

# Problems and Solutions in Response to Non-English Major Postgraduates' Academic Writing

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**Abstract:** With the increasingly extensive international scientific and technological development, more and more Chinese postgraduate students expect to publish papers in international academic journals to demonstrate their scientific research achievements. Although graduate students have received knowledge education for many years, they still face many difficulties in the process of transforming from knowledge learners to knowledge creators. In many English-speaking countries, such as the United States and Australia, the teaching and training of academic writing in English has been attached great importance. However, most Chinese students lack the learning and training of English paper and report at the stage of university and postgraduate. Based on this, academic English paper writing education has become a very important link in graduate education. This paper is mainly a summary and analysis of the problems that often appear in non-English major postgraduate English academic writings, so as to find out the enlightenment of postgraduate's academic writing teaching, it will also be beneficial to improve the level of graduate education in our country.

**Keywords:** Academic English; Academic Writing; Teaching.

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## 1. Introductory

Academic English generally refers to the English used by graduate students, professors and researchers in the course of study and research. Ken Hyland defines academic English as "teaching English with the aim of assisting learners' study or research". The main uses of academic English include writing and publishing academic papers, speaking at international conferences and serving as editors of international journals.

Writing and publishing high-quality academic English papers is not only an important channel to participate in international academic exchanges, but also a basic necessary for a qualified postgraduate student. The content and innovation of the paper are the key to whether the paper can be published, and the English writing level of the paper is also an important factor. It is not only difficult to effectively express the author's research thoughts and academic views, but also may cause reviewers and editors to doubt the author's research ability, resulting in the embarrassing situation that the innovative research results are not recognized.

In the English education of non-English major postgraduate students, the important position of academic writing has become more prominent. Therefore, in the past ten years, the research on academic English essay writing has gradually become a hot topic. However, the existing research is seriously homogenized.

Domestic researches on academic writing mainly focuses on defining the process of academic paper writing and the challenges may encountered (Liu Meihua and Liu Shisheng, 2014). Zhu Haiqing (2020) summarized the common problems and countermeasures in the writing of academic English papers for postgraduates. Some scholars have summarized the necessity of teaching professional academic English paper writing from different disciplines such as medicine (Li Qi and Xu Xiaoying, 2021) and agriculture (Xu Chenchen, Lan Yu, et al. 2014). Lin and Morrison(2021) investigates the academic writing challenges encountered by L2 postgraduate students in Engineering and the strategies they developed to address these issues. Their study identified

major differences between students and faculty regarding academic writing challenges, which have significant pedagogical implications for providing appropriate writing models and writing interventions for L2 graduate students in Engineering.

Jiang Feng (2022) analyzed academic English papers in core journals at home and abroad by bibliometric method, studied the development of academic English in the past 40 years, and sorted out and reviewed the research topics and progress. His results show that academic English studies are mainly focused on the relationship between discourse, speaker and context under the background of academic communication, which is influenced by the sociocultural turn in applied linguistics.

Foreign research focuses on interpersonal interaction, identity construction, academic literacy and teacher development. Besides, Khazaal (2019) pointed out in his study that the summarizing strategy has a significant effect on postgraduates' learners in academic writing skills, so he recommended that summarizing strategy be applied in the curriculum of primary and secondary schools and universities. By reviewing corpus-based genre analysis studies, Ta (2010) presents an overview of the findings in current research focusing on rhetorical aspects of academic writing and discusses the implications of these findings for EAP writing pedagogies. In addition, Anke (2017) combined the training of writing strategies with the provision of feedback to conduct a research that undergraduate and postgraduate students participated in the 2-h experimental intervention study in a computer-based learning environment. His research shows that text structure knowledge application strategy affected academic writing skills positively. Feedback related to writing experience resulted in higher text quality: undergraduates benefited from informative tutoring feedback, postgraduates from try-again feedback.

Akbas (2022) examined the features of the academic texts produced by three groups of postgraduates from a cross-linguistic and cross-cultural perspective, The study involves a micro discourse analysis of a corpus of ninety discussion

sections of dissertations to identify and classify the choices made by the authors for expressing commitment/detachment in presenting knowledge claims.

Studies of research articles of Chinese non-English major undergraduates are rather scarce compared with those of English majors and of non-English major post-graduates. It is hoped that this study can bring enlightenment to the teaching of academic English writing and research paper writing for non-English major undergraduates.

## 2. Methodology and Findings

This paper mainly adopts the literature analysis method. Through the summary of 10 papers in China national knowledge infrastructure and foreign journals, it finds out the common problems of graduate students in English paper writing and puts forward the corresponding countermeasures.

Non-English major postgraduate students face many difficulties and stresses in academic writing for the English as a second language. Through literature review, the author found the following problems, which can be divided into two parts: structural level and language level.

First of all, students are not familiar with the structure of academic papers. Even after taking writing classes, they do not have a very clear understanding of the status and role of each part of the paper. As a result, the structure of the papers written by students is often very confusing. In addition, postgraduate students tend to overlook certain writing processes. The academic paper writing steps can generally be divided into six parts, including brainstorming, organizing, drafting, reviewing, revising and publishing. Students always forget to reviewing and revising. After the paper was finished, most students breathed a sigh of relief and submitted it immediately, but there were still obvious defects and mistakes in the paper at this time.

There are more prominent problems at the language level, the first is the inaccuracy of the words. Accuracy mainly refers to that the language expression of the paper conforms to the rules of English grammar system and the language norms of academic writing. English academic papers should use the professional vocabulary within the professional scope and the words that are frequently used in academic papers, and carefully use the words that indicate the quantity and degree. However, students often lack professional vocabulary and phrases in their thesis writing, which can easily confuse words with similar meanings in academic English and have difficulty in distinguishing spoken and written English. It can be concluded that common mistakes including confusion in the use of articles “a, an and the”, errors in the single and plural of nouns and confusion in the combination of “such as” and “etc.”.

In the actual writing process, there is another prominent problem, that is, inappropriate use of English sentence patterns. When Chinese postgraduate students write academic papers, they always write in Chinese first and then translate Chinese into English. The direct consequence of this writing method is that the sentence pattern used is not English at all, and the whole paper is almost completely expressed in accordance with the Chinese word order.

Besides, there is another serious problem with language expression, which is that there is often strong subjective expression in students' papers. For example, some students often use “We” as a subject.

Finally, some postgraduate student's academic attitude is not rigorous, which leads to many problems when citing

references. Some postgraduate students did not see the full text when they cited the literature, and there were many secondary citations, resulting in the misreading of the original meaning. Some postgraduate students cite foreign literature without understanding the original text, and the translated literature is full of mistakes. Some postgraduate students even can't tell the first and last names of foreign scholars, thus causing the wrong citation format.

## 3. Analysis

In view of the above mentioned problems, the following suggestions are putting forward.

### 3.1. Use Model Essays.

During the teaching process, teachers can help students find 10 excellent English papers in the paper database whose topics are closely related to students' major. These Essays can provide students with structural reference and language reference, including terminology, sentence patterns, writing style and so on. Students can select some sentences from the sample text to paraphrasing. It is a form of repetition and variety practice, which will not only help improve fluency, but also achieve the effect of drawing inferences about other cases from one instance.

### 3.2. Combine English Teaching with Specialty

Relying on the resources of different colleges in the university, develop new thesis writing course direction. On the basis of general English learning, postgraduate English learning should be closer to academic English. Due to the different majors, there are also differences in the research direction and research methods. For example, some professional English papers focus on summary, while others focus on evidence. Teachers should conduct teaching on the basis of specific analysis of the characteristics of the major, help students enrich vocabulary and accumulate academic English expressions.

### 3.3. Attach Importance to Objective Expression

In order to highlight its science and rigor, academic papers always try to avoid the use of subjective words and sentence patterns. As the goal of English thinking tends to point to the outside world and explore the influence of the external objective world on people, this way of thinking is reflected in the language expression, which is the tendency of English to use non-biological words as the subject. The objectivity of English journal papers is mainly expressed through the forms of “impersonal structure, passive voice, nominalization structure, and simple present tense”.

In order to express rigorous ideas, the language with strong objectivity must increase the restrictive and expansive elements, its logical requirements are correspondingly strict and the sentences must be long. Therefore, academic English papers often use that, which or where clauses to express clear concepts.

### 3.4. Attach Importance to Writing Practice

In order to make students familiar with the process of English writing, teachers should let students do more writing exercises. In the process of writing, students should be strictly required to follow the writing process, do not miss any steps. To minimize the influence of mother-tongue thinking on

paragraph and text expression and make language expression organized, students should also be trained in language logic in practice. Only logical language can keep the discourse clear and coherent. In teaching, teachers should cultivate students' ability to use sentence patterns flexibly while ensuring that the paper is concise and to the point.

### 3.5. Positive Writing Attitude

In addition, both teachers and students should pay attention to the problems existing in English academic writing. For purpose of meeting the teaching requirements, teachers should pay more time and energy to constantly find out new problems in students' writing and solve them accordingly.

## 4. Conclusion

With the deepening of international academic exchanges, the public publication of English papers in international journals has become one of the important symbols to measure the academic level. Influenced by the transfer of mother tongue writing and thinking as well as cultural traditions, there are many problems in the English papers of non-English majors, such as insufficient discussion of the results, improper logical thinking in the papers, informal language expression and so on. It is worth noting that the reasons for these problems are manifold. Through the discussion of these reasons, it is helpful to improve the teaching quality of English thesis writing.

English teaching should pay more attention to the acquisition and application of language, complete the transformation from imparts knowledge to cultivate ability. In teaching, teachers should not only further develop postgraduate students' ability of writing English papers, but also focus on developing students' ability of academic communication, reading English papers in professional journals and communicating with international experts in the same industry.

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