
如何避免英语写作中的常见错误（一）

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“我从来没听说过，我也从来没那样教过”，一位中国的英语老师曾经对我说。当时我们在讨论一个我所谓的关于书面英语的“小问题”。二十世纪六十年代时，我的老师们把这些小问题叫做“书面英语的运作机制”。今天，我们来讨论一下为什么写英文时这些小问题如此重要，以及亚洲作者们如何能够快速提高他们的英文写作水平。我们将特别谈到大写、标点、字距，并且会讨论在科技论文写作时如何正确使用专有名词和中文字体。最后，我们将讨论过长的句子以及与之相关的问题，也就是句子中分号的用法。之后，我们也将会对非英语母语作者写作时遇到的其他几个相关问题进行解答。

例如，罗莉，我的一个侄女，最近跟我说，“如果有人给我一份错误很多的简历，我肯定不愿意去雇用这个人”。很多简历中都存在问题，但是一些常见的错误是有办法避免的。今天，我们就介绍一些简便的方法。

这些小问题包括大写、标点和字距(即英文书写中空格的用法)。曾经有人告诉我，中国古代的作者们在写作时不使用任何空格或标点。最近我读到，在二十世纪初期，当那些从海外学习归国的孩子们开始在中文中使用标点时，很多中国父母们感到难以理解。如今时代变了，我曾经教过不同年级的学生，我也去过中国大陆的一些小学，我能想象得到要教小学生们这些“小问题”有多么困难，尤其是教英语本身就很难了。下面我就来解释一下。

时间回到1961年，当我还是美国加州一个在上三年级的男孩时，我的老师杨小姐，和今天中国的老师们一样，跟我强调说手写的字应该是同样间距、对齐并且前后一致的，当我们在电脑上打字时，我们也该记住这些在小学时学到的规则。作为一个专业编辑，我发现我看到的一部分论文，光是调整其中的空格问题就需要花费相当多的工作量。下面是一些简单的规则，你们可以在写作中使用到，能使你的写作水平看起来有巨大的提升。下面的例句中，正确的和错误的用法都将用粗体表示：

[句号或逗号前一定不要加空格。句号之后加一个(现在的习惯)或两个(以前的习惯)空格，但是同一篇文章中不要两种方式混用。一对括号的前后各加一个空格，但是句号和逗号前不要加空格。引用文章时仍要遵守这些规则。(注：例句请见英文部分)]

大写是一个类似的问题，这里给出一些简单的规则和例子。

[使用大写有很多特殊的规则，有几条很容易被亚洲作者忽略。专有名词指的是特定人物，地点，或物品的名称，需要大写。普通名词不是特指，不需要大写。很多非英语母语作者在列出多个专有名词时会出错。比如，列举多个省份的时候，province这个词是不大写的。(注：例句请见英

nouns as well as English and Chinese fonts in scientific research papers. Lastly, we will discuss sentences that are too long (run-on sentences) and the related topic, the use of semicolons in sentences. Later we will discuss several other writing-related topics that create problems for non-native speakers of English.

For example, a niece of mine, Lori, recently told me, “ If I found a resume with many errors, I definitely would not hire that job applicant. ” While many resumes have errors, there are ways to avoid common errors. Today, we will find simple ways to avoid those errors.

The little things are capitalization, punctuation, and spacing (or the use of spaces in writing English). I ’ m told that ancient Chinese writers used no spacing or punctuation. Recently, I read that Chinese parents in the early 1900s were upset when their children returned to China from studying overseas and started using punctuation with Chinese. Times have changed. However, having been a teacher at several levels as well as having visited elementary school classrooms in mainland China, I can imagine how difficult it is to teach “ The Little Things ” when simply teaching English to students is a challenge in itself. Please let me explain.

I will go back to 1961, as an American boy in third grade in California. My teacher, Miss Young, much like Chinese teachers today, emphasized that handwritten letters should be evenly spaced, well-aligned, and consistent. The rules we learned in elementary school should be remembered when typing on a computer. As a professional editor, a small majority of the papers I see need a considerable amount of work to clean them up simply by using spaces correctly. Here are a few simple guidelines that can be applied and may improve the look of your writing dramatically. Examples, both correct and incorrect, are shown in bold text.

Never use a space before a period or comma ,like this incorrect example. Use either one space (today ’ s style) or two spaces (an older style) after a period; but don ’ t mix the two styles in the same paper. Always use a space before and after parenthesis (such as shown correctly here) in a sentence but do not use a space before a period(this example is incorrect) . Similar rules apply when citing research papers such as Smith and Gao (2014) shown correctly here or at the end of a sentence shown here(Smith and Gao1999) with incorrect spacing in two places .

Capitalization is a similar issue. Here are a few simple rules and examples.

Many specific rules exist for capitalizing words, but here are a few rules that are most frequently overlooked by Asian writers of English. “ Proper nouns ” are the names of specific persons, places, and things (Beijing, Starship Enterprise, the People ’ s Republic of China, President Obama). Common nouns are not specific (city, spaceship, country, president). Many non-native speakers start making mistakes with lists of proper nouns. Correct examples would be Fujian Province and Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region with all words starting with capital letters. However, when multiple provinces are listed, the word “ province ” is not capitalized such as Fujian and Hunan provinces or Tibet and Xinjiang autonomous regions.

Another point should be emphasized when listing provinces, keywords, or any list. Writers should list things alphabetically unless another reason exists for some other sequence. Therefore, we usually write “ the cities of Beijing and Tianjin ” and not “ the cities of Tianjin or Beijing ” .

Chinese, Simsun, and MS Mincho fonts should also not be mixed with English. This occurs most frequently with parenthesis, commas, and symbols. While it may seem minor, this creates major problems for editors related to style and spacing. To say it simply, the different fonts take up different amounts of space and look

different. For example:

Time New Roman font: ,./;?+_)(*&^%\$#@! ° C and I, II, III, IV, and Cambria Math, , , ,

Simsun font: , 。 、 ; 《 : 》 ?+——)(*&.....%¥#@! ° C and , , , , , , ,

As you can see, Chinese punctuation (using a Simsun font) has added space that is not available with English fonts. Look again(at these Simsun parentheses)and you can see the difference. This is one reason the use of spaces is important with English. Also notice two other points. First, in the Times New Roman font, Roman numerals are typed as individual characters such as the three keystrokes needed to type III; in the Simsun font, the Roman numeral III is a single character, 三 .

Let ' s conclude this part of the discussion with two more topics related to punctuation and sentence structure, run-on sentences and the use of semicolons. While semicolons (;) are used in several ways, we are discussing sentences and not table or figure legends; bold text is used again to show examples. In sentences, semicolons are mostly used to separate two “ independent clauses. ” An independent clause can stand by a sentence separately; I ' ve used a semicolon in this sentence to show how two sentences can be joined by a semicolon. This is often convenient when an author is citing someone else ' s research; using a semicolon allows a person to join two or rarely three or four ideas and attribute those ideas to a single research paper such as Smith and Gao (2014), a fake reference cited here as an example.

Lastly,this is an example of a run-on sentence because a run-on sentence is one that never seems to end and you should not use a run-on sentence like this sentence because even though you may join words with conjunctions and the word “ and ” your readers will eventually get lost in the long and complex sentence that you are trying to write because it never seems to end and just goes on and on forever so you should keep your sentences to where they only provide one idea for each sentence. That is, that is a run-on sentence; it is far too long.

A scientific journal will gladly not review a paper that has many of these “ little ” types of errors. This is because an editor would have to spend several hours carefully correcting the spacing and other little errors and removing the Simsun fonts. If you can avoid these types of errors, your paper will be much more likely to receive the review it really deserves by the journal editors.

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