

Abilities Tested in the New-added Summary Question of the TEM-4 Writing Part and Countermeasures

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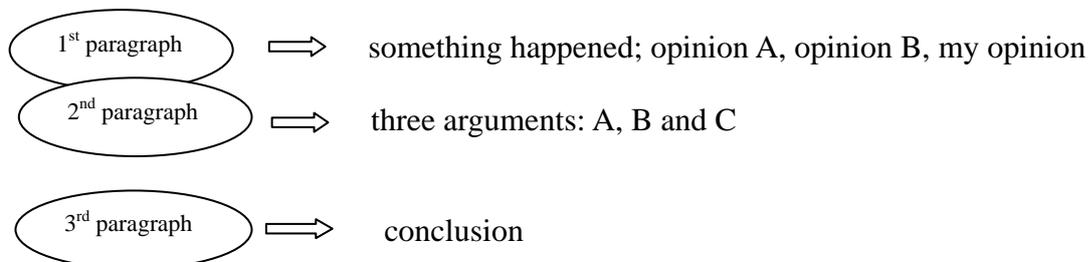
Keywords: summary; reading comprehension; information extraction; paraphrase; countermeasures.

Abstract: Test for English Majors-Band 4 (TEM-4) is one of the authoritative English proficiency tests for English majors of China. It is the wind vane of English majors' education. Since 2016, TEM-4 has adopted new types of questions. In the writing section, the note-writing is cancelled; the proportion of composition is increased. Students are also required to summarize the given material. This paper analyzes the new-added summary question of TEM-4. This part mainly tests three abilities: reading comprehension ability, information extraction ability, summarizing ability and paraphrasing ability. The author also points out corresponding countermeasures, hoping to help English majors and teachers.

1. Introduction

Since 2016, TEM-4 (Test for English Majors-Band 4) has adopted new types of questions. According to *Notes on the Adjustment of TEM-4* issued by the Office of Foreign Language Teaching and Testing in Colleges and Universities in August 2015, the note-writing is cancelled in the writing part, and the score of composition is increased from 15 points to 20 points. The writing time is still 45 minutes. In the composition writing section, English majors are required to write an English article of not less than 200 words in accordance with the given topic, icon or material. The genre of the composition is usually argumentation. The given material covers a wide range. For instance, the material for 2016 is *Term-time Holiday Will Be Banned*; the material of 2017 involves the issue, *With Intelligent Machines to Do the Thinking, Will Our Brains Get Lazy?* The topic for 2018 is *Report Exposes the Dark Sides of Conservation*, the topic for 2019 is *How Much Screen Time is too much for Kids?* Topics in these years are flexible, ranging from home-school cooperation to stop traveling to the popularization and influence of artificial intelligence, from the conflicts between conservationists and native residents to the time children use on electronic products.

Regardless of the topic the material involves, the composition part requires students to summarize the given material. Students can no longer use the composition framework for the TEM-4 test before 2016.



The reformed composition in 2016 added the question of summarizing the given material. If the students still follow the previous prototype like “some people say..., while others say that....,” the exam marker will surely be discontent. Students can get low marks under that situation. Therefore, it is necessary for us to clarify the reform direction of TEM-4, so as to understand which abilities are tested in the summary part and provide targeted guidance.

2. Abilities Tested in Summary and Paraphrase

Students are required to use their own language in summary. They need to satisfy following requirements: accurate expression of the theme; accurate expression of the central contents; comprehensive and accurate expression of key points. All three requirements mention one word: accuracy. Accuracy means objectivity, clarity and error-free. The summary part in writing examines English majors' reading comprehension ability, information extraction and summary ability, as well as paraphrasing ability.

2.1 Reading comprehension ability

The given material requires students to quickly read and understand the purpose of this excerpt, and to integrate information immediately to understand the topic, which is the key word of the composition. In the face of the given material, students should first determine its genre and the central topic, and analyze whether the viewpoint is controversial. Then they should quickly judge the author's writing tone and emotional color according to the wording style. The given material often presents both positive and negative views. From 2016 to 2019, the reading quantity of the given material increased significantly. Meanwhile, the analysis of long and difficult sentences and the limitation of vocabulary also affect the reading comprehension of English majors. Students are a little confused when dealing with the given material in the writing part. A very simple way to solve these problems is to analysis the passage by paragraph. If they can find the central idea of each paragraph, and then list the whole framework of the article, the whole structure of the article will be clear.

For example, in the passage of TEM-4 in 2016, if students can grasp and understand the framework of the reading material, they will be able to find out the topic of the composition.

P1- P2 Michael Gove: { ban parents to ...
 { abolish head teacher to...

P3 - P4 a senior source

Consequence: damage the education —truancy

Treatment: stricter penalty for parents & teachers

P5 ultimate effect: to make education academically rigorous

P6 Hobby: expected result

a. discourage parents to expect term time holiday

b. education is more important than holiday.

After analyzing the text, students can easily grasp the framework of the given passage. The first and second paragraphs first point out the decision of the British education department to reduce the phenomenon of students asking for leave to travel, and to this end, punishment measures are formulated for parents and teachers of students who violate the rules. The third, fourth and fifth paragraphs discuss the consequences of students' traveling during class, as well as measures to reduce this phenomenon and their ultimate effects: to make school education more standardized and stricter. The sixth paragraph refers Hobby's point of view, showing that there are two expected effects of eliminating this phenomenon. In this way, the structure of the passage is clear. Students can easily grasp the overall framework, and understand the topic well. They will not digress from the subject in writing, which lays a good foundation for the content organization of summary.

2.2 The ability of information extraction

The writing process requires information analysis and extraction on the basis of understanding the given material. There are a lot of interference information in the passage. Which information is important? This is a question which needs to be solved by students. A feasible way is to find the five "W" and one "H": where, who, when, what, why and how. In the process of reading, any key words involving the five "W" and one "H" should be extracted to facilitate the organization of the text. The writing part of 2016 is taken as an example. Students can find three characters in the article: Michael Gove, a senior source and Hobby. But when summarize and integrate information, these specific characters can be represented by U.K. Educational Officials. That is, the specific

characters need to be abstracted, rather than listing one by one.

Therefore, when extracting the content of a given material, students need to find the key information with the help of five “W” and one “H”.

Where: U.K.

Who: educational officials, students, parents, head teachers

When: now/recently/nowadays/currently

What: Term-time Holiday Will Be Banned.

Why: Term-time holiday will damage the education.

How: stricter penalty for Parents & Teachers $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{ban parents to ...} \\ \text{abolish head teacher to ...} \end{array} \right.$

When extracting, students need to respond quickly and extract key information accurately. They need to learn to choose primary and secondary information, and highly summarize the content of the given passage, so as to make basic preparations for summarizing the material.

2.3 Summary and paraphrase abilities

On the basis of reading the given material and accurately understanding and extracting the information, students can summarize the passage. Summaries do not mean to edit the information of the original text. It requires students to reproduce the original extract in their own words. This process involves students' abilities of generalization and paraphrasing. They do not only need to grasp the theme, but also should express the key contents impartially, objectively, comprehensively and concisely. After extracting the key information, students should express the central meaning of the given material and outline the original viewpoints in the first natural paragraph. In the process of writing summary, they should pay attention to following points. First, the article should have a complete framework and clear logics. The model is: what phenomena/reasons/enlightenments/facts are told by given material + what aspects are explained/discussed/explained by the given material. Second, the logic should be clear. Summaries can be made according to the order of the given passage. Students can also re-organize the text according to key information, so as to highlight key points and express them in a structured way. However, English majors tend to have divergent and imaginative thinking; they cannot summarize information skillfully. Third, the use of words should meet the requirements of written language and strive to be correct, accurate and refined. For example, if they want to express the “given material”, they can borrow the word “excerpt” that appears in the question. If they want to express the meaning of “tell”, they can use some words in written language, such as illustrate, demonstrate and declare, instead of colloquial words like say, show and tell.

We still use the composition in 2016 TEM-4 exam as an example to illustrate the summary of the given material.

The given excerpt illustrates that, nowadays, the UK education officials try to ban the term-time holidays which badly damage the education and increase truancy. To make education academically rigorous, both parents and head teaches should be banned to have children out of school during the term time. They appeal to parents to take children's education into consideration and education outweighs holidays.

In the summarizing and paraphrasing part, many students feel that the language of the given material cannot be surpassed, and think that their language organization is super poor. They cannot express the opinion as good as the original passage; they may even have an impulse to copy the original text. In the process of scoring, however, the grade will get marked down in all cases involving copy. Students should establish self-confidence. With a complete framework, clear logics and appropriate words, their summaries are already good enough.

3. Countermeasures

Summary, the new type of writing in TEM-4 examines English majors' reading comprehension ability, information extraction ability, summarizing ability and paraphrasing ability. Therefore, in the process of education, teachers should focus on training these three abilities. In the aspect of

reading comprehension, teachers can choose excerpts of original English works, and ask students to read and understand these excerpts within the prescribed time, so as to increase students' inputting amount and enhance their abilities of analyzing original English materials. They can also choose some long and difficult sentences in original English works and ask students to analyze and understand, so as to cultivate students' ability to grasp and analyze the textual framework. Of course, the improvement of reading comprehension ability needs time. It is directly related to students' vocabulary, grammar, scope of knowledge and thinking mode. Therefore, if students want to pass TEM-4 successfully, they must lay a good foundation and improve their reading ability during the freshman year. In terms of information extraction ability, teachers can instruct students to extract five "W" and one "H" information according to the material. In this process, teachers need to pay attention to the guidance of students. Some of the five "W" and one "H" information is irrelevant; some information is important. They need to teach students how to choose. Summary ability and paraphrasing ability are the language output ability, which involves not only the accurate understanding of the original text and the accurate extraction of information, but also the writing strategy of how the English thinking mode is applied in layout, writing and language usage. The summarizing and paraphrasing process needs to take into account the tone and attitude of the original material. It requires students to express the contents of the original materials objectively, fairly and comprehensively. It also requires the students to organize the key information in English by using the English thinking method reasonably. Teachers should actively cultivate students' English thinking habit and improve their ability of summarizing and paraphrasing in the daily teaching process. Students should also take the initiative to cultivate their reading ability, information extraction ability, summarizing and paraphrasing ability, as well as writing ability and skills. Only when these abilities are greatly improved can students build up confidence in their English proficiency and lay a good foundation of the passing TEM-4.

4. Conclusion

After 2016, the writing section of TEM-4 added the new question of summary. It tests English majors' reading comprehension ability, information extraction ability, summarizing ability as well as paraphrasing ability. In the education process, teachers should help students to improve these abilities, and cultivate their English thinking mode, so as to pass the exam smoothly.

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