



书面英语

ENGLISH FOR WRITERS AND TRANSLATORS

基础 (影印版)


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藏书

基本功 训练

Robin Macpherson
编著



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高校英语
选修课
系列教材



● 书面英语基本功训练

在英文的写作或翻译中，如何从文章的语篇结构、遣词造句、标点字体等方面正确地把握书面英语的规范表达形式，写出漂亮合体的英文，是许多希望进一步提高书面英语水平的朋友们所关心并亟待解决的问题。本书正是为希望解决这一问题的学生、学者、翻译者或职业写作人员等人士而编写的一本书面英语基本功训练教程。

本书从外国人学英语、用英语的特点出发，分文章整体结构、单句表达和字词用法等三个主要方面对书面英语的要求、规范及应注意的问题作了较全面的讲解。为了使您对问题有个比较明确的感性认识，作者列举了大量的实例，并在每个章节后设计了丰富的具有针对性的练习，使您在学习和演练的过程中，提高书面英语的实际应用能力，收到清晰表达、规范写作、用词准确娴熟的效果。本书所有练习均附有参考答案。

本书作者毕业于牛津大学，长期从事英语语言、英语写作和翻译等方面的研究与教学，对外国人使用书面英语时应注意的问题有独特的见解。

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English for Writers and Translators

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Table of Contents

目 录

Preface 前言	7
Part One 第一部分	
Paragraphing 分段	9
‘Brainstorming’ and Ordering Material “构思”与组织材料	13
The First Paragraph 第一段落	21
Substantiating the Argument 列举论据	24
Preserving Clarity 保持简捷明了	30
Narrative 叙述	34
Part Two 第二部分	
Coordination 调整	41
Left-and Right-Handed Sentences 句子的偏正关系	45
Emphasis 强调	64
Comparison and Contrast 比较与对比	78
Cause and Effect 原因与结果	83
Qualification and Concession 限定与让步	97
Discourse Markers 语篇衔接词	104
Word-Order 词序	113
Punctuation 标点符号	132

Part Three 第三部分

Style and Register 文体与语域	149
Words of Latin Origin 源于拉丁文的词	151
Foreign Borrowings 外来语的借用	162
Words and Expressions Best Avoided 应注意避免使用的词与表达	168
Confusing Words 易混淆的词	174
Collocations 搭配	183
Capital Letters 大写字母	184
Italics 斜体字母	186
The Article (<i>A/An/The</i>) 冠词(<i>A/An/The</i>)	187

Appendix A: Verb Complements: Infinitive or Gerund?

附录 A: 动词补语: 用不定式还是用动名词?	206
-------------------------------	-----

Appendix B: A Few Recurrent Errors of Language

附录 B: 经常出现的一些语言错误	219
-------------------------	-----

Appendix C: Spelling

附录 C: 拼写	222
----------------	-----

Key to the Exercises 参考答案	225
---------------------------------	-----

Preface

This book aims to give practical and detailed guidance to foreign learners of British English who are interested in writing the language at an advanced level, whether they be students, scholars, translators, or in some other way professional writers. It is organised into three parts, the first dealing with the work as a whole and with ways of organising the material; the second and third are largely concerned with style — the second on the level of sentence-structure, and the third on the level of individual words.

Wherever possible exercises have been provided, since they are generally indispensable for any mastery of the material. In certain crucial sections the exercises are very extensive, in the hope that teachers will then reinforce and consolidate the material in successive classes. A key to the exercises will be found at the back of the book.

The great majority of examples and exercises are based on a wide variety of “authentic” sources — fiction, magazines, western radio-stations — and every effort has been made to select ones that are as colourful and as arresting as possible, not least in order to facilitate memorisation.

The learning of a foreign language is a voyage over an endless ocean, and those people who have lived in an English-speaking country for a long time naturally enjoy a great advantage over others. No handbook can be a substitute for such exposure to the language; those who wish to write English in contexts other than college essays or private correspondence should generally try to have a native speaker check it for errors of language, above all for mistakes with tenses, articles, and word-order. However, such an observation does not exclude the possibility of attaining a broad mastery of the subject.

Finally, I would like to thank my students for granting me the permission to draw on their work for a few of my examples.

Many paths exist to learning to write good English, ones which are often very different from those described below. This book is addressed especially to those people who have so far been unlucky.

Gdańsk, 1995

PART ONE

Paragraphing

In most written English the paragraph is of crucial importance, since that which the writer is trying to say is essentially conveyed by a good ordering of paragraphs. Generally speaking, any prose which lacks regular paragraphs deters potential readers. There is great freedom as regards length, though anything between 50 and 150 words might be considered optimal.

Prose which is divided up into one-sentence paragraphs is often felt to be slovenly or in bad taste, especially when the aim of the writer is to 'create an effect'. Here is a typical example of such writing:

The war in Vietnam lasted nearly forty years and was one of the biggest wars of liberation this century. The Vietnamese people displayed the highest degree of heroism, endurance and patriotism.

- 5 The war ended in defeat for the foreign aggressor.
But Vietnam paid a high price for the victory. It is still paying.
One tenth of the population died in the war. The killed, the butchered, and the napalmed go by the name of "the martyred".

Such paragraphing is generally alien to English. English idiom would be more likely to reduce the text to two paragraphs, with the second one perhaps beginning with the sentence *The war ended in defeat for the foreign aggressor* (l. 4).

Before we examine the mechanics of paragraph-writing, it is worthwhile to examine some prose where the paragraphs have been omitted. Where should paragraphs be placed in the following passage?

The history of Britain spans many centuries, and its origins are lost in the mists of time. In its earliest phase Britain was linked to Europe by a land-bridge, and it was only gradually that Britain became an island, perhaps around 5000 B.C. The earliest known inhabitants of Britain

5 were Paleolithic hunters, who have left little behind on the physical
landscape except cave-dwellings and a few primitive earthworks and
barrows. Gradually, however, perhaps around 4000 B.C., farming
— agriculture and pastoralism — was introduced into Britain, and the
10 Neolithic peoples who practised it have left behind far more in the way
of artefacts and above all standing stones, barrows and tumuli, which
marked out ancestral claims to property. There were also enclosures,
which were centres of ritual and seasonal tribal feasting. From them
developed, late in the third millennium, more clearly ceremonial
15 ditch-enclosed earthworks known as henge monuments, some of them
of great size. Thus British Neolithic culture developed its own in-
dividuality. One very distinctive ethnic group that settled in Britain in
Neolithic times was a curly black-haired type whose descendants are to
be found in parts of Wales and Cornwall, and whose counterparts may
20 be sought in northern Spain. The next wave of settlers (arriving around
2300 B.C., and the first to leave behind some truly impressive ar-
chaeological remains) is the mysterious Beaker Folk, a Late-Neolithic
and Early-Bronze Age people that extended over much of western
Europe some 4000 years ago and was responsible for the transformation
25 of Stonehenge, Britain's most important historic site. Magnificent
though this structure is, not least from the technical viewpoint, its exact
function is shrouded in mystery, as are the origins of the builders. The
Beaker Folk are identifiable mainly because of the metallurgy that they
introduced and their practice of burying their dead in individual graves,
often with the "beakers". The next settlers were mainly Celts, who
30 colonised Britain in successive waves, the earliest being the representatives
of the Iron-Age Hallstatt and Urnfield cultures (700-500 B.C.). Some of
the first hill-forts in Britain were constructed in this period, suggesting
powerful chieftains and conditions of strife. These Celtic settlers were
followed by those of the highly sophisticated La Tène culture (as from
35 300 B.C.) and by the Belgae (c. 150 B.C.), who settled above all in
Southern England. By 200 B.C. Britain had fully developed its insular,
Celtic character. The next great phase of settlement is the Roman
colonisation of Britain, which began in 43 A.D. and lasted until the early
fifth century, and which was confined to England and Wales. Several
40 Roman authors have written about Britain, and we also possess a wealth
of archeological and numismatic evidence from that period.

Where do the paragraphs belong in this unwieldy passage? The only feasible ones would be more or less coextensive with each new phase of colonisation: (*The earliest known inhabitants...* [1.4], *Gradually, however...* [1.7], *One very distinctive ethnic group...* [1.16], *The next wave of settlers...* [1.19], *The next settlers...* [1.29], possibly *These Celtic*

settlers... [1.33], and certainly *The next great phase of settlement...* [1.37]).

The first sentence of any paragraph is usually of special importance, being programmatic in nature, describing what the paragraph is going to be about. Hence it is often called the *topic sentence*. All the suggested paragraphs in the above text begin with topic sentences.

In addition paragraphs very often end with sentences that summarise the previous text. Examples from the passage are the sentences beginning *Thus British Neolithic culture...* [1.15] and *By 200 B.C. Britain had fully developed...* [1.36].

In such linear, chronological material, the ordering of paragraphs is very straightforward. The same tendency to divide up prose into manageable units is also in evidence, however, in passages where the framework is not chronological, as in the following:

It is impossible to date exactly the fall of the Roman Empire. The year 476, which is widely held to mark the end of the Roman Empire in the West, used to be favoured by historians, since they were attracted by the drama of the last emperor being forced to abdicate and being succeeded
5 by a barbarian king. But this date also poses problems, since much of the West was to be reconquered by the Eastern Roman emperor Justinian in the sixth century. Another alternative is to date the fall to the capture of Constantinople by the Crusaders in 1204, or even to its
10 capture by the Turks in 1453. The problem with these two dates is that by that time the society and culture of Constantinople was scarcely recognisable as "Roman", being rather a strange blend of Greek, Oriental and Christian influences. A further possibility is Napoleon's abolishing of the Holy Roman Empire in 1806, an institution which
15 claimed to be the inheritor and continuer of Roman rule. But again, that shadowy entity had long been a cadaver, neither holy nor Roman nor an empire.

This passage lists a number of possibilities for dating the end of the Roman empire. Again the obvious thing to do is to begin new paragraphs with each new option, namely the sentences beginning *Another alternative...* (1.7) and *A further possibility...* (1.12). We would then have three paragraphs of roughly comparable length.

Suggested Exercise (01):

Divide the following into manageable paragraphs and give your reasons:

There is a clear link between industrial waste gases and car exhaust fumes on the one hand and environmental destruction on the other, even though some of the exact details are still a matter of debate. Thus sulphur dioxide and oxides of nitrogen, emitted by various sources, combine with clouds to form acid rain, which in turn acidifies the soil, making it impossible for forests to survive. When the forests go, there is little to protect the topsoil, which is blown or washed away. The result is often a steppe-like landscape, as can be seen in several areas of Central Europe, including Germany, the Czech Republic, and Poland. Another consequence of dying forests is the destruction of the earth's atmosphere, since forests play an essential role in the creation of oxygen. There is no need to point out the effects that oxygen-depletion is having and will have on human life. This destruction of the earth's atmosphere is also reinforced by emissions of so-called "greenhouse gases", above all carbon dioxide, which are bringing about "global warming", i.e. a gradual rise in the temperature of the earth's atmosphere. A rise of one degree celsius would be especially catastrophic for many countries which already have a warm or hot climate, since certain of man's greatest enemies, above all the mosquito, would colonise new areas. Such a rise in temperature would also entail the gradual melting of the polar ice-caps, bringing with it the prospect of a rise in sea-levels. One consequence of this would be that certain low-lying areas of Europe, such as London, Venice, and Amsterdam, would be threatened by flooding. Even if the sea-level were to rise by only a few centimeters, the costs of building sea-walls for many of the world's towns and cities would be astronomical. Another by-product of global warming is that areas which are at present highly fertile, such as Northern Italy or the Ukraine, would tend to become arid, while areas further to the north, such as the Russian taiga, would tend to become agricultural. Thus, acid-rain is opening up a Pandora's box of problems whose ramifications are potentially endless.

‘Brainstorming’ and Ordering Material

Anyone embarking on a piece of writing must be clear about a number of things. Obviously, that person must know who he is writing for; that is to say, he must know his audience, and know what kind of language to use. More importantly, there must be something worth saying. Those who do a lot of writing try to allow their ideas to incubate over days, weeks, months, and sometimes even years. Indeed, in the English culture the belief is widespread that one should “sleep on” a problem or task: in other words that one of the benefits of sleep is to allow the unconscious to provide answers to problems or at least to enhance our perception of them.

Before one writes a school- or college-essay it is important to read the title *carefully* and to think about it for a while. Needless to say, the more time one devotes to this stage, the better. In an exam it is important to spend *ten or fifteen* minutes just *thinking about* the title and *jotting down* on a piece of paper whatever — names, ideas, examples — may come to mind. This process is generally known as ‘brainstorming’.

Let us suppose that you have got a homework assignment with the title: “What Needs to be Done to Improve This Country’s Education-System?” So you sit down and after some minutes you have come up with the following *random* assortment of words and phrases, largely based on your memories of school:

35 in a class (!!!)
hopeless teachers
learning parrot-fashion
Latin — boring!
Dracula’s Coffin

art classes — a joke
ancient textbooks
terrorist teachers
too much homework
sports
school meals
stupid timetable
the truant
teacher-student relations
teachers' wages
choice of studies
surnames
sex education?

Anyone who has ever written an essay will recognise such a list of phrases which come to mind when dealing with a given topic. You should now have a collection of ideas, key phrases and examples, which need to be sifted carefully. The material can generally be built on and grouped into categories, and from these the outline of an essay can be constructed, as in the following:

- I. (Introduction.) Catastrophic situation. National scandal. School exam-results abysmal. Many people still cannot read or write, or locate our country on an atlas (!!!!) 35 students in a class on average.
- II. Antiquated methods. Tedious exercises and presentation of material. Learning parrot-fashion. Excessive homework-demands.
- III. Antiquated attitudes. Lack of mutual trust, let alone of dialogue. Boys called by their surnames. Terrorism in the classroom. Corporal punishment still allowed. The boy who played truant.
- IV. Antiquated system. No choice. Inflexible curricula. Useless subjects. Our maths lessons (!!!!) Why not typing, shorthand, computer science? Cooking and domestic science? Sex education?
- V. Neglect of artistic subjects — music, painting, drawing, embroidery? Dancing? Sports? Judo, etc.
- VI. What's to be done? Revolution in attitudes and priorities. More money for new schools, better wages for better teachers, new textbooks, sports facilities, libraries, computers, proper school meals.

Once you have got this far with your essay you are ready to begin the writing proper. Obviously you can modify the outline as you see necessary, and divide the paragraphs further.

The principles underlying the arrangement of the paragraphs are, of course, up to the writer. If he is writing narrative, i.e. relating a story, recounting history, or describing a process, they may be *chronological*, with each development clearly marked out from the preceding one. Or the paragraphs may be arranged according to *categories of importance*; that which the writer considers the most important or remarkable would generally come at the end. But whatever approach is taken, the structure of the work must be apparent, with *clear, manageable paragraphs*, each logically progressing one from the other, and if necessary with headings and subheadings clearly marking the way. Needless to say, great care must also be devoted to a *clear, coherent introduction* on the one hand and an equally *clear conclusion* on the other.

Students who have difficulties with finding material for an essay should concentrate on possible examples and illustrations. This is very important as a way of making a piece of work interesting and of commanding the reader's attention. In the above outline you will see that virtually all of the paragraphs contain *concrete examples*, and none of the paragraphs are purely abstract. Generally speaking, concrete examples are especially effective in the first and last paragraphs.

A clear plan is crucial for any piece of work, and while examples, illustrations, and recapitulations at regular intervals are very much to be welcomed, digressions are not. Writers of English tend to avoid digressions, except in frequently discursive contexts such as travel adventures, memoirs, speeches and the like.

In an exam-situation the student himself must decide whether to write the final essay the first time round or not. He may choose to write it first in rough and then in a 'clean copy'. Unless he is very experienced, however, he will be well advised to write the essay twice over, since teachers and examiners generally find untidy work irritating and difficult to mark. Above all, it is crucial to spend plenty of time *reading the work over* when it has been finally written, checking especially for mistakes of spelling and grammar. In an exam of two and a half hours, *at least twenty minutes* should be devoted to this last stage!

If you are writing a homework-assignment, use A4-sized paper (i.e.

297 × 210 mm). Remember that teachers tend to experience a great feeling of relief when they receive work that has been neatly typed, instead of handwritten. *Always leave a wide margin (at least 3 cm) on the left-hand side.*

One last point: when writing homework-assignments in general and exam-essays in particular, it is not a bad idea to check whether you have remembered to write your name as well as the title of the essay at the top! Some people do forget.

Suggested Exercises (02):

1. Choose one of the following list of topics, then do some 'brainstorming' and finally write an outline-essay for your ideas, making the principles of organisation clear.
 - a. Would children be better off by being given unlimited freedom?
 - b. What things do you find most attractive and/or unattractive in American culture?
 - c. What are the main job-prospects for students of your department?
 - d. Europe's environmental future.
 - e. Classify the main youth-cultures at this point in time.
2. You have been asked to write a brochure designed to introduce your department to prospective students. Jot down the basic elements of the curriculum and anything else students might need to know, and from there make an outline. Finally write a brief but informative description of the place where you are studying.
3. Do the same, but this time preparing a brochure for people who intend to visit your country. Put in the brochure the information that foreign visitors urgently need to have.

Here is a list of items which you might find useful; all of them except nos. 20 and 28-36 are most likely to be found at the beginning of the sentence (brackets usually indicate a word that is optional):

1. first
2. firstly
3. first and foremost
4. firstly and most importantly
5. to begin with
6. to start with
7. second