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# 前言



从事高校英语写作教学及研究多年,一直心仪能有一整套供 师生从低年级到高年级使用的写作教材。这套教材应包括基础英 语写作、英语应用文写作和高级阶段的英语论文写作。作为基础 阶段的教材,应从句子到段落,再到篇章,帮助学生打下坚实的英 文写作基础;应用文写作则为增强学生应用英语进行交际的能力 添砖加瓦:论文写作应从普通论文讲起,再到学术论文,初步培养 学生从事学术研究、撰写学术文章的能力。这套教材,可分阶段教 材自成体系,但从知识和技能的讲解及训练规划上讲,应循序渐 进,具有系统性。这套教材应有很好的可操作性,理论的讲解和技 巧的介绍应深入浅出、环环相扣,且能及时和准确地得到操练,转 化为学生的"知识"。这套教材,既然是英文教材,就必须使学生在 使用过程中感到自始至终沉浸在英美语言文化的浓重氛围之中, 逐步脱离汉语母语的影响, 养成新的写作习惯, 写出道地的英语文 章。让中国学生把英语文章写得真正像英美人士所写,并非易事, 但正因为此,一套好的英语写作教材,更应把东西方思维模式、行 为方式、生活习惯等对各自语言和语言的应用的影响说得使人信 服。这样的写作教材,让人心仪,也给人以创作的冲动。《英语论 文写作》正是这种创作冲动的产物。该书的主要对象是大学本科 高年级学生,对其他英文学习和工作者而言,不乏为一部指导性的 专著。这部专著/教材除努力体现上述愿望外,有以下几个特点:

- 1. 全书用第一人称写成,充分体现了人文精神,让使用者以平等的身份参与问题讨论,增强写作道地英语论文的自信心。
- 2. 一些写作理论和技巧,从课文阐述转到了练习之中,从而减轻 了说教式的讲解带给读者的枯燥感;同时,读者通过练习去探 索,提取某种理论或技巧,会兴致勃勃,因为接下来的是一种成 就感。
- 3. 在学会使用图书馆的章节里,直接用计算机时代美国先进的图书馆为例,给读者树立了一个很高的目标,这一点,相信每一位科研工作者或准备从事科研者都不会有异议。

**编者** 2005 年元月

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# Chapter One An Overview of the Essay

# I. What Is an Essay?

An essay is "a short literary composition on a particular theme or subject" (Random House Dictionary). In Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary, it is defined as "an analytic or interpretative literary composition usually dealing with its subject from a limited or personal point of view; something resembling such a composition." The two dictionaries have told us that basically, an essay is a composition on a certain topic, and with a point of view. It is always analytic or interpretative. It is also called a theme, especially when referring to the student's essay.

An essay is written about one topic or one main idea, just as a paragraph is. The main idea of the essay is expressed in a thesis statement, which is much like the topic sentence in a paragraph. However, the topic of an essay is bigger and more complex than that of a paragraph. A well-written thesis statement not only pinpoints the main idea or topic, but also indicates the major subdivisions of the topic. In other words, it tells both the writer and the reader what the essay is driving home, and what major points are planned to help.

## 1 The Basic Structure of an Essay

An essay has three main parts; an introduction, a body, and a conclusion. The introduction presents the thesis statement and catches the reader's interest. Introductions can vary in length. For a brief essay of 300 to 500 words, a paragraph will be enough. Longer essays sometimes contain introductions of two or more paragraphs. The thesis statement is usually placed at the end of the introductory paragraph, or at the end of the last paragraph of the introduction. Although it is acceptable to place it in other locations, many writers recommend that the thesis statement conclude the introduction so that it can lead in naturally to the body of the essay.

To analyze in detail, the introduction has two parts: general statements, and a thesis statement. The following chart can well describe the functions of the two parts.

Introduction				
Item	General Statements	The Thesis Statement		
Function	<ol> <li>introduce the topic of the essay</li> <li>give background information on the topic</li> </ol>	<ol> <li>states the main topic</li> <li>lists the subdivisions/subtopics</li> <li>indicates the organization of the entire paper</li> </ol>		

A skillful writer will start his introduction with a very general comment about the subject of the essay so as to attract the reader's attention and to give the background information on the topic. Each subsequent sentence in the introduction becomes more specific than the previous one and finally leads into or brings forth the thesis statement.

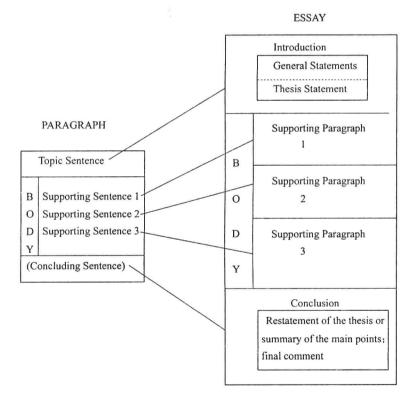
The body is the longest part of the essay. It usually consists of

one or more paragraphs, and its purpose is to develop and expand upon the thesis statement. Each body paragraph develops a subdivision of the topic, so the number of paragraphs in the body is usually decided by the number of subdivisions indicated in the thesis statement. The body paragraphs are like the supporting sentences of a paragraph. They can be arranged by chronological order or by order of importance, just as the supporting sentences in a paragraph. And the ways of organization are very often suggested in the thesis statement by the order of subdivision listing.

The conclusion of the essay is usually stated in the last paragraph. It may consume more than one paragraph in a long essay as in the case of introductions. The conclusion in an essay, like the concluding sentence in a paragraph, is a summary or review of the main points discussed in the body, or a restatement of the main topic/thesis. Moreover, a skillful writer would think that besides having a strong and effective message to the reader by taking the last opportunity to make the point, it is wise to add a final comment on the subject to urge the reader to take a certain course of action. The following chart can well describe the functions of the conclusion.

Conclusion				
Item	a transitional signal	a summary of the main points or a restatement of the thesis in different words	a final comment on the subject	
Function	to tell the reader we are going to wind up the essay	to remind the reader the main idea or main points	to urge the reader to take a certain course of action	

In actual reading, we may occasionally find an essay that departs slightly from this three-part structure. For example, an introduction may consist of only one sentence or start with a question. The conclusion may be a one-sentence paragraph or several paragraphs. We may even find essays in which the thesis is implied rather than directly stated. In any case, we can recognize the basic three-part structure and the functions of each part in such essays. We can see that writing an essay is essentially the same as writing a paragraph: an essay is just longer. The chart below shows us how the parts of a paragraph correspond to the parts of an essay.



# **2** Essays in Different Types of Writing

Different types of writing are required for different purposes. In general, we can divide writing into four kinds: narration, description,

exposition, and argumentation. Since argumentation is actually exposition with the additional purpose of convincing and persuading, in some writing books, writings are classified as narration, description and exposition.

### 1) Narration and the Narrative Essay

Narration tells what happened. It tells a story. It is the kind of writing we find in novels, short stories, and biographies. In actual writing, the account of events often goes with *description*, and sometimes, with other kinds of writing.

There are two kinds of narration. One is an exact account of what happened. The purpose of this kind of narration is to recreate or retell the experience. In such a narrative, facts are the most important things, and they are required to be stated correctly and in a good chronological order. We call it a *factual narrative*.

Another is a story told to make a point, and therefore, is regarded as a *personal essay* or a *personal narrative*, or a narrative essay. The writer of this form of narrative deals with personal experience and expresses a personal attitude toward the subject, but the emphasis changes from stating facts or recreating experiences to explaining the effect they have. In other words, the personal essay focuses on a central idea or theme observed in a series of events or as some emotional response to a particular incident. This kind of narration demands different organizational skills of the writer. Instead of presenting a story arranged step by step in time, the writer focuses on some generalization or conclusion. His purpose is to *talk about* or *comment on*, not *re-create* or *retell* the experience.

Although their subject matter is virtually unrestricted, most contemporary narrative essays do display similarities in form and style. Characterized by first-person pronouns (I, we) and a tone that

is usually relaxed, informal, genial, somewhat amused, and conversational, they reflect the writer's personality. Especially in newspapers and magazines, the essay is often mildly satirical, poking gentle fun at the subject matter.

Less flexible in form than the factual autobiographical narrative, the personal essay focuses on an opening generalization or conclusion about the subject. Usually this focusing statement appears in the first or second sentence of the opening paragraph. Not only does it introduce the theme, but it establishes the tone of the essay and indicates the writer's attitude toward the subject. The following statements can tell us how these ends are achieved.

Surely nothing in the astonishing scheme of life can have nonplussed Nature so much as the fact that none of the females of any of the species she created really cared very much for the male as such.

-James Thurber

In this beginning statement, Thurber introduces his subject and theme, the universal indifference of females toward males. In addition, this sentence establishes the tongue-in-cheek tone that is sustained throughout the essay. The words "astonishing" and "non-plussed" contribute to this end, as does the ironic suggestion that this indifference is not what Nature intended.

There is a book out called *Dog Training Made Easy* and it was sent to me the other day by the publisher, who rightly guessed that it would catch my eye. I like to read books on dog training. Here again, in his opening statement the writer introduces his subject and establishes his sympathetic point of view toward it. The first-person pronouns and the commonplace vocabulary help to establish a conversational, familiar tone, too.

I'm wild about walking....

-Leo Rosten

In this succinct statement, Rosten introduces his subject—walking, and establishes his enthusiasm for it by using the word wild. To make ourselves aware of how one word can make a difference in tone and point of view, we may try substituting different adjectives for wild. "I'm fond of walking," for instance, has a markedly different tone.

From these examples, we can see that the opening statement acts as a direction pointer and a barometer: it sets off the personal essay in a particular direction and indicates its climate or the writer's attitude toward the subject—sympathetic, sardonic, hostile, or amused. Sustained throughout the paper, this attitude supplies the second characteristic necessary to the personal essay: focus, or unity. In the following personal essay, the opening statement provides the subject and the focus of the essay—kids who carry around blaring! radios. The essay then maintains coherence and unity because the author's further comments are only concerned with this one subject.

# Making a Statement with Blaring Boxes Russell Baker

One of the things poor kids in a lot of cities like to do is walk around carrying a big machine they call a "box." The box plays music