

高级英语写作教程

A Course for Advanced College English Writing

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前 言

《高级英语写作教程》(A Course for Advanced College English Writing)适合大学英语专业和其他涉外专业学生用作英语写作课教材,也可供程度相当的其他学生和自学者使用。

本教程分四大部分。第一部分包括第一到第三单元,讲解句子、段落及整篇文章的选题、剪裁和谋篇布局。句子讲究精练,句型有变化,重点突出。务求避免病句。句和句之间转折照应,段落讲究统一、连贯和完整。这些都是英语写作中的应有之义。

第二部分从第四到第十二单元,包括描写文、叙述文、论说文等各种不同体裁的写作。每单元分 Section A 和 Section B 两部分。Section A 详细解释该体裁的结构特点和写作策略等。Section B 是范文选读,选该体裁的名家佳作数篇,附以若干分析鉴赏性问题,以利揣摩模仿,最后布置适量的练习。

第三部分是实用性写作,从第十三到第十五单元,包括书信(私人信件和商务信件)、简历和应聘信以及备忘录等写作,这些都是学习英语写作的学生应掌握的写作技巧。

第四部分包括第十六单元,主要讲解英语写作中标点符号的使用,这是学习英语写作者常常疏忽却又是写作中必须重视的方面。

本教程作为教材,以每周一次(2 课时)计,可使用两学期。教师可选择一部分材料和选读范文用于课堂上讲解,其余内容可布置学生课后自行阅读。写作练习根据具体情况可在课堂上限时完成,也可作为课后作业。

在编写本教程过程中,编者曾参阅国外多种教材和文选读本,引用其中一些材料,在此一并致谢。本书后并附有《主要参考书目》,收录了编者参阅的一些国外出版物。

囿于编者学识和水平,虽经努力,疏漏之处难免,尚祈识家不吝指正。

编者

2003 年 6 月

CONTENTS

Unit 1 Writing Effective Sentences	1
Section A: What are effective sentences?	1
I. Conciseness	1
II. Variety	4
III. Emphasis	10
Section B: Recognizing and repairing basic sentence faults	21
I. Sentence fragments	21
II. Run-on sentences	23
III. Improperly placed modifiers	27
IV. Errors in parallelism	30
Unit 2 Writing Effective Paragraphs	32
Section A: Understanding paragraph structure	32
I. Topic sentence	32
II. Supporting sentences	34
III. Concluding sentence	35
IV. Details in the paragraph	36
Section B: How to develop a paragraph	37
Section C: Two special types of paragraphs	44
I. Opening paragraph	44
II. Concluding paragraph	49
Section D: Characteristics of a well-designed paragraph	53
I. Unity	53
II. Coherence	57
III. Completeness	65
Section E: Connecting paragraphs	67
I. Transitions	67
II. Signposts	68
III. Previews	68
IV. Key words or key ideas	69

Unit 3 Planning an Essay	73
I. Choosing and limiting a topic	73
II. Determining your purpose	74
III. Gathering Material	75
IV. Writing a thesis statement	78
V. Outlining an essay	80
Unit 4 Description	84
Section A: Understanding description	84
I. Structure of a descriptive essay	84
II. Features of a descriptive essay	84
III. Strategies for writing a descriptive essay	86
Section B: Model essays	89
Unit 5 Narration	98
Section A: Understanding narration	98
I. Structure of narration	98
II. Strategies for writing a narrative essay	98
Section B: Model essays	102
Unit 6 Argumentation	113
Section A: Understanding argumentation	113
I. Types of argumentation	113
II. Strategies for writing an argumentative essay	114
Section B: Model essays	117
Unit 7 Illustration	125
Section A: Understanding illustration	125
I. Nature of illustration	125
II. Strategies for writing an illustrative essay	125
Section B: Model essays	128
Unit 8 Definition	138
Section A: Understanding definition	138

I . Nature of definition	138
II . Strategies for writing a definition essay	139
Section B: Model essays	142
Unit 9 Classification	148
Section A: Understanding classification	148
I . Nature of classification	148
II . Strategies for writing a classification essay	148
Section B: Model essays	152
Unit 10 Comparison and Contrast	158
Section A: Understanding comparison and contrast	158
I . Nature of contrast and comparison	158
II . Strategies for writing a comparison-contrast essay	158
Section B: Model essays	162
Unit 11 Cause and Effect Analysis	170
Section A: Understanding cause and effect analysis	170
I . Nature of cause and effect analysis	170
II . Strategies for using cause-effect analysis in an essay	170
Section B: Model essays	174
Unit 12 Process Analysis	181
Section A: Understanding process analysis	181
I . Nature of process analysis	181
II . Strategies for writing a process analysis essay	182
Section B: Model essays	184
Unit 13 Writing Letters	192
Section A: Nature of letter writing	192
I . Types of letters	192
II . Parts of a letter	193
III . Differences between personal letters and business letters	197
IV . Forms of layout for a letter	198
Section B: Sample letters	200

I . Business letters	200
II . Personal letters	203
Unit 14 Writing a Resume and a Cover Letter	209
Section A: Resume	209
I . Function of a resume	209
II . Parts of a resume	210
III . Sample résumés	212
Section B: Cover letter	215
I . Parts of a cover letter	215
II . Sample cover letters	216
Unit 15 Writing Memos	221
Section A: Layout of a memoranda	221
Section B: Sample memos	224
Unit 16 Punctuation	227
Section A: A brief overview of punctuation	227
Section B: End punctuation	228
I . Period	228
II . Question mark	230
III . Exclamation mark	230
Section C: Comma	231
Section D: Other types of punctuation	235
I . Semicolon	235
II . Colon	237
III . Quotation marks	239
IV . Dash and parentheses	241
V . Brackets	244
VI . Hyphen	245
VII . Ellipsis mark	246
VIII . Slash	246
IX . Apostrophe	247
主要参考书目	249

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Unit 1

Writing

Effective Sentences

Sentences are the fundamental units in writing. The effectiveness of a piece of writing depends largely on the effectiveness of individual sentences. The strengths and weaknesses of the sentences will shape the quality of the writing generally. No matter how interesting your ideas are or how well you organize your essay, your writing appears on the page one sentence at a time. The aim of this unit is to help you write sentences that say what you mean and affect your readers as you intend.

Section A:

What are effective sentences ?

Effective sentences are *concise, varied, and emphatic*. They say as much as possible and as economically as possible without sacrificing clarity. They use a variety of structures and are at different lengths. They emphasize the important ideas so that the reader can spot that writer's intentions.

I. Conciseness

The best sentence contains no flab or unnecessary words. Compare the following two sentences:

Wordy: One of my close personal friends who lives in the city of Indianapolis at the present time has under consideration moving his residence to Buffalo for the reason that he has been offered a position in that metropolis. (38 words)

Concise: One of my friends in Indianapolis is considering moving to Buffalo because he has been offered a job there. (19 words)

By cutting the verbiage in half, we have made the sentence clearer and

stripped it of its pomposity. This does not mean that all sentences must be brief or “bare bones.” When you want to emphasize certain words or ideas, then concrete, specific details to make the meaning clear and precise and repetition may be necessary. But empty phrases, padding, and unnecessary repetition add nothing to the meaning of a sentence and are barriers between you and your readers. Be sure to watch for the following constructions in your writing:

- i) **Redundancies.** A redundant phrase is one that contains unnecessary repetition; it says the same thing twice with no new shades of meaning. Here are some common examples: *blue in color*, *cooperate together*, *few in number*, *fundamental principles*, *smaller in size*, and so on. Looking at the following sentences.

Redundant: The *slowly moving* train *crawled* into the station.

Concise: The train crawled into the station.

Redundant: They *softly whispered* words of devotion.

Concise: They whispered words of devotion.

Redundant: The tax committee, after much debate, finally reached a *consensus of opinion*.

Concise: The tax committee, after much debate, finally reached a consensus.

You will occasionally want to repeat an idea in different words to emphasize a particular point. Except in those instances, cut out any repetitive words or phrases that do not emphasize or clarify your point.

- ii) **Wordiness.** Unnecessary words clutter up a sentence because they add nothing to its meaning. They make sentences flabby and, like redundancies, they are no more than padding. Compare the following sentences:

Wordy: With regard to the fact that our environment is polluted, members of Congress should draft and consequently enact laws that prohibit pollution in our nation.

Concise: Because our environment is polluted, Congress should pass laws prohibiting pollution.

The right column below contains concise phrases.

Wordy
make inquiry regarding

Concise
inquire, ask

at this point of time	now
have under consideration	are considering
in view of the fact that	because, since
for the purpose of	for, to
of an indefinite nature	indefinite
at the present time	now
in order to	to
for the reason that	because
in the final analysis	finally
in case that	if

This is not an exhaustive list, but it suggests how familiar and subtle wordy expressions can be. As you revise your writing, delete any unnecessary words.

Words like *aspect*, *factor*, *field*, *kind*, *thing*, *element* and *situation* are overused. They are often resorted to by writers who cannot think of a more precise word; they can usually be deleted by rewording the sentence. For example:

- Wordy:** Having entered the field of medical science as my major, I have become personally aware of the factors that contribute to various common diseases.
- Concise:** Since majoring in medicine, I have learned why various common diseases start.

Sentences that begin with *It is* and *There is/are* are usually weaker and less assertive than sentences that begin with the real subject.

- Wordy:** There were four strangers pounding on the door.
- Concise:** Four strangers were pounding on the door.
- Wordy:** It is a fact that people have lost confidence in their elected leaders.
- Concise:** People have lost confidence in their elected leaders.

Phrases like *in my opinion*, *it seems*, *I believe* and *I think* can usually be cut from a sentence without damaging it; the result is usually a more forceful sentence.

- Wordy:** In my opinion, the voting age should be raised to 21.
- Concise:** The voting age should be raised to 21.
- Wordy:** It seems to me that a course in computers should be required.
- Concise:** A course in computers should be required.

Exercise

1. Revise the following sentences, making them as concise as possible without changing their meaning.

- (1) At a public ceremony in front of the student body, Rose Diaz was presented a scholarship as a gift from the Alumni Club.
- (2) At approximately 8:00pm last night, I found a quiet and peaceful spot in the park and perused my academic lecture.
- (3) Insofar as learning to play a musical instrument is concerned, the harp, in my personal opinion, would be in the category of the kind that is difficult to learn to play.
- (4) The average worker who works in a surrounding environment that contains poisonous pollutants sometimes dies of a mortal illness connected with the pollutants.
- (5) The arbitrator, who is an acknowledged expert in the field of labor negotiations, recommended that each chairman of both sides meet with him tomorrow morning at 10:00 am.
- (6) Although they were few in number, the early settlers who came to this country brought with them strong and devout religious faith and beliefs.
- (7) Many kinds of factors determining the decision of an admissions committee in selecting applicants for admittance to medical school.
- (8) In view of the fact that the job market is constantly changing, the counselor urged each and every student to plan alternate plans for the future.
- (9) It is a fact that there are many individuals who do not vote in elections.
- (10) Various aspects of personal behavior are studied and analyzed by specialists in the field of psychology.

II. Variety

Sentences are the building blocks of paragraphs. If all sentences in a composition are of the same length and structure, the composition will be as drab and uninteresting as a straight highway. If the sentences are varied,

however, the composition will hold the reader's attention as a road curves and rises and falls with the changing landscape. A good essay includes a variety of sentence types. It mixes shorter with longer sentences and employs a variety of sentence patterns.

To achieve sentence variety and include a mixture of sentence structures, we need to keep the following points in mind.

1 Strike a balance between long and short sentences

Sentences come short, medium, and long—and the simple principle for effective writing is to try variety. Good writing uses a mixture of short and long sentences to imitate the natural rhythms of speech. A piece of writing filled with sentences of the same length is monotonous. A succession of simple sentences will bore your readers; a succession of compound or complex sentences may confuse or tire them. Your writing should offer your readers sentences of different lengths.

- i) **Combining sentences with phrases.** In the following examples, short sentences are combined into longer ones that include at least one phrase.
 - a. The Blue Angels perform spectacular stunts. They are part of the United States Navy. They perform stunts at air shows. Air shows are held around the world.
 - b. The Blue Angels *of the United States Navy* perform spectacular stunts *at air shows around the world*. (with prepositional phrases)
 - a. The Blue Angels are usually the last to perform. They bring the show to a thrilling finish.
 - b. The Blue Angels are usually the last to perform, bringing the show to a thrilling finish. (with a participial phrase)
- ii) **Combining sentences by coordinating.** Another way to combine your sentences is to link items of equal importance with coordinating conjunctions (*and, but, or, for, yet* and *so*). The resulting combinations will contain compound elements. For example:
 - a. Coincidences often intrigue people. Coincidences often frighten people.
 - b. Coincidences often *intrigue or frighten* people. (with compounded verbs)
 - a. Superstitions are foolish. Superstitions can be interesting though.
 - b. Superstitions are *foolish but interesting*. (with compounded predicate adjectives)

- iii) **Combining sentences by subordinating.** Still another way to combine sentences is to join ideas of unequal importance by turning the less important idea into a dependent clause with relative pronouns or subordinating conjunctions:

Relative pronouns
who, that, whom, which,
whose

Subordinating conjunctions
after, because, until whenever,
unless, although

Read the following examples:

- a. Ludwig van Beethoven began to lose his hearing at the age of 26. Many regard him as the world's greatest composer.
- b. Ludwig van Beethoven, *whom many regard as the world's greatest composer*, began to lose his hearing at the age of 26. (with a relative clause)
- a. With his loss of hearing, his music reached new heights of beauty and feeling. His loss of hearing was nearly complete in 1816.
- b. With his loss of hearing, *which was nearly complete in 1816*, his music reached new heights of beauty and feeling. (with a relative clause)
- a. He needed comfort from his mental anguish. He would walk in the woods to find peace.
- b. *Whenever he needed comfort from his mental anguish*, he would walk in the woods to find peace. (with an adverbial clause)

2 Vary sentence structure

Sentences are classified according to the number and kind of clauses within them. The four basic kinds of sentences are simple, compound, complex, and compound-complex.

A simple sentence consists of one independent clause:

- This letter just arrived for you.

A simple sentence can have a compound subject, a compound verb, or both:

- Jason and Luis finished their work and have gone home.

A compound sentence consists of two or more independent clauses:

- Penguins cannot fly, but they can dive into the ocean.
- Football is an autumn sport; baseball is a spring sport.

Independent clauses should not be combined to make a compound sentence unless they are closely related.

A complex sentence consists of one independent clause and one or more subordinate clauses:

- I enjoy a comedy more than I enjoy heavy drama.
- Although I have tried many times, tennis is one sport that I cannot master.

A compound-complex sentence consists of two or more independent clauses and one or more subordinate clauses. For example:

- If a color-blind woman marries a man with normal vision, all the daughters will have normal vision, but all the sons will be color-blind.

Strive for a mixture of sentence types to create interest and variety for your readers. As you develop sentence variety, you should remember, however, that the heart of the sentences is the independent clause and that complements must have a clear relation to the independent clause. Notice the variety of sentence structures in the following passage:

Suddenly the air was shattered by the screams of five male gorillas bulldozing down the foliage toward me. Their screams were so deafening that I could not locate the source of the noise. I knew only that the group was charging from above; then the tall vegetation gave way as though an out-of-control tractor were headed directly for me. Only on recognizing me did the group's dominant silverback swiftly brake to a stop three feet away, causing a five-gorilla pileup. I then sank to the ground submissively. The hair on each male's head-crest stood erect; canines were fully exposed. The irises of their eyes, ordinarily soft brown, glinted yellow, and an overpowering fear odor filled the air. For a good half hour all five males screamed if I made even the slightest move. After a 30-minute period, the group allowed me to pretend to feed meekly on vegetation and then finally moved rigidly out of sight.

Exercise

2. The following two paragraphs contain only simple sentences. Using the combining techniques mentioned above, revise the paragraph so it contains a mixture of simple, compound, complex and compound-complex sentences.

(1) Experts at handwriting analysis use only their eyes and a microscope

as tools. Handwriting analysis is an inexact science. Experts are called on to discover forgery. They compare two documents side by side. They look for telling details. They look for the dots above i's and the crosses through t's. They look for the angle of the pen. They analyze the beginnings and ends of pen strokes. Sometimes experts disagree. Many people doubt the reliability of handwriting analysis. These doubts will not disappear. Courts allow experts to testify. Juries are often persuaded by the testimony of handwriting experts.

- (2) At least 50,000 grizzly bears ranged from Texas to Oregon. That was before the white man came. Today, no more than 1,000 survive in the lower 48 states. This is the result of hunting, poaching, and encroachment on their habitat. In the 1960s the National Park Service issued a decree. They stated that the animals could no longer be fed by the public. The bears had long foraged in old dump sites. The sites were abruptly closed. Hotelkeepers used to put food out for the bears. They were no longer allowed to do this. The bears began to look for food. They looked in campgrounds. They looked outside the parks as well. Inevitably, the grizzlies began to be shot. They would be shot just for showing up. Conservationists must devise a solution. The grizzly will eventually disappear.

3 Vary sentence beginnings

Inexperienced writers tend to begin every sentence with the subject. This is natural, because the subject-verb pattern is the most common arrangement in English sentences. A series of such sentences, however, can be boring and monotonous. By beginning some of your sentences with something other than the subject you can make them more appealing. The following ways help to achieve sentence variety.

i) **Begin some sentences with appositive expressions.**

- The world's second largest country in land size, Canada stretches 3,223 miles from east to west.
- The most spectacular mountain in China, Huang Shan Mountain attracts thousands of visitors each year.

ii) **Begin some sentences with participles.** They can appear alone, in a pair, or

with a phrase. For example:

- Whining and crying, Greg left the room convinced that I was a cruel mother.
- Stricken with grief, Greg cried for an hour because he could not take French.

iii) **Begin some sentences with adverbs.** When you use two adverbs to begin a sentence, these adverbs may be separated in one of the four ways: with a comma, with *and*, with *but*, or with *yet*. For example:

- Loudly and irritably I argued with the principal about the wisdom of teaching French to third-graders.
- Slowly, thoroughly, Greg's teacher explained why Greg should take French.
- Excitedly, Greg told me of his opportunity to take French. Patiently but/yet firmly, I told Greg I did not want him to take French.

iv) **Begin some sentences with *to* and a present-tense verb.** When *to* is used with the present-tense verb form, the structure is called an infinitive. Infinitives can appear alone, in pairs, or with phrases or modifiers. But often they appear with phrases or modifiers. For example:

- To understand my reaction, you must realize that I value reading above all other school subjects.
- To appreciate and to accept my view, you must agree with me that reading is more important than French.

v) **Begin some sentences with prepositional phrases.** A preposition is a word that signals direction, placement, or connection. A prepositional phrase is a preposition plus the words that are functioning with it. To achieve sentence variety, you can begin some of your sentences with one or more prepositional phrases. For example:

- For a number of reasons, I oppose foreign language instruction at the third-grade level.
- On my desk I found an important letter addressed personally to me.
- By my standards, reading is more important than French for third-graders.

4 Vary the placement of transitional words and phrases

Many transitions can function either at the beginning, in the middle, or at the end of a sentence. To achieve sentence variety, vary the placement of these structures. For example:

- *Indeed*, Greg was disappointed that I would not allow him to take French.
- He was so disappointed, *in fact*, that I felt compelled to give in.
- This does not mean my belief has changed, *however*.

Exercise

3. Vary the beginnings of the following sentences.

- (1) Doctor Samuel Mudd was a physician in Maryland who was falsely accused of conspiring to assassinate Abraham Lincoln.
- (2) Scientists have made a number of breakthroughs in recent years in their search for the cause of cancer.
- (3) The coaches and parents were proud of their team as the players received the trophy.
- (4) Some people still believe that the earth is flat.
- (5) Sue complained that she could not get to sleep until after midnight because her neighbors were arguing and playing loud music.
- (6) I found a note pinned to my door when I came home this afternoon.
- (7) The foreman of the jury adjusted her notes hurriedly and nervously and began to speak to the judge.
- (8) The piercing tones of the trumpet sounded throughout the valley.
- (9) Russia exerts influence on Mongolia because of the vast amount of economic and technological assistance it has poured into the country.
- (10) The spring rains have relentlessly and tirelessly threatened the city's drainage system.

III. Emphasis

Effective sentences emphasize their main ideas, making them forceful, and keeping related but less important ideas in the background. Emphasis is a reflection of purpose. There are usually several ways of expressing an idea, and if one way gives greater emphasis than others to what you want to stress, that is the best way. Here we shall discuss several ways of obtaining purposeful emphasis: emphatic word order, loose sentences and periodic sentences, repetition, parallelism, and active voice.