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A Handbook of

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Thesis Writing

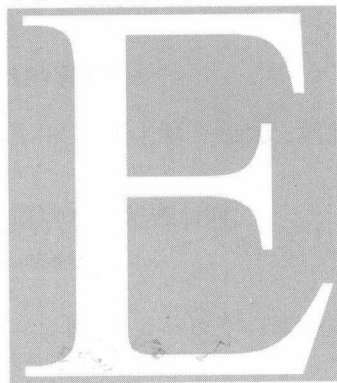
英语

论文写作手册

◎操时尧 主编 ◎舒白梅 主审

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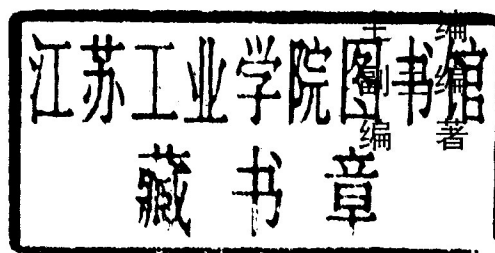
A Handbook of



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Thesis Writing

英语论文写作手册



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内容提要

依据 2000 年 5 月教育部批准实施的《高等学校英语专业英语教学大纲》的要求,英语论文写作是全国各类高校英语专业的一门专业知识类必修课程。《高等学校英语专业英语教学大纲》还明确规定:毕业论文一般应用英语撰写,篇幅为 3 000~5 000 个单词,要求文字通顺、思路清晰、内容充实,有一定的独立见解。

《英语论文写作手册》是一本按照《高等学校英语专业英语教学大纲》要求编写的英语专业必修课教材,它具有很强的实用性和针对性。为了更有效地指导学生进行毕业论文写作,该书以大量的例子阐述了如何完成从选题、查阅文献、撰写到答辩的全过程。全书共分 8 章:第 1 章概述了英语论文写作的意义和要求;第 2 章讨论了论文写作的步骤和过程;第 3 章诠释了构成论文的各个要素及其特点;第 4 章介绍了国际上通行的三种学术写作格式;第 5 章从词法、句法和篇章三个角度分析了英语论文的语言特点;第 6 章介绍了几种常见的英语语言研究方法;第 7 章简述了论文答辩的相关知识;第 8 章提供了一个完整的论文案例进行评价和分析。另外,在附录里还列举了供师生参考的英语专业毕业论文选题、成绩评定标准和排版装订格式。

本书以英文书写,语言简洁易懂,且术语和格式与国际学术规范一致,既可作为专业本科生教材,也可以作为研究生和研究人员的参考书。

Preface

English Thesis Writing has been prescribed as a required course by The National Syllabus for English Majors in China's Colleges and Universities, the purpose of which is to help college students understand the nature of scientific research and to teach them how to write a graduation thesis or research papers, possibly for a better extension in their future academic career. In order to meet these demands, some experienced teachers who have taught this course for many years have assembled to write *A Handbook of English Thesis Writing*, aiming at guiding students with specific step-by-step instructions.

This handbook consists of the following parts:

Chapter 1 English Thesis Writing: An Introduction

Chapter 2 The Writing Process of English Thesis

Chapter 3 Elements of English Graduation Thesis

Chapter 4 Documenting Styles and Mechanics

Chapter 5 Language Features of English Thesis

Chapter 6 Research Methodology: An Overview

Chapter 7 Oral Defense

Chapter 8 A Sample Thesis and Grading Remarks

This book is a result of joint efforts made by the editor-in-chief, the authors and the expertise proofreader. Cao Shiyao framed the outline and wrote the Preface, Chapters 2, 3, 7 and 8, and the Appendices; Yue Xueling, Chapters 1 and 5; Wang Senlin, Chapter 6; Wang Ying and Cao Shiyao jointly, Chapter 4. Wang Ying also devoted enormously to reading and revising the jointed drafts of the whole book. It is our great honor to have invited Shu Baimei, Professor at School of Foreign Languages of Huazhong Normal University, to proofread the final draft, and we wish to extend to her our sincere gratitude for her

valuable suggestions and careful revisions. We would also like to thank Li Haining, deputy copy editor at Hubei Science and Technology Press, for the tremendous work he has done to ensure the timely publication of this book. Finally, we are grateful to Peng Liangli, who has generously offered her graduation thesis to appear in Chapter 8 as a sample.

In addition, this book can also be used as a manual for graduate students and researchers.

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Chapter 1

English Thesis Writing: An Introduction

At most Chinese colleges or universities, undergraduates majoring English language and literature are required of writing an academic thesis in English upon graduation. However, it is not an easy job for most native English-speaking university students to do this, let alone Chinese college students. Writing an academic paper is a rather demanding task even for most successful language learners in any language learning context. Realizing these facts, one might ask: what makes academic writing so difficult? Is there any specific guidance for reference? These questions had become the original intentions of this book.

Graduation thesis writing, as is in the case of ritual composition and literary writing, is a tough mental activity and of great importance. It is particularly true with thesis writing in English which is believed to be a daunting challenge for non-native speakers of English. Though it shares a lot with other styles of English writing, it has its own unique functions, characteristics and demands due to its peculiarity in writing purpose, readership, content and style of writing.

1.1 The needs for thesis writing

No one would deny the great importance of thesis writing for a graduate student. Graduation thesis writing is an indispensable and practical part in teaching schedules for college English majors. "Graduation thesis writing is a significant means to measure overall

proficiency and evaluate academic performance of undergraduates.”, as is said in *The National Syllabus for English Majors in China's Colleges and Universities*, which was prescribed by the Ministry of Education. It has long been clearly confirmed in most universities that whether a student could be granted bachelors' degree largely depends on whether he or she could write a qualified graduation paper. Therefore, graduation thesis writing is considerably needed and deserves valued attention. Virtually the importance and necessity of graduation thesis writing can be seen in the following aspects.

- **Graduation thesis writing can spur one's input of English language and knowledge.**

Chinese students are generally unaware of the significance of writing skill in foreign language learning. They do not take writing seriously and do not pay much attention to writing as they do to reading which they think is the most important skill. Many students share the same assumption about foreign language learning that, if one can remember a large number of words and show a good performance in reading comprehension, he has learned the language well. Nevertheless, as is known, to learn a language is to develop different skills in listening, speaking, reading and writing. Writing is an inseparable part of language learning and it can reinforce language learning, which is especially true of graduation thesis writing. In general, a graduation paper calls for 3,000 to 5,000 words in length. Such a piece of writing involves a great amount of reading. One must be a good reader before he becomes a good writer. No one was born with rich thoughts and ideas that he would put into words. Apart from one's social experiences, what a writer intends to convey must be obtained indirectly from his reading activities. It is believed that reading is one of the most important and most efficient means to acquire knowledge. The more the writing calls for, the more active and desirous one is to

strengthen his input through reading. In extensive and intensive reading, one can not only enlarge his vocabulary, broaden his mind, consolidate his grammatical knowledge and accumulate his social and cultural background knowledge, but also learn the basic writing rules and techniques. Thanks to writing, as it were, reading serves as a wider and better choice for one's knowledge input. Meanwhile, writing itself provides a good chance for a learner to reinforce his language learning through word choice, sentence construction, paragraph organization and text editing. Without writing, one could not have efficient acquisition of language.

- **Graduation thesis writing is the most efficient means to activate one's output of English language and knowledge.**

As is well known, the ultimate goal of learning English is not to obtain language and knowledge (input), but to use what has been learned (output). However, during nearly four years' English learning, English majors usually do more reading and listening than speaking and writing. Though language output can be realized through all these four basic skills, yet it is more rigorously challenged in productive skills, speaking and writing, especially the latter one. Writing is not just a basic productive skill that a learner aims to achieve in language learning. It is an effective means through which one can manifest, measure and test his ability of using language and knowledge as well as consolidate and strengthen his knowledge input, as is discussed above. According to the process approach, writing is not just a production, but is a process in which the writer is striving to get familiarized with basic writing rules and skills, learning to arrange words into sentences, sentences into paragraphs and paragraphs into texts, thus conveying all that he attempts to express. To put it another way, "writing is the process of selecting, combining, arranging and developing ideas in effective sentences, paragraphs and often, longer

units of discourse” (舒白梅, 2005). Compared with speaking, writing needs greater clarity and conciseness above all other qualities, along with logical sequencing of ideas. That is, it needs effective use of lexical, grammatical and stylistic techniques to focus attention on main points. Meanwhile, there is a greater need for logical organization in writing than in a conversation, for the reader has to understand what has been written without asking for clarification or relying on the writer's tone of voice or expression. All these traits are certainly not exclusive to academic thesis writing. Actually, no other means can provide a better opportunity for a student to effectively activate his output of English language and knowledge than graduation thesis writing.

- **It helps one to strengthen logical thinking power and organization ability**

The process view of writing sees it as thinking and discovery (Hedge, 2002). In the process of thesis writing, one probes into a subject through literature reading and logical thinking until he has some new findings or shapes his own points of view which are then put into a formal, longer and academic text. The process requires the writer to cope with a number of variables such as methods of development (usually explaining, reporting and persuading), tone (formal rather than personal in a thesis), form (maybe a long research report), purpose (usually discovering or arguing) and potential audience (supervisors or examiners). Compared with ordinary composition and ritual course paper, graduation thesis is much richer in content, more logical in reasoning and more cogent in coherence and cohesion. A writer needs to advance step by step and uncover layer upon layer till he draws a conclusion as naturally as a ditch is formed when water flows along. From this point of view, the process of planning, designing and completing a thesis can help one to strengthen logical thinking power

and organization ability.

- **It helps one to develop creative spirit and scientific research methods**

Writing a thesis is a tentative effort in research, and the process of thesis writing is a scientific and scholarly practice. Scientific research falls into two categories: natural science research and social science research. English language and literature belong to the latter. The nature of scientific research is that it has a specific research target and it needs to find evidence for verification through scientific and reliable research methods. A thesis must be written to achieve a clear writing purpose: to identify, analyze, discuss and argue for (or against) a practical or theoretical issue, or to find solutions to a problem or some implications for teaching or learning, or to inform, to explain, or to change readers' mind behavior about something controversial, or maybe just to probe, beginning with a very general hypothesis and bearing no clear conclusion. If some findings in a research study can assist any future research, or add to a teacher or learner's general understanding of a topic or concept, then its purpose is served. In order to complete a thesis, what a writer usually does is library research or experimental research, assisted by computer technology. The whole process of research involves locating references, reading, sorting out, summarizing and understanding a variety of materials, analyzing and achieving some discoveries, shaping some ideas and finally putting thoughts into words. It is a process of absorbing and digesting knowledge, discovering, producing and creating and expressing something new. Undoubtedly, the process of thesis writing can help writers to be familiarized with all the means to obtain wanted knowledge and information, to make full use of library and internet and to learn thinking independently. In other words, it helps learners to develop creative spirit and scientific methods.

• Problems reflected in English graduation theses can provide valuable implications for ELT.

English learners' writing proficiency mirrors their overall ability to command the language. Academic thesis writing is supposed to employ formal written style, ranging from discourse construction to coherence and cohesion of paragraphs and sentences, from generating topic sentence to sentence construction, word choice and even punctuation. All these need learners' solid language foundation. Considering all the importance that has been mentioned above, it can be said that graduation thesis writing is actually a thorough reflection of the comprehensive ability of using language as well as the ability of analyzing, judging, deducing and generating. Therefore, problems that are mostly reflected in a graduation thesis imply the need and track of reforming college English pedagogy for the improvement of some ability. It has been found that one of the most prominent problems in graduation theses is graduates' low ability of using language. Another problem is the lack of creative spirit. These suggest valuable implications for teaching English majors throughout four years' college education. For one thing, when teaching English knowledge and training basic skills at intermediate level, teachers should teach students not only the knowledge itself, but also the methods of acquiring knowledge and practicing skills. For example, they can guide students to make full use of reference books, libraries, internet, help them to learn asking questions and judging the value of questions, and encourage them to care much about form, or content, or both in course paper writing at different levels. What is the most important, through reflection on the problems in thesis writing, great importance should be attached to developing learners' creativity in English teaching.