

普通高等院校“十三五”规划教材
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A Basic Course : Writing in English
英语写作基础教程

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· 成 都 ·

前 言

英语写作是英语专业本科学生的一门专业基础课程，也是英语专业核心课程。《英语写作基础教程》适用于英语专业本科学生的写作课程，是为训练学生掌握英语写作的基本知识、培养学生的基本写作能力，为学生毕业论文的写作做准备而编写的。本书按照全国《高等学校英语专业英语教学大纲》的基本精神编写，同时结合普通本科院校英语专业学生的基础，对学生进行专门和系统的英语写作训练，为学生将来的工作与科研打下良好的基础。

一、本书的主要特点

1. 针对性

编者是在对普通本科院校英语专业本科生英语写作需求进行调研的基础上制订编写计划，针对学生英语写作的需求，力图在有限的篇幅内为学生提供最有效的英语写作信息、写作思路及语言运用等训练。

2. 创新性

本书反映了英语写作的教学实践和最新研究成果。书中融入了近几年国内外一些新的英语写作教学研究成果，把英语写作的新理论和新方法渗透到写作的教学实践环节，适合新时期普通本科院校英语专业基础阶段写作教学的需要。

3. 实用性

目前国内图书市场上常见的英语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，不能满足英语专业本科生的写作需求；同时，写作教材通常以专题介绍和范例分析为主，缺乏供学生思考和讨论的练习，因而学生缺乏通过实践提高写作技能的训练。本书不仅提供英语写作的基础理论知识和写作技巧，而且提供具有代表性的范例分析以及丰富多样的练习，把理论与实践结合起来，具有明显的实用性。

二、本书的编写原则及要求

1. 结合专业特色，优化知识结构

为适应教学改革需要，本书针对部分教学内容进行整合，尤其适合教学内容的选择，便于教师在教学过程中进行取舍。本书内容精练，文字简明，深入浅出，逻辑清晰，可作为英语专业学生的专业基础课程应用教材，也可以作为其他专业学生掌握英语写作基础知识的参考教材。

2. 内容与时俱进，体现学术价值

本书努力做到把英语写作领域的最新研究成果引入教学中，不仅吸收了国内相关专家、学者的研究成果，也借鉴了国外学者的主要学术成果。

3. 内容完整，体例统一

本书以《高等学校英语专业英语教学大纲》为依据，在内容上力求做到精、准、全，达到深入浅出、举一反三的目的。在编写体例上力图做到完整统一，既有理论知识的详细阐述，又有实例分析和专项练习，力求理论与实践紧密结合。

三、本书的使用建议

本书基本能够满足英语专业本科阶段基础写作的教学要求，可以作为英语专业本科学生写作课程的教材。建议分三个学期使用本书。教学时间和教学内容建议做如下分配：

学 期	教 学 内 容	
2	第一部分	措辞
	第二部分	句子写作技巧
3	第三部分	段落写作
4	第四部分	短文写作

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本书在编写过程中参考和借鉴了国内外许多专家、学者的论著，在此向他们表示衷心的感谢。由于编者水平有限，书中内容难免有遗漏或不当之处，真诚希望广大同行及各位读者批评指正，提出宝贵意见，以便本书进一步修改完善。

编 者
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PART I DICTION

Diction is the choice and use of words. The English language has a very large vocabulary: as many as 400,000 words are collected in the *Oxford English Dictionary*. Of course no one knows or needs to use so many words. Only a small part of them are used by ordinary people for ordinary purposes. A student learning to write should learn to use the words that are most useful and most often used. Sometimes he may use the wrong words, but more often the words he uses are not entirely wrong, but inappropriate, inexact, unidiomatic or uninteresting. A basic knowledge of diction may be of help to him.

Chapter 1 Levels of Words

The words that are often used may be divided, from a stylistic point of view, into three types: formal, common, and colloquial.

1.1 Formal Words

Formal words may also be called learned words, or literary words, or “big” words. They mainly appear in formal writing, such as scholarly or theoretical works, political and legal documents, and formal lectures and addresses. Many such words contain three or more than three syllables, and most of them are of Greek or Latin origin. They are seldom used in daily conversations, except for special purposes. Here is a paragraph from a scholarly paper which contains some of the features of formal English:

There is nothing new in the recognition, within a given language, of a distinction between common usage and uses of the language for more restricted purposes and often enough, perhaps characteristically, more elevated purposes. The monolithic nature of English is not questioned when literary essayists like Emerson contrast poetry and common speech. The latter is recognized in America to be the proper subject for the investigation of linguists who, however, now show some incipient inclination to investigate poetry, too, and other regular utterances in a given language.

— C. F. Voegelin

There are only three sentences in this paragraph; all of them are long and involved.



And there are in it quite a few formal or learned words, such as *recognition*, *characteristically*, *elevated*, *monolithic*, *investigation*, *incipient*, *inclination*, *regular*, and *utterances*. Long sentences and formal words are appropriate here because the paper, which discusses a rather complex topic, needs them to be theoretically clear and exact.

1.2 Common Words

Most of the words in the paragraph above, however, are those that people use every day, and appear in all kinds of writing. Because of this, they are called common words. Read the following paragraph:

When I was a kid, and reading every science fiction book in the local library, I used to wonder exactly how the future would happen. By that I don't mean what the future would be like — science fiction already told me that — but rather how we'd actually get there. Science fiction books seemed to agree, for example, that in the future there would be no money — all transactions would be made via identity cards and centralized computers. But that seemed dubious to me: how, I wondered, are you going to get everybody to give up money in the first place?

— Michael Rogers

In this paragraph, except one or two words that are very colloquial, like *kid*, and one or two that are a little formal, like *transactions* and *dubious*, all the words are commonly used words. The sentences are much shorter and simpler than those in the preceding paragraph. Such vocabulary and sentence structure fit the content of the paragraph, as it describes the thoughts of a child.

1.3 Informal Words

Some words are mainly used in informal or familiar conversations. Such words seldom appear in formal writing, and in literary works their main use is to record people's thoughts and dialogues. They are usually short words of one or two syllables and most of them are of Saxon origin (i.e., not borrowed from Greek, Latin, or French). They are called informal words, such as *guts* (meaning courage), *guy* (meaning man), and *hassle* (meaning bother).

Here is a paragraph with some colloquial words:

You have your tension. Sometimes you come close to having an accident, which 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.

— Studs Terkel

This is part of a talk given by a Chicago driver. He uses very colloquial words and expressions like *there's*, *you're*, *by a hair or so*, *on there*, *cuts you off*, and *you got to*. But most of the words he uses are common words.

Thus, there are three levels of words, with the formal or learned at the top, the colloquial at the bottom, and the common in the middle. Common words are good for all kinds of writing; formal words are as a rule seldom used in informal writing, while colloquial words are seldom used in formal writing, unless for some special purposes or effects. These are all words of Standard English, which is used by all educated speakers of the language.

There are also some words which are used only by special groups of people for special effect. Among these are slang words, dialectal words and certain words that are often used by uneducated speakers.

Slang words are highly informal; they may be vivid and interesting, but they may, when used inappropriately, make the writer or speaker sound offensive or funny:

On hearing that his father had kicked the bucket, we wrote him a letter to express our sympathies.

The big banquet held in honor of the distinguished guests was really neat.

Because of the slang expressions, the first sentence above does not really sound sympathetic, and the second one is not serious in tone.

In the following passage a farmer said some angry words about the school teacher who had taken his pupils out on a field trip:

I'll attend to that myself in th' mornin'. I'll take keer o' im. He ain't from this county nohow. I'll go down there in th' mornin' and see'im. Lettin' you leave your books and gallivant all over th' hills. What kind of a school is it nohow! Didn't do that, my son, when I's a little shaver in school.

— Jesse Stuart

The farmer's dialect is shown in his pronunciation: he omits certain sounds and pronounces *-ing* like *-in* and *care* like *keer*. He uses *ain't* for *isn't*, *I's* for *I was*, and *nohow* for *anyhow*. These words, which may be used by uneducated speakers, are not of standard vocabulary. *A little shaver* is a slang expression meaning a little boy.

Such nonstandard (or substandard) words and expressions are often seen in stories describing poorly educated people. Foreign students of English need to understand them, but should not try to use them in speech or writing.

Exercises

1. The following words are formal words. Give their common equivalents. Consult a dictionary if necessary.

Formal
concur

Common

Formal

exorbitant

Common



fracture	_____	verify	_____
lucid	_____	apprehend	_____
residence	_____	corpulent	_____

2. The following passage is taken from a business letter. It is intended to be very formal in levels of words. Choose the formal phrase or word to fill in each blank.

_____ (I should like / I'd like) to _____ (ask you to / request that you) review my account and _____ (inform me of / let me know) the exact amount which I owe you. _____ (You sent me / I have received from you) a bill for \$3.65, but I _____ (find nowhere / don't find) any evidence in my records that I had _____ (bought anything / made a purchase) in that amount. I do, on the other hand, find a letter from you dated May 3 _____ (informing me / telling me) that I had made an overpayment of \$3.85 and asking whether I _____ (preferred / wanted) credit or a cash refund I have not had _____ (a chance / an opportunity) to answer this letter. It _____ (occurs to me / crosses my mind) that perhaps through some _____ (mistake / oversight) you have sent me a bill for \$3.65 instead of a check for \$3.85. _____ (I will / I shall) be most grateful if you will _____ (look into / investigate) the matter.

3. Rewrite each sentence below, using common 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) His instructional technique is a very positive one.

4. Read the following passage carefully and then answer the questions.

Language is our facility to talk to each other. The word "talk" is used not merely to avoid a rather more technical and high-sounding word like "communicate"; talk is more precise and more relevant to the special nature of human language than "communicate". In the first place, all creatures — cat, sparrow, and bee — can be said to communicate with each other to some extent. They can attract each other's attention, warn of danger, woo their mates, and direct the way to food. We are still learning just how well animals can communicate with each other, but there can be no doubt that animal communication is wholly rudimentary as compared with the complex and subtle control of language possessed by even the least intelligent or least educated English tramp or Australian aboriginal. It is therefore appropriate to say that language involves "talk" to emphasize that language is a peculiarly human activity.

— Randolph Quirk

- (1) From what type of book is this passage taken? What do you think is the purpose of the book?
- (2) Is the book written for scientists or for ordinary readers?
- (3) Are there slang expressions in the passage? Are there formal words in it? Give examples.
- (4) Is the diction appropriate for the content of the passage? Give reasons.

Chapter 2 The Meaning of Words

The meaning of a word has two aspects: denotative and connotative. A word's denotation is what it literally means, as defined by the dictionary; its connotation is the feeling or idea suggested by it.

For instance, *country*, *nation*, *state* and *land* have more or less the same denotation and may all be translated into *guojia* [国家] in Chinese, but their connotations are quite different. *Country* refers to an area of land and its population and government; *nation* emphasizes the people of a country; *state* refers to the government or political organization of a country; and *land* is less precise but more literary and emotive than *country*.

an island *country*; neighboring *countries*

In area China is the third largest *country* in the world.

a peace-loving *nation*; the awakening *nations* of Africa

The modernization program has won the support of the whole *nation*.

state organs; *state*-owned enterprises

China is my native *land*.

As compared here, these four words may be said to be synonyms. English is particularly rich in synonyms as a result of incorporating words from other languages over the centuries. But we should remember that it is difficult to find two words that are exactly the same in meaning and use. They may be different in stylistic level, in the degree of emphasis, in emotional coloring, in tone, and in collocation.

Generally speaking, words of Anglo-Saxon origin are more informal than those of Latin or French origin. The following words are good examples in case.

ask	time	rise
question	age	mount
interrogate	epoch	ascend

In each group the first word is from Anglo-Saxon and the second and third from French or Latin. The first one is clearly more informal or colloquial than the other two.

Big and *large* are both commonly used words, but *large* is slightly more formal and may be used to describe things that are unusually big, so it is more emphatic than *big*. *Huge*, which is more literary than these two words, means extremely large and is more emphatic than *large*.

a *big* / *large* city; a *big* / *large* house

Wuhan is a very *large* city in Central China.

The team has got a *huge* man over two meters tall.



Small and *little* are often interchangeable, but there is some difference in emotional coloring between them. *Small* is objective, while *little* may imply a feeling of fondness:

They lived in a small town.

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

Modest and *humble* both indicate a lack of pride, but modesty is a virtue and humbleness is not. *Humble* often connotes undue self-depreciation. So they are different in tone: *Modest* is a laudatory word and *Humble* is a derogatory one.

Modest and hardworking, he made very quick progress at school.

Clearly Gompers was overawed by Wilson. His face took on a servile look; his voice was *humble*.

Some synonyms have different collocations: they are habitually used with certain words. *Large*, not *big*, for instance, is used to modify nouns like *amount*, *number* and *quantity* (a *large* amount of money, a *large* number of people, a *large* quantity of beer, etc.). Similarly, with nouns denoting personal qualities, such as *courage*, *confidence*, *ability*, and *wisdom*, not *big* or *large*, but *great*, is commonly used.

All this shows that to discriminate between synonyms is important to a student learning to write. When in difficulty, he should use a good dictionary with notes on usage or synonyms. Here is an example of such notes:

SYN. — **proud** is the broadest term in this comparison, ranging in implication from proper self-esteem or pride to an overweening opinion of one's importance [too proud to beg, proud as a peacock]; **arrogant** implies an aggressive, unwarranted assertion of superior importance or privileges [the arrogant colonel]; **haughty** implies such consciousness of high station, rank, etc. as is displayed in scorn of those one considers beneath one [a haughty dowager]; **insolent**, in this connection, implies both haughtiness and great contempt, esp. as manifested in behavior or speech that insults or affronts others [she has an insolent disregard for her servant's feelings] ...

— *Webster's New World Dictionary*

There is one thing about the meaning of words that Chinese students should be on guard against: taking the Chinese equivalent of an English word as its exact meaning, or understanding the meaning of an English word from its Chinese equivalent. It is true that the Chinese equivalents of many English words express their true meanings, but very often an English word has no exact Chinese equivalent and it has to be translated in different ways in different contexts.

Take a very simple word, *send*, for instance. A student who thinks its meaning is *song* [送] in Chinese may make sentences like: "He came to *send* me the letter" (He brought me the letter); or "I *sent* my friend to the station yesterday" (I went to the station with my friend to see him off). In fact, to *send* means to cause to go or be taken to a place without going oneself. If you *sent* something to a place, you asked someone else to take it there; you did not go there yourself.

To understand the meaning of an English word one had better find out how it is defined in English in a dictionary with English explanations. Chinese translations are not always reliable, and sometimes they are misleading.

English words that may be translated into the same Chinese expression are not necessarily synonymous. *Family* and *home*, for instance, may both be translated as *jia* [家], but they are not synonyms. *Family* refers to the people related to one, while *home* to the place where one lives. *Except* and *besides* are sometimes translated in the same way as *chu le* [除了], but they are opposite in meaning. The word *except* means leaving out or not including, and the word *besides* means in addition to or as well as.

Exercises

1. Read the following passage carefully and then answer the questions.

That night in my rented room, while letting the hot water run over my can of pork and beans in the sink, I opened [H. L. Menken's] *A Book of Prefaces* and began to read. I was jarred and shocked by the style, the clear, clean, sweeping sentences. Why did he write like that? And how did one write like that? I pictured the man as a raging demon, slashing with his pen, consumed with hate, denouncing everything American, extolling everything European or German, laughing at the weaknesses of people, mocking God, authority. What was this? I stood up, trying to realize what reality lay behind the meaning of the words. Yes, this man was fighting, fighting with words. He was using words as a weapon, using them as one would use a club. Could words be a weapon? Well, yes, for here they were. Then maybe, perhaps, I could use them as a weapon? No. It frightened me. I read on and what amazed me was not what he said, but how on earth anybody had the courage to say it.

— Richard Wright

Questions:

- (1) Read the sentences with *shocked*, *raging*, *slashing*, *mocking*, and *amazed* again and explain the meaning of each of these words.
 - (2) Think of two words that are synonymous to each of the above words, substitute them for the latter, and then compare the effect of your words with that of the original ones.
2. In the sentences below, the words in parentheses have similar denotations but different connotations. Fill in each blank by choose the appropriate word from the pair given in parentheses. Consult a dictionary if necessary.
- (1) A few listeners were _____ (disinterested / uninterested) and dozed off.
 - (2) Though she has grown up, her behavior is often _____ (childlike / childish).
 - (3) I am quite _____ (jealous / envious) of your opportunity to study at such a famous university.
 - (4) Her clothes, though made of _____ (cheap / inexpensive) material, are quite elegant.
 - (5) This _____ (homely / ugly) old man is a well-known musician.
 - (6) I am sorry to _____ (refuse / decline) your invitation.
 - (7) He was _____ (surprised / stunned) to find that his little sister had become a pretty,



(slim / skinny) young woman.

(8) My uncle became _____ (fat / stout) as he grew older.

(9) This servile man was especially _____ (modest / humble) when he was talking with his superiors.

(10) I asked _____ (every / each) boy in the group the same question, and interestingly, _____ (everyone / each) gave me a different answer.

(11) The enemy troops were driven back when they _____ (attempted / tried) to cross the border.

(12) They all felt _____ (sympathy / pity) for the victims of the disaster and made donations.

(13) Empress Dowager Cixi was _____ (famous / notorious) for her cruelty.

(14) Is that _____ (old / elderly) _____ (woman / lady) sitting on the bench your mother?

(15) Many new _____ (houses / rooms) have been built along this road.

(16) There has been _____ (healthy / vigorous) opposition to the proposals for a new road.

(17) The patient was _____ (restored / repaired) to health by physical therapy.

(18) Most fashion models are _____ (lofty / tall).

(19) He is badly hurt but still _____ (conscious / aware).

(20) He _____ (tolerated / endured) the pain as long as he could.

3. Arrange the following groups of words and phrases into columns, according to connotation: favorable, neutral, or unfavorable. Consult a dictionary if necessary.

- (1) heavy, fat, plump
- (2) thin, slender, skinny
- (3) firm, stubborn, pigheaded
- (4) unique, bizarre, unusual
- (5) old, elderly, senile

	favorable	neutral	unfavorable
(1)	_____	_____	_____
(2)	_____	_____	_____
(3)	_____	_____	_____
(4)	_____	_____	_____
(5)	_____	_____	_____

Chapter 3 General and Specific Words

Comparatively speaking, some words are more general or more specific in meaning than others. *Professionals*, for instance, is more general than *scientists*, *doctors*, *teachers*, *lawyers*, *journalists*, etc., all of which are more specific. But *scientists* may be called a general word when compared with *physicists* or *chemists*, which, in turn, is more general than *biochemists*.

Although both general and specific words are useful, a student learning to write should make an effort to master and use specific words wherever possible. Specific words help to make writing clear, exact, vivid, and striking, for they are more informative and expressive than general words. Compare:

a good man: kind, honest, just, generous, sympathetic, warm-hearted, selfless, brave,
honorabile

good food: tasty, delicious, nourishing, rich, wholesome, fresh, appetizing, abundant

house: mansion, villa, chateau, cottage, bungalow, cabin, hut, shack, shanty, shed, barn

laugh: smile, grin, beam, giggle, titter, snigger, chuckle, guffaw, chortle

It is easy to see that the specific words on the right are much more concrete and colorful than the general ones on the left; they seem to make the reader see, hear or feel what the writer wishes to describe.

Using specific words should go along with providing details, and then there will be effective and impressive writing. Study the following examples:

General : It is often windy and dusty here in spring.

Specific : In spring there is often a very strong northwest wind. It carries so much fine dust with it that sometimes the sun becomes obscure. There is no escape from the fine dust; it gets into your eyes, your ears, your nostrils, and your hair. It goes through the cracks of closed windows and covers your desks and chairs.

General : Students do many interesting things after classes.

Specific : Every morning and afternoon the sports fields are alive with energetic students. Football and basketball matches, volleyball, and badminton, track-training and gymnastics are all in full swing. Even the alleyways under the trees and around the flower beds provide enough space for enthusiasts to practice. Through the windows comes the pitter-patter of ping-pong balls, the sound of songs and music, or laughter and discussion.

General : An old Negro woman was walking in the woods.

Specific : Far out in the country there was an old Negro woman with her head tied in a red rag, coming along a path through the pinewoods. She was very old and



small and she walked slowly in the dark pine shadows, moving a little from side to side in her steps, with the balanced heaviness and lightness of a pendulum in a grandfather clock. She carried a thin, small cane made from an umbrella, and with this she kept tapping the frozen earth in front of her. This made a grave and persistent noise in the still air, which seemed meditative like the chirping of a solitary little bird.

— Eudora Welty

General : Not far from the railway there was a cottage with a garden and trees and flowers around it.

Specific : On the outskirts of a little town upon a rise of land that swept back from the railway there was a tidy little cottage of white boards, trimmed vividly with green blinds. To one side of the house there was a garden neatly patterned with plots of growing vegetables, and an arbor for the grapes which ripened late in August. Before the house there were three mighty oaks which sheltered it in their clean and massive shade in summer, and to the other side there was a border of gay flowers. The whole place had an air of tidiness, thrift, and modest comfort.

— Thomas Wolfe

Exercises:

1. The following words are rather general in meaning. Think of words that are more specific.

walk	look at	cry
angry	tree	animal
flower	wind	rain

2. Provide concrete and specific information for the following sentences, paying special attention to the italicized words.

- (1) I had an *awful* time at the dancing party.
- (2) I think Professor Smith is a *bad* teacher.
- (3) Ralph gave his wife a *present* for her birthday.
- (4) Our university provided the students with some *fine* programs.
- (5) It is *funny* how he got to know everyone at the party.
- (6) We had a *good* time on last weekends.
- (7) The movie had an *interesting* story.
- (8) I was astonished that only *several* people attended the game.
- (9) I like my English teacher because she has a *nice* character.
- (10) There are certain *things* I look for in judging a person's personality.

3. The italicized word in each sentence below is too general. Replace it with a word (a phrase) that is more specific.

- (1) My uncle lives in *Europe*.
- (2) *Somebody* asked me to deliver these red roses to you.
- (3) The *good* smell of freshly-made coffee came from the kitchen.
- (4) She *walked* down the street, stopping occasionally to look in the shop windows.
- (5) He is very proud of his new *car*.

4. The following words are rather general in meaning. Give words that are more specific.

furniture	athlete	flower	food	invention
school	job	vegetable	building	clothes