

Practical English Writing

英语应用文写作

主 编 黄衡田
副主编 李伟荣
编 者 黄衡田 李伟荣 莫再树
张小勇 刘 扬 陆 茜
唐轶雯 张志清

湖南大学出版社

2005 年 · 长沙

图书在版编目(CIP)数据

英语应用文写作/黄衡田主编. —长沙:湖南大学出版社,
2005. 2

ISBN 7-81053-893-4

I. 英... II. 黄... III. 英语—应用文—写作
IV. H315

中国版本图书馆 CIP 数据核字(2005)第 009195 号

Practical English Writing

英语应用文写作

主 编: 黄衡田

责任编辑: 王桂贞

封面设计: 吴颖辉

出版发行: 湖南大学出版社

社 址: 湖南·长沙·岳麓山 邮 编: 410082

电 话: 0731-8821691(发行部), 8821594(编辑室), 8821006(出版部)

传 真: 0731-8649312(发行部), 8822264(总编室)

电子邮箱: press@hnu.net.cn

网 址: <http://press.hnu.net.cn>

印 装: 长沙环境保护学校印刷厂

总 经 销: 湖南省新华书店

开本: 850×1168 32 开 印张: 8.5

字数: 213 千

版次: 2005 年 2 月第 1 版 印次: 2005 年 2 月第 1 次印刷

印数: 1~4 000 册

书号: ISBN 7-81053-893-4/H·112

定价: 16.00 元

版权所有, 盗版必究

湖南大学版图书凡有印装差错, 请与发行部联系

Preface

This book of *Practical English Writing* has been prepared with three objectives in view. Firstly, with the emergence and development of market globalization and the Internet, practical writing is more and more widely used in an exchange of ideas or views individually and collectively. The present situation appeals to us for dealing with practical writing not only from a theoretical point of view but in an up-to-date practical manner. So it is designed to meet the requirements of the times.

Secondly, the English readers, especially the English learners, are thirsty for a book offering them the know-how about practical writing rather than telling them a world of theories. It provides the readers with plenty of illustrative examples, and it will be greatly convenient for the readers to have a good command of practical writing. Besides, it aims at solving the problem the students of English are likely to encounter, of how to express themselves in English in daily life on the campus, rather than cover a wide range of knowledge of practical writing. So it is intended to meet the needs of the English learners.

Lastly, the teaching of practical writing is a constituent part of English language teaching, especially the teaching of English writing, for a practical writing is a written communication. Merely touching on the subject of practical English writing will be in vain without teaching the students the layout and style of

practical writing. So it is compiled to the advantage of the English teachers in their teaching work. To sum up, it is a must for English language teachers and students.

As a result of too much haste, if any errors have crept in, they will be corrected in the second edition for sure. Through the exertion of our language colleagues, it has at last come out to the public.

All writing is in some sense collaborative. This book is no exception. It in particular builds upon the ideas and advice of teachers, students and researchers. We have obtained indispensable help from many original books and articles from various magazines and the Internet. Though we have compiled a bibliography in the end of the book, we are not sure that we have exhausted all the resources we have consulted. Everyone who has helped us deserves our sincere gratitude.

We are also indebted to Hunan University Press for their assistance in the publishing of the book.

Huang Hengtian

Jan. 1 2005

Contents

Preface

Chapter 1 An Introduction to Practical Writing

1.1	Practical Writing as a Communication Channel	(1)
1.2	Criteria for Effective Writing	(6)
1.3	Concluding Remarks	(35)
	Exercises	(38)

Chapter 2 The Writing of English Letter

2.1	The Structure of an English Letter	(52)
2.2	The Style of an English Letter	(61)
2.3	The Envelope of an English Letter	(67)
2.4	Writing Steps and Tips for an English Letter	(70)
2.5	Kinds of Letter Writing	(73)
2.6	Commonly-used Sentences in English Letter-writing ...	(100)
2.7	Notes	(102)
2.8	Notices	(104)
2.9	Posters	(107)
2.10	Announcements	(108)
	Exercises	(109)

Chapter 3 Advertising

3.1	Introduction	(111)
3.2	The Structure of an Advertisement	(115)

3.3 Suggestions on Advertising Writing (124)

Exercises (124)

Chapter 4 Instruction Manual of Products

4.1 The Structure of an Instruction Manual (127)

4.2 Language Features of an Instruction Manual (135)

4.3 Samples of Instruction Manual (139)

Exercises (142)

Chapter 5 Commercial English Correspondence

5.1 The Structure of a Commercial Letter (143)

5.2 The Layout of a Commercial Letter (154)

5.3 Introduction to International Business Practice (156)

5.4 Samples for Commercial Letters (159)

Exercises (192)

Chapter 6 Essay Writing and Abstract Writing

6.1 Essay Writing (193)

6.2 Abstract Writing (214)

Exercises (221)

Chapter 7 Resume Writing

7.1 Introduction (222)

7.2 Possible Categories to Include in Your Resume ... (225)

7.3 Styles of Resume (229)

7.4 Suggestions on Resume Writing (242)

Exercises (246)

Appendix (263)

Bibliography (266)

Chapter 1

An Introduction to Practical Writing

1.1 Practical Writing as a Communication Channel

1.1.1 Definition of Practical Writing

Practical Writing is hardly a term with a regular sense in today's English. Searching through [www. google. com](http://www.google.com) with the key word “practical writing”, we get 24,800 results. For the 16 usable results of the first 20 links, this term is used to mean effective ideas, skills, workshops or programs for writing in the most general sense in six of them, while in the other 10 webpages practical writing is employed to denote a course in, a program of, or skills in writing for professional purposes. It is a term used in contrast to creative writing, where imagination, individuality and creativity are valued.

In this book, this term is mainly applied to denoting a course in writing of organizational documents or professional messages. This kind of writing is described as “being practical”, since organizational documents and most of professional messages are constructed for specific and practical purposes in professional settings. Therefore, practical writing is often referred to with other terms carrying various degrees of specific connota-

tions, such as technical writing, business letter writing, legal writing, or organizational writing. In this chapter, these terms may be used interchangeably to mean various forms of practical writing.

Practical writing is the preferred term in China. There are 2 obvious reasons behind this preference. The first is that we have a counterpart of writing in Chinese —“*yingyongwen*”. The second is that when reading an English business letter, a memo, or a letter of credit, our attention is first drawn to its strikingly different format from a Chinese counterpart. For example, the date and the receiver’s address are always put at the top of the letter on a sheet with a letter head. So people have the first impression that great care should be given to the different formats, while the information and the style of language are naturally similar. Unfortunately, the first impression is always questionable. For a foreign language learner, the information and the style of language that are considered suitable for a certain form of English document require careful observation and patient practice to achieve a good understanding, while it is much easier to model on the format.

1.1.2 Writing as a Channel of Communication

1.1.2.1 Definition of Communication

Today, people have come to assess the importance of writing in the context of communication. Communication is the process of sending and receiving messages. Communication takes many forms: face-to-face or phone conversations, informal meetings, email messages, letters and reports. All of these methods are verbal communication. Nonverbal communication does not

use words. Pictures, computer graphics, and company logos are nonverbal. Interpersonal nonverbal signals include smiles, who sits where at a meeting, the size of an office, and how long someone keeps a visitor waiting.

Effective communication helps people understand each other, stimulate others to take action, and encourage others to think in new ways. In business people must communicate to plan products, coordinate manufacturing and delivery, persuade customers to buy, and bill them for the sale. Indeed, for many businesses, nonprofit organizations and government agencies, the “product” is information or service rather than something tangible. And information and services are created and delivered by communication. In every organization communication is the way people get their points across and get work done.

Without effective communication, people misunderstand each other and misinterpret information. Ideas misfire or fail to get attention, and people and companies flounder. Fourteen percent of each 40-hour work week is wasted because of poor communication between staff and management. Whether you are pitching a business proposal, responding to a customer inquiry, or explaining a new process to your teammates, your ability to communicate effectively increases your chance for career success.

1.1.2.2 Channels to Transmit Information

Communication takes the 4 channels; listening, reading, speaking and writing. Reading and listening are 2 channels we rely on to extract information, and speaking and writing are other 2 channels we use to transmit information. In his book *Excellence in Business Communication*, John V. Thill gives the per-

centage of communication business people spend on various communication channels. Figure 1-1 illustrates that people spend more time receiving information than transmitting it. Listening and reading are every bit as important as speaking and writing. Many people are not good listeners and effective readers. Those skills still need long and patient practice. Next we will take a further look at speaking and writing — the 2 channels to produce information.

People spend much more time in speaking (30%) than writing (9%). That is to say, people would rather talk to each other than writing to each other. Talking takes less time and needs no composing, keyboarding, rewriting, duplicating and distributing. Even more important, oral communication provides the opportunity for feedback.

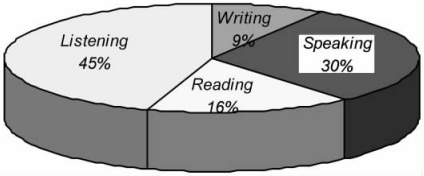


Figure 1-1 The Percentage of Communication Time Businesspeople Spend

However, speaking is such an effortless activity that we tend to do it without much thought, and that casual approach can be a problem in business. You have far less opportunity to revise your spoken words than to revise your written words. You can’t cross out what you just said and start all over.

It is important to improve the skills in using speech as a tool for accomplishing your objectives in a business context. Break the habit of talking spontaneously, without planning what you are going to say or how you are going to say it. Before you speak, think about your purpose, your main idea, and your audi-

ence. Organize your thoughts, decide on a style that suits the occasion and your audience, and edit your marks mentally. Perhaps the most important thing you can do is to focus on your audience. Try to predict how your audience will react, and organize your message accordingly. As you speak, watch the other persons and judge from verbal and nonverbal feedback whether your message is making the desired impression. If it isn't, you'll have to revise and adapt to your listeners.

1.1.2.3 Writing's Increasing Importance

Effective speaking in professional setting is quite different from our daily casual chatting with others after work. Although Figure 1-1 shows that writing only accounts for 9 percent of the time business people spend, oral communication in professional settings is very much like writing: accurate word choice, efficient use of words and well planned organization.

The increased use of fax, email, electronic commerce, Internet group discussion and teleconferencing technologies has highlighted the importance of writing. Fax and email have greatly decreased the use of telephone, since these technological means don't require the receiver to be present when the messages are being sent. E-commerce is transacted over the Internet without the parties involved in the business even meeting once. In an electronic meeting, the participants can be at different places, but they can see everyone else's messages as soon as it's sent. At the end of the meeting, the system provides a printed summary for everyone. It is estimated that electronic meetings are up to 55 percent faster than traditional meetings. All participants type their responses at the same time. And participants can

share their opinions honestly, since they air theirs anonymously. Doubtlessly, all these technologies require the users to write well for effective and efficient communication. Today, almost every job description for a new position includes this line: Required-effective organization skills and a mastery of the language in written and oral forms.

1.2 Criteria for Effective Writing

1.2.1 Factors Underlying Writing Criteria

Criteria for effective writing have always been changing, as they reflect changes in business practices and developments of the society. In the present world, the 3 most important factors that influence the change of the criteria are information explosion, globalization of market, and the Internet.

1.2.1.1 Information Explosion

In our age of information, ideas and data are replacing natural resources and physical materials to be the most productive factor. However, the ability and time to process raw data, transform the data into information, distribute the information appropriately, and use it speedily to make decision pose a great challenge to all the members of our society. A recent study by the Gallup organization found that, on a typical day, the average white-collar worker sends and receives as many as 190 messages (see Figure 1-2). With phone calls, e-mail, faxes, and voice mail — not to mention printed research, reports, and industry news — many executives are overwhelmed by information overload.

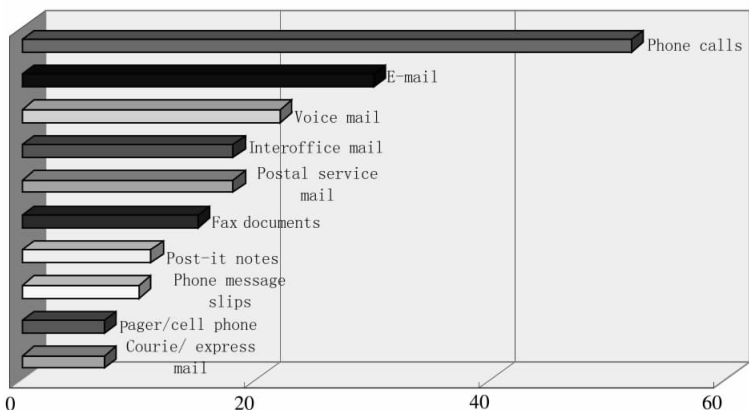


Figure 1-2 Average Number of Messages Received Daily (Per Employee)

1.2.1.2 Market Globalization

Market globalization is the increasing tendency of the world to act as one market. Domestic markets are opening to provide growth opportunities for a company's goods and services. Technological advances in travel and telecommunications are the driving forces behind market globalization. New communication technologies allow teams from all over the world to work on projects and share information without leaving their desks. At the same time, advanced technologies allow manufacturers to produce their goods in foreign locations that offer an abundant supply of low-cost labor. Natural boundaries and national borders have disappeared, for the most part, as increasing numbers of people work in multicultural settings.

1.2.1.3 Internet Technology

Internet is now an important form of communication. It has completely changed the way people communicate. When infor-

mation is needed, the first choice people think of is searching the Internet. Electronic forms are also the most convenient and fastest communication means. E-mail offers speed, low cost, increased access and convenience. Web site offers interactive communication through hyperlinks, allowing readers to absorb information a self controlled way; they can take what they need and skip everything else. A web site can tailor the same information for numerous readers by breaking up the information into linked pages.

Many factors have influenced the criteria of writing. Information explosion prompts people to grab the audience's attention and communicate efficiently and effectively. Market globalization makes it necessary for people to communicate with a cultural sensitivity and write in easy English to facilitate communication. And the Internet requires different organization of contents and different styles of language.

1.2.2 Criteria of Effective Writing

1.2.2.1 Thill and Bovee's Communication Guidelines

In their co-authored book *Excellence in Business Communication*, they proposed 4 guidelines for overcoming communication barriers:

- 1) Adopt an audience-centered approach.

An audience-centered approach to communication means that the communicator cares about the audience and tries his/her best to get a message across in a way that is meaningful to the audience.

- 2) Foster an open communication climate.

An open communication climate encourages candor and hon-

esty. In such a climate, communicators feel free to confess their mistakes, disagree with those with higher status than them, and express their opinions.

3) Create lean, effective messages.

Too much information is as bad as too little; it reduces the audience's ability to concentrate on the most important data. Successful communicators overcome information overload and other communication barriers by reducing the number of messages, decreasing possible distractions, and using technology wisely.

4) Commit to ethical communication.

Ethical communication includes all relevant information, is true in every sense, and is not deceptive in any way. When sending an ethical message, you are accurate and sincere. You avoid language that manipulates, discriminates or exaggerates. You don't hide negative information behind an optimistic attitude, you don't state opinions as facts, and you portray graphic data fairly.

Centering on your audience is paramount because it facilitates the fulfillment of the three guidelines we have discussed in Section 2.2.1. Because you want to know what your audience's needs are and what they think of your messages, you work for an open climate inside and outside your organization. Because you value your audience's time and anticipate your audience's expectations, you create lean, efficient messages and use communication technology responsibly. And because you sincerely wish to satisfy your audience's needs, you approach communication situations with good intentions and high ethical standards.

1.2.2.2 Locker's Criteria for Effective Writing

Kitty O. Locker, president of the Association for Business Communication in 1994-95, proposed five criteria for effective writing in her book *Business and Administrative Communication* :

1) It's clear.

The meaning the reader gets is the meaning the writer intended. The reader doesn't have to guess.

2) It's complete.

All of the reader's questions are answered. The reader has enough information to evaluate the message and act on it.

3) It's correct.

All of the information in the message is accurate. The message is free from errors in punctuation, spelling, grammar, word order, and sentence structure.

4) It saves the reader's time.

The style, organization, and visual impact of the message help the reader to read, understand, and act on the information as quickly as possible.

5) It builds goodwill.

The message presents a positive image of the writer and his or her organization. It treats the reader as a person, not a number. It cements a good relationship between the writer and the reader.

Case Study 1:

The form letter in Figure 1-3 failed to meet the criteria for

effective writing, because it's stuffy and selfish. Below is an analysis of the problems with the letter:

1) The language is stiff and legalistic.

Note the obsolete and sexist "Gentlemen": "Please be advised", "herein", and "expedite".

2) The tone is selfish.

The letter is written from the writer's point of view; there are no benefits for the reader. The writer says there are, but without a shred of evidence, the claim isn't convincing.

3) The main point is buried.

The main point is placed in the middle of the first paragraph. The middle is the least emphatic part of a sentence.

4) The request is vague.

How many references does the supplier want? Are only vendor's references OK, or would other credit references, like banks, work too? Is the name of the reference enough, or is it necessary also to specify the line of credit, the average balance, the current balance, the years credit has been established, or other information? What "additional financial information" does the supplier want? Annual reports? Bank balance? Tax returns? The request sounds like an invasion of privacy, not a reasonable business practice.

5) Words are misused.

"Herein" is misused for "therein", suggesting either an ignorant writer or one who doesn't care enough about the subject and the reader to use the right word.