

沈传海 / 主编

英语学术论文 写作十讲



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Ten Lectures on English Academic Writing

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Preface

The writing of English academic research papers (mainly theses or dissertations) is not only an important way to examine the comprehensive ability of English majors, but also a process of applying and sublimating the professional knowledge and various abilities during their school years. And with the increasing regularization of postgraduate training in China, many key universities have required doctoral candidates (non-English majors) to publish academic research papers in international authoritative journals before graduation, making known the creative results and achievements. This undoubtedly challenges their academic writing skills. Then, how to improve the graduate students' ability to write English academic papers, expressing their own academic views and insights and scientifically recording their research findings, is a pressing job of work that must be taken seriously by college English academics.

On account of the above reasons, the compilation of *Ten Lectures on English Academic Writing* is based on the course content of "Academic Paper Writing" for graduate students majoring in English and the teaching content of the "Academic English" course for doctoral students in science and engineering. The basic requirements of the writing elements of academic papers (theses, dissertations and journal articles), as well as the format specifications and methodological skills of research papers, are systematically talked about in the book, from how to effectively select topics and how to collect research materials to the design of writing outlines, the organization of introductions and the writing of literature reviews, and from the description of the research methods, the discussion of the research results, the referencing of the sources, the methods to avoid plagiarism, the effective completion of the first draft to how to modify the first draft, the refinement of the abstract content and so on and so forth. In the meantime, the differences between several concepts are pointed out in relevant

chapters, such as the difference between "summary" and "abstract", the difference between "discussion" and "conclusion", and the points of similarity and difference between "abstract" and "introduction".

In the process of writing this book, much domestic and foreign literature has been referenced. The writer hereby expresses his sincere gratitude to the distinguished authors. The main bibliographies are noted at the end of the book. The research on academic paper writing has been strongly supported by the relevant departments of the Graduate School of Hefei University of Technology (合肥工业大学研究生院). Here, the author would like to express his hearty thanks. And he is also grateful to the teachers of the Academic Paper Writing Group because, for the compilation of this book, they put forward a lot of pertinent and constructive suggestions. Gratitude is especially to Ms Xiao Yang (肖杨), who reviewed the manuscript twice in her busy schedule.

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Lecture One Deciding upon a Proper Topic

1. Introduction

Whether you are a university (graduate) student majoring in English or a graduate student of science and technology, you would have to write an English academic research paper before graduation as partial requirement for some degree. As a matter of fact, the writing is a complex process which involves choosing a topic, searching for relevant materials, reading the literature, outlining the paper, developing and revising the first draft, etc. Hence the first thing you need to do is to discover a proper research subject and decide on a suitable topic in your preliminary research for the research paper.

2. Definition & Principles

A topic is what the research paper is about. A research paper usually deals with a relatively specific topic, and with a comparatively narrow subject. Choosing a proper topic for the paper requires careful consideration. If your topic is too broad or general, it may be hard for you to focus on the relevant information; if your topic is too narrow, it may be hard for you to find any information at all. How should you select a topic that is possible to research? The three most important principles are as follows:

- 1) **Intriguing** Select a topic that genuinely interests you, or you are curious about. If a topic can hold your interest, it will most likely make you enjoy working on it. And the topic should be interesting to both you and your readers

as well as meet the assignment requirements. A good topic will make the research process more fun and engaging.

2) **Significant** Consider the academic and social value of the topic you are likely to choose. A research paper without practical or theoretical value will be a failure. The academic community subscribes to the idea that for a BA/MA thesis there should be something new in it, and a PhD dissertation should have something original. That is to say, the discussion of a thesis may have an original perspective, and a dissertation should make a new and important contribution to the academic field.

3) **Appropriate** Narrow down your topic to make your paper manageable, that is, limit your topic to prevent it being too big or too broad, which will necessitate a superficial treatment of the research subject. Meanwhile, you should also try to avoid a topic being too narrow or too specialized/technical, for it may yield inadequate information for an effective research paper. Therefore, the topic you pick should be more specific, and then you can have a thorough study of your research. All in all, manageability of a suitable research topic should take time, knowledge, expertise and other things into consideration, like content, scope and availability of library and human resources.

3. Relevant Information

1) Term Understanding

The term *subject* designates a broad area of knowledge; cancer, ...; *topic* denotes an aspect of a subject; melanoma, A subject is narrowed to a specific part of the topic; a thesis designates an approach to the subject.

If you are assigned a general subject like “Education,” you will need to find a topic like “School Uniforms” and compose a thesis such as “Although some opponents claim that mandatory school uniforms violate students’ First Amendment rights, courts have consistently ruled that they do not.” If your assignment is open-ended, you will be on your own to explore a general subject, find a narrow topic, and formulate a defensible thesis. (Coyle and Law 6)

2) Hints

subject 主题, 问题 topic 题目, 论题 thesis 论点, 论题; 论文 title 标题,

题目

A thesis title refers to the main character or a major event in research. A topic is a narrower subset of a subject. You need to look within the broad subject area to find your topic.

4. Discussion

1) How can one get enlightenment to discover an appropriate research subject?

2) How can one find a specific research topic under the chosen subject?

3) Why is it important for one to decide on a topic before the writing of an academic essay?

4) Which is the best way to generate research ideas, using personal learning experiences, reading journals or books, talking with teachers, getting help from tertiary source materials, or collecting empirical data?

5. Train-of-Thought Examples of Topic Selection

(general subject → specific topic)

1) American Poetry → Emily Dickinson's Poetry → Emily Dickinson's Attitude Towards Death (a possible choice for a 1500⁺-word term paper);

Emily Dickinson's Poems → Emily Dickinson's Attitudes Towards Death and Eternity Reflected in Her Poetry (a manageable choice for a 5000⁺-word BA thesis);

Emily Dickinson's Poems → Emily Dickinson and Her Poetry from the Perspective of Eco-feminism (a defensible choice for a 30000⁺-word MA thesis);

Emily Dickinson's Poems → A Landscape in Solitude: On the Consciousness of Loneliness in Emily Dickinson's Poetry (a suitable choice for an 80000⁺-word PhD dissertation);

2) Cancer → Breast Cancer → The Causes for Breast Cancer (a possible choice for a 1500⁺-word term paper);

Breast Cancer → The Effects and Prevention of Breast Cancer (a manageable

choice for a 5000⁺-word BS Med. thesis);

Breast Cancer → The Clinical and Pathological Characteristics of Young Ladies with Breast Cancer (a defensible choice for a 30000⁺-word MS Med. thesis);

Breast Cancer → Epidemiological Study on Risk Factors and Risk Assessment Model of Breast Cancer in Chinese Women (a suitable choice for an 80000⁺-word MD dissertation).

3) Computer Science → Artificial Intelligence → Some Effects of Artificial Intelligence on People's Life (a possible choice for a 1500⁺-word term paper);

Artificial Intelligence → Predicament and Way Out of the Development in Artificial Intelligence (a manageable choice for a 5000⁺-word BCS/BE thesis);

Artificial Intelligence → A Philosophical Perspective of Artificial Intelligence (a defensible choice for a 30000⁺-word MCS/ME Sc. thesis);

Artificial Intelligence → The Key Technologies of Net Safety Management Based on Artificial Intelligence (a suitable choice for an 80000⁺-word DCS/DE Sc. dissertation);

4) China → Chinese Economy → The Effect on China of Its Economic Policies During the Past 10 Years (a possible choice for a 1500⁺-word term paper);

Chinese Economy → Supply-Demand Relations of China's Economic Growth in the Past 10 Years (a manageable choice for a 5000⁺-word BE thesis);

Chinese Economy → The Ways to China's Economic Modernization after the Reform and Opening up (a defensible choice for a 30000⁺-word ME thesis);

Chinese Economy → The Spillover Effects of American Interest Rate Policy on China's Economy (a suitable choice for an 80000⁺-word DE dissertation)

Lecture Two Conducting a Literature Review

1. Introduction

A literature review is an important part of the academic research project. It may be a self-contained/independent report of the past research studies and findings on some research subject or a part of the introduction to an academic essay. In either case, the aim is to demonstrate your clear understanding of the chosen topic. According to John Bitchener, the key linguistic features of a thesis literature review are as follows: summarizing (paraphrasing and coherence), synthesizing (cohesion), reporting the published literature and evaluating and critiquing the published research. (91 – 97)

Often the first draft is written during the preparation of a thesis proposal and then expanded before you finally decide on the various components of your methodology. Thereafter, sections of the literature review will be revised with new material being added and with some existing material possibly being excluded. (Bitchener 55)

2. Definition & Functions

A literature review is a text of a scholarly paper, that is, a description, classification and evaluation of the literature relevant to a particular research field or a topic being investigated. Literature reviews are secondary sources, most often associated with academic-oriented literature, so they are a basis for research in nearly every academic field. Producing a literature review may also be part of

graduate and post-graduate student work, including in the preparation of a thesis, dissertation, or a journal article. Literature reviews are also common in a research proposal (the document that is approved before a student formally begins a dissertation or thesis). It should indicate that you are familiar with both historical and current research on your selected topic, which will establish your credibility as one that has got fully prepared to embark on independent research. It demonstrates that you are following other people's research traditions, getting theoretical support for the present research, providing well-accepted definitions and concepts, discovering gaps needed to be filled, identifying problems in other people's studies, and clearing the research ground for the present study. If you ignore the existing literature, it will imply that you are unfamiliar with the research situation, and not quoting other people's work will suggest that you are not aware of what has been done in the field, which in turn will indicate the inadequacy of the research being proposed or undertaken. (Huang and Ghadessy 92, 95 - 96)

3. Collecting & Evaluating the Source Materials

Once you have decided on the subject to research into and the topic to write about, you should familiarize yourself with the background information and discover existing studies. And the specific methods may be the library research and the Internet search. The former is to check the card catalogs by subject/keyword/author/title search; the latter is to use computer networks. The whole process may be searching published literature, approaching primary literature, assessing the related research, synthesizing the source material and organizing the review. The following are the most popular search engines.

<http://www.google.com> <http://scholar.google.com> <https://www.baidu.com>

<http://www.cnki.net> <http://www.nlc.gov.cn> <http://www.lib.pku.edu.cn>

<http://www.bfsu.edu.cn> <http://lib.shisu.edu.cn> <http://www.lib.nju.edu.cn>

<http://www.library.fudan.edu.cn> <http://www.lib.tsinghua.edu.cn>

Most college libraries now are able to facilitate students' searching during their holdings by using an online catalog, and today's online databases will provide access to the articles in magazines and journals, such as Web of Science SCIE (Science Citation Index Expanded), CPCI (CPCI-S: Conference Proceedings Citation Index-Science; CPCI-SSH: Conference Proceedings Citation Index - Social Sciences & Humanities), ESI (Essential Science Indicators), IEEE/IET Electronic Library, SDOL (Elsevier ScienceDirect), Springer LINK, John Wiley, DII (Derwent Innovations Index), Science Online, Emerald, PQDT (ProQuest; ProQuest Dissertations & Theses).

In almost any kind of research, data collection is indispensable, no matter whether you are doing literary studies or scientific research, and generally there are three ways of collecting information; 1) collecting experimentally (data in quantitative form, i. e. using mathematical and statistical manipulations); 2) collecting non-experimentally (data in qualitative form, i. e. analyzing in verbal form); 3) qualitative and quantitative methods combined. (Huang and Ghadessy 19)

When reading the relevant literature, you should read critically and evaluate its suitability for your purposes. In so doing, as a matter of fact, you will have to try to look into the ideas and views of different sources, check the facts and figures in the sources to ensure their accuracy, identify the strong points, especially the weak points to be further explored, and determine how to use the certain information. You cannot merely summarize a series of books and articles; you should call attention to the most important previous work, evaluating and interpreting the existing research, not just repeating it; you should delineate the areas of agreement and disagreement in the field, identifying the place of your work in relation to other research.

4. Content & Structure of a Literature Review

A literature review is a crucial piece of the academic research project. It, especially as a part of the introduction to an academic thesis, should contain not only the methods, findings, conclusions of the past researches related to your selected topic, but also your own critical comments on the previous studies,

especially their weaknesses or limitations, so that your present study will convince the readers that it is more rational and significant rather than being a just repeat of the past study. That is to say, a literature review must state what different scholars have said about and what has already been done on the topic, what major findings have been published, and what controversial areas exist. The steps of writing a literature review are as follows:

1) search for the materials relevant to your topic being investigated; 2) read the materials carefully and critically before determining which literature contributes most to your research topic; 3) summarize and discuss the past research findings and conclusions of each article in a critical way; 4) identify and describe the relationships between variables, potential inconsistencies, contradictions and knowledge and research gaps or shortcomings in the literature for further study; 5) explain and provide a rationale for the particular focus for your further study; 6) organize the review logically by using connective phrases or sentences.

Generally speaking, the structure of a literature review contains an introduction, a body and a conclusion. The aim of the introduction is to give the audience an overview of the main themes or topics presented in the body of the review. The body of the review is to provide the reader with an understanding of what is known and what is unknown about the theoretical and research literature relevant to the study presented in the thesis. It will summarize the shortcomings in the theoretical arguments and the research that has been reported, thereby revealing directly or indirectly where further thinking and research could be considered. And it will also present the introduction to the aims and design or methodology of the research project. The conclusion of the review will usually start with a summary of the key claims in the body, involving an evaluation or weighing up of the importance of the claims. It will then identify the gaps or shortcomings in the literature and explain why the gap(s) should be filled. (Bitchener 85 - 86)

5. Examples

1) *Review of the Literature* of “Scholarly Writing Among Graduate

Students: A Qualitative Project Study” by Marsha Armstrong Harwell (<http://pqdt.bjzhongke.com.cn/Detail.aspx?pid=KJXtu7LU2Y4%3d>);

2) *Literature Review* of “AUTOMATION, SCALABILITY, AND REALISM IN CYBER TEST RANGES” by John Perretta (<http://pqdt.bjzhongke.com.cn/Detail.aspx?pid=UxkJK7kouGScPm27xA55YA%3d%3d>);

3) *Literature Review* of “Great Expectations: A Qualitative Study of How Chinese Graduate Students Navigate Academic Writing Expectations in U. S. Higher Education” by Hairong Shang-Butler;

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Overview

This chapter explores literature related to the intersection of EAL writing, academic writing expectations, and the Chinese graduate students in the United States. It is divided into four major sections. It starts with a brief overview of writing in higher education. Then EAL students’ academic writing is to be critically examined from the perspectives of critical thinking, rhetorical style, content and discipline, and EAL writers’ peer support in U. S. higher institutions as these four aspects are the major lens EAL writing researchers use to understand EAL students’ writing. The third part focuses on the expectations about academic writing in U. S. higher education, from the perspectives of writing expectations of graduate students, whose expectations to meet, how writing expectations are communicated, and different academic writing expectations in EAL students’ home country and the United States. This author then review literature of writing experiences of Chinese EAL graduate students in the U. S. and explain the significance of studying Chinese EAL students’ writing experience, and examine literature on how English writing is taught in China. I conclude with the research gap that, on the one hand, highlights the necessity to carefully study how Chinese graduate students navigate academic writing expectations in the United States; on the other hand, not enough scholarship has explored their experience and research on this topic is thin. I claim that research into the ways Chinese graduate students navigate writing expectations in the U. S. draws from multiple scholarly influences and it warrants more research.

Writing in Higher Education

Writing is an essential tool for constructing meaning and disseminating information, and is vital for academic success in higher educational contexts (Ying, 2003). It is also an important means of fostering and demonstrating thinking abilities (McLaughlin & Moore, 2012). For EAL learners, academic success is closely associated with good writing skills. Along the same lines, Lillis and Scott (2007) argue that academic writing is a “high stakes” activity as problems with writing can result in failing university education.

Writing is a “socio-political process” which takes place in a social context where institutional norms, instructors’ expectations and gatekeeper criteria are highly valued (Casanave, 2003). At post-secondary levels, students are generally expected to “move past obvious or surface-level interpretations and use writing to make sense of and respond to written, visual, verbal, and other texts that they encounter” (Council of Writing Program Administrators, National Council of Teachers of English, National Writing Project, 2011, p. 7). Research has shown that writing at college levels calls upon writers to adapt new ways of knowing, understanding and organizing knowledge (Lea & Street, 1998), to present a writer-based perspective (Flower, 1979), to demonstrate independent learning and thinking, and also to do so as a response through appropriate academic discourse (Graff, Birkenstein, & Durst, 2006). Additionally English writing is a core activity in academic research (Curry, 2002), and a major means to access, produce, and disseminate knowledge in American and international research communities (Chang & Kanno, 2010).

It is evident in the existing literature that English writing plays a significant role in students’ academic success. However, writing is a complex practice for students and poses many challenges for international EAL students. As argued by Dubley-Evans (1995), writing involves important linguistic skills, such as linguistic forms to express the writers’ purpose, the conversion of the rhetorical and linguistic awareness into the ability to transform one’s ideas and data into logical “narratives” in the appropriate form expected by the discourse community. Writers are also expected to demonstrate the ability to make critical use of published works and source materials and originality. Adding to the complexity of academic writing to EAL students is that “writing activities are usually self-planned, self-initiated and self-sustained” (Zimmerman &