

The significance and efficiency use of using Chinese idioms in improving writing skills for HSK test

Tầm quan trọng và tính hiệu quả của việc sử dụng thành ngữ tiếng Trung để nâng cao kỹ năng Viết trong kỳ thi HSK

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Tóm tắt

Idioms are crucial in both teaching and learning Chinese language. They have even become a standard for assessing Chinese language proficiency, especially in the process of writing. The accurate use of idioms is an extremely effective skill for improving writing. By utilizing idioms correctly, one can express viewpoints more vividly and enhance the persuasiveness of a paper. This article starts from the grammatical structure of idioms and aims to help test-takers establish a correct writing mindset, such as opening paragraphs, supporting/ extending paragraphs, and conclusion paragraphs. The article also classifies 114 idioms from the test outline into different situations in various paragraphs, providing examples of sentence construction to help test-takers understand the meaning of idioms and their correct usage. Based on previous exam question types, the author introduces relevant idioms in 11 exam themes to help test-takers establish a correct idiom database. To enhance the visual effect of idioms, the author also provides a comparison of before and after of the use of idioms to strengthen the effectiveness of using idioms. Obviously, the role of idioms in writing cannot be ignored.

Keywords: idiom, writing, HSK test, improve.

Abstract

Thành ngữ có vai trò quan trọng trong việc dạy và học tiếng Trung. Chúng thậm chí còn trở thành tiêu chuẩn để đánh giá trình độ ngôn ngữ, đặc biệt là kỹ năng viết. Thành ngữ là một công cụ cực kỳ hiệu quả giúp nâng cao kỹ năng này. Sử dụng thành ngữ một cách chính xác có thể giúp người viết thể hiện quan điểm một cách sinh động hơn, đồng thời tăng tính thuyết phục của bài viết. Bài báo này phân tích cấu trúc ngữ pháp của thành ngữ để giúp thí sinh hình thành tư duy viết đúng, ví dụ như biết cách mở đầu đoạn văn, chứng minh quan điểm hay mở rộng lập luận, và cách viết phần kết luận. Bài viết còn phân loại 114 thành ngữ trong bài thi thành các câu khác nhau ở các đoạn văn khác nhau, đưa ra các ví dụ về cách xây dựng câu để giúp thí sinh hiểu được ý nghĩa của thành ngữ và sử dụng chúng một cách đúng đắn. Dựa trên các dạng câu hỏi trong những kỳ thi trước, tác giả giới thiệu các thành ngữ có liên quan trong 11 chủ đề thi nhằm giúp thí sinh xây dựng cơ sở dữ liệu thành ngữ chính xác. Để có cái nhìn rõ ràng hơn về thành ngữ, tác giả đã so sánh tính hiệu quả của việc diễn đạt trước và sau khi sử dụng thành ngữ, đồng thời khẳng định vai trò của thành ngữ trong văn viết là rất rõ ràng và không thể bỏ qua.

Từ khóa: thành ngữ, viết, kỳ thi HSK, nâng cao.

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1. Introduction

Writing is the best way to demonstrate one's mastery of a language and it reflects the comprehensive ability of foreign language learners. The improvement of writing skills is the result of various factors, such as grammar, vocabulary, accumulation of argumentative materials, and coherence of article structure. With the improvement of Chinese proficiency, writing has become an important criterion to test learners' abilities. So, how to improve writing skills always causes confusion. Among many standards for the level of language proficiency, I believe the accurate and skillful use of idioms is one of the undoubtedly one.

Chinese idioms are fixed phrases that are traditionally used, have rich meanings, and are written in a formal style. They occupy a pivotal position in modern Chinese. Their expressive power is higher than that of general words, and their structure is fixed and concise, with rich connotations. They are widely used not only in excellent literary works, newspapers and magazines but also in daily oral and written communication. Learning Chinese idioms is an indispensable part of mastering Chinese comprehensively, communicating, writing fluently and authentically with Chinese people. In the views of most Chinese learners, idioms in Chinese are profound and unattainable. In modern Chinese, disyllabic words are dominant. Starting from the primary stage of learning Chinese for international learners, they have gradually become accustomed to this feature. However, in terms of form, most idioms come from ancient books and classics, and are mainly based on the "four-character format." In terms of meaning, due to the influence of ancient Chinese, they are generally composed of "one word, one meaning" in the four-character format. Some idioms have not only literal meanings but also profound "implications."

However, for Chinese learners, idioms are more like putting four unrelated morphemes together, even if they can understand the literal meaning of idioms based on acquired knowledge. It is difficult to comprehend the extended and metaphorical meanings of idioms. The relatively fixed structure format of idioms and the specific cultural connotations behind them make the acquisition of idioms a difficult part of the Chinese learning process. Even many Chinese learners have a fear of learning idioms and often adopt avoidance strategies even after acquiring certain idioms. Therefore, learning Chinese idioms has become a major challenge in the vocabulary learning process for international learners. Correct use of idioms requires accumulation and familiarity.

In the process of preparing for the HSK test, the writing section usually does not have answers, which makes it difficult for candidates to self-test the writing part. Therefore, providing students with some writing materials is an effective way to improve their writing skills.

2. The origin and structure of idioms

Idioms are fixed phrases formed through long-term usage and refinement in the Chinese language. They are language units that are more expressive than individual words in meaning and have a grammatical function similar to that of words. Idioms are also rich in profound thoughts and are concise, memorable, and easy to use. They often carry emotional connotations, including negative and positive implications, and some are neutral.

The structure of idioms is tight, and their word order cannot be arbitrarily changed, nor can their components be substituted, exchanged, or added. Most idioms consist of four characters, but there are also some that have three or more characters, and some are divided into two parts separated by a comma, like “人无远虑，必有

近忧”。 Idioms originate from ancient classics, works, historical stories, and oral traditions.

Idioms are a prominent feature of Chinese traditional culture, with fixed structural forms and expressions that convey a certain meaning. In a sentence, idioms are used as a whole and perform the functions of subject, object, attributive, and so on. A large part of idioms has been passed down from ancient times and represents a story or allusion. Some idioms are

even mini-sentences. Idioms are a kind of ready-made language, similar to idiomatic expressions and proverbs, but with some differences.

2.1. Grammatical structure of idioms

Due to the large number and the fact that each of the four characters in an idiom has its own meaning, idioms have a complex structural feature. The following is a rough outline of their structure^[1,2]:

Table 1. Grammatical classification of idioms

Type of structure	Examples
Subject-predicate idioms	名副其实、盛气凌人、胸有成竹、万象更新
Compound subject -predicate idioms	天翻地覆、水落石出、手舞足蹈, 莺歌燕舞
Compound verb-object idioms	知己知彼、发号施令、提心吊胆、破釜沉舟、称心如意、丢三落四
Compound noun-verb idioms	粗心大意、南辕北辙、镜花水月
Compound verb-verb idioms	突飞猛进、勇往直前
Verb-complement idioms	逍遥法外、问道于盲、青出于蓝、爱不释手、心乱如麻、重于泰山
Coordinate idioms	千山万水、画蛇添足、喜怒哀乐、吹拉弹唱、琴棋书画
Attributive idioms	倾盆大雨、窈窕淑女
Consecutive idioms	见异思迁、先斩后奏
Causal idioms	水滴石穿、水落石出

2.2. Classification of idioms in common HSK test

Idioms express complex meanings in the most concise language. If Chinese learners can use idioms skillfully in their writing, undoubtedly, it helps to improve their writing skills and the level of their articles. In order to enable students to accurately master and use Chinese idioms, the author has classified and summarized common Chinese idioms, making it easier for students to remember and use them.

The New HSK Vocabulary (2012 Revised Edition)^[3-6] mentions 114 idioms. There is no doubt that paragraphs are extremely important in the writing process. It can be said that if one cannot write paragraphs, one cannot write articles. Except for the special opening and closing paragraphs, a typical paragraph has a structure of a topic sentence + supporting/extending sentence + conclusion sentence. In other words, each paragraph of the main argument of an article adopts this structure.

Based on writing habits and the difficulty of HSK writing, if a paper is divided into three paragraphs: an opening paragraph, a supporting/ extending paragraph, and a conclusion paragraph, the 114 idioms mentioned in the outline can be roughly classified, and with the help of some examples, students can better understand how to use idioms in writing.

Table 2. The position and examples of idioms in writing

Paragraph	Sentences	HSK test idioms	Sentences for HSK writing
Opening paragraph	Topic sentences	众所周知	众所周知，气候对健康有不可忽视的影响。
		迄今为止	迄今为止，我还没有去过中国。
		刻不容缓	治理环境刻不容缓。
		爱不释手	我对这本书爱不释手。
		博大精深	中国文化，博大精深。
		举足轻重	李老师在我们学校是举足轻重的人物。
		饱经沧桑	爷爷的一生饱经沧桑。
		微不足道	我的这点付出是微不足道的。
		岂有此理	这样解决问题根本不公平，岂有此理啊！
		不可思议	最近发生了一件不可思议的事情。
		肆无忌惮	伪劣产品的制造已经到了肆无忌惮的程度。
		天伦之乐	王叔叔退休后，在家享受天伦之乐。
称心如意	我买到了一个称心如意的书包。		
Whole paragraph	Describe emotions	兴高采烈	我兴高采烈地和朋友去旅行。
		兴致勃勃	我兴致勃勃地开快递的包装。
		心甘情愿	我心甘情愿地照顾生病的妈妈。
		朝气蓬勃	小明朝气蓬勃，永远乐观向上。
		小心翼翼	为了不打扰家人休息，我小心翼翼地推开了房门。
		迫不及待	我迫不及待地打开快递。
		热泪盈眶	听到这个消息，我感动得热泪盈眶。
		吞吞吐吐	在喜欢的男生面前，我吞吞吐吐不知道说什么好。
		见多识广	她去过很多国家，见多识广。
		不相上下	我和闺蜜的中文水平不相上下。
		欣欣向荣	我开了一家奶茶店，生意欣欣向荣。

		不言而喻	马上要去中国了，激动的心情不言而喻。
		烟花爆竹	现在过年的时候，中国不允许放烟花爆竹。
		南辕北辙	只有目标明确，才不会南辕北辙。
		丢三落四	我有丢三落四的坏习惯。
		东张西望	考试的时候不可以东张西望。
		全力以赴	我全力以赴准备HSK考试。
		通货膨胀	通货膨胀，让物价飞速上涨。
		无动于衷	他竟然对我的热情无动于衷。
		无精打采	她生病了，一副无精打采的样子。
		无理取闹	小孩子的无理取闹，让家长很头疼。
		当务之急	现在当务之急是解决环境污染的问题。
Supporting/ extending paragraph	Beginning of the plot	自力更生	我很享受现在的生活，自力更生，自得其乐。
		喜闻乐见	游泳是一项喜闻乐见的运动。
		废寝忘食	考试前，我废寝忘食地备考试。
		画蛇添足	这件事我已经说得很清楚了，再多说就是画蛇添足了。
		供不应求	这个球鞋从上市以来，供不应求。
		津津有味	我津津有味地品尝着最爱的蛋糕。
Supporting/ extending paragraph	Process of the plot	无微不至	在家人无微不至的照顾下，我很快恢复了健康。
		后顾之忧	退休金让我们没有后顾之忧。
		聚精会神	我经常聚精会神地一做事情。
		侃侃而谈	不论对谁，他总能侃侃而谈。
		斩钉截铁	我斩钉截铁地拒绝了他的表白。
		狼吞虎咽	一天没吃饭，我看到美食立刻狼吞虎咽起来。
		络绎不绝	岷港的游客络绎不绝。
		不择手段	他为了达到自己的目的不择手段。
		锲而不舍	他锲而不舍地申请中国的研究生，终于成功了。
		争先恐后	看到奖品，同学们争先恐后来报名。
		雪上加霜	生病加上丢钱包，真是雪上加霜，苦不堪言啊！
		循序渐进	学习知识要循序渐进，一步一个脚印。

		再接再厉	这次失败没有关系，我们再接再厉。
		拔苗助长	拔苗助长的方式对学习没有任何好处。
		礼尚往来	礼尚往来，是人之常情。
		理直气壮	我们可以理直气壮地指出了他的错误。
		力所能及	我们鼓励孩子自己去做力所能及的事情。
		新陈代谢	掉头发是正常的新陈代谢的结果。
		日新月异	最近科技的发展日新月异，令人目不暇接。
		一如既往	虽然我通过了考试，但还要一如既往地努力。
Supporting/ extending paragraph	Progression of the plot	一丝不苟	他对待学习一丝不苟。
		与日俱增	我对妈妈的想念与日俱增。
		有条不紊	只有精打细算才能有条不紊地生活。
		精打细算	为了省钱，他精打细算地过日子。
		精益求精	德国人精益求精的态度值得我们学习。
		想方设法	他想方设法找到了女孩的联系方式。
		千方百计	他千方百计找到了女孩的联系方式。
		滔滔不绝	她滔滔不绝地述着旅行的收获。
		层出不穷	新型饮品层出不穷。
		潜移默化	我潜移默化地被他改变了。
		无能为力	丈夫不想离婚，却无能为力。
		恍然大悟	我恍然大悟，终于明白了他的用意。
		家喻户晓	他在家乡成了家喻户晓的画家。
		莫名其妙	我的手机莫名其妙地丢了。
		难能可贵	拾金不昧是难能可贵的品质。
		齐心协力	我们齐心协力地完成了这项大工程。
		深情厚谊	老师对我的深情厚谊，我永生难忘。
		锦上添花	她本来就聪明，加上漂亮的外表，真是锦上添花啊！
兢兢业业	他兢兢业业地工作，认真地学习。		
Supporting/ extending paragraph	Conclusion sentences	举世瞩目	我的梦想是成为举世瞩目的明星。
		名副其实	他是名副其实的大孝子。

		各抒己见	讨论就是各抒己见，集思广益。
		根深蒂固	女人做家务是根深蒂固的传统思想。
		急功近利	他总是急功近利，没有长远规划。
		急于求成	急于求成往往得不偿失。
		得不偿失	为了工作，忽视健康，是一件得不偿失的事情。
		竭尽全力	他为了这次考试，竭尽全力，经常通宵学习。
		空前绝后	这个建筑真是空前绝后啊！
		苦尽甘来	父母苦尽甘来，终于换来了幸福的生活。
		优胜劣汰	优胜劣汰就是市场运转的机制。
		半途而废	他学过钢琴，但很快就半途而废了。
		恰到好处	她唱歌时情感把握恰到好处。
		实事求是	实事求是地说，我不喜欢他的做事方法。
		统筹兼顾	找工作时，要统筹兼顾自己的爱好和市场需求。
		得天独厚	虽然有得天独厚的天赋，他仍然不认真学习。
		悬崖峭壁	他喜欢攀登悬崖峭壁。
		鸦雀无声	教室里鸦雀无声，同学们都在认真思考。
		飞禽走兽	如今餐桌上，飞禽走兽，无所不有。
		川流不息	步行街里热闹非凡，游客川流不息。
Whole paragraph	Describe environment	风土人情	越南的风土人情与中国大不同。
		物美价廉	这个超市的东西物美价廉。
		无忧无虑	孩子们无忧无虑地玩耍，真让人羡慕啊！
		一目了然	是非对错，一目了然。
		一举两得	骑自行车既锻炼身体又避免堵车，真是一举两得啊！
		知足常乐	知足常乐就是我的座右铭。
		理所当然	我理所当然地认为妈妈最爱我。
		任重道远	教育工作任重道远，背负着年轻人的未来。
Conclusion paragraph		无穷无尽	知识是无穷无尽的，你永远学不完。
		归根到底	归根到底，环境被破坏还是意识的问题。
		总而言之	总而言之，这件事情对我的启发很大。

		见义勇为	见义勇为值得表扬。
		一帆风顺	祝老师一帆风顺。
		相辅相成	这两件事相辅相成，缺一不可。

3. The clever use of idioms in HSK test composition types

3.1. Writing section test questions and requirements for the New HSK test

The writing section of the New HSK Level 5 test consists of three major questions: completing sentences, writing key words, and writing based on pictures. There is a total of 10 questions, numbered 91-100, with a total score of 100 points. The test primarily assesses students' writing abilities in areas such as sentence formation and short essay writing.

The writing section of the New HSK Level 6 test consists of an abbreviation. The requirement is for students to compress a 1000-word article

into a short essay of approximately 400 words, while maintaining the main content and genre of the original text. The Level 6 abbreviation test places high demands on language organization and refinement, as well as coherence and cohesion skills.

This article refers to Appendix I of the General Syllabus for International Chinese Language Teaching^[7,8] "Suggestions on Topics and Contents of Chinese Language Teaching" and combines with the commonly tested question types in the HSK test^[9], to roughly classify commonly used idioms into 11 categories, as shown in the table below.

Table 3. Classification of common idioms by topics in writin

Topics	Idioms
1. Personal quality	平易近人、宽宏大度、冰清玉洁、持之以恒、锲而不舍、废寝忘食、临危不惧、光明磊落、不屈不挠、料事如神、足智多谋、融会贯通、学贯中西、博古通今、才华横溢、出类拔萃、博大精深、集思广益、文质彬彬、风度翩翩、相貌堂堂、斗志昂扬、意气风发、威风凛凛、容光焕发、神采奕奕、相貌堂堂、眉清目秀、和蔼可亲、心慈面善、冰清玉洁、蓬头垢面
2. Emotion and attitude	忐忑不安、心惊肉跳、心神不定、心慌意乱、七上八下、心急如焚、悠然自得、眉飞色舞、喜笑颜开、神采奕奕、欣喜若狂、呆若木鸡、喜出望外、垂头丧气、无动于衷、勃然大怒、心旷神怡、心平气和、目不转睛、眉开眼笑、愁眉苦脸、愁眉紧锁、目瞪口呆、嬉皮笑脸、兴高采烈
3. Physical and mental health	头昏脑胀、神清气爽、生龙活虎、无精打采、无微不至
4. Social interaction	落落大方、能说会道、巧舌如簧、能言善辩、伶牙俐齿、出口成章、娓娓而谈、妙语连珠、口若悬河、对答如流、滔滔不绝、谈笑风生、高谈阔论、豪言壮语、夸夸其谈、花言巧语
5. Food culture	狼吞虎咽、美味佳肴、津津有味

6. Cooperation	幸福美满, 相敬如宾, 不动声色、争先恐后, 同心协力
7. Bustling scene	五彩缤纷、车水马龙、人来人往, 人山人海、多彩绚丽、美不胜收、琳琅满目、熙熙攘攘
8. Tourism and scenery	美不胜收、富丽堂皇、美妙绝伦、巧夺天工、锦上添花、别有洞天、举世闻名, 举世瞩目, 迫不及待、千山万水
9. Study	学无止境、学而不厌、真才实学、不假思索、聚精会神、理直气壮、如饥似渴、开卷有益、学而不倦、发奋图强、废寝忘食、争分夺秒、孜孜不倦、笨鸟先飞、闻鸡起舞、自强不息、只争朝夕、不甘示弱、全力以赴、力争上游、循序渐进、日积月累、温故知新、学海无涯
10. The beauty of nature	波澜壮阔、春意盎然、春暖花开、春风化雨、暑气蒸人、烈日炎炎、秋风送爽、秋高气爽、秋色宜人、冰天雪地、寒冬腊月、春光明媚、万紫千红、生机勃勃、春色满园、鸟语花香、百花齐放、和风细雨、锦绣河山、高耸入云、水天一色、波光粼粼、湖光山色、山明水秀、高山流水、繁花似锦、绿草如茵、古树参天、万木争荣、百花齐放、万紫千红、桃红柳绿、绿树成荫
11. Values and concepts	人无远虑, 必有近忧、静如处女, 动如脱兔、千军易得, 一将难求、麻雀虽小, 五脏俱全、宁为鸡首, 无为牛后、千里之行, 始于足下、三人行必有我师、人不可貌相, 海不可斗量、久旱逢甘雨, 他乡遇故知、九牛二虎之力、一年之计在于春, 一日之计在于晨

3.2. Question type - Picture writing

Picture writing is an important question type in the HSK 5 writing section. To show how idioms are used in different types of picture writing, this article provides explanations for three commonly tested question types, like character writing, health writing, and rules writing.

3.2.1. Character writing

Describing a character based on a picture is a common writing task that often appears in the tests. In this type of writing, having a clear writing process is crucial. To organize the process, we can follow these steps:

Step 1, Give the protagonist a name. The character can be yourself or you can use a common name such as Xiaomei小美, Xiaofang小芳, Xiaoli小李, or Ms. Chen陈女士 for women, and Xiaoming小明, Xiaowang小王, Mr. Zhao赵先生 for men. If the character is a typical Westerner, you can use names like Mary or Jack.

Step 2, Determine the time (as long as it makes sense), the location, other people present, what they are doing, and their emotions.

Step 3, Use the "topic sentence + story plot + conclusion" writing framework.

Step 4, Search for relevant idioms in your mind.



Figure 1. Picture writing of past tests related to communication

After organizing the first three steps, the appropriate idioms can be used in the fourth step. Anyhow, this article will focus on the use of idioms in different types of writing both before and after using idioms. There are some examples of figure 1.

1) When expressing the happy state of the character

- BEFORE: 小华很开心。
- AFTER: 小华开心得手舞足蹈。
小华开心得合不拢嘴。
小华眉飞色舞地讲着她的喜悦。

2) When expressing sadness

- BEFORE: 她看上去很难过。
- AFTER: 她无精打采，难过极了。
她一蹶不振的样子让人心疼。

3) When express talking with someone (H51001)

➤ BEFORE : 玛丽和杰克经常一起聊天。

➤ AFTER: 玛丽和杰克相谈甚欢。

玛丽和杰克侃侃而谈。

玛丽和杰克无话不谈。

玛丽和杰克总是滔滔不绝。

玛丽和杰克说起话来没完没了。

玛丽总是被杰克的花言巧语逗得开怀大笑。

杰克的高谈阔论早就让玛丽反感了。

4) When interview happens (H51553)

➤ BEFORE: 他今天接受电视台的采访。

➤ AFTER: 他今天在接受电视台采访时谈吐风趣，得心应手。

3.2.2. Health writing

The topic of health is also a common type of HSK tests. Pay attention to the idioms used in illness and low mood.



Figure 2. Picture writing of past tests related to illness

1) A perspective on health

➤ BEFORE: 健康对每一个人来说都很重要。

➤ AFTER: 健康的重要性不言而喻。

健康对我们每一个人至关重要。

2) Expressing care from doctors and family (H51552)

➤ BEFORE: 王叔叔生病了，有妻子照顾，有医生关心。

➤ AFTER: 经医生的对症下药，和家人无微不至的照顾下，王叔叔的病情大有起色。

3) Common cold symptoms (H51221)

➤ BEFORE: 她感冒了，头疼，流鼻涕。

➤ AFTER: 她因感冒浑身酸痛，精神萎靡，还伴有头疼和流鼻涕。

4) Emotional expression after illness (H51448)

➤ BEFORE: 她的胳膊骨折了。

➤ AFTER: 她因胳膊骨折而愁眉苦脸，疼痛让她苦不堪言。

3.2.3. Rules writing



H50000



H51008

Figure 3. Picture writing of past tests related to prohibition

1) Emotional expression after illness (H50000)

➤ BEFORE: 这里禁止钓鱼。

➤ AFTER: 禁止钓鱼的标志，一目了然。

2) Emotional expression after illness (H51008)

➤ BEFORE: 禁止吸烟。

➤ AFTER: 毋庸置疑，吸烟有害健康。

3) Emotional expression after illness

➤ BEFORE: 节约用水，热爱地球，很重要。

➤ AFTER: 众所周知，人们对浪费水源已经习以为常。

Of course, using idioms is not a case of the more the better, nor is it necessary to add them.

However, in an 80-100 word essay, if used accurately, 1-3 idioms can be excellent. The concise and expressive nature of idioms will be particularly evident in short essays.

4. Conclusion

Idioms are a characteristic of Chinese culture and a national treasure of the Chinese language. They often consist of four concise characters but convey profound meanings. This article is geared towards the writing test at the HSK5-6 level, and skillful use of idioms is believed to play a crucial role in improving writing skills in both the test and future writing. The first step in using idioms is to correctly understand the words. By combining each character's meaning

