

College English Composition Researching a Topic

大学英语写作



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第四册

奈尔



南京大学出版社

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大学英语写作

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编者说明

我们这套《大学英文写作》的编写遵循了国家教委高校英语教学大纲的精神,努力满足英文专业本科阶段不同年级教学上的需要,注重帮助学生提高毕业论文的质量。我们希望我们的教学能够培养学生独立从事科研工作所需要的分析问题和解决问题的能力,为国家经济建设和教育发展输送高质量、高水平的外语人才。

长期以来,我国大学英文专业的写作教学一直缺少一套较为完整的、由浅及深、循序渐进、适合课堂教学使用的教材。有的教师在不得已的情况下用些《写作手册》之类的小册子,既不好用又没有连贯性,我们编写这套教材的目的之一就是要填补这一空缺,做到老师用顺手,学生用有效。为了使这套教材真正对教学起到帮助的作用,我们想说明下面几个问题。

一、对于英文专业写作课的教学,大纲已有了明确的规定和要求,但是各个学校在执行上因具体情况的差别而又各不相同。有的学校一年级上学期就开写作课,有的则要待到一下或二上才开写作课。在教学进度上各校也不一致,有的不能切实完成大纲所规定的教学任务,学生在毕业撰写学术性论文时有很大的困难。同时,大纲本身也有一个在实践中不断完善、不断适应学生毕业后工作需要和国家经济建设快速发展需要的问题。

本套教材大致上第一、二、三册分别供大学一、二、三年级使用,第四册则供四年级使用一个学期。对于一年级下学期才开设写作课或者四年级全学年开设写作课的学校来说,第一册的一部分也可供二年级使用,第二、三册也可分别供三、四年级使用。

为了帮助学生适应四级考试和八级考试对写作的要求,我们在第二、三册里又分别包括了快速写作的练习。

二、一般说来,本科阶段英语写作的学习要上两个台阶,过四道关口。第一个台阶是写记叙文、说明文和一般的议论文,学生上这个台阶就是要用英语写出他们在中学时期汉语写作中已经熟悉的各种文体。这里的两道关口,一道是克服畏惧心理,敢于用英语写作,另一道是学会用英语来写作,把作文写好。第二个台阶是写大学本科阶段

专业学习所必需的议论文、科研报告和学术论文。这里也同样存在着“敢写”和“会写”这样的两道关口。

由于学生在这几道关口所面临的困难不尽相同,写作课的教学也应有不同的侧重,我们的写作教材一至四册在一定程度上反映了这些不同的侧重点,在编写过程中我们也没有勉强去追求体例上的一致。总的说来,第一、三册是帮助学生打消顾虑,鼓励他们用一门尚未熟练的外语来写作或者用外语来写学术性的文章,而第二、四册则是要帮助学生在已经可以写的基础上把文章进一步写清楚,写规范,真正上好上述的两个台阶。

三、因为教学情况多样,任课老师在教材内容的选用上应该有很大的灵活性,不必去使用这套教材的每一章、每一节、每一个练习。

首先,学生在不同的地方和时期有着不同的兴趣,老师应根据学生的具体兴趣和要求来组织教学。对于书中的练习,有的可做深,有的可做浅,有的可多做,反复做,有的则可以不做,一切从教学出发,从调动学生积极性出发。

其次,写作是一个不断挖掘深化,不断修改提高的过程。如果课本上每一个练习都要做,就难免会占用过多的时间,影响到一篇作文的深化和提高。

老师对学生帮助最有效的时机是当这一过程仍在进行之中的时候,而不是在这一过程结束之后再来写评语、批分数。在写作过程中,老师可以指出问题,提出修改意见,启发学生,从而参与这一过程,帮助学生写出更好的作文。因此,课堂的主要时间应该是用来评讲学生的作文,帮助他们修改第二稿、第三稿。

这一套教材的出版,得到了校、院、系各级领导长期的关心和支持,藉此机会表示衷心的感谢。我们还要感谢所有参与这项教材编写工作和给予这项工作各种支持的老师和同学们,没有他们,就不可能有今天的成果。

编 者

Words for the Teacher (and the Student)

This textbook attempts to meet several needs of teachers and students in English language programs. We encourage you to use it in a way suitable for your program:

1. **fourth year writing courses:** For one semester courses, use Unites 1-9 including the “Cinderella” research materials as the basis for the course. If you have a second semester use Units 10 and 11 to lead students in their own independent research writing.
2. **undergraduate thesis writing:** Students and thesis advisors are encouraged to use chapter 10 as a basic guide to writing the graduation thesis.
3. **term papers:** The text can be used as a guideline for student term papers required in upper level undergraduate courses or M.A. courses in literature, language and culture. Students can use the text on their own even when the specifics of writing a term paper are not taught in the course.
4. **M. A. program writing courses:** Use Units 1-9 as an introduction to academic writing and Units 10 and 11 for courses preparing students to write their M. A. theses.

We think this textbook can be used flexibly as it gives students opportunities to generate their own themes, elaborate on issues of their own concern and interest, while fostering important skills. For instance, we show the relevance of research skills to the tasks of various careers to encourage fourth year students to maintain their interest in academic work while they are busy job hunting. The teacher can build on student interest in career preparation by assigning topics and research forms that help students with their transition to work.

Students going on with academic work need to master the forms of academic writing and to use those forms in their advanced study. From the first course in which they are assigned a term paper to thesis writing at the graduate level, they should be building their skills in reading, analyzing and using the methodologies of their area of specialization. We think this textbook can serve them through all these stages as it

begins with exploring one topic in depth and ends with a step-by-step guide that can be used as a handbook on research writing.

The text can also be used to link the work of the fourth year writing course and the graduation thesis requirement. Teachers can use the assignments to start the students on their thesis topics, thus encouraging a thoughtful approach to that final work. Thesis advisors, each one working independently or working as a faculty group, can use the text to set a responsible standard for thesis writing. Doing this, we believe, results in theses that are a source of pride for the faculty and the students. Such an approach helps all involved recognize and appreciate the accomplishments of the four year program and builds confidence that students are well prepared for the next step in their professional lives.

We also think that students should experience the joy and satisfaction of writing and of exploring ideas. We have found that the “Cinderella” topic stimulates students to write, to think and to discuss. They enjoy themselves as do their teachers. The topic is universal, full of unexpected riches connecting us to all humanity, but also particular to Chinese culture and to Western culture and thus especially appropriate for Chinese students studying a western language. We hope that when you use the materials you will share in the wonder and magic this humble fairy tale still holds.

Acknowledgments

Over the years my Chinese students have inspired me and taught me so much that I only hope the book adequately reflects their spirit and aspirations. It was to do them justice that I wrote it. The friendship and support of my colleagues in the School of Foreign Studies of Nanjing University gave me the model of international cooperation such a project needs. Above all, Ting Yenren, the persevering leader of the writing curriculum and the writing textbook project, encouraged me every step of the way, contributing ideas, passages and practical help that show on every page. He wrote much of Unit 9 and all of Unit 11. He is the “magical helper” in this tale.

Linell Davis

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Unit 1 Research Writing in Context

Overview

Topic:

Introduction to the basics of research writing

Learning Activities:

Use interviewing to conduct research

Write an essay based on information gathered from interviewing

Read a recent academic article

Survey opinions on research writing

Design, administer and interpret an opinion survey

Learning Goals:

Understand the basic elements of research writing

Use interviewing and opinion surveying as research tools

In a rapidly changing world the knowledge we already have quickly goes out of date. Modern life requires that we master modern *tools of inquiry*, tools that assure that we won't become obsolete because our store of knowledge is obsolete. These include skills in:

finding information by searching and reading;

creating information by observing, interviewing, surveying, polling, experimenting and testing;

evaluating, analyzing, organizing and synthesizing information; and

communicating information to an audience.

The fourth year writing course and the thesis requirement should prepare you to participate in the emerging high technology world in which information skills are so critical. No matter what job you go to, you will need to be able to find, select, analyze and synthesize information to solve problems. The problem you deal with in the writing class may be an academic one like interpreting the meaning of a

literary work, but the methods you use have a wider application. In research writing you learn:

- to ask questions;
- to make a plan for finding the answer;
- to distinguish between authoritative sources of information and those that are less reliable;
- to scan information to efficiently select what is useful;
- to manage large amounts of information;
- to analyze information in light of the problem before you;
- to make inferences from facts;
- to assemble, integrate and synthesize information in a way that is responsive to your question; and
- to present your findings in a way that is attractive and consistent with accepted forms.

You will have to work more independently than before and sustain your motivation on a project that may take weeks or months to complete. All this is precisely what will be required of you in your future work settings.

Assignment 1

1. Interview someone who is working or studying in a professional field you might like to enter. This might be a classmate from another department, a graduate student, a friend or relative who works in a particular field. Ask about the skills, knowledge and art needed to be successful in that field.

Transcribe the results of your interview into one page of notes in English, retaining as many specifics from the interview as possible. Bring your findings to class.

With your classmates make a list of "success factors" that combine the findings of all your interviews. Do this by starting with one student reporting, followed by others in turn who tell both what they heard that is similar to what has already been reported and what they learned that is not yet on the list.

After sharing your data, compare your findings with our list of information skills. Use your data as the basis for an essay on preparing for work in the information society.

2. In your personal journal or in a class discussion, explore ways to use the graduation thesis requirement to help you develop the skills you will need in your probable or hoped-for future profession.

For instance, if you are interested in journalism, you might want to develop your interviewing skills. Perhaps you can use interviewing in your research for the graduation thesis. If you plan to teach, you might use the thesis requirement to learn about a specific teaching method.

Look for connections between your personal goals and the academic requirements of your program.

Writing for a professional audience

You have often been told that you need to write with a ***purpose***, which might be to explain, argue, compare or persuade, and that you should address your writing to a particular ***audience***.

In academic and research writing your audience is the scholarly or professional community. For English majors the professional community is international in scope. This means you are often communicating through reading and writing with people, most of whom you will never meet face-to-face. You meet them and converse with them by reading their statements that have been preserved in books, journals, papers from conferences and reference materials in libraries and by contributing your own ideas and research findings in the form of academic writing.

Similarly people in business, journalism, the arts, science and government participate in specialized professional communities, each with their own styles and set forms for discussion and presentation of ideas. To become a professional you need to master their customary forms for presenting information, ideas and opinions. In different fields the products of research writing might have different names such as "marketing plan," "case study," or "research report," but the basic skills needed to do such writing are those we described above.

Style manuals

You can learn some of the rules for academic writing by consulting *style manuals*. In this book we use the style recommended for scholarly manuscripts and student research papers by the Modern Language Association (MLA) of America. The MLA style guidelines have been widely adopted by journals, university publishing houses, graduate schools and departments in the humanities, language and literature around the English speaking world. If you want more information on the MLA style, consult:

Gibaldi, Joseph and Walter S. Achtert. MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers. 3rd edition. New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1988.

In your library you may find style manuals specific to professional fields such as the APA (American Psychological Association) style which is commonly used for scholarly work in the social sciences, linguistics and education. This format is fully described in:

Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association. 3rd edition. Washington, DC American Psychological Association, 1983.

Use the style recommended by your instructor or thesis advisor and choose an up-to-date manual. The economics and technology of publishing have led to substantial changes in style in recent years. For instance, footnotes have disappeared in favor of endnotes or the now dominant style, parenthetical documentation. The once common *Ibid.* and *Op. cit.* are no longer used. Bibliographies have been replaced by a list of Works Cited (MLA style) or References (APA style). For this reason you should not model your style on what the author of a scholarly book or article has used. You may read excellent articles published only ten years ago that use a documentation style that is now obsolete. Some of your source materials may be written in MLA style, while others are written in APA or another style. If you model your style on your sources, you won't be using any one style consistently or accurately.

In this text we use the MLA style throughout, so you can follow our instructions and know that your paper will conform to an accepted

standard. If you are writing a paper for publication, check with the publisher to find out what style they require.

Assignment 2

1. In the current periodicals section of your university library, scan a recent issue of a journal from a field that interests you.

Read an article, noting how the authors document and cite their sources. Are there footnotes? Endnotes? Are notes used for citing sources or for some other purpose? Look for information about the style required by the journal's publisher.

How does reading the article add to your understanding of the rules of academic writing? Write a brief report of your findings.

2. Investigate the type of research most commonly used in a profession you are interested in. Look for examples of marketing surveys for business, investigative articles for journalism, reports of classroom experiments for teaching or critical articles for literary study.

What research methods do the authors use?

What types of information do they use?

How would you describe the form they use to present their findings?

What do you notice about the writing style?

Writing from source materials

It is challenging in an English-as-a-foreign-language environment like China to find good sources on topics that interest you. Quite naturally libraries do not have as many English language books and journals as you would find in an English speaking country. Despite this limitation our experience with students shows that they can do excellent research. Most of the problems you face are remarkably similar to those of students in the West.

Students expect that their biggest problem will be lack of sources. Quite the opposite is usually true. Students more often have trouble **finding** sources that are available, **choosing** high quality sources among those available and **making good use of sources** they do find.

Finding sources

Often when students start on a first research project they do not know how to find the encyclopedia articles, books, magazines and journals that contain the information they need. The first visits to the library may be frustrating, and you may walk away thinking, "There is nothing here." Be patient. The information, more than likely, is there but you have not yet found the keys to unlock it. As the amount of information explodes, more attention is put on its organization. Information specialists publish bibliographies, encyclopedias, almanacs, abstracts and thousands of indexes and catalogues to help people find the information they require. To find what you need you must first gain experience in using these resources.

We recommend that you learn to do *keyword searches* as this method is suitable for libraries with limited subject headings and is the approach to searching used in the new computer technologies. Begin searching for sources by making a list of terms related to your topic. Take the list to the library and look them up in a general encyclopedia. For some terms on your list you may find no articles, but for others you will find articles and those articles will include more specialized terms and names that you can add to your list of keywords. With a good list of keywords you can begin to search the card catalog, specialized reference books and indexes to periodicals.

Students sometimes start with outmoded search methods such as going first and only to the shelves in the book collection related to their topic. If they find three books on the shelf with titles that sound almost the same as their chosen topic, they are happy. If not, they think their search is hopeless. Both reactions are faulty. If there are three books that cover a topic, the student has probably not narrowed the topic sufficiently. It is not possible to read three whole books in the time available, nor is a summary of three sources proper research. In this case, the student would only be doing a review of what had already been done better by others, a useless and boring task.

A better **search strategy** is to begin in the reference section where you read several entries in general and specialized encyclopedias. From this initial search you learn the keywords used to discuss the topic.

Later you use your list of keywords to search the card catalog and the indexes to the periodical literature. You can also use your keywords to search the indexes of books on subjects related to your narrowed topic.

Selecting sources

For this textbook we have already chosen a collection of sources on one topic, the fairy tale "Cinderella". In our collection we have:

- an introductory essay on folktales.
 - a definition essay on the fairy tale hero,
 - three European versions of Cinderella,
 - the Walt Disney version,
 - a Chinese text from the Tang Dynasty,
 - two English translations of the Chinese text,
 - four critical essays expressing four different views of Cinderella,
 - and
 - two poems and one short story by contemporary writers.
- altogether sixteen sources.

For convenience we can categorize these as background sources (the first two essays), primary or original sources (versions of the fairy tale and modern literary retellings) and critical sources (the four critical essays). Each type of source has a place in research writing, but we encourage you to follow our example and use original sources as much as possible.

Part of effective searching is looking for and choosing the types of sources that support a carefully thought out *research plan*. By starting your research with preliminary reading in the reference room in the library you learn about the questions and problems that others who have investigated your topic are concerned with. This, we hope, will stimulate you to ask questions of your own and make a plan to answer one or more of those questions. The type of sources you search for and select depends on the question you are trying to answer. For instance, one of our students wanted to know more about the novel *Joy Luck Club* and the Chinese-American author Amy Tan. She did a reference search, read the novel and then asked as her research question, "Are the four mothers stereotypes of traditional Chinese women in feudal society?" Her question led her to search for and choose the novel

(primary source), biographical essays on Amy Tan and several articles in English on women, marriage and the family in feudal China (secondary sources).

Using sources

To effectively search for sources, you should have an idea of what you will do with them when you find them. Sometimes students pass over original or primary sources, reading them only superficially, and reach for the secondary sources because they lack confidence that they can find meaning in literary works themselves. We advise you to read, reread, absorb and reflect on original sources first. This is essential. Otherwise you may become intimidated by the “experts” and undervalue your own thinking.

Record your thoughts, questions and opinions on original sources in a reading diary and then review your notes for further ideas on the approach you want to take to the work. Often it is better to use background sources rather than critical sources to add to your understanding of a literary text. If your research question is such that you want to include literary criticism among your selected sources, you should become familiar with the primary source or sources before you read the critical sources. By the time you read the criticism you should be well-grounded in the literary work so that you can test the critics’ opinions against your own reading. The critics will open up new ideas and possibilities, but by reading and studying the originals first, you won’t be tempted to allow any critic to have the last word.

As in our “Cinderella” example, you may find that critics disagree with one another. Critics bring their own assumptions to their discussion of literary works and to evaluate their opinions, you need to examine those assumptions. By studying many critical opinions, we hope you will discover that there is no one right answer to the question, “What is the meaning of this literary work?” We think that meaning in a literary work is negotiable, a topic of discussion rather than a certainty. You will find that there is no final authority on a literary work or any final truth about it. There is only good evidence, good argument and good writing.