomatic   The hit – and – miss performance of the financial markets is causing increasing concern.

Formal/Neutral   The erratic performance of the financial markets is causing increasing concern.

Table 1−1   **List of the contrast of formal words and informal words**

appear	seem
ascend	climb
assist	help
cease	stop
commence	begin
consume	use
decrease	shorten
demonstrate	show
depart	go
desire	want
enquire	ask
finish	end
inform	tell
obtain	get
preserve	keep
reject	mend
require	need
reside	live
retain	keep
finally	In the end
immediately	at once
initially	at first
principally	mainly

repeatedly	again and again
subsequently	next
therefore	so
comprehension	understanding
deficiency	lack
opportunity	chance
perspiration	sweat
residence	house
vision	sight
amiable	friendly
complete	whole
energetic	lively
fortunate	lucky
immature	childish
incorrect	wrong
inferior	worse
inexpensive	cheap
indistinct	dim
insane	mad
relaxed	laid back
responsible	in charge
sufficient	enough
superior	better
transparent	clear
vacant	empty

1.2.2   Avoid using the verb 'get'

Colloquial/Idiomatic   The settlers got ill after drinking polluted water.
Formal/Neutral   The settlers became ill after drinking polluted water.
Colloquial/Idiomatic   The study participants reported that they got better

after the first course of treatment.

Formal/Neutral   The study participants reported that their health improved after the first course of treatment.

Colloquial/Idiomatic   Doris Lessing got the Nobel Prize in 2007.

Formal/Neutral   Doris Lessing was awarded the Nobel Prize in 2007.

1. 2. 3   Avoid two–word verbs. Use the single-word equivalent instead

Colloquial/Idiomatic   The proposal for regional representation was turned down.

Formal/Neutral   The proposal for regional representation was rejected.

Colloquial/Idiomatic   Scientists are looking into the production of biofuels using non –food crops.

Formal/Neutral   Scientists are investigating the production of biofuels using non–food crops.

Colloquial/Idiomatic   Biofuels based on non–grain crops have the potential to bring food prices down.

Formal/Neutral   Biofuels based on non–grain crops have the potentia to reduce food prices.

Colloquial/Idiomatic   Most of the patients reported that they put on weight after taking the new medication.

Formal/Neutral   Most of the patients reported that they gained weight after taking the new medication.

1. 2. 4   Avoid too casual language, such as, *cool*, *pretty awful*, *a lot of*, *stuff*, *thing*, *sort of*.

1. 2. 5   Use full forms of words rather than abbreviations, such as, *does not*, *should have*, *it is*, rather than *doesn't*, *should've*, *it's*.

1. 2. 6   Use complex rather than simple sentences, and long rather than short paragraphs.

1. 2. 7   Avoid the 'not + verb' negative form if an alternative form is available.

Table 1–2   Negative Expressions

'Not + verb' negative	Preferred negative form
There isn't any evidence in support of this claim.	There is no evidence in support of this claim.
The new study doesn't support many of the initial findings.	The new study supports few of the initial findings.
There isn't much research on this topic.	There is little research on this topic.

EXERCISE 1. Rewrite the following sentences, replacing the informal expressions with more formal equivalents.

1. With women especially, there is a lot of social pressure to conform to a certain physical shape. (much)

2. Significantly, even at this late date, Lautrec was considered a bit conservative by his peers. (somewhat)

3. Later Florey got together with Paul Fildes in an experimental study of the use of curare to relieve the intractable muscular spasms which occur in fully developed infection with tetanus or lockjaw. (collaborated)

4. When a patient is admitted to a psychiatric inpatient unit, the clinical team should avoid the temptation to start specific treatments immediately. (commence)

5. Therefore after six months the dieter is behaving according to all twenty–six goals and she has achieved a big reduction in sugar intake. (considerable)

6. Modern houses have so many labour–saving things that it is difficult for the person at home to have adequate exercise by doing chores, cooking, and looking after a family. (devices)

7. Simply making the effort to reclaim this wasted stuff for fertilizer would have a positive effect on greenhouse releases. (material)

8. Unfortunately, since there are so many possible explanations, the correct one is most difficult to find out. (ascertain)

9. These exercises can easily be incorporated into an exercise routine, with each exercise done again a number of times. (repeated)

10. Fleming did well in isolating a streptococcus from the cerebrospinal fluid of the patient. (succeeded)

11. Effective vaccines prevent such hazards, but only if a social organisation makes sure that all potential mothers are vaccinated in good time. (ensures)

12. I really got mad of Professor Heath when he made me retake the midterm. (angered)

13. After Mr. Deacon croaked, his family decided to put up a monument in his honor. (build)

EXERCISE 2. Rewrite the following sentences, replacing the informal abbreviated form with a more formal equivalent.

1. The radical restructuring of British politics after 1931 doesn't lie in the events of 13—28 August, but in the changing attitudes within the National Government.

2. This isn't easy to do since most historians persist in speaking of The National Government as if the same sort of government ruled from 1931 to 1940.

3. The first National Government wasn't intended to be a coalition government in the normal sense of the term.

4. These aren't at all original or exotic but are based on the ordinary things that most people tend to eat.

EXERCISE 3. Rewrite the following sentences, replacing the *informal two–word verb* with a more formal equivalent.

1. A primary education system was set up throughout Ireland as early as 1831. (established)

2. This will cut down the amount of drug required and so the cost of treatment. (reduce)

3. The material amenities of life have gone up in Western society. (increased)

4. The press reflected the living culture of the people; it could influence opinion and reinforce existing attitudes, but it did not come up with new forms of entertainment. (create)

5. Thus, he should have looked into how the patient has coped previously. (investigated)

6. The aggregate of outstanding balances went up and down quite violently. (fluctuated)

7. In 1947 the Treasury brought up the question of excluding South Africa (and India) from the sterling area. (raised)

8. Dieters often feel that they should totally get rid of high-fat and high-sugar foods. (eliminate)

9. Thus when a Gallic bishop in 576 converted the local Jewish community to Christianity, those who turned down baptism were expelled from the city. (refused)

10. Western scholars gradually turned out a corpus of translations from the Arabic and studies of Islam. (produced)

11. Ms Tucker, Lord White's 29-year-old companion, has since taken her statement back. (retracted)

12. Discussion of the outcome of experiments that have used this method will be put off until Chapter 7. (postponed)

13. They did not easily accept or put up with differences in others. (tolerate)

14. My high-school friend signed up for three years with the army so he could put away enough money to go to university and study law. (save)

15. The solitary feeding of insectivores in forests was therefore put down to a foraging strategy involving the pursuit of cryptic and easily disturbed prey by singletons. (attributed)

16. In style, the turn toward abstraction and simplification came about earliest with Anquetin and Bernard and next with van Gogh. (occurred)

17. For Klein that cloudless day never arrived, but he never gave up his hope for a just world. (relinguihsed)

18. Eventually the Irish party was forced to go back to Westminster. (return)

19. The court thinks it just and equitable to give back the property. (return)

20. The English liked coal fires even though they do not always give off much heat. (produce)