



面向十二五规划教材

教育部高等教育课程改革和建设规划教材

聂茸 张杰●主编

# 英语写作



 东华大学出版社

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## 前 言

英语写作课程属于语言技能类课程。随着我国社会、经济、科技的发展和对外交流的不断扩大,需要越来越多的有着良好英语运用能力的专业人才,本书的编写目的在于提供一本将语言知识与语言技能相结合的英语写作教材

本书共九章,就选词、造句,到整篇作文、应用文体和学术论文,都有所讲述。我们希望本书对各个专业的学生和愿意学习英语写作的朋友都有所帮助。

第一章阐述了关于英语写作中选词方面的基础知识,写作中的选词及修辞策略,主要介绍了词义的类别和语体特点,并提出了词汇处理的种种策略。本书针对英语专业函授生的特点,用语言学理论指导英语写作实践。

第二章讲解句子的建构及其修辞策略,重点是语句的通顺连贯、言简意赅、生动活泼等修辞问题,而非句法的正确与否。

第三章讲述段落写作。本章展示了段落的基本结构及其发展的几种重要模式,并提出了作为论题的段落的建构策略。

第四章、第五章、第六章针对不同类型的段落,详细阐述了其基本的写作方法。

第七章讲解了文摘的写作方法和写作过程。

第八章阐述了各种不同类型的应用文体的写作方法和注意事项。

第九章讲解作为学术论文的文章的写作要领以及文章开头、结尾的具体写作策略。

本书的各章对中国学生英语写作中的常见问题进行了分析,并提出了相应的解决办法。为了便于学习,各章都附有针对性的练习。

本教材的编写力求坚持这样几个原则:一是做到科学性、准确性和完整性;二是突出重点,主次分明,便于掌握;三是注意通用性、实用性和稳定性。

本书由聂茸、张杰主编。聂茸设计整体编写结构,并编写了第一、四、五、六、七章;张杰编写了第二、三章,并对正本书稿进行了校对;高国鹏编写了第八章;杜坚冰编写了第九章。

编写本教材,我们参阅了很多版本的相关教材。由于时间紧迫,编者水平所限,书中难免疏漏、谬误之处,敬请广大读者和专家不吝赐教。

编 者

2012年1月

# CONTENTS

<b>Part One Choosing Right Words</b> .....	1
1.1 The Correct Word .....	1
1.2 The Appropriate Word .....	4
1.3 The Better Word .....	7
Exercise .....	8
<b>Part Two Shaping Effective Sentences</b> .....	13
2.1 Complete Sentences and Sentence Fragments .....	13
2.2 Types of Sentences .....	15
2.3 Coordination and Subordination .....	21
2.4 Effective Sentences .....	23
Exercise .....	33
<b>Part Three Understanding Paragraphs</b> .....	39
3.1 Paragraph Structure .....	39
3.2 Paragraph Unity .....	42
3.3 Coherence .....	44
3.4 Paragraphs in an Essay .....	49
Exercise .....	52
<b>Part Four Writing Descriptive Paragraphs</b> .....	56
4.1 About a Person .....	56
4.2 About an Object .....	63
4.3 About a Place .....	66
Exercise .....	70
<b>Part Five Writing Narrative Paragraphs</b> .....	74
5.1 Deciding on a Theme .....	74
5.2 Arranging a Proper Order .....	77

5.3 Choosing an Appropriate Point of View .....	81
5.4 Making the Narrative Accurate, Specific and Lively .....	84
Exercise .....	88
<b>Part Six Writing Other Types of Paragraphs .....</b>	<b>90</b>
6.1 Comparison and Contrast .....	90
6.2 Classification .....	94
6.3 Process Analysis .....	100
6.4 Cause and Effects .....	103
6.5 Definition .....	109
Exercise .....	112
<b>Part Seven Writing a Summary .....</b>	<b>114</b>
7.1 Uses of Summary Writing .....	114
7.2 Procedure of Summary Writing .....	115
Exercise .....	118
<b>Part Eight Writing for Special Purposes .....</b>	<b>123</b>
8.1 Notices .....	123
8.2 Greetings, Good Wishes, Congratulations .....	125
8.3 Note .....	127
8.4 Letters .....	131
8.5 Resumes .....	141
8.6 Memorandum( Memo) .....	145
Exercise .....	147
<b>Part Nine Composing Essays .....</b>	<b>149</b>
9.1 Understanding Research .....	149
9.2 Choosing a Research Topic .....	154
9.3 Conducting Preliminary Research .....	160
9.4 Writing a Research Proposal .....	170
9.5 Writing a Working Outline .....	175
9.6 Composing the Draft .....	178
Exercise .....	184

# Part One

## Choosing Right Words

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### Learning Points

- ① Recognize multiple meanings a word may have, i. e. denotative and connotative meanings, affective and collective meanings;
  - ② Learn to choose the correct word for an idea;
  - ③ Differentiate various styles in English, namely, formal, general, colloquial, and slang;
  - ④ Develop an awareness of audience in writing;
  - ⑤ Know how to choose better words, i. e. words that are concise, precise, and effective.
- 

### I. The Correct Word

#### 1. Denotation and Connotation

Suppose you are going to write about a respectable teacher whose body size is above the average. Choose the one you would use from the sentences below, and then discuss the inappropriateness of the other two.

- a. He/ She is plump.
- b. He/ She is portly.
- c. He/ She is fat.

Then if it is the doorkeeper of your dormitory, an amiable middle – aged woman, that you are to write about, which adjective would you use?



Words are the building blocks of writing; therefore, we need to have a good command of them. When we put pen to paper, first and foremost we have to make sure that we choose the right word. If we are asked to describe a person who is fat, we have to decide whether the word fat is the right one. If the person is a respectable teacher, you may not use it, as it does not have a pleasant overtone. And if it is the doorkeeper, you may choose the word plump, as it not only means overweight, but has a pleasant overtone. What's more, it is usually used to describe a woman. So the words fat, portly and plump do not just mean overweight; they also suggest whether it is pleasant or unpleasant. We call the suggested meaning of a word its connotation.

Denotation, on the other hand, refers to the literal and primary meaning of a word — the definition you find in a dictionary. Thus, we can say that the word mother denotes a woman who is a parent but connotes qualities such as protectiveness and affection; and that the word weed denotes an uncultivated plant but connotes destruction and uncontrolled growth. When we write, we have to watch out for the connotative meaning of a word; otherwise, we may make silly mistakes.

## 2. Attitude

See if you can detect in the following sentences how the writer's attitude changes from sentence to sentence:

- a. What a slim girl she is!
- b. How thin the girl is!
- c. The girl is so skinny!

In all kinds of writing, the words you choose may do more than inform. The selection of a word often reveals how you feel about your subject, whether you are pleased, angry, critical or admiring. All the sentences above state the fact that the girl has a small size but are different in the writer's attitude. The word slim suggests the writer's approval of the girl's figure, while the word skinny is just the opposite. No girl will feel flattered if she is said to be skinny, as it is next to a bag of bones! So the three words, though similar in their denotative meanings, are diverse in affective meanings — that is, they reveal different attitudes of the writer. When we write in English, we have to be careful with such emotionally loaded words — i. e. words that can reveal the Writer's attitude.

## 3. Collocation

Certain words tend to occur together regularly. For example, when we describe *coffee*, we can say *strong coffee* or *weak coffee*, but when we describe soup, we cannot say the soup is strong or weak; instead we say the soup is *thick* or *thin*. From this we can see certain nouns are usually

modified by certain adjectives and words with the same meaning are not interchangeable in this situation. We call this fixed combination of words collocation.

Collocation is a very important language feature and we must make note of that when we learn a language. There are several types of collocation — verb plus noun, adjective plus noun, verb plus adverb, preposition plus noun, verb plus preposition, to name just a few. Examples of these are, respectively: follow the fashion ( *v. + n.* ), a brilliant success ( *a. + n.* ), think alike ( *v. + ad.* ), ( the answer ) to a question ( *prep. + n.* ), and think of ( an idea ) ( *v. + prep.* ) .

Learning a word is not only learning its meaning; but also learning which word or words it usually goes with, that is, its collocations. Yet under certain circumstances, a deliberate violation of a collocation can bring out a novel effect, but it must be based on respect for the conventional use.

#### 4. False Friends

Read the following conversation between Alice and the Red and White Queen in Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass* and *What Alice Found There*.

"Can you answer useful questions?" asked the Red Queen. "How is bread made?" "I know that!" Alice cried eagerly. "You take some flour . . ."

"Where do you pick the flower?" the White Queen asked. "In a garden or in the hedges?"

"Well, it isn't picked at all," Alice explained, "it's ground. . ."

"How many acres of ground?" said the White Queen. "You mustn't leave out so many things. "

Can you find out the cause of the misunderstanding?

Words like flour and flower, ground (*pp.*) and ground (*n.*) in this dialogue are troublesome and misuse of them can easily cause misunderstanding. We call pairs of words that similar in appearance or pronunciation but different in meaning are false friends. For instance,

advise vs. advice

angel vs. angle

affect vs. effect

capital vs. capitul

complement vs. compliment

conscious vs. conscience

continually vs. continuously

credible vs. credulous

Many false friends have common roots but are used in different senses. Take human and humane for example. They come from the same origin, but their meanings are different, though closely related. A human action is not the same as a humane action. We cannot speak of Human Rights. There is a weapon called a humane killer, but not a human killer. In English, there are many false friends and we must be on the alert for them. The best way to avoid making

mistakes with false friends is, perhaps, to compare them when either of them appears.

In all, the meaning of a word is multi-faceted: it includes denotative and connotative meanings, affective and collective meanings, etc. The denotative meaning refers to the literal meaning, the one in the dictionary, and the connotative meaning is the implication. A word can also convey a favorable, neutral, or unfavorable attitude of the person who uses it. And when we use a word, we have to pay attention to its collocations. In writing all these meanings should be taken into account and try to avoid using a word whose meanings do not fit the specific context.

## II. The Appropriate Word

### 1. Style

#### (1) Formal and General

Suppose you are making an entry in your diary about a meeting held last Friday. Which of the following sentence would you write?

The meeting adjourned at 5 p. m. without any consensus being reached.

The meeting finished at 5 and we didn't reach any agreement.

In English, words can be, roughly, formal, general, colloquial, and slang in terms of style. Formal words are those used by educated people in formal contexts such as thesis writing, official news releases, and formal announcement.

Formal words are not as common as general words, which form the basis of vocabulary and are used for everyday communication. A comparison between the two styles is illustrated below:

Formal	General
fracture	break
lucid	clear
terminate	end
corpulent	fat
facilitate	make easy
verify	prove
concur	agree

A common belief among students is that formality is a virtue. A passage filled with multi-syllable words is often admired with jealousy, while one written in general words is rejected as plain and simplistic. The truth is, as George Orwell, a famous British essayist, once said, "The great enemy of clear language is insincerity," which refers to a pretentious and bloated way of writing.

Therefore, the best policy is to use general words in most cases and formal words in specific, formal contexts.

## (2) Colloquial and slang

How does the following sentence sound? And why? How can you revise it?

The violin virtuoso's performance on the cello was a real bomb.

The colloquial style and slang are normally used in a conversation or in order to achieve a conversational effect. The colloquial style forms the basis of an oral speech. It is characterized by contractions, e. g. don't, won't, hasn't, etc. and abbreviations, e. g. auto, TV, phone, etc. In writing, however, the colloquial style takes a less prominent role. Therefore, for most writing tasks, it may not be ideal.

Slang originates from a desire for novelty. For instance, you may often hear people say something is the in thing nowadays. The word in is a slang expression which means popular, fashionable. Slang is vivid if novel, but most is short lived, while some does pass into colloquial expressions. Too much slang can make a passage loose and unserious; some may even sound odd, as the example below shows:

The author has put a terrific lot into her book and she comes up with some pretty good ideas. She really goes to town over horror films. According to her these films help you get rid of hang - ups as well as frighten the pants off you.

Now can you revise the paragraph with words in a more acceptable style?

## (3) Style and audience

There are in general three main styles in writing with distinctive language features:

The *formal* style is characterized by extensive vocabulary, frequent use of formal and abstract words, absence of slang and almost no contractions or clipped words. It is also stricter in observing grammatical distinctions that are often ignored in the informal style.

The *informal* style is characterized by vocabulary ranging from formal to colloquial but mostly general, and occasional contractions and clipped words. It may also contain some inconspicuous slang expressions.

The *colloquial* style uses general and colloquial words, frequent contractions and clipped words, and there are more slang words than in the informal style.

Different styles are used to address different audiences and on different occasions. When you talk to a friend, you use words different from those you use to your teacher. And when you add an entry to your diary, you use words different from those in a term paper. We need to master various styles so as to cope with various types of audiences and situations.

## 2. Chinglish

## (1) Avoid literal translation

You may have come across some of the following sentences in a Chinese student's writing or

perhaps in your own.

His body is very healthy.

He only said a few sentences. He made us very disappointed.

His two eyes are blind.

Is there anything wrong with them?

Chinglish in this book refers to the unidiomatic use of English by Chinese speakers. One of the causes of Chinglish is literal translation, a common practice of many foreign language learners. Though for many beginners a translative approach is unavoidable, literal translation cannot get them too far, for each language has its distinctive way of classifying and interpreting the world, hence impossible to be changed into another language by simply switching the code. So we must learn the English way of thinking, which is manifested by its grammar and vocabulary, and try to examine our writing from the perspective of a native speaker.

## (2) Grasp the connotation

Compare the pairs of italicized words below:

a. 请帮我们宣传一下这个新产品。

Please help us to propagate this new product.

b. 他遇事总是先想着自己，真是太个人主义了。

He is self-concerned and individualistic.

How would you react to the above English sentences?

When you try to express your idea in English, you have to be careful with the connotation of English words. The seemingly equal expressions in two languages may carry completely different connotations. And again you should try your best to avoid literal translation.

## (3) Avoid repetition of meaning

Repetition of meaning is common in the Chinese language, but improper in English. Translate the following sentences and compare the two versions:

a. 大家一致感到那听起来不像是真的。

b. 那个主意听起来很有趣，而且两个主意恰巧合为一体。

c. 这位跳高选手创造了新的世界纪录。

From the examples above, we can see that Chinese seems to be more descriptive or “wordy”, while English seems to be more succinct or concise. In Chinese, it is natural to emphasize your ideas by repeating it in a round-about way, but this is regarded in English as against the rule of economy and clarity and, therefore, should be eliminated.

In a word, the best way to avoid Chinglish is to be familiar with English, and try to think like native speakers when you use their language.

Generally speaking, the language should be more formal when you are writing to an old per-

son, a stranger, or a business client than when you are writing to a young person, a close friend, or a relative.

In all, two questions are considered: how to classify styles in English, and how to avoid Chinglish usages. It is known that English vocabulary can be roughly divided into formal, general, colloquial, and slang. The first two varieties are often used in writing, and the last two are mainly used in speech. One misunderstanding must be cleared up, that is, the more formal our writing sounds, the better. In Fact, the style of a piece of writing is determined by the purpose and the audience. It is necessary to adjust the style to different occasions and different audiences.

### III. The Better Word

#### 1. Conciseness

Read the following sentence and decide if it is appropriate in the written context.

You know I had a very difficult time making up my mind whether or not I should quit the job I'm doing now.

If the sentence is spoken, how do you feel about it?

The sentence above can be regarded as a fairly normal one in speech, but it appears rather awkward in the written form. Written language is characterized by conciseness while spoken language tends to be "wordy." The words "You know" sound quite natural in speech but empty and redundant in the written form because they add little to the meaning of the rest of the sentence. So we must try to remove any "dead branches and leaves," i. e., unnecessary words, and make our writings more concise. Based on this principle, the preceding sentence should be turned into:

I had a very difficult time making up my mind whether or not I should quit my present job.

Redundancy is not always easy to spot the best way is to proofread your writing carefully and try to find words, phrases or even sentences that are not essential.

#### 2. Preciseness

Apart from conciseness, the success of your writing also depends, to a large extent, on the preciseness of your language. For instance, if you are asked to describe to your audience a structure you saw on a trip to the countryside, do you think words like building or house are precise enough? If not, what would you use to give them a better idea of what you saw?

Words like building and house are general in meaning, whereas cottage, hut, castle, villa,

lodge, and mansion are more specific. Specific words can make your ideas clearer and your writing more effective. In addition, you should use concrete details, especially when you describe something. Read the following paragraph by Jonathan Swift and see how he explains the term war.

... And being no stranger to the art of war, I gave him a description of cannons ... pistols, bullets, powder, swords, bayonets, battles, sieges, retreats, attacks ... bombardments, sea – fights; ships sunk with a thousand men, twenty thousand killed on each side; dying groans, limbs flying in the air, smoke, noise, confusion, trampling to death under horses' feet; flight, pursuit, victory, fields strewed with carcasses left for food to dogs, and wolves, and birds of prey; ...

The abstract term of war is defined through specific scenes in the battlefield: cruelty, pain, and dying, so that we can almost see, hear, smell, and touch it. The force of the description comes from its concrete details.

### 3. Effectiveness

Suppose you were describing the final moment of a 100 – meter dash at a sports meet, what would you write?

You may write that the runners *ran toward the tape at a great speed*, but it is too wordy and weak to effectively convey the speed and strain involved in such a race. By searching your mind for a moment, however, you may come up with verbs that might be more effective. *Dashed*, *sprinted*, and *streaked*, for instance, are all improvements because they are more concise and vivid and, therefore, more effective. Being able to find an effective word is the third rule of language use in writing.

In all, we have learned how to choose better words for our writings, and the three criteria are conciseness, preciseness, and effectiveness. By conciseness, we mean an expression should be simple and free of unnecessary words, and preciseness means that an expression should be specific rather than general. Effectiveness is based on the first two qualities and refers to the skillful use of language that adds power to our writings.

### Exercises

1. Some words are misused in the following sentences. Find them out and then make corrections.
  - 1) The little boy was mouse – hearted.
  - 2) That politician is a respectable figure in the political arena.
  - 3) We sat down by the oak tree, enjoying the wind coming from the lake.

- 4) We need to utilize the milk before it sours.
- 5) The child had difficulty ascertaining his way to school.
- 6) The young woman was bombarded with flowers and gifts.
- 7) My father opened the curtain a little lest I see him.
- 8) Our university can contain 4, 000 students.
- 9) Social habits vary greatly from country to country.

2. Can you detect in the following pairs of sentences how the writer's attitude changes from the first sentence to the second one? Point out the words that indicate the change.

- 1) Jerry nagged at me to walk the dog.  
Jerry reminded me to walk the dog.
  - 2) Gloria was tall and bony. As she left, she hung a fur jacket around her shoulders.  
Gloria was tall and slender. As she left, she draped a fur jacket around her shoulders.
  - 3) Grandmother said Dad was a mama's boy all his life.  
Grandmother said Dad was a devoted son all his life.
3. Correct the mistakes of false friends in the following sentences if there is any.
- 1) The state attorney said that the man would be persecuted.
  - 2) We suppose that a referee should be uninterested but not disinterested.
  - 3) Tony can hit a ball further than I can.
  - 4) We must pursue this matter farther.
  - 5) The principals behind our constitution are a principle reason for its astounding success.
  - 6) All the band instruments accept the tuba will be carried to the auditorium for the music contest.
  - 7) The federal government composes the legislative, judicial, and executive branches.
  - 8) The whole region was struck by an economical disaster.
  - 9) The car is an economical purchase.
  - 10) He was waken to the risk.
4. In the following story some words have been misused. Single out each misused word and correct it.

My sister Lulu excepted a scholarship to study in the UK. She had done very well in school and the principle thought that living with a British family would teach her a lot. Mother said she would let her go if she bought a box of stationary and promised to write home every week. She said that she would live up to her promise and she always does pretty well in living up to her principles. Soon after she arrived in the UK, she adopted to her new environment. Her new life did not effect her a great deal. She knew that as a student she had to be economic and she was not self – conscience of her poor clothing and strange accent. These were the things she was dis-



interested in; what fascinated her instead was the cultural differences between the two countries. She found people there liked to pay complements and were more credible to what she said. Of course, she never lay to them about her motherland. Though she experienced cultural shocks continuously, she developed a fair attitude towards the other culture. In the preceding years, she settled down in the UK and became a person with an alternative cultural identity.

5. Translate the following Chinese idioms into English and see if they are literally translatable.

- |        |             |         |           |
|--------|-------------|---------|-----------|
| 1) 跑龙套 | 2) 我对此一窍不通。 | 3) 马后炮  | 4) 无风不起浪。 |
| 5) 害人虫 | 6) 自投罗网     | 7) 红光满面 |           |

6. Delete unnecessary words or repeated meaning in the sentences below and make improvements. Then compare the two versions and see how the two differ.

- 1) We must practice economy and reduce unnecessary expenditures.
  - 2) It is essential to control environmental pollution so as to protect the environment.
  - 3) We must arrive at the station on time and not be late.
  - 4) Financial expenditures should be arranged in order of priority rather than be given equal importance.
  - 5) We should speed up housing construction in cities and towns, so as to improve the housing conditions of the inhabitants there.
  - 6) Private capital has to meet two conditions to make profits. First, illegal profits are not allowed; only legal ones are allowed. Second, excessive profits are not acceptable; only reasonable profits are allowed.
7. Improve the following passage with what you have learned in this unit.

### Women's Rights

In China's feudal society, women had little social status, and were regarded as inferior than men. After the women's liberation movement, women are equal with men according to the law. But in fact, women still can't enjoy equal rights with men. At home, wives must do all the housework. This is evidently unequal. Husband and wife should share the work and responsibilities of a home and family. I see some husbands get angry when they find the cleaning or cooking hasn't been done by wives. I just wonder why they don't do it for themselves?

I think women should be spiritually and economically independent if they want real equality with men. So they have to learn as much as men do to find a good job. One's appearance is no longer important to women. Nowadays, a job is given to you according to your ability rather than your appearance. So I think the best way for women to get more rights is to be well educated.

8. Fill in each blank with the appropriate pronoun in brackets.

- 1) Let \_\_\_\_\_ give you a hand. (I/me)
- 2) Mario is a craftsman \_\_\_\_\_ I think works meticulously. (who/whom)