

大学英语技能训练丛书

英语写作向导

WRITING WITH ACCURACY AND STYLE:

A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR CHINESE WRITERS OF ENGLISH

袁义 杨瑞英 编著

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前言

对于许多英语学习者来说，写作可能是听、说、读、写、译五种技能中最难掌握的一种。它不但要求写作的人具有较好的语法知识和较大的词汇量，遵循英语各种文体的规范，而且还要求写作的人对英美等英语国家的语言、文化有较深的了解，以便能写出地地道道的英语来。

目前市场上有不少英语写作方面的参考书，但是专门为中国学生写的、特别针对中国学生写作困难的参考书却寥寥无几。《英语写作向导》就是为了填补这一空白而问世的。本书的两名作者都是具有丰富英语教学经验的教授，在中国和新加坡教过大量的中国学生。在近二十年的教学过程中不断看到中国学生重复犯下相同或相似的错误，因此在这里收集、整理、归类成册。我们引用这些真实的学生作文和语句，从词汇、语法、习惯用法、段落和文章各个方面逐步探讨中国学生的写作难点，并提供各种类型的练习题和答案供读者自我检查和提高。希望读者在了解了这些错误的根源之后能避免相同错误的再次发生并提高对英语的语言意识及写作水平。

虽然这本书是为中国学生而写，但我们却没有用中文写作，有两

个原因。第一，要写出地道的英语，必须学习用英语思维，在头脑中建立英语语言的体系；第二，要写出地道的英语，还必须加大语言接触量。在国内这样缺乏英语交际环境的语境下学习英语，对大多数学生来说，英语的接触量一般仅限于英语课堂和教材。为了帮助学生建立英语思维习惯和最大限度扩大学生的语言接触量，这本帮助大家学习英文写作的书就采用了英语作为写作语言。

我们立足于使本书的写作语言——英语——浅显易懂，简明扼要。对于大家不太熟悉的语法术语，我们在书中提供了中文翻译，并且在书的末尾提供了术语词汇解释。

本书的出版凝聚了众多人的辛苦和支持。在此，我们要感谢上海外语教育出版社及其编辑王冬梅、张传根在本书的出版和内容修订方面给予我们的帮助，感谢我们在新加坡国立大学和西安交通大学外语学院教授过的学生同意我们在此书中引用他们所写的英语作文，感谢 Michael Serwatka 博士为本书第五章的一些范文润色并提出宝贵的修改意见。同时我们也要感谢家人的支持与鼓励，感谢他们乐意做本书的第一批读者并提供宝贵的建设性意见。

袁 义 杨瑞英

2010年10月

Preface

A majority of Chinese writers of English find it a daunting task to write anything in English, be it a simple sentence, a short paragraph, or an extended argumentation. Even when they have managed to produce something in writing, the output may sound strange, unidiomatic with a 'foreign' trace, or even worse, unclear and confusing.

Although a number of books have been published in the past few decades to discuss writing problems for English language learners in general, there have been very few that are written to address the specific problems of Chinese learners of English. *Writing with Accuracy and Style* grows out of the authors' urgent need for such a book during our long teaching experience of Chinese learners of English in Singapore and China. We have seen the most common problems of this group of learners recurring and have decided to record these problems from the lexical, syntactic, sentence, paragraph and essay perspectives for future students and learners. Special efforts have been made to provide detailed explanations of the problems and to trace the origins of such problems wherever possible. Authentic student writing samples by Chinese learners of English are used both as examples in the text and as exercise items in

the exercises to make the discussion more meaningful.

The first four chapters of the book are written by the first author while the fifth chapter is written by the second author. Although the chapters are arranged from smaller units of writing to bigger units, there is no absolute need to follow this order as each part of the book is self-contained and can be used independently. The book is, therefore, ideal as either a supplementary textbook or reference book for writing courses for Chinese learners of English, or as a reference and self-study guide for those who need to write in English on a daily basis.

The authors would like to take this opportunity to thank our students at the National University of Singapore and Xi'an Jiaotong University of China for allowing us to use their written work in this book. Our thanks also go to Dr. Michael Serwatka who helped proofread Chapter 5 and polish some sample essays. Finally, we thank our respective families, especially our husbands Jia Quanxi and Du Shejiao, for their unconditional love and support. Quanxi was also the first critical reader of our manuscript.

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Introduction

In reading recent literature on second/foreign language acquisition, one can hardly disagree that theoretical discussions on 'interlanguage' and 'error analysis' are particularly significant with regard to language teaching practice in the real world. This is due to the fact that studies in interlanguage and error analysis centre on developmental patterns of language learning by analysing and revealing the causal factors of the kinds of errors learners make, the types of language learners produce during the learning process and the stages of progression through which learners acquire a second/foreign language. These studies lead to better understanding of the learning process which can be in turn translated into pedagogical solutions to learning problems.

Inspired by these theoretical insights, EFL/ESL scholars have in recent years produced a number of texts that focus on error analysis and other practical problems for Chinese learners of English. However, few seem to have systematically dealt with the problems that Chinese learners of English are seen to encounter, particularly when they undertake writing tasks to meet today's educational requirements and other communication needs.

The book, *Writing with Accuracy and Style: A Practical Guide for Chinese Writers of English*, is written to fill in this gap. Using authentic samples collected by two EFL/ESL educators with years of experience in English language teaching in China, Singapore, and the United States, the book

presents the types of interlanguage Chinese learners produce and offers clear explanations for the common errors they tend to make in the learning process. The book is clearly a timely contribution to EFL/ESL learning and teaching, given the huge population of Chinese learners of English and teachers inside and outside of China.

Aim of the Book

The book aims to make English language teaching more relevant to the needs of students from China. It achieves its aim by

1. increasing learners' awareness of the most commonly-made errors in writing with a clear presentation of the causes of errors, such as first language interference;
2. developing basic writing skills, starting from familiarisation with smaller units of writing at lexical, syntactic and sentential levels to more coherent writing of paragraphs and academic discourse; and
3. reinforcing the awareness of common pitfalls and learning the basic skills with carefully designed exercises with keys.

Users of the Book

The value of the book lies in its use of authentic data showing common errors and frustrations experienced by Chinese learners of English both inside and outside of China. The book suggests possible reasons for the errors and frustrations and ways to deal with them. Hence, it is clear that the book benefits the following three groups of users directly:

1. Chinese EFL/ESL learners. These people can use it as a reference and self-study guide to understand possible causes of their weaknesses in writing and to gain more confidence in dealing with the target language. The book is written in very plain English, so learners with a pre-intermediate knowledge of the language and reading ability should be able to follow the instructions to do the exercises with ease. More advanced learners can also benefit from this book as the book does not only aim at accuracy but also style.

2. EFL/ESL teachers who teach Chinese students anywhere in the world. They can use the book as either a reference book or a supplementary textbook for writing courses for this particular group of learners, be they adult students pursuing their studies abroad or school students learning English inside China.
3. SLA scholars. As the authentic samples of writings by Chinese students resulted from a long-term action research project by the two authors, SLA scholars in general can also use it as source material to research interlanguage and further develop theories in error analysis.

Organisation of the Book

The book consists of five chapters, each of which is self-contained and can be used independently. Each chapter comprises of several self-contained sections with each focusing on one particular type of common errors. Users can go to any section by checking the Table of Contents at the front of the book.

1. Chapter 1 centres on common pitfalls at the vocabulary level. Chinese learners, like all other learners of English, make mistakes of all types at the vocabulary level, but the types of errors dealt with in this chapter are found to be of high frequency in writings by Chinese students because of their L1 interference. By following the explanations given in this chapter, many of these errors can be avoided and L1 interference reduced.
2. Chapter 2 concentrates on typical grammatical errors found in Chinese student writings. While some errors such as those on prepositions and articles are relatively difficult to avoid apparently because of the vast difference between the linguistic systems of the two languages, many others such as subject-verb agreement can be easily rectified with adequate practice. The exercises at the end of each section serve this purpose well.
3. Chapter 3 can be particularly useful for Chinese writers of English with a pre-intermediate knowledge of the target language. Such

writers often produce sentences that look grammatically correct but make little sense in the eyes of native speakers. The chapter gives clear explanations of common pitfalls by comparing the two languages and offers tips on how to make writing idiomatic.

4. Chapter 4 deals with the difficult task of writing paragraphs. By analysing the logical progression of well-written paragraphs and by comparing them with poorly-written ones, the difficult task of writing paragraphs has been made easy. The graphic representations of paragraph structure and the techniques to develop the contents of paragraphs given in this chapter help learners see the real picture of seemingly messy chunks of writing and enable them to cope with paragraph writing independently.
5. Chapter 5 is valuable as far as essay writing is concerned. The chapter starts with a clear-cut analysis of a well-written essay and goes on to tackle the most common problems Chinese learners of English face in essay writing. Tricky topics such as thesis statements, coherence, and consistency become easily accessible to Chinese learners of English. By following the instructions in this chapter, a writer at pre-intermediate level or above is likely to build up his/her confidence in writing and come up with reasonably accurate and fluent pieces of work when such needs arise.

The underlying rationale of the book is clear: the more insights we gain into common errors our learners make, the better position we are in to rectify the situation. This book is grounded on sound linguistic theories and offers both insights into and sound solutions to practical problems experienced by Chinese learners of English. Therefore, it is a book for anyone who has an interest in EFL/ESL learning and teaching. Of course, as the book is focused on the experience of Chinese learners, it is of particular value to this group of learners and their teachers.

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Working with Vocabulary

词汇是语言表达的根本。要学好一门外语，就必须从词汇上下工夫，努力掌握好单词的确切含义、使用环境以及使用规则，以避免词不达意或文不达意的情况。

我们在本章中将讨论一些中国学生在学习英语写作时经常用错、用混淆的词条，包括同义词、同音同形异义词、同音异形异义词、动词、介词、副词、形容词等等，帮助读者辨析这些单词的意义。

English has many synonyms (words with similar meanings 同义词), homonyms (words that are identical in sound and spelling but different in meaning 同音同形异义词), homophones (words that have the same pronunciation but differ in both spelling and meaning 同音异形异义词), and words that are only minimally different in either form or meaning. Such words have not only enriched the English language but also made it interesting and powerful. At the same time, however, they also make it difficult for second and foreign language learners to grasp the nuances.

In this chapter, we discuss words and pairs of words that pose great difficulties for Chinese writers of English. The misuse of these words can make an utterance so inaccurate and unclear that it may sometimes block communication, or worse, it may even send a wrong or unintended message.

Capital ~ Capitol (首都/资产 ~ 国会大厦)

These two words are homophones (同音异形异义词). 'Capital' means **the city or town where the central government of a country or state is located**. It also refers to **the money or property used or owned by a business**.

'Capitol', with an upper case 'C' at the beginning of the word, is **the name of the U.S. Congress building in Washington D.C.** It also refers to a **building occupied by a state legislature** with a lower case 'c'.

In other words, 'capital' is a **city or town** whereas 'capitol' is a **building**.

Come out (出现/出版/真相大白)

'Come out' is a common verb phrase (动词词组) to mean to **become known, to be published, or to end up with**. For example,

1. He was very embarrassed when the truth **came out**.
(=became known)

2. When will your new book **come out**?
(=be published)

However, some Chinese learners tend to use the expression as a generic term to mean 'to appear'. In many cases, the sentences may sound vague or odd even though there is nothing wrong with the sentences grammatically. In such cases, it is better to replace 'come out' with a more accurate verb:

3. ? Some problems may **come out** when you put two rivals together.



(Replace with 'emerge')

4. ? Since the Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) **came out** ten years ago, the number of people who take public transport has tripled.

↓
(Replace with '**was built**') ↓

5. ? After the problem was discussed in the group, a better solution **came out**.

↓
(Replace with '**was found**') ↓

Common ~ Ordinary (普通, 平常)

These two words are synonyms (同义词) that can both be translated as “普通, 平常” in Chinese, but they differ in some subtle ways. ‘Common’ refers to **something that is widespread or unexceptional**, often suggesting inferiority or coarseness. One can, therefore, say ‘common servants’ or ‘a common soldier’. ‘Ordinary’, on the other hand, refers to **something that is expected in the usual order of things**. It suggests that something or somebody is average or below average. While ‘common people’ refers to people who lack rank, status, or distinction in society, ‘ordinary people’ refers to those with no special quality, interest, ability, or talent. Compare:

A common soldier → a soldier with no ranking (列兵, 二等兵)

An ordinary soldier → a soldier with no special talent or ability (平凡的战士)

Of course, the word ‘common’ also has other meanings that the word ‘ordinary’ does not share. For example, one cannot replace ‘common sense’ or ‘common knowledge’ with *‘ordinary sense’ or *‘ordinary knowledge’. In addition, one often catches ‘the common cold’, not *‘the ordinary cold’.

Compliment ~ Complement (赞扬话 ~ 补充物)

The two words are homophones (同音异形异义词). A 'compliment' is **an expression of praise or admiration**. You can either 'compliment somebody' or 'pay somebody a compliment' to make him/her feel good.

'Complement', on the other hand, means **to complete, make up a whole, or make perfect**. For example,

The diamond earrings and necklace are a perfect **complement** to your beautiful dress.

Council ~ Counsel (议会 ~ 忠告)

These are homophones (同音异形异义词). 'Council' refers to **a group of leaders elected or appointed to serve in an administrative or legislative capacity**, such as a 'city council' or 'student council'. 'Counsel', on the other hand, refers to **advice or guidance solicited from a knowledgeable person**. Compare the two words in the following sentence:

The student **council** decided to seek **counsel** from its former president for possible actions to be taken to get out of the embarrassing situation.

Economic ~ Economical (经济上的/经济学的 ~ 节约的)

These two adjectives are often confused by Chinese writers of English. While 'economic' refers to **of or relating to an economy**, 'economical' means **not wasteful or intended to save money**. Are the two words used correctly in the following sentence?

The government is promoting a more **economical** use of resources

because of the current **economic** crisis.

If your answer is 'Yes', you have understood the difference between them.
Good job!

Enter (进入)

The verb 'enter' means **to come or go into a place**. It does not take the preposition 'into' as the meaning of 'to the inside of a place' is already embedded in the verb itself. An example is given in 1 below:

1. He **entered** the room so quietly that nobody noticed his arrival.

The phrasal verb (动词短语) 'enter into' is only used to mean **to participate in, to start, or to form a part of something**. Some examples include

- to enter into a negotiation (开始/进入谈判)
- to enter into an agreement (达成协议), or
- to enter into a treaty (缔结条约)

A typical error made by Chinese writers of English is to add 'into' to 'enter' when it is not required:

2. *When a student **enters into** a university, he tends to participate in too many activities out of curiosity.

The solution to the problem is just to omit the preposition 'into'.

Fair ~ Fare (公平 ~ 车资)

These two words have the same pronunciation but differ greatly in meaning.

'Fair' means **even-handed or free from biases** whereas 'fare' means **the amount of money one pays to ride on a bus, train, airplane or other carrier**. The two words are not related in any way. The following example contrasts the meanings of the two words clearly:

It is not **fair** to charge such high bus **fares** in the city.

Farther ~ Further (更远的 ~ 更远的/进一步)

Although both words are the comparatives (形容词的比较形式) of the adjective 'far' and have been used interchangeably by some when referring to distance, such as in 1, 'farther' is more often reserved for **physical distance** while 'further' for **time or quantity**:

1. We walked much **farther/further** than we had planned.
2. This research plan needs **further** discussion and deliberation.

In other words, only 'further' carries the meaning of 'to a greater extent'; hence in 2 'further' cannot be replaced by 'farther'. Finally, only 'further' can be used to mean 'moreover' or 'in addition', as in 3:

3. **Further**, we do not have enough funding left to carry out the project.

Few ~ A few; Little ~ A little (不多/几乎没有的 ~ 一些)

Whether there is an indefinite article (不定冠词) in front of the words 'few' and 'little' makes a big difference in the meaning of the expressions. 'Few' and 'little', without the indefinite article, are sometimes called **half negative words** (半否定词), meaning a **negligibly small number or amount or almost non-existent**.

For example, in 1, we are talking about more than one person but the number is