

Composition and Rhetoric

英文写作与修辞

华东师范大学 杨霞华

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序

中国人学习英语已经有相当长久的历史，但在解放前，所重视的往往只是阅读。解放后又强调了听和说的训练。尽管大家认为培养学生的写作能力很重要，但历来写作只附设在精读课里，并没有作为一门独立的课程来作系统的讲授。因此，长期以来，我国高校所培养的外语人才，相对来说，写作能力是比较差的。近年来，我们为了加速国家的现代化建设，对外语人才的需要，不但在数量上大大增加，在质量上也提出了更高的要求。培养和提高写作能力就成了当前一个十分迫切的任务。我国各高等院校有鉴于此，近几年来纷纷开设了英语写作课。但随之而来的一个问题，是缺少一本适合我国学生的英语写作教材。杨霞华等同志的《英语写作与修辞》，就是为了适应这个需要而编写的。该书对英语各种体裁的文章和修辞，作了比较详尽的阐述，而又能理论联系实际，深入浅出，便于读者领会和掌握，并附有大量练习，有利于读者巩固所学得的知识和技能。

杨教授根据数十年的英语教学经验，又把中国学生难于掌握的一些常用词的用法，编了一个词汇用法表。此表针对性强，这是一般国外写作教材中涉及较少的一个方面。该书的出版，填补了我国英语写作教材上的一个空白，对提高学生的英语写作能力，无疑将起一个推动作用。我相信一定会受到广大读者欢迎的。

方 重

1984, 3

Table of Contents

Introduction	(1)
Exercises	(5)

Chapter 1 The Paragraph

Fundamental Functions of the Paragraph	(9)
Unity and Controlling Idea	(11)
The Topic Sentence	(13)
Paragraph Development.....	(16)
Coherence	(18)
A.Coherene Through Logical Arrangement. ...	(20)
B.Coherenee Through Cohesive Devices	(21)
Transition.....	(23)
Three Special Paragraphs	(27)
A. Opening Paragraphs	(27)
B. Closing Paragraphs	(32)
C. Dialogue Paragraphs	(35)
Exercises	(36)

Chapter 2 Narration

What Is Narration	(43)
Model Essay	
Langston Hughes: <i>Saved from Sin</i>	(44)

How to Write a Narrative (48)

 A. Decide upon a Theme (48)

 B. Organize the Narrative in Temporal Order (50)

 C. Build Conflict in the Plot (52)

 D. Focus on the Character (53)

 E. Select and Pace the Details (54)

 F. Use Consistent Point of View (55)

Exercises (57)

Further Readings

E.R. Braithwaite: *The Interview*..... (61)
Nikos Kazantzakis: *A Night in a Galabrian Village*
..... (66)

Chapter 3 Description

What Is Description (70)

Model Essay

George Orwell: *A Hanging* (71)

How to Write a Description (78)

A. Establish a Dominant Impression	(78)
B. Arrange the Description in Spatial Order	(80)
C. Point of View	(81)
D. Four Sub-types of Description.....	(83)
1. Describing a person	(83)
2. Describing a place	(85)
3. Describing a scene	(86)
4. Describing an object	(87)
E. Use specific and vivid language.....	(87)

Exercises (88)

Further Readings

Henry David Thoreau: <i>The Battle</i>	(94)
Deems Taylor: <i>The Monster</i>	(99)

Chapter 4 Exposition: Illustration

What Is Illustration	(106)
Model Essay	
Joanna Mermey: <i>A Victim of the Consumer</i>	
<i>Crusaders</i>	(107)
How to Write an Illustration	(111)
A. Select Good Examples.....	(111)
B. Types of Examples	(113)
C. Order Examples	(114)
D. Balance the General with the Specific	(115)
Exercises	(117)
Further Readings	
Marya Mannes: <i>Packaged Deception</i>	(121)
J.B. Priestley: <i>Two Personal Essays</i>	(126)

Chapter 5 Exposition: Division and Classification

What Is Division and Classification	(130)
Model Essay	
Bertrand Russell: <i>What I Have Lived For</i>	(131)
How to Write a Division / Classification	(133)
A. Overall Structure of the Model Essay	(133)
B. The Introductory Paragraph.....	(133)
C. Provocation and Response.....	(135)
D. Overall Plan and Variation	(136)
E. Rules of Division and Classification	(137)

Exercises	(139)
-----------------	-------

Further Readings

C.L. Wrenn: <i>The Characteristics of English</i>	(142)
---	-------

Aaron Copland: <i>Different Types of Composers</i>	(146)
--	-------

Chapter 6 Exposition: Comparison and Contrast

What is Comparison and Contrast	(150)
---------------------------------------	-------

Model Essay

Bruce Catton: <i>Grant and Lee: A Study in Contrasts</i>	(151)
--	-------

How to Write a Comparison / Contrast	(158)
--	-------

A. Overall Structure of the Model Essay	(158)
---	-------

B. Subject-by-Subject and Point-by-Point Comparisons	(159)
--	-------

C. Selection of Material and Thesis Statement	(160)
---	-------

D. Balance and Emphasis	(162)
-------------------------------	-------

E. Transitions	(164)
----------------------	-------

Analogy	(165)
---------------	-------

Exercises	(166)
-----------------	-------

Further Readings

David Skwire: <i>Sentence Fragment and Speeding</i>	(171)
---	-------

Brander Mathews: <i>Franklin and Emerson</i>	(173)
--	-------

Eugene Raskin: <i>Walls and Barriers</i>	(174)
--	-------

Chapter 7 Exposition: Causal Analysis

What Is Causal Analysis	(180)
-------------------------------	-------

Model Essay

Robert Jastrow: <i>Man of Wisdom</i>	(181)
--	-------

How to Write a Causal Analysis	(188)
--------------------------------------	-------

A. Overall Structure of the Model Essay	(188)
---	-------

B. Distinguish Necessary, Sufficient and Contributory Causes	(189)
C. Consider Both Immediate and Remote Causes	(191)
D. Patterns of Causal Analysis	(192)
E. Avoid <i>Post Hoc</i> Fallacy	(195)
F. Avoid Circular Reasoning	(195)
G. Explain Cause and Effect Explicitly	(196)
Exercises	(197)
Further Readings	
Edwin Newman: <i>Language on the Skids</i>	(200)
John Brooks: <i>The Telephone</i>	(205)

Chapter 8 Exposition: Definition

What Is Definition	(208)
Model Essay	
Desmond Morris: <i>Barrier Signals</i>	(208)
How to Write a Definition	(215)
A. Overall Structure of the Model Essay	(215)
B. Formal Definition	(216)
C. Personal Definition.....	(218)
D. Extended Definition	(219)
1. Definition by origin	(219)
2. Definition by example	(221)
3. Definition by comparison.....	(221)
4. Definition by contrast	(222)
5. Definition by description	(223)
6. Definition by classification.....	(223)
Exercises	(225)

Further Readings

- Ellen Goodman: *The Workaholic* (229)
Mark Van Doren: *What Is a Poet?* (232)

Chapter 9 Exposition: Process Analysis

- What Is Process Analysis (241)

Model Essay

- Matthew Kay: *How to Kill a Bull at a Fiesta* (242)

- How to Write a Process Analysis (245)

- A. Overall Structure of the Model Essay (245)

- B. Collect Adequate and Accurate Information (246)

- C. Begin with a Clear Thesis Statement (247)

- D. Deal with the Process..... (247)

1. Chronological order and spatial order (247)

2. Divide a continuous process appropriately (248)

3. Group minor actions into major ones (249)

4. Order simultaneous actions (250)

5. Handle properly comments, explanations, etc. (251)

- E. Make Each Individual Step Clear, Complete, without
Repetition (251)

- F. Use the Flow Diagram..... (252)

- Exercises (253)

Further Readings

- How to Enlarge a Photograph* (255)

- S.I. Hayakawa: *How Dictionaries Are Made*.....(258)

- I Remember, Granner*..... (261)

Chapter 10 Diction	(264)
Abstract and Concrete Words	(265)
General and Specific Words	(265)
Denotation and Connotation	(267)
Synonyms	(270)
Euphemisms	(271)
Exercises 1—5	(273)
Slang	(275)
Jargon	(276)
Cliches	(277)
Exercise 6	(280)
Figures of speech	(282)
A. Simile	(282)
B. Metaphor	(283)
C. Personification	(284)
D. Metonymy	(285)
E. Hyperbole	(286)
F. Litotes	(286)
G. Transferred Epithet	(287)
H. Onomatopoeia	(288)
I. Irony	(288)
Exercise 7	(289)
 Chapter 11 The Rhetoric of Sentences	(291)
Active Voice or Passive Voice?	(291)
Parallelism	(293)
Exercises 8,9	(296)
Dangling and Misplaced Modifiers	

A. Dangling Modifiers.....	(298)
B. Misplaced Modifiers	(301)
Exercise 10.....	(302)
Sentence Clarity	(304)
A. Lack of Necessary Details	(304)
B. Choppy Sentences	(305)
C. Confusing Shifts	(306)
D. Confusing Pronoun Reference	(308)
Exercises 11, 12	(313)
Sentence Conciseness	(315)
Exercise 13	(319)
Sentence Emphasis	(321)
A. Positions of Words	(321)
B. Periodic and Loose Sentences	(322)
C. Balanced Sentences.....	(323)
D. Repetition	(324)
E. Other Means of Emphasis	(326)
Exercises 14, 15	(326)
The Expletives	(327)
Stringy Sentences	(328)
Exercises 16, 17	(329)
Sentence Variety	(330)
A. Vary Sentence Beginnings.....	(330)
B. Vary Sentence Patterns and Kinds of Sentences	(333)
C. Vary Sentence Length	(333)
Exercises 18, 19	(334)
Sentence Combining	(334)
Exercises 20, 21	(338)

Chapter 12 Tone and Style	(241)
Tone	(341)
Style	(343)
Exercise 22	(347)

Appendix

Glossary of Usage	(352)
Punctuation	(390)
Index	(406)

Introduction

Why do we need a writing course? Some students think that since they can already speak English, and since writing is no more than a process of recording speech or thought on paper, it cannot be a really challenging course. On the other hand, many students fear to meet the challenge posed by composition writing. To them the craft of writing is far beyond their reach and accessible only to a gifted few.

Both attitudes are, of course, harmful to developing students' writing skills. To prepare students mentally for the writing course, it is necessary to disprove these prejudices by exploring the similarities and dissimilarities between writing and speaking.

Now let's suppose you want to tell a joke to your friends. The success of your joke telling depends on many factors. First, the joke must be good, that is, interesting and fresh. Second, you must organize it to the best effect. For example, you must make sure your joke does have a good punch line. Third, you must tell it to the right people at the right time. It will be a grievous social mistake if you tell the joke to a friend who has just lost a near relative. And you must be sure that your friends have the necessary background knowledge to appreciate your joke. Fourth, you must really direct the joke to your friends. If, instead

of beginning vigorously by saying "Hey, have you heard this one?" and engaging your friends' attention with your lively speech, you just murmur it to yourself, the joke is doomed from the very start. Finally, you must watch your friends' reaction to your joke. If they question you about some points, you must make these points clear immediately. If they laugh heartily, you can be sure that your joke works and you may feel encouraged to go on. But, if they just smile at you politely, saying "Well..."; if, worse still, they are simply not paying attention, then your joke must have fallen flat. And you must consider whether you are telling it in the right way. If not, use some tricks to hold their attention and lead them on. To sum up, to tell a joke successfully, you must always have good stuff (*content*); you must organize it effectively (*organization*); you must tell it in the right *context* (or situation); you must know your *audience*, pay active attention to it, and respond appropriately to its *feedback*.*

In fact, these five factors are essential not only to the success of oral communication, but to that of written communication as well. To produce effective writing, you must have good, well-organized ideas and present them in the right context. (You won't write a paper on the nervous system if you write to a nearby factory to complain about the irritating rumble of concrete mixers in the middle of night, will you?) In addition, a strong awareness of the *audience* and its *desire* is necessary to make your

*Here the *context* or *situation* is stipulated as setting or background (the external conditions which give rise to a speech) as well as the speaker's purpose (which is in a sense a reaction to the setting). *Audience* and *feedback* in this text roughly correspond to "audience" and "delivery" in traditional rhetoric.

writing well focused and properly organized.

But, we would oversimplify the matter if we rest contented with such a comparison of speaking and writing. In fact, while sharing some fundamental similarities, speaking and writing possess very different features.* These distinct features stem primarily from different situations in regard to the audience and its feedback. In speaking, the audience is present at the time of speaking, and immediate feedback, provided usually in both verbal and nonverbal channels (e.g. facial expressions), enables the speaker to adjust his ideas constantly in the course of his speech. (Such immediate feedback in addition to the lack of time makes speaking more or less spontaneous and loose in structure.) Besides, the speaker is aided in his effort to arouse and hold the audience's attention by social etiquette: a fear of giving offense often helps to retain reluctant listeners.

In writing, the audience is absent, and the sending and receiving of messages become removed in time and space. This lack of direct contact with the audience creates a problem in feedback: response from the reader is in most cases too late to influence the written text. (Of course, such feedback is useful when the writer revises his writing later, but this is another question.) In these circumstances, the writer must create in his mind an audience and imagine its feedback so as to make proper

*We don't attempt to make a comprehensive examination of this topic. In practical use we can have a very formal speech and very informal piece of writing; we may speak from a written text or simply transcribe spontaneous speech. The discussion here is based on typical speaking and writing situations.

adjustments in his writing. In other words, he must anticipate his reader's questions and try to answer them throughout the text. The absence of audience also makes it difficult for the writer to provoke and sustain the reader's interest. A reader turns to a piece of writing for information or for entertainment. He is not necessarily bound by social rules that may function in a speaking situation, and failure to satisfy his need and engage his interest often means outright rejection of the written stuff. Facing this danger, the writer has to employ some special strategies and techniques to catch and hold his reader. (We will discuss these strategies and techniques in the following chapters.) Fortunately, the absence of audience gives the writer more time to organize his writing and enables him to make better choice of words, which usually results in better structure and greater accuracy. Moreover, the fact that writing can last long, reach a larger audience, and is easy to revise, can well compensate the writer for the pains he takes to produce it.

Now when we return to the students' two extreme attitudes towards writing, we can easily see their respective problems. Those who think that writing is not much different from speaking have ignored the special characteristics of writing both as a process and a product of communication. They underestimate the effort and skills needed for writing even a decent nonprofessional piece successfully. And those who believe that writing has little in common with speaking have failed to see the common basis on which the two communicative abilities rest. They don't realize that their experience of speaking good English can be transferred