

全国高等教育英语专业重点规划教材

总主编 吴耀武



ENGLISH WRITING

—Theories, Skills and Practice

英语写作

——理论、技巧与实践(上册)

冯正斌 编著

西北工业大学出版社

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【内容简介】 《英语写作——理论、技巧与实践》分为上、下两册,适用于高等院校英语专业一、二年级学生及非英语专业初学写作的学生、英语爱好者和英语水平相近的自学者。

本册主要讲授遣词的原则和方法、句子的类型和写法、段落的整体性、连贯性和展开段落的各种技巧、标点符号的用法等写作的基本知识和技能,辅之以具有针对性和实用性的练习。本书的编写思路是写作技能的讲解与实践训练并重,旨在引导学生通过大量的实际操作理解各种写作技巧的实质和作用,逐步掌握运用写作技巧的方法,最终达到熟练地使用写作技巧表达自己的思想感情。

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网 址:www.nwpup.com

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写作是人们借助书面符号传递信息、表达思想、进行交际的重要手段,是一个复杂的、动态的语言应用过程,也是语言能力测定的重要手段。英语写作技能作为一项重要的语言产出技能,是英语学习者使用英语语言的主要体现。在培养英语综合运用能力的过程中,写作能起到承上启下的作用,促进学习者语言发展的功效。英语写作不仅要求作者要有相当的语言应用能力,还要具有一定的认知能力和英语思维能力。

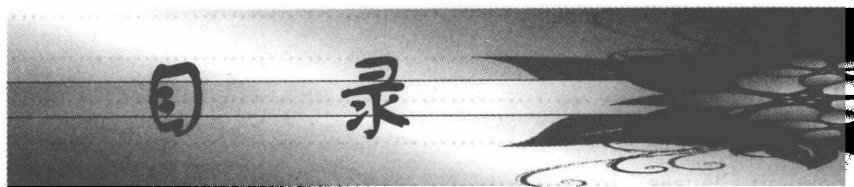
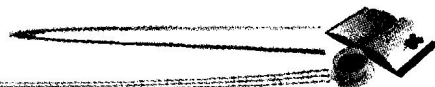
本着引导学生在写作实践过程中加强语言基础,掌握写作技巧的原则,本书在编写过程中,首先是提供了较多的选自英、美原著的例句、例段和例文,供学生阅读、思考、仿效,帮助学生理解英语写作方法,认识中西方不同思维模式造成的词汇选用、句子结构和语篇结构的差异,增加英语语言输入,积累更多的语料。其次,提供了大量的练习,引导学生通过系统、循序渐进的写作实践领悟和掌握各种写作技巧的实质和作用,逐渐形成在写作中自觉地运用适当的写作技巧表达思想感情。另外,书中在“应用文写作”一章中,提供了个人信函、商务信函和简历的一般写法和注意事项,帮助学生初步掌握信函、简历写作的基本知识。

在英语写作中,语言问题固然重要,但孤立的学习语言很难达到传递信息、表达思想、进行交际的目的。在写作实践中,重要的是将注意力更多的放在篇章的内容上,把语言的学习贯穿于不同题材、体裁的写作之中,掌握不同题材、体裁的词汇和语法特点,了解特定语篇的信息组织形式,了解语篇的构建方法和原则,运用符合人们所期待的、公认正确和适合的形式进行写作,实现写作目的。

本书在编写过程中,得到了西安科技大学外国语学院同事和学生的关心和支持,在此谨表谢意。同时对所参阅的大量国内外书籍、网络资料的作者致以诚挚的谢意。

限于水平及其他客观原因,疏漏和错误在所难免,敬请学习者、同行和专家不吝赐教,予以指正。

编者
2010年6月



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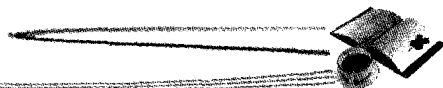




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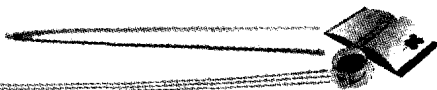
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Chapter One Diction



Diction is the choice and use of words. The English language has a very large vocabulary. It is impossible and unnecessary for you to master all of them. Instead, you should learn to use the words that are most useful and most often used to express yourself. Sometimes you may choose the wrong words, but more often the words you choose are not entirely wrong, but inappropriate, inexact, unidiomatic or too stale to be interesting. It is therefore necessary for you to have basic knowledge of diction, of the principles that guide the choice of words.

1. Appropriateness

A word is appropriate when it suits, the audience, the occasion and the purpose for which it is intended. You can use various kinds of language — various sets of words — depending on the context in which you are speaking or writing. For example, a highly colloquial vocabulary, non-standard English, and slang might be quite appropriate in a novel or a play dealing with the problems of juvenile delinquents, but the same vocabulary would be quite inappropriate in a formal lecture on the same subject. Similarly, when writing an article for a popular science journal, one would try to avoid highly technical language.

Word plays an important role in expressing people's ideas exactly and clearly. Word is as important to writing and speaking, as brick is to buildings. When you construct buildings, you choose bricks of different shapes, sizes and colors to make them go well with the whole structure of the buildings. Similarly, when writing your paragraphs and essays, you choose words of different styles to go well with the whole paragraphs or essays. So choosing the appropriate word is essential in expressing your ideas accurately and decently.

1.1 Level of Words

The words that we come across are generally classified into three levels or layers, according to a stylistic point of view: formal, common, and colloquial or slang.

Formal Words may also be called learned words, or literary words, or “big” words.





They mainly appear in scholarly articles, official documents, formal letters, and scientific writing. Many such words contain three or more than three syllables. Most of them have been borrowed from Latin, French and Greek. They are seldom used in daily conversation, except for special occasions such as the court.

Common Words are also called popular words. In English, a great part of the total vocabulary consists of words which are used by ordinary people in daily communication. These words are the basic elements of the language. They form the core of the English vocabulary and appear in all kinds of speech or writing.

Colloquial Words are mainly used in casual conversation and informal writing, e. g. exam, fellow, cute, math, movie, sure, kind of, and lot of. Most of them are of Saxon origin. They are usually inappropriate to college writing unless the writer is seeking a very special effect. They are not “incorrect” or “bad” English.

Slang is highly informal and is widely used in spoken language. As slang word doesn't last long enough to have clear and established meaning, it is not encouraged in college writing. Slang word may be vivid and forceful. However, slang word may make the writer or speaker sound offensive or funny when used inappropriately.

The following three paragraphs give examples of such classification.

Paragraph A

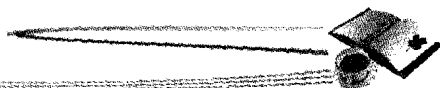
The idea of an African renaissance has taken hold in our continent with all the resonance of an idea whose time has come. The rebirth we are engaged in is not one that will culminate, as European renaissance did, in colonization and dominance of a world economic system, of which the slave trade was an integral part. Ours is, however, a rebirth that must deal with problems that derive from Africa's historical relation with the rest of the world, established in that period. And this must be achieved in a rapidly globalizing world.

Paragraph B

With the emergence of the technological age, it has become increasingly difficult to be a knowledgeable person; There is just too much information to know something about everything. So what should an educated person be in the twenty-first century? It isn't always clear whether one should try to become a specialist or a generalist in today's world. Some people have focused their education, developing skills in one area; specialists now flourish in every field of life. Inversely, others continue to believe that a well-rounded education offers the most in life; generalists typically follow a liberal arts education but may never become experts in any field.

Paragraph C

You have your tension. Sometimes you come close to having an accident that upsets you. You just escape maybe by a hair or so. Sometimes maybe you get a disgruntled



passenger on there, and start a big argument. Traffic. You have someone who cuts you off or stops in front of the bus. There's a lot of tension behind that. You got to watch all the time. You're watchin' the drivers, you're watchin' other cars. Most of the time you have to drive for the other drivers to avoid hitting them. So you take the tension home with you.

In paragraph A, there are only four sentences. All of them are long and involved except the last one. It contains those formal or learned words such as *renaissance*, *resonance*, *culminate*, *colonization*, *dominance*, etc. They are appropriate for formal writing.

In paragraph B, except *emergence* which is a rather formal word, almost all the words in the paragraph are common words. The sentences are much shorter and simpler than those in paragraph A.

In paragraph C, the diction is colloquial and it conveys an oral quality. It contains colloquial words and expressions like *there's*, *you're*, *by a hair or so*, *on there*, *cuts you off*, and *you got to*. The diction is appropriate for a driver giving a talk.

1.2 *Standard and Non-standard English*

Standard English is the English used by all educated speakers of the language. All the three levels of words are of standard English. For college students, the appropriate vocabulary is the standard English commonly used and understood by educated readers and writers. Words and phrases which are often not acceptable even in conversation are non-standard English. Such nonstandard words and expressions are often seen in stories describing poorly educated people. College students of English need to understand them, but should not try to use them in speech or writing.

Standard English

can hardly
have begun
all right
gentler
nowhere
regardless
himself

Non-standard English

can't hardly
have began
alright
morw gentler
nowheres
irregarless
hisself

1.3 *Style*

Style in writing has a range of meanings with references to the writer, the audience, and the occasion. It also refers to levels of language. These levels may range from informal to general to formal. Any language has a variety of styles. Different occasions require different styles. We usually match language to the writing occasion. What is most important is that we should tell one style from another and use different styles on different occasions appropriately.





Formal Style is often found in addresses, scholarly articles and formal reports. Usually the formal or learned diction is preferred. The passage of a formal style contains no slang words or colloquial expressions. There are many abstract words or phrases and specialized terms that suggest an audience of educated readers. The sentences are relatively long, with considerable modification. The sentences are carefully connected with transitions. The voice is usually impersonal, that is, the writer does not speak in his own voice directly. Sometimes the collective we is used rather than you. Paragraph A in the above section is such an example.

General Style is appropriate to a wide range of writing occasions and purposes. It is the style college students are expected to use in most of their writing. It stands midway between formal and informal style. The words are neither slangy nor very learned. Sentence patterns are varied, ranging from the simple and short to more sophisticated structures. The voice may be personal or impersonal. Paragraph B is an example of a general style.

The passage with **an informal style** usually contains many slang words or colloquial expressions. The language suggests an oral quality. The vocabulary as a whole is concrete and the sentences are either a single brief clause or several brief clauses joined by coordination. The writer generally speaks in the first person and express his own feelings.

2. Consistency

The language should be matched to the writing occasion. Appropriate diction requires a consistent style. Writers shouldn't mix formal and informal language.

Informal words and expressions often occur in dialogue, for example:

Inappropriate: Please let me express my gratitude for having been a guest at your house last Saturday night. I had bags of fun that evening.

Revised: Please let me express my gratitude for having been a guest at your house last Saturday night. I enjoyed the evening enormously.

Inappropriate: As Orwell observed, the English language is unquestionably hard up.

Revised: As Orwell observed, the English language is unquestionably in difficulty.

Inappropriate: I enjoy history, but ancient Rome doesn't turn me on that much.

Revised: I enjoy history, but I am not interested in ancient Rome.

Inappropriate: In class the teacher gave a definition of ecosystem, but I didn't get it.

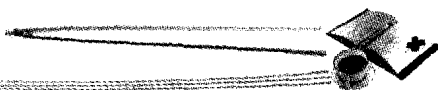
Revised: In class the teacher gave a definition of ecosystem, but I didn't understand it.

3. Exactness

3.1 Denotation and Connotation

Denotation refers to their dictionary meaning, that is its literal meaning. A word's





denotation is its explicit meaning without any emotional associations. If you want to select the word that expresses exactly what you intend to say, you must understand its denotation; what it literally means. Connotation is the implied meaning of a word and it reflects feelings, attitudes and emotional overtones. Some words are neutral and have no connotations, and many words have connotations that are pleasant or unpleasant, positive or negative. Notice the differences in tone in each group of sentences.

- ✱ My brother is firm.
- ✱ My sister is stubborn.
- ✱ My neighbor is pig-headed.

In the first sentence, “firm” has the most positive connotation, that is, it is used in the commendatory sense. In the third sentence, pig-headed has the most negative connotation used in the derogatory sense. In the second sentence, stubborn has the neutral connotation used in the neutral sense. For another example, home denotes a place where one lives, but for different people its connotation varies. For most people, home means warmth, harmony, safety, coziness, comfort, and love. But for those whose family members do not keep good relations with, or are even hostile toward, each other, or for those whose families are in constant wars, home may mean coldness or burden. It is a place that they are reluctant to refer to. The word’s connotation differs greatly for different cultures. For example, red, according to *Webster’s New World Dictionary*, denotes a primary color, or any of a spread of colors at the lower end of the visible spectrum, varying in hue from that of blood to pale rose or pink. So its denotation is relatively definite to all people in the world. But in fact, for us Chinese, red is a holy word which stands for revolution, communism, glory, and happy events. Hence we have red flags, red flowers, and red stars. Even at a wedding ceremony, the bride is often in a red wedding dress. However, in the western culture, it implies something totally different—debt or anger. It is no wonder that they have such phrases as in the red (in debt or losing money) and see red (to become angry).

When choosing a word for your context, be sure that its connotation is exactly what you want. If the connotation does not seem appropriate for your purpose, your audience, or your subject matter, you should change the word.

3.2 General and Specific Words

A general word relates to an overall group (e. g. fruit). A specific word identify individual items in a group (e. g. grape, orange, apple). The terms general and specific are relative. They are determined by the relationship of one word to other words. The same word may be both general and specific. For example, movie is a specific word compared with entertainment, but it becomes a general word as opposed to western; swimming suit is less general than clothes, but more general than bikini. General words are used to describe whole classes of things or events, and a general point is thus conveyed. Specific words are used to



convey information. They usually give strong support to statements that use general words and they will make these statements clearer and more vivid. When you write, you must use both general and specific words, but you should try to use specific words whenever possible. Contrast the following versions of the same experiences.

(1) I have heard Grandfather speak of his fascination with the train and how it interested the whole family as it went past their farm from time to time. And Grandmother, whose home was in an urban community, recalls with amusement the debates that automobiles caused in the early days.

(2) Grandfather tells of his family's leaving their field work to run to the fence and wave to the engineer and fireman as the train chugged past on Tuesdays and Fridays. And Grandmother, who was a town girl, laughs about the debates in the early 1900's on whether automobiles should be kept out of the city limits because they frightened horses pulling buggies.

The second version is more vivid and effective because it is more specific and "pictures" what happened. "Run to the fence and wave to the engineer and fireman" in the second version are more specific than "interested" in the first one. Similarly, the second version enables reader to understand what "the debates" were about and why they now seem amusing, while the first one fails to do so.

3.3 *Abstract and Concrete Words*

Abstract words refer to qualities, characteristics and concepts that we know with your mind, such as beauty, truth, management, justice, labor, faith etc. Concrete words, on the other hand, refer to objects and things that we can see, touch, hear, smell, or taste, such as, hard, apple, and brick. Concrete words are specific, and they get your point across. Abstract words are general, and they can hardly communicate much about real things. Abstract words are used to discuss concepts. Concrete words are used to provide tangible details to support these concepts.

Abstract: The long flood caused a lot of awful destruction in the town.

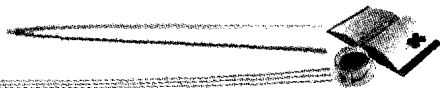
Concrete: Then flood waters, which rose swiftly and then stayed stubbornly high for days, killed at least seven townspeople and made life a misery for the hundreds who had evacuate their ruined homes and stores.

Abstract: The moon looked spectacular.

Concrete: The moon had risen, and its orb was shedding a flood of light over the dark outline of pines which crowned the eastern mountain... the rays from the moon striking upon the smooth white surfaces of the lakes and fields, reflecting upwards a light that was brightened by the spotless color of the immense bodies of snow which covered the earth.

Suggestions for Choosing Concrete and Specific Words:

✧ Use the most specific word you can to refer to or describe something. For



example, you can use German shepherd instead of dog; use tulips instead of flowers; use Boeing 747 instead of plane; use Aunt Sally instead of a relative; use a bad toothache instead of sick; use *Farewell to Arms* instead of a book; and use 15 degrees below zero instead of very cold.

✱ Verbs are among the most expressive words in language. Using a verb that most vividly describes an action can bring a sentence to life. For example:

Weak verbs: The man did badly in front of a large audience.

Revised: The man panicked in front of a large audience.

Weak verbs: The boy doesn't care for rice and chooses not to eat it.

Revised: The boy hates rice and refuses to eat it.

✱ Use words that are clear and appropriate for the topic. Don't use words that aren't common in conversation, and in particular, don't choose big words to impress the readers rather than to communicate ideas clearly. For example:

Big verbs: My eyesight is getting worse.

Revised: I can't recognize you in dim light.

Big verbs: Those lately purchased chairs that rock to and fro were of a very steep price.

Revised: Those lately bought rock-chairs were very expensive.

✱ Whenever possible, show the readers something instead of telling them about it. For example:

Telling: Myrtle has a good sense of humor.

Revised: Myrtle loves to tell funny stories about her childhood and to play practical jokes on her friends.

Telling: The math test was easy.

Revised: The math test had only fifteen true-false questions, and all of the answers came from the first five pages of the book.

Telling: Matthew put up a good fight against the bully.

Revised: Matthew blooded the bully's face and knocked him down twice before getting knocked out.

3.4 *Synonymous Words and Expressions*

Synonyms are words or expressions that mean exactly or nearly the same as other words or expressions. English is particularly rich in synonyms as a result of incorporating words from other languages over centuries. There is always a shade of difference in meaning between the synonyms. They may be different in stylistic level, in the degree of emphasis, in emotional coloring, in tone, and in collocation. Students should be careful to select the word or phrase with the appropriate connotation as well as the denotation. When in doubt, consult the dictionaries of synonyms.

Small and little can often be used interchangeable when referring to physical size, but



little connotes a sense of charm, tenderness, or pathos.

They lived in a small town.

I can never forget the little town where I spent my happy childhood.

Murder, assassinate and massacre all refer to killing. Murder refers to the crime of killing sb. deliberately. Assassinate implies a murder in which someone murder an important or famous person, especially for political reasons. Massacre applies to cruel killing of a large number of people or animals.

A plot to assassinate the President was uncovered by government agents.

The press has reported the massacre of thousands of people for their religious beliefs.

His parents and sister were all murdered by the terrorists.

3.5 Idiomatic Language

An idiom is a fixed expression that is peculiar to a language. These phrases established by usage and mean something different from the meanings of the separate words. For a foreign learner, English idioms are difficult to understand because they cannot be analyzed grammatically. Idioms help students of English to express themselves with much power. So it is necessary for you to learn as many idioms as possible. When you are not sure whether what you say is idiomatic or not, consult dictionaries.

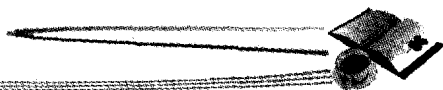
Collocations in English are often different from collocations in Chinese. Usually, problems in idioms are caused by collation, especially the collocation of prepositions and verbs or adjectives. The following are some of the idioms that are often misused by students.

Unidiomatic

according with
abide with
accustomed with
agree to (a person)
apologize about
capable to
conform in
derive of
die with
different than
in accordance to
independent from
inferior than
jealous for
preferable than
prior than

Idiomatic

according to
abide by
accustomed to
agree with (a person)
apologize for
capable of
conform to/with
derive from
die of/ from
different from
in accordance with
independent of
inferior to
jealous of
preferable to
prior to



similar with
superior than

similar to
superior to

4. Figures of Speech

A figure of speech is an intentional deviation from ordinary language. The purpose of the figure of speech is to increase the vividness and impact of language; to emphasize or clarify the expressions. A figure of speech should be fresh, clear, and should make a vivid image for the reader.

A figure of speech expresses an idea, thought, or image with words which carry meanings beyond their literal ones. Figures of speech give extra dimension to language by stimulating the imagination and evoking visual, sensual imagery; such language paints a mental picture in words. Some types of figurative language are the following:

4.1 *Simile*

Simile is a direct, expressed comparison between two things essentially unlike, but resembling having at least one quality or characteristic in common or in resemblance by the use of like, as, as...as, and as if. It is a device both of art and explanation, comparing the unfamiliar thing to be explained to some familiar thing known to the reader. It is a figure of speech which makes a comparison between two unlike elements.

✧ My love is like a red, red rose.

✧ His face was white as pie-dough and his arms were lank and white as peeled sticks.

In the above two examples, woman is compared to rose, face is compared to pie-dough, and arm to peeled sticks. They are of different categories, but each pair have one similarity: loveliness, whiteness and lankness. The discrepancy between the two things compared makes their similarity more striking.

Here are some more examples:

✧ As cold waters to a thirsty soul, so is good news from a far country.

✧ My wife's new hat is like a lighthouse.

✧ He talked as if he were the president of the United States.

✧ The mist hung like a veil over the whole valley.

✧ He watches from his mountain walls, and like a thunderbolt he falls.

✧ My heart is like an apple tree whose boughs are bent with thickest fruit.

✧ Clouds like fluffy balls of cotton; snowflakes like soft white feathers; a motor purring like a kitten; a lawn like a green carpet; thin as a bookmark; as contented as a cow.

4.2 *Metaphor*

Metaphor is a figure of speech in which a word or phrase literally denoting one kind of