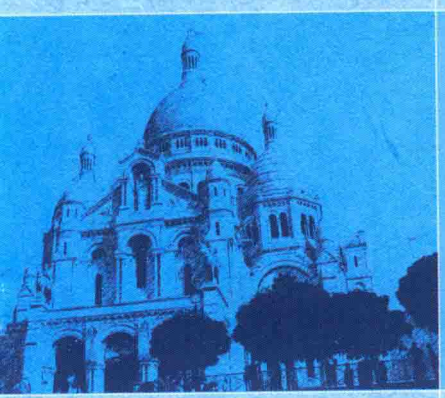
大学英语阶梯写作

总主编 王玉括



大学英语基础写作

主 编 朱彦

A Resourceful Book for College Writing

南京大学出版社

大学英语阶梯写作

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大学英语基础写作

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Preface

A Resourceful Book for College Writing is a systematic writing book. The book is designed for college students, offering them instruction in, modeling of, and guidance with essay writing— one most commonly-used writing form in English. It is especially suited to students in the first-year writing courses, and for any level writers or self-learners who are unfamiliar with the basics of writing English essays.

Composing an essay involves both a writing process and a written product. This is a very practical writing book with the following highlights to aid instructors and students. Using this book, the instructor can recommend chapters or passages that students will consult for all key matters, large and small, about effective essay writing. Students can turn to this book for the instructions on how to compose an essay from the beginning of the process to the end. Some students in particular may benefit from the additional support and practice in the mechanics of writing like punctuation, word use, sentence building, and grammar activities dealing with some typical mistakes by Chinese students. An enhanced focus on these specific subskills is also a key ingredient in developing advanced writing skills. Of special interest of the book is Chapter 2, "Getting Started," which illustrates the major strategies to generate ideas to help set forth a workable thesis. A strong writing begins with a strong thesis which we believe is central to any type of writing whether the student is writing a brief essay or even a term paper. As is claimed in numerous books, the development of communicative competence in writing entails critical thinking which is highly reinforced in this book as well. Another most outstanding highlight of this book is its provision of a wide array of writing exercises and activities that help students apply and master the skills and principles emphasized throughout the book. For example, rather than merely listing the seven steps as many books do, this book walks students through the step-by-step writing process— generating ideas, choosing a topic, developing the support, constructing paragraphs, revising a draft, editing a revision, and preparing final copy. We believe that within these abundant and varied exercises and activities, most teachers and students will find what a novice writer needs in order to improve his or her writing competence and skills. Considering that there is no versatile ready-made writing formula to be taught precisely, student-generated essays are offered for a closer inspection of the components that concern writing a successful college essay. The final innovative section in this book is the conscious inclusion of three common "College Writing Projects" (Chapter 9): essay exams, summaries and book reports, which

generally receive little attention and instruction. Plus a focus on those common practical writings in Chapter 10, the book is meant to provide students with advice on what they mostly need in everyday learning and living situations.

This book consists of ten chapters. Each chapter contains six general sections— brief introduction to the teaching and learning goals of the chapter, explanation of concepts and writing skills, presentation of samples or models for analysis and discussion, summary of writing tips, practice and activities, and review activities. The students who are already familiar with the essay form or one section may skip some material.

Writing, as an essential skill of the "four skills," is often neglected. However, writing is an important way that helps enhance students' language competence and progress from receiving or understanding to producing or expressing. Interacting with others across the globe, Chinese students also need to communicate in effective written English. Given the actual needs of learning and communication, it is imperative that students learn to write well in English. There are many ways to write essays as there were many writers. The book has incorporated the front-line teachers' understanding of the ways Chinese students learn and the typical obstacles Chinese students pose in writing essays into the organization of the contents, instructions, and activities in each chapter. The book, we hope, offers practical and accessible advice on all critical matters contributed to writing essays successfully and meets the needs of most instructors and college student writers.

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1 Getting to Know Essays

GOALS

- Learn the basics of essays
- Learn the structure of a traditional essay
- Learn the general steps of writing an essay

If your experience is like many other university students, it is common to note that you are more often required to write an English essay within a word limit. Why is it the essays that dominate in college English composition courses and even in various English exams? In order to help you find the answer, Chapter 1 first discusses some basics of essays so that you can have more clarification of this writing form. It also presents the structural bond shared by all essays. Finally, the chapter outlines the general writing steps that are covered thoroughly in the next chapters.

1.1 Some Basics of Essays

1.1.1 What is an essay?

An essay is a group of paragraphs that are united in a certain pattern. Whether an essay is as short as three paragraphs or as long as more than ten typed pages, it provides a detailed discussion or, more important, personal interpretation of a topic. And essay writing can serve a variety of topics and purposes, ranging from an explanation of the process of making a hamburg to an argument against the overuse of mobile phones.

1.1.2 Why do people write essays?

There are many possible reasons. As you know, an essay is a common writing assignment at colleges and universities, not only in English composition classes but also in many other college courses, such as literature, history, or science. And almost all English tests involve a writing task which requires all test takers to write a short essay on a given topic. In everyday life, essays are in almost all printed or written material—a publication that entertains its readers, an academic paper that answers a research question, or a report

that describes the process of a chemical experiment and presents the findings. What's most important, essays with different purposes permit you a high degree of the freedom of expression. In detail, you can discuss on a subject in depth, explore the issues you are interested in, propose theories or solutions, and make observations or comparisons. During the writing process, you gradually grow into a thoughtful individual, which is just an important part of the reason why you are in college. In this sense, the essay greatly fits into a pattern of individual growth.

Langan has also summarized, writing, as a skill that can be learned, a process of discovery, and a way to communicate with others, offers at least three benefits:

- help make you a better writer
- strengthen your skills as a reader and speaker
- make you a strong thinker

In a word, practicing traditional essay writing is an effective way to learn how to think and write logically and critically.

1.1.3 What are the criteria of a good essay?

There are at least five elements that are key to good essay writing. Keep them in mind whenever you write.

Element 1: Purpose

A good piece of writing fulfills its purpose, that is, the reason for writing. A writing purpose can be established by asking yourself a simple question, "What goal do I want to achieve in writing?" As you know, an exam essay must meet the requirements in the direction; a front-page report must be devoted to the who, what, when, where, and why of an event. The major purposes of essay writing could be various, including informing, persuading, entertaining readers and so on.

Good writers consistently remind themselves of their purpose for writing. In practice, you can create a **purpose statement** before pre-writing activities. A purpose statement is a simple sentence which clearly states the reason for writing an essay. It helps your writing stay focused on the topic and achieve unity since you can check whether everything you have to say actually meets the initial objective for writing. An effective purpose should be concise and to the point. For example, if your topic is the ways of ordering a hotel room at a discount, your purpose statement will be like this one:

> This piece of writing is aimed at telling the readers how to book a hotel room at a discount.

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Element 2: Audience

The second element of a good essay is to keep your audience in mind during the whole process of writing. Who is your audience? That is the person or people who will read your writing. You may be familiar with this experience. Every time you are assigned a writing task whether on a given subject or that of your own choosing, you will start with a question "What can I write?" Instead, maybe you need to think about what your instructor has already known and what he or she wants to read. Identifying audience is vital at different stages of writing. Whenever you are trying to develop ideas, draft or revise your essay, imagine one real reader in mind. It is especially helpful when you examine your ideas thoughtfully, decide on the tone and style of writing and sort out useful support when you are overwhelmed by huge amounts of material. Barnet, Bellanca, and Stubbs suggest a useful rule for writers:

> When you write, you are the teacher. It's probably easier to assume the role of the teacher if you imagine your reader to be someone in your class that is, someone intelligent and reasonably well informed who shares some of your interests but who does not happen to be you, and who therefore does not see the material in precisely the way you do. That reader can't know your thoughts unless you organize them and explain them clearly and thoroughly.

In other words, your classmates, besides your own teacher, are the essential readers that you can rely on. This is also why great emphasis has been laid on peer-editing in the revising process. For understanding audience effectively, you may try asking yourself these questions:

(1) Who will read my article?

(2) What does he or she have already known and need to know?

(3) What do I want them to believe or learn?

(4) Why should he or she feel necessary to read what I write?

In real writing practice, you can relate to your audience in two ways: choosing person (or viewpoint) and determining informal or formal writing.

Choosing person

In total, there are three different persons or viewpoints that you can choose from when writing an English essay. Successful writers seldom shift between three persons (first, second, or third) without a necessity. That means a good piece of writing stays consistent in terms of viewpoint.

The **first person** refers to the person who is saying. When you write about personal stories and experiences, the first person is commonly used. See an example.

Last month, I celebrated my fifth wedding anniversary at Jinling Hotel.

first person words

The **second person** refers to the person who is being said to. When you give directions or instructions, and write in an informal way, you are more likely to use it. See an example.

It is important for you to report any of your findings to the person in charge of this case.

second person words

The **third person** refers to the person, the object or the thing that is talked about. In academic and formal writings, the third-person is more acceptable since it sounds objective. See a sample sentence.

Studying with others has several benefits, but it also has its drawbacks.

third person words

Determining informal or formal writing tone

Closely related to the choice of person, you must determine formal or informal tone before writing. Telling personal stories, feelings or experiences, you'd better use informal writing tone. Academic writings are generally written in a formal way. To sum up, certain writing subjects or types work better when the particular person or the proper level of language is used. The followings are some examples.

Subject or type of writing	Person	Level of language
An essay about the effects of Internet technology	Third	Formal
A letter to a girl you have a crush on	First and/or second	Informal
A description of your graduation ceremony	First	Formal or informal determined by who is your audience

Element 3: Unity

Good writing is unified. Unity means that all the information in an essay is relevant to the controlling idea. As mentioned above, you can achieve unity by checking whether everything you want to add follows your writing purpose. If something does not, just chop it. There are also other things you need to note for establishing unity. They will be suggested in Chapter 3 of revising.

Element 4: Clarity

Good writing is clear. Clarity concerns the issue whether the reader can easily understand the ideas in writing. Good writers can get their points across to the reader in language as simple as the subject allows. Generally, there are three ways you can use to improve clarity: choosing precise and specific words; adding detailed and effective support; using clear pronoun references. These methods will be discussed in great details in the relevant chapters.

Element 5: Coherence

Good writing is coherent. A piece of writing with coherence is said to have all of its parts well-organized. For readers, a coherent writing is easy to follow. Simply put, the readers can move from point to point smoothly. Therefore, even though it is a time-consuming and hard job to revise for coherence, it is worthwhile. You can keep five features of coherence in mind while writing and revising. They are:

- Arrange sentences and paragraphs logically and clearly
- Be consistent with pronouns
- Avoid the shift of tenses without a warning or for no reason
- Repeat key words or particular grammatical constructions
- Use transitions as signals to link sentences, paragraphs and ideas

For more details, you can read Chapter 3.

Work with some elements of a good essay

Activity 1 Read the following topics and then write a purpose statement for each one.

1. The dark side of biotechnology

   _____

2. My favorite subject

   _____

3. Alternative sources of energy

   _____

4. The worst job experience

   _____

5. Free admission to museums

   _____

6. Fast food and obesity

   _____

Activity 2 Read each topic below and then choose the person and the level of language that suit it best. There may be more than one correct answer for each item.

Subject or type of writing	Person	Level of language
Writing a letter to your instructor		
Explaining the function of a new model of camera		
Telling the necessities of saving fresh water		
Analyzing why you fail in math exam		
Exploring different types of leadership		
Discussing the issue—Internet addiction		

1.2 Structure of a Traditional Essay

1.2.1 Understanding the components of a traditional essay

What does an essay look like? As described in definition, a short essay may be just one-page long while a long one may cover several pages, depending on the purpose the essay needs to accomplish. Regardless of length or other issues, a traditional essay, as is well-known, is made of three basic parts:

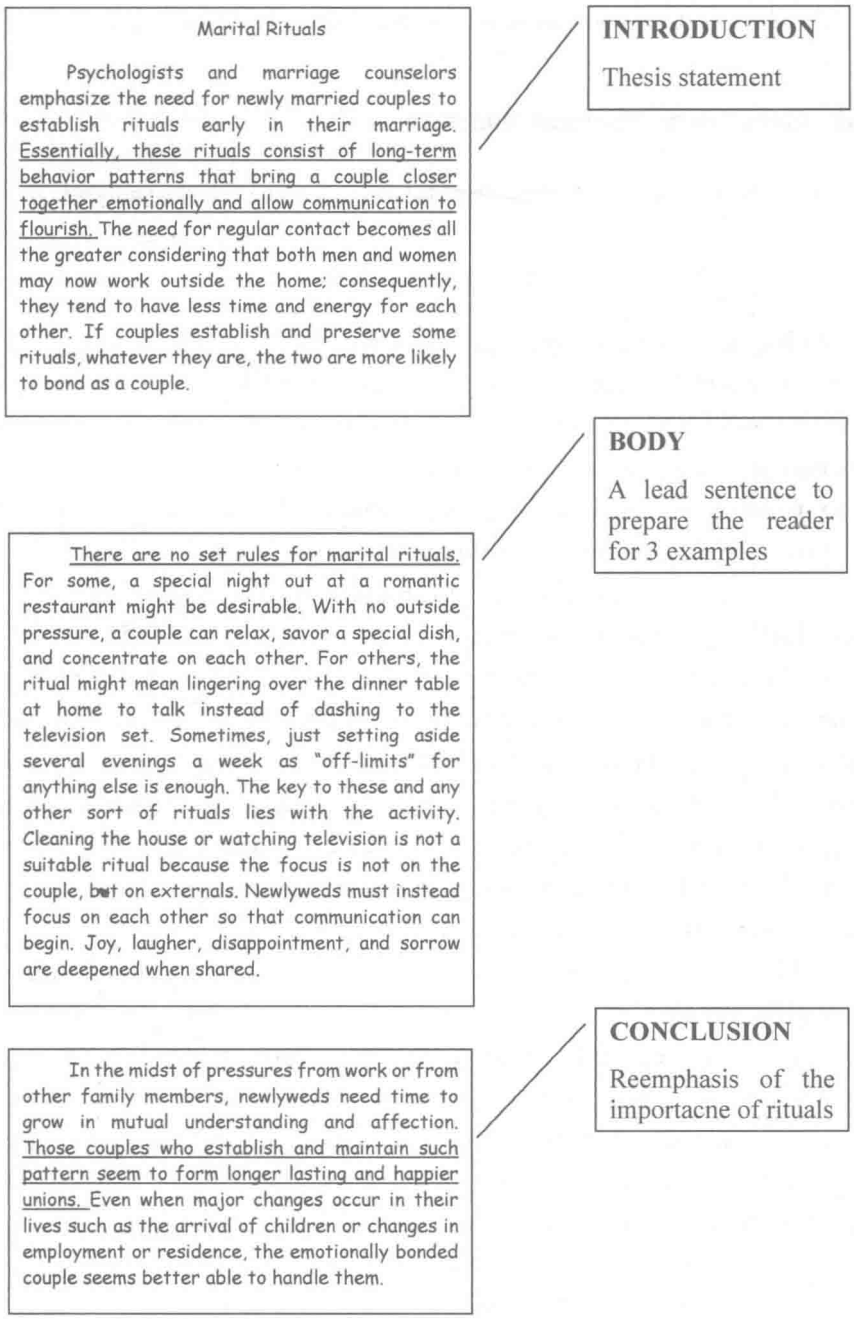
- Introduction (thesis statement/hook)
- Body (supporting points 1, 2, 3...)
- Conclusion (restatement of the thesis)

The all-important goal of an **introduction** is to give a clearly-stated main idea or thesis. Besides stating the thesis, the beginning part of an effective introductory paragraph often involves one or two sentences providing whatever background information which is aimed to arouse a reading interest. The sentences are also called "hook." The ways of writing a hook will be introduced later.

The **body**, as the name suggests, is the largest part of the whole essay. In it, several supporting ideas need to be developed for the thesis. Each one may expand into a separate paragraph in a long essay. The body paragraphs especially function to explain reasons, make discussions, present facts, or give examples.

The final part of an essay is the **conclusion** which completes the essay as a whole. The purpose of the concluding paragraph is to review or summarize the main supporting points in the essay. A common way to conclude is to restate your thesis in a brief and different way. A good writer, however, may effectively end an essay with a suggestion, a solution, a prediction or perhaps a new insight into the issue. When these three basic components do their jobs, the essay you produce is well-organized.

Before you learn to write essays, studying the example will help you better understand the form of a traditional essay. The following is a sample essay from *Re: Writing Strategies for Student Writers*.



1.2.2 Identifying the structural characteristics of other texts

It is certainly necessary for writers to understand the structure of a traditional essay before getting started. However, there is something equally important. That is an ability to spot the structural characteristics of the different types of texts. The best way to train yourself this ability is to look for and recognize the structural elements or principles of organization in models. Ruszkiewicz, Hairston, and Seward especially recommend that you can practice by making yourself conscious of the format or design in the most ordinary

form of writing like texting messages, blogs, and movie reviews.

Work with identifying structural elements

Activity 3 Read the following essay and then fill in the space with the proper information.

A Community Need

When I observe my community, there are a number of conditions that could use some improvement. It would be valuable to have a Neighborhood Watch on our block to prevent crime or to get better lighting near some of the wooded areas. But I think that the need to care for our younger generation is most important. This is why I believe that every elementary school in my community should have crossing guards at all intersections used by the school children. There are two excellent reasons for such an action.

First of all, a full crossing guard program would ensure the safety of the youngsters. Little ones are often unaware of the danger of cars and the rules of the road, so they become, in a sense, perfect victims. All of us have heard of children who were hit by cars or abducted while walking to school. It is a tragedy not only to the family but to the entire community if a child is injured or killed by a careless driver or a disturbed individual. Guards positioned at key areas can help to lessen the likelihood of some accidents or criminal act. In fact, the sign of crossing guards is often enough to cause many drivers to be more cautious or to discourage a potential abductor.

A full crossing guard system is beneficial not only to the children but to the guards themselves. There are many in our community who would enjoy an opportunity to work outdoors in a physically undemanding job. Retired people who do not want to stop working would make fine guards. A woman or man whose children are grown may wish to care for the school children to fulfill a need to nurture and to protect. Not only did they watch the children, but they obviously enjoyed the youngsters, just as the youngsters enjoyed the guards. Most guards knew the children by name and made enough of a fuss over them to get their days started on a pleasant note. Believe it or not, my spirits were improved as a result of watching their interaction. I remembered being so impressed that I sent a note to Wilson's principle praising this policy. I only wish that the same system could be set up at the other elementary schools in our community.

A reader may conclude that my interest in this program stems from being a parent, but I have no children. I simply believe that care of the young is everyone's obligation and should be a priority in any school or city budget. A well-staffed crossing guard program is one way we can help the children who will, after all, be the new generation of citizens.

— *Re: Writing Strategies for Student Writers*

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