

學術擂台 反應熱烈

頒獎席上 精英湧現

瑪利亞書院英文學會月前舉辦“大學及專欄作者英文水平評估辯論”受到全港學者熱烈響應。

參加者包括現職大學教授、講師、翻譯師、律師、會計師、英文科教師及報館編輯等文化、教育界人士，他們不少是擁有博士、碩士銜頭的學識淵博之士。

日前，瑪利亞書院英文學會假座九龍美麗華酒店舉行優勝者頒獎典禮，儀式簡單而隆重。李鳳瓊校長讚揚參賽者學術水平淵博，具研究精神，實為香港教育界之福！

這封大學來函，水準實在太差，其實，學會已盡力維護其缺點。所以，較高之評核標準只有棄而不用：如：diction, sequence of tense, wordiness, tautology, jargon 等。至於替此函保駕護航之英文專欄作家更不知所謂，此君將信內無錯者改為有錯。如：a solicitors' letter(文法是正確的，如：La Salle is a boys' school)改為錯誤語法：a solicitor's letter(在香港solicitor要有s)。將小錯變為大錯，如：legal cause of action變為 legal course of action。

以下為讀者周博士將大學覆函重寫，行文精簡，將信中意思表達得更為清晰及恰當，充分發揮了語文傳情達意之效果，絕不像原文一般水平。

Dear Sir/Madam,

Thank you for your letter dated February 11, 1998 bringing to our attention a complaint made by your client Mr. X to our tutor, Ms Y.

We certainly understand the frustration Mr. X has when he felt he had received unfair course grades. What he could have done was to raise such query to the tutor or to the University so that prompt investigation can be made. Our Student Handbook contains clear appeal procedures for students on query of course grades. I enclosed an extract of the relevant clauses for your information.

Had he followed the appeal procedures in the Student Handbook, he could have taken another examination, or he would have obtained a satisfactory resolution to his case by now.

The University encourages open dialogue with students. We also have fair procedures to deal with students' complaints. Please encourage your client to talk to us. Should you have any further queries on the subject, please give us a call at 1234-5678. We would be very pleased to help.

This rewrite is only one of the alternate responses, and Dr Chow, the writer, humbly says it is too good to be a model.

Comments by English Society of Maria College

We've seen "How bad is bad?" of the original letter from a local University. Now we come to appreciate "How good is good?" of a rewritten one by our reader, Dr Chow.

Paragraph 1:

This is a concise sentence without wordy phrases and expressions. (Errors in English and Ways To Correct Them - By Harry Shaw, 1993, p169, Harper Perennial.)

Paragraph 2:

This coherent paragraph lets readers see through the interrelationship of details and sentences to the purpose of the paragraph. (Essentials of English - By Vincent F. Hopper, Cedric Gale, Ronald C. Forte, 1990, p.153, Barron's Educational Series, Inc.)

Paragraph 3:

A single-sentence paragraph can be used to achieve an easy transition from a preceding to a subsequent paragraph. (Pocket Guide to Punctuation - By Merriam-Webster, 1995, p.286.)

Paragraph 4:

Usually a short simple sentence in the last position will give rise to a forceful ending to wrap up the whole passage, but too many single ones gathering closely will have an adverse effect. Yet, just with such a softening tone the writer achieves his objective to ease down the rising tension between the two parties. Look at the two separate concluding sentences:

(a) "We would be very pleased to help." - Rewritten by Dr Chow.

(b) "Any legal proceedings ... will be strenuously resisted." - Written by the University.

Conclusion:

The sentences of this rewritten letter are noted and admired; the writing is unobtrusive so that its sense can be immediately apprehended and the reader is never distracted from it. (Grammar & Style - By Michael Dummett, Wykeham Professor of Logic, University of Oxford, 1993, p.62.)

Rewrite-analysis by Dr Chow

Indeed, Dr Chow is so kind as to share with us the principles he applied in the rewrite of the letter. He pointed out that a good reply to a complaint should incorporate the following elements: L-S-C-P-A. * (1) Listen - expressing interest in listening, (2) Share - showing empathy, (3) Clarify - restating the complaint question from a different angle, keeping readers' interest in mind, (4) Present - presenting supportive arguments and (5) Ask - seeking for consent and support for action.

Comments by Dr Chin

Dr Chin, another reader, regards that Dr Chow's writing could show us how a decent official letter looks like: be short, be simple and be human (Sidney Greenbaum & Janet Whitcut (ed.), 1987, *The Complete Plain Words*, London: Penguin, p22). As the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein says, "It is very difficult to express things clearly." Unclear writing covered with pretentious complexity, as the original "University letter" shows, demonstrates not only poor grammar but also a mind poisoned by power: I am right because I am in the position to say so. Once you have this in mind, no grammar can help.

主辦機構

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