



# 高级英语写作

Advanced English Writing

● 周红红 杨若东 主编



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## 内 容 简 介

《高级英语写作》(*Advanced English Writing*) 针对目前我国非英语专业硕士生和博士生的英语基础和他们对英语学术论文及常见应用文的写作需求, 从最基本的写作技巧入手, 由词一句一段一篇到学术研究和论文写作以及申请书、简历、考试作文写作, 系统而又深入浅出地讲解写作要点, 分析学生写作弱点, 通过大量有针对性的练习帮助学生实现在短时间内最大限度地提高写作水平的目的。

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# 前 言

《高级英语写作》(*Advanced English Writing*)是北京交通大学研究生英语教研室所承担的中国学位与研究生教育学会“十一五”研究课题《研究生英语读写课程教学的改革与研究》的成果之一,是基于研究生英语作文语料库,通过对研究生英语作文典型错误的统计、分析和研究,专门为我国非英语专业硕士生和博士生编写的英语写作教材。本教材主要操练英语写作的各个主要环节,介绍英语学术论文和常见应用文的写作,通过课堂教学和课内外学习,切实帮助研究生提高实用英语写作能力。

本教材的主要特色如下。

一、针对性。本教材是在对我校非英语专业研究生的英语学习状况和写作需求进行了大规模调研的基础上制定的编写计划,编者针对学生的弱点和需求,力图在有限的篇幅内为学生们提供最有效的写作信息和思维及语言训练。

二、创新性。目前国内图书市场上常见的写作教材以介绍英语文体为主,内容往往浅显有余而深度不足,不能满足研究生阶段的写作需求。同时,写作教材通常以专题介绍和范文分析为主,缺乏供学生思考和讨论的练习,写作课只能以教师讲授为主,学生们缺乏积极参与的机会,无法通过亲身实践提高写作技能。本教材力求在这两方面有所建树,一是根据研究生阶段的写作需求介绍学术论文和常用应用文的写作技巧及注意事项,二是按照以学生为中心的课堂教学需要编写教学内容,以练为主,通过读写训练实现提高写作能力的目的。

三、实用性。本教材不仅介绍记叙文、描写文、说明文和议论文等一般性英语文体的写作技巧,而且训练学生们学术论文和应用文的写作技能,总结中国学生写作常用的表达,分析和更正他们写作时常犯的错误,为他们在专业学习、求学、留学、谋职和供职时具有一定的英语写作技能打下坚实的基础。

编 者

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## Chapter One

# Basic Writing Techniques

## Introduction

When we put down our ideas, either on a piece of paper or on the screen, we are engaged in the activity of writing. Written language is permanent: the readers can go back over a piece of writing again and again if the meaning is not immediately clear. This is not possible with speech, which is fleeting and ephemeral. Writing does not usually involve direct interaction, except for personal letters and perhaps some computer based communication such as E-mail. The greatest differences between speaking and writing are those between formal written texts and very informal conversation. Since it is permanent, writing provides opportunities for more careful organization and more complex structures. Therefore, when we write, we need to take a lot more into consideration besides the idea itself. We need to pick the right words, to follow the correct syntactic rules and to care about the other writing techniques like capitalization, punctuation and the form of the manuscript. These, like gravel, sand, rocks, or debris, make up the solid foundation of good writing.

## 1.1 Diction

Mark Twain once said, “The difference between the right word and almost the right word is the difference between ‘lightning’ and ‘lightning bug’.”(Alfred 578) The most important goal in choosing the right word in academic writing is the preciseness implied by Twain’s comment.

Diction is the choice and use of words. It is one thing to use words correctly but quite another thing to use words effectively or appropriately. When we write or speak, we choose from thousands of words that make up the language. In the spoken medium, diction is often imprecise, but we can clarify or emphasize our meaning with the help of facial expressions, bodily gestures, tones of voice,

and the like. In the written medium, however, only words are available to supply the specific information. As a result, the words we choose in writing should be as exact, specific and unequivocal as possible. Consulting a thesaurus or a dictionary that discriminates the meanings of synonyms will frequently yield the word that conveys our intended meaning precisely. In the course of writing, we should weigh our words because diction is the essential part of writing.

### 1.1.1 Formal and Informal Words

Formal and informal English differs in word choice, word usage, and grammatical structures. Informal writing might utilize the words *fire*, *kid*, *how come*, and *quote* as a noun. A formal writer might prefer *dismiss*, *child*, *why*, and *quotation*. Informal writing may sound more like conversation while formal writing may be more polished. An informal style may make listeners feel more comfortable when you are speaking, but a formal writing style can make a good impression.

Read the following two letters and find out which one is formal and which is informal.

#### Letter One

*John,*  
*I'm looking for a job, and I've heard through the grapevine that you need a workhorse for your shop. Well, I'm the man of the hour, as I've got a lot to offer. I'm pretty hard-working, and I'm really good about being on time. I'm also used to working by myself. Anyway, tell me whether you want to get together for an interview, okay?*  
*Informal Joe*

#### Letter Two

*Dear John:*  
*I understand that you are looking for a strong worker to assist you in your shop. I should appreciate consideration because I am diligent, punctual, and accustomed to working with minimal supervision. Please contact me if you are interested in setting up an interview. I thank you for your time.*  
*Respectfully,*  
*Professional Joe*

Formal words, also referred to as learned, literary or “big” words, mainly appear in scholarly articles, official documents, formal letters, and scientific writing. Most of them have been borrowed from Latin, French, and Greek. In academic writing we should aim to be succinct, thus:

1. When picking a word, choose the formal way of expression, for example:

**Informal:** *Lots of*      *job loss*      *is*      *just one thing resulting from automation.*

**Formal:** *Widespread unemployment is one consequence of automation.*

The formal way of expression often employs the use of technical words, for example:

Informal	Formal
job loss	unemployment
TV	television
workers	employees
the same as	equivalent

2. Avoid using phrasal verbs such as *get up*, *put into*, *find out* that are often used in spoken English. Replace these with more formal single verbs such as *rise*, *contribute* and *discover*, for example:

**Informal:** *Researchers **looked at** the way strain **builds up** around a geological fault.*

**Formal:** *Researchers **examined** the way strain **intensifies** around a geological fault.*

3. Avoid the first and second person. Formal writing often tries to be objective, and the pronouns *I* and *you* tend to imply subjectivity. In the most formal writing, the pronoun *I* is replaced by the pronoun *we*; this is known as the royal *we* or the editorial *we*. Formal writing generally avoids the pronoun *you* when it refers to people in general.

**Informal:** *You should sleep eight hours each night.*

**Formal:** *One should sleep eight hours each night.*

4. Always include the relative pronoun. In formal English, you should be sure to include *whom* or *that* even when they are not essential to your meaning.

**Informal:** *This is the paper I wrote.*

**Formal:** *This is the paper that I wrote.*

5. Avoid vague words. Vague words, such as *really*, *very*, *just*, are less formal and are open to interpretation; they do not express the ideas as well as more precise words would. *A few* or *enough* can often be replaced by something more precise.

**Informal:** *It caused a **really big** reaction.*

**Formal:** *It caused a **considerable/ dramatic/ an explosive** reaction.*

## Exercise 1

*Slang words and phrases are highly colloquial and widely used in informal conversations. Most of them get out of date quickly. They should be avoided in formal writing. Study the meaning of some slang words and then fill in the blanks.*

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Slang	Meaning
wanna	want to, want a
oughta	ought to
lotta	lot of
gonna	going to
gotta	got to
gotcha	I got you
gimme	give me
dunno	don't know

- I'm \_\_\_\_\_ get you!
- Then he grabbed hold of me and said "\_\_\_\_\_!"
- Robber: "Just shut up and \_\_\_\_\_ the money!"
- Sorry, I can't stay. I \_\_\_\_\_ go now.
- What's his name? — I \_\_\_\_\_.
- Go away! I don't \_\_\_\_\_ talk to you!
- I think you \_\_\_\_\_ talk to him before it's too late.
- This is going to cost you a whole \_\_\_\_\_ money.

**Exercise 2**

*There are 3 alternate colloquial sentences to each main sentence. Pick out the sentence which is the opposite of the main sentence, or which does NOT have the same meaning as the main sentence. (Note: US = American English)*

**1. I'M COLD!**

A. I'm freezing!

B. I'm burning up!

C. I'm a popsicle! (US)

**2. HE STAYED CALM!**

A. He didn't bat an eyelid!

B. He saw red!

C. He was as cool as a cucumber!

**3. I'M HUNGRY!**

A. I'm famished!

B. I'm stuffed!

C. I'm starving!

**4. IT'S VERY CLEAN!**

A. It's filthy!

B. It's spotless!

C. It's as shiny as a new pin!

**5. HE'S STUPID!**

A. He's thick!

B. He's a real egghead!(US)

C. He's dumb!

### Exercise 3

Replace the underlined parts in the following sentences with less formal words.

1. At the counter, we inquired about the arrival time of the aircraft.
2. He eradicated all the imperfections in his notes.
3. She contemplated his utterance.
4. Paul was terminated from his employment.
5. Personnel are requested to extinguish illumination before departure from these premises.
6. Unfortunately, we are not in a position to offer assistance to you.
7. Our university is in close proximity to an amusement park.
8. Terry is of the opinion that everything will be going on smoothly.

#### 1.1.2 General and Specific Words

General words relate to an overall group (*vehicle*), while specific words identify individual items in a group (*car, truck, train, boat*, etc.). General and specific are relative terms, since a word may be general compared with one word and specific compared with another. *Professionals*, for example, is more general than *scientists, doctors, teachers, lawyers, journalists*, etc., but *scientists* may be called as a general word when compared with *physicists* or *chemists*, which, in turn, is more general than *biochemists*.

Both general words and specific words are useful, but why are we suggested to use specific words wherever possible? Because specific words are much clearer, more exact, vivid, striking, impressive, informative, expressive, colorful, concrete, detailed and effective.

Look at the following sentences:

**General:** *John is a good student.*

**Specific:** *In college, John has been rewarded a scholarship over five years.*

**General:** *Your relative is nice to me.*

**Specific:** *Your aunt Betty always stops and talks to me when she meets me in the street.*

General words refer to groups; specific words refer to individuals — but there's room in between. The more you rely on general terms, the more your writing is likely to be vague and dull. As your language becomes more specific, though, your meaning becomes clearer and your writing becomes more interesting.

Does this mean that you have to cram your writing with loads of detailed description? No. First, you don't always need modifiers to identify an individual: *Bill Clinton* and *Mother Teresa* are specifics; so are *Bob's Book* and *the scar on Mary's chin*. Second, not everything needs to be

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individual: sometimes we need to know that *Fred sat in a chair*, but we don't care what the chair looked like. Tips:

1. Use the most specific word you can find to describe something. For example, use *tulips* instead of *flowers*; use *Uncle Tom* instead of *a relative*.

2. Use a verb that most vividly describes an action can bring a sentence to life.

**Weak verbs:** *The boy walked into the classroom.*

**Revised:** *The boy staggered into the classroom.*

3. Whenever possible, show the readers something instead of telling them about it.

**Telling:** *We had fun at the beach.*

**Revised:** *Last Sunday night we barbecued hamburgers at Sagamore Beach, played volleyball, and then sat around singing and telling ghost stories.*

4. Use specific and concrete words when giving details; use general or abstract words when making summaries.

**General:** *The government has made big progress in economic policy.*

**Specific:** *The Australian Government has made considerable progress in implementing fiscal policy nationwide.*

5. Avoid using unsophisticated adjectives such as *good*, *bad*, *big*, *little*, etc.

**Weak adjectives:** *It was a productive meeting.*

**Revised:** *The meeting resulted in the approval of the health-care benefits package.*

Abstract and general words enable us to express ideas. Specific words enable us to define entities. Both types of words are indispensable, and an accomplished writer can take advantage of both — move back and forth between the language of ideas and that of specific and concrete descriptions.

## Exercise

Rephrase the underlined words in the following sentences by using more specific, concrete words or expressions in order to make the sentences more interesting.

1. General: He has a big house.

Specific: He has a two-storeyed house with four bedrooms, two living-rooms, a dining-room and a kitchen.

2. General: The man ate a big meal.

Specific: \_\_\_\_\_

3. General: Somebody asked me to deliver these red roses to you.

Specific: \_\_\_\_\_

4. General: My relative gave me two gifts.  
Specific: \_\_\_\_\_
5. General: The film I saw last week was good.  
Specific: \_\_\_\_\_
6. General: In spring, the weather in Beijing can be very bad.  
Specific: \_\_\_\_\_
7. General: A car was parked in the street.  
Specific: \_\_\_\_\_
8. General: She bore a great burden.  
Specific: \_\_\_\_\_
9. General: She uses simplicity in her style of writing.  
Specific: \_\_\_\_\_
10. General: Some children stood anxiously at the counter.  
Specific: \_\_\_\_\_

## 1.2 Grammar

As traffic regulations ensure safety and swiftness on the road, grammatical rules lay the foundation of good writing and promote understanding. Due to the differences of the two languages, Chinese student writers tend to make some simple grammatical mistakes in subject-verb agreement and the use of pronouns in their English writing.

### 1.2.1 Subject-Verb Agreement

The fundamental rule of subject-verb agreement is that verbs must agree with, or match, their subjects. For example:

*The **Beijing roast duck** tastes delicious.* (singular subject and verb)

*The **vegetables** taste fresh.* (plural subject and verb)

There are several types of subject-verb agreement:

#### 1. Indefinite pronouns

Indefinite pronouns, such as *each, every, no one, everyone, everything*, etc., are singular in Standard English and are followed by a singular verb.

***Everyone** associated with the project **is** proud to be part of the effort.*

***Someone** **has** to be responsible.*

Don't be confused by phrases that come between the subject pronoun and its verb phrases that



may contain plural words.

***Each** of the project partners **is** responsible for writing a chapter summary.*

## 2. All, half, none, some

Verbs that accompany pronouns such as *all*, *half*, *none* and *some* will be determined by whether the pronoun is referring to something that is countable or not.

***Some** of the students in the cafeteria **have** voted already.*

***Some** of the grain **was** ruined by the flood.*

***None** of the representatives **has/ have** indicated how he or she/ they will vote.*

## 3. Together with, along with, as well as...

Though seeming to join subjects, phrases such as *accompanied by*, *as well as*, *as much as*, *rather than*, *more than*, *no less than*, *in addition to/ with*, *along with*, *together with*, *combined with*, *except*, *but*, *besides*, *like*, etc., are not conjunctions and do not work the same as *and*.

***Some** of the hay in the barn, as well as some major pieces of farm equipment, **was** ruined in the flood.*

***She**, more than anyone else in the class, **knows** how to study efficiently.*

## 4. Either, neither

In formal writing, when *either* or *neither* appears as a subject alone (without using *or* or *nor*), they are singular. This is true even though the subject seems to be two things.

***Neither** of these choices **appears** to be satisfactory.*

When *either* or *neither* acts as correlative conjunction, the subject that is closer to the verb determines the form of the verb.

***Either** the employees **or** the manager **has** to be responsible for the year-end festival.*

***Neither** the teacher **nor** the students **were** informed of the bad news.*

## 5. Fractional expressions

With fractional expressions (fractions or decimal equivalents), the verbal forms will be determined by what is being measured, whether it is countable or uncountable.

***Two-fifths** of the grain **is** ruined.*

***One-half** of the students **were** convinced that there would be no final exams this year.*

## 6. Expletive construction

When a sentence begins with an expletive construction (*there is*, *there are*, *here is*, etc.), the subject (which determines the form of the verb) comes after the verb.

***There are** several **explanations** for the Civil War.*

*If the management team takes this attitude, **there is** very little **latitude** for negotiation.*