

# Application of Keywords Strategies Based on the Effect of Alignment in Continuation Writing

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**Abstract:** Based on the effect of alignment, namely, the coordination between input and output in language, this thesis analyzes the functions of keywords in obtaining main idea of the passage, presupposing the plot and enriching the content and then puts forwards three keywords strategies. The first strategy is reading the content and classifying keywords. And then allocating keywords and associating topic words. The last one is reviewing keywords and imitating language usage. It takes the continuation writing of the National College Entrance Examination in Zhejiang province in June, 2021 as an example. The main purpose is to improve students' ability to write after reading, and to evaluate the effectiveness of these three strategies through three instruments, namely, literature research method, questionnaire and interview.

**Keywords:** Continuation Writing; keywords strategies; the Effect of Alignment

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Research background

In the contemporary era, with the proliferation of second language acquisition research, a multitude of scholars have begun to pay attention to the study of psychological phenomena among second language learners and the characteristics of the conversation generated by language learners. As a universally psychological mechanism, the effect of alignment in language usage has received unprecedented attention and ignited great interest in the field of psychological linguistics and second language acquisition. Therefore, scholars have conducted a lot of in-depth theoretical discussions and exploratory empirical studies on it. Pickering and Garrod maintain that alignment is a mechanism that drives interpersonal communication and negotiation to be more smooth and coherent. <sup>[1]</sup> Atkinson et al. highlight that alignment not only occurs between people but also between people and their social or physical environment from the perspective of language learning. <sup>[2]</sup> Hence, alignment is a key strategy of second language acquisition. When students compose a continuation writing, they also experience the effect of alignment. In a previous experiment, 100 students were divided into two groups. One group of students was given a short story written in Chinese, while the other group was given the same story written in English. Then, they were required to read the story within a time limit and to write the continuous story in English based on the provided story. Results from the experiment revealed that students who read the story in English performed better than their counterparts in terms of vocabulary and grammar (article, tense, and number agreement). That is because when students read the passage in English, they will construct a correct context, associate the relevant English words, and imitate the language in their mind. Consequently, what they read will propel them to produce when they create the following story. Scientifically, representations in the human brain, which are not static, will change in accordance with environment and processing tasks. <sup>[3]</sup> Wang Chuming also claims that the effect of alignment exists in continuation writing, which is a close combination of comprehension and production. <sup>[4]</sup> The combination strengthens the coordination between input and output, creates the need for communication, and triggers off the interaction between the reading content and readers.

### ***1.2 The significance of the study***

As the degree of difficulty in the English of College Entrance Examination in Zhejiang province is increasing year by year, plenty of students find it tough to obtain a satisfactory score in this subject, especially in continuation writing. As this type of exercise demands comprehension and production simultaneously based on abundant vocabulary, logical thinking and vivid imagination, it is imperative for scholars and instructors to come up with some constructive and applicable solutions to help students tackle this predicament and achieve rapid progress in this field. Therefore, a variety of researches and experiments about continuation writing on the basis of the effect of alignment should be attached to significant importance.

### ***1.3 The definition of Continuation Writing***

Continuation writing can be defined as a method to integrate language input with output and to promote students' capability to use language as a whole. <sup>[5]</sup> In the case of College Entrance Examination, it means that after reading a passage of about 350 words, students are required to write a passage of about 150 words according to the content of the given passage, the beginning of the two following paragraphs and ten keywords underlined in the passage. There must be logical cohesion and a complete structure between the created content and the given passage. At the same time, students are required to use more than five keywords appropriately according to National Education Examinations Authority in 2015. Therefore, continuation writing boasts a wide range of advantages. The first merit is igniting students' motivation to express their ideas. In the process of creating the content, students are supposed to associate language usage with pragmatic context, which helps students enhance their ability to convey foreign languages. The second one emphasizes the function and significance of context. Continuation writing requires students to employ the context of the original content and to create the story by imitating the given passage, thus ensuring the logical development of the content and the appropriate usage of language. Besides, it is more consistent with the law of language learning and usage, which has a better wash-back effect in exams.<sup>[6]</sup> The last one is promoting interaction and learning. In line with some experiments, referring back to the original content happens frequently in continuation writing, which is a useful strategy and a fundamental way of boosting interaction and learning.<sup>[7]</sup> In the teaching process of continuation writing, a majority of instructors are able to guide students to obtain the main information of the content they read and to construct the new content according to the beginning of the follow-up paragraphs, but the time invested in guiding students to employ the keywords strategically is little.

### ***1.4 The definition of the Effect of Alignment***

The interactive alignment model was proposed by Pickering and Garrod in 2004. According to this model, alignment derives from interaction, which is the key to successful interpersonal communication. In the process of conversation, the speaker and the listener cooperate and adapt to each other dynamically, which makes the phenomenon of alignment emerge in the brains of both sides. This alignment occurs at two levels. One is linguistic level, such as phonology, vocabulary, syntax and so on. The other is the context model level, which refers to the multidimensional representation constructed for understanding the content, including the five core dimensions of character, time, place, cause and effect, as well as the intention of communication. The communicators coordinate their situational patterns in interaction, which leads to linguistic coordination and understanding of information in communication. Situational patterns and linguistic representations make linguistic comprehension and output closely integrated through interaction and coordination, thus facilitating the communication of information smoothly. The closer the integration of language comprehension and output is, the stronger the effect of alignment will be. The stronger the effect of alignment is, the more effective the learning will be. <sup>[8]</sup> Hence, the effect of alignment provides a new perspective for us to recognize the teaching and learning of foreign language. And it exerts a vital part in continuation writing and determines the efficiency of learning. <sup>[9]</sup> Only through reading the given passage seriously and acquiring sufficient information, can students continue their writing based on the important evidence. In this process, keywords help students concentrate on the main character, action, emotion and so forth. Thus, instructors and students ought to devote more time to understanding the functions of these keywords and how to employ these keywords appropriately.

## 2. Functions of keywords

### 2.1 To obtain the main idea of the passage

The keywords must reflect the main idea of the passage and convey the essential information on the grounds that continuation writing requires students to expand the given passage into a sound story with a complete plot and a coherent structure with more than five keywords. For example, the keywords of a model exercise provided in the Test Instructions in 2021 contain the basic elements of the narrative. For example, locations: Park Avenue and the bank; characters: the young man and the bank chief; carriers to develop the plot: suitcases, in the back seat, the loud noise of an alarm, robbery, people and the shouts. All these elements basically cover the main idea of the passage. After scanning through the passage, it can be founded that information is connecting these keywords logically: The author encountered a young man at Park Avenue in front of a bank and offered to assist him in carrying the suitcases in the back seat of a taxi. When the author heard the loud noise of an alarm from the direction of the bank and shouts of people on the street, he tumbled that there was a robbery. Afraid of being deemed as the bank chief, he escaped with the suitcases promptly.

### 2.2 To presuppose the plot

Since keywords contain the basic elements of a narrative and the usage of them is a significant criterion for the evaluation of the continuation writing, they can serve as the presumption of the continuous plot in the passage. In other words, after scanning the passage to get the main idea and analyzing the beginning of the follow-up paragraphs to determine the direction of the plot, we can create the following story based on these keywords. The Test Instructions in 2021 provide the beginning of follow-up paragraphs: “As he was running, Arthur heard the young man shouting behind, ‘Stop, stop!’” and “The taxi stopped in front of the Police Station and Arthur...” Therefore, we can speculate on the content of the first paragraph: Arthur ran away and took a taxi to the Police Station. Meanwhile, we can also speculate on the content of the second paragraph: A funny and unexpected thing happened to Arthur on his way to work one day. On the basis of these two directions, we can set out to write the following plot with the assistance of keywords (see Table 1).

Table 1. Plots with keywords

Para.	Story line	Plots with keywords
1	What did Arthur do after escaping?	Arthur clenched the suitcase firmly and called a taxi in a rush.
1	What did he think in the taxi?	Retrospecting what happened on the street, he speculated that there was a robbery in the bank and the young man must be the bank thief...
2	What did the suitcase involve?	It involved a staff ID card and some worn maintenance tools. They ultimately drew the conclusion that the man was an electrician ...
2	What was the final result?	It was indeed a funny misunderstanding. Actually, there was no robbery in the bank, but a fire alarm was set off abruptly...

### 2.3 To enrich the content

Besides supporting the presumption of the following story, keywords can also motivate relevant topic words (see Table 2), thus making the content of continuation writing more diversified and the description more vivid. For instance, the ten keywords in this model passage can be associated with these topic words, which enrich the content enormously.

Table 2. Relevant topic words

Keywords	Relevant topic words
Park Avenue, the bank	a crowded and busy avenue, the hustle and bustle, turbulent, passers-by, luxurious cars, high buildings, a large sum of money, shriek, horror, the bank manager...
the young man, the bank thief	bolt, steal, immoral, flee, run away, lots of money, pistol, police, cruiser, interrogate...
robbery, suitcase, the back seat	the heavy suitcase, doubt, fear, the driver, promptly and quickly, urgency, call the police...
the noise of an alarm, the shouts	a funny misunderstanding, scare, panic-stricken, gather, assemble, push and squeeze, congestion, catch the thief...

### 3. Keywords strategies

Based on the above analysis of the functions of keywords in the continuation writing, the author of this thesis puts forward three strategies concerning the employment of keywords. The specific keywords strategies are elaborated based on the continuation writing of the National College Entrance Examination in Zhejiang province in June, 2021. The given passage goes as Appendix.

#### 3.1 Reading the passage and classifying keywords

After reading the given passage, students should classify the keywords according to the basic elements of a narrative and quickly obtain the main idea of the passage. The designated exercise provides ten keywords: dad, worked, family, future, farmer, learned, tiring, growing up, realize, fair. Then, the author invites students to classify these keywords (see Table 3) in accordance with the elements of a narrative.

Table 3. Classifying keywords

character	dad, farmer
action	worked, learned, growing up, realize
emotion	tiring, fair
thing	family, future

After classifying keywords, students immediately get the main idea of the passage as follows:

After graduating from high school, the boy was employed by a neighboring farmer, landed a tiring job, and made a fortune through his endeavor and perspiration. However, he was reluctant to contribute the money to the family. Later, when he saw his dad working arduously, he realized that his parents wanted to mold him into a selfless person in the future and to drive him to grow up. Finally, the boy learned to be unselfish and found it fair to give his money to his dad.

#### 3.2 Allocating keywords and associating topic words

The exercise in 2021 provides the beginning of the follow-up two paragraphs: One is “The pay arrived at last.” The other is “I understood immediately what my parents were worried about.”

Then, the author instructs students to conceive the main content of these two paragraphs by combining the beginning of the two paragraphs with keywords and then allocating it to the two paragraphs for the sake of avoiding the difficult employment of keywords in the continuation writing. Since the two paragraphs focus on the description of the process and the statement of ending respectively in the development of the story, the distribution of keywords before writing should also be paid heed to. Namely, the first paragraph is supposed to chiefly employ keywords that describe the process, while the second paragraph is supposed to employ it that determine or summarize the outcome of the story. Therefore, the keywords of the exercise in 2021 can be allocated according to the given paragraphs as Table 4:

Table 4. Allocating keywords

Para.	Main idea	Keywords
1	After obtaining the money, the boy planned to use this sum of money with delight and was reluctant to contribute the money to the family. However, the author suddenly witnessed his dad working laboriously under the scorching sunshine.	Dad, family, farmer, tiring, worked, growing up
2	The boy realized that his parents wanted to mold him into a selfless person in the future. Ultimately, the boy gave his money to his dad with pride.	Realized, learned, future, fair

After presupposing the plot and allocating the keywords, students can activate relevant topic words based on these keywords, thus helping the content be more fascinating and informative.

#### 3.3 Reviewing keywords and imitating language usage

In the process of continuation writing, in order to keep the style and logic consistent with the given passage in terms of topic, thinking and terminology, learners should constantly review the given passage, which can trigger language cognition, stimulate cognitive comparison and generate the effect

of alignment in language.<sup>[10]</sup> According to Wang Chuming, no matter in the basic stage of second language acquisition or in the advanced stage of figuring out the language expressions of native speakers, English learning is inseparable from imitation.<sup>[11]</sup> And the most prominent strength of continuation writing is that it incorporates language imitation with the innovation of content and improves students' ability to use foreign languages precisely.<sup>[12]</sup> As a consequence, teachers should guide students in reviewing keywords in the course of continuation writing, which helps to avoid the repeated use of words through imitation and to maintain the unity of language style. For example, when students use the keyword "family", they can refer back to the original usage in the provided passage as "And his dad, Albert, took the money my dad earned and used it to pay family expenses." Then, they can use "family" to describe two scenes. When it comes to the keyword "tiring", students can associate this word with other adjectives that describe a work that involves a lot of effort and energy, such as arduous, painstaking, backbreaking, grueling, laborious and so forth.

After imparting these strategies to students, the author discovered an excellent composition made by a student that goes as follows:

The pay arrived at last. When the sum of money was put in my palm, my eyes popped with an overwhelming sense of exhilaration. Fashionable shoes, stylish clothes, and palatable delicacies poured into my mind in a flash. "What are you going to do with the money?" Dad inquired. I was surprised, reluctant to contribute the money made by my tiring work to the family. However, when my dad's livestock truck started rumbling, and he continued to do his tiring work, his words hit my mind, "A job's a big step to growing up." I understood immediately what my parents were worried about. They were concerned that I was too selfish to give. Seeing summer pouring scorching sunlight into the farm, I realized that although my dad's work was extremely painstaking, he never complained. He thought it was fair to contribute all his money to the family. Ultimately, I made the decision and was determined to be a selfless person in the future. In the evening, after my dad came back, I clenched my own money and handed it to him with pride.

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1 Results of the questionnaire

The subjects of the survey are students of grade 2 in a senior high school. They have already been exposed to the continuation writing for two months and have accumulated basic linguistic knowledge in terms of vocabulary and grammar. Besides, most of them are capable of reading complex and long sentences. Furthermore, they have an itch to absorb new knowledge for the sake of enhancing their grades on continuation writing. In this survey, the author chooses two classes of students, including 37 girls and 45 boys. The title of the author's questionnaire is A Questionnaire Survey on the Effectiveness of Keywords Strategies in Songmen Senior High School at Wenling ( see Appendix). The specific questions and data are as follows.

Q1: What's your previous score on continuation writing generally? (table5)

Q2: What's your score on continuation writing in this monthly examination after learning strategies? (table5)

Q3: Please rate these strategies. (table6)

Table 5. Score comparison

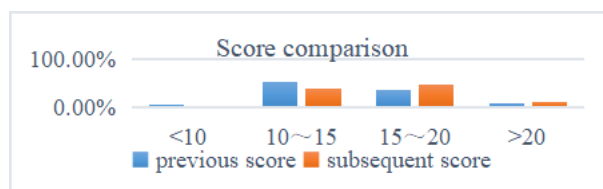
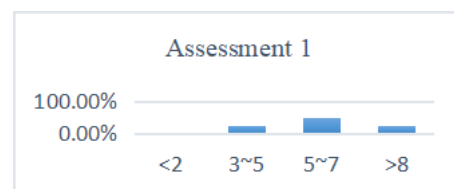


Table 6. Assessment 1



Q4: Do you find it difficult to continue writing? (table7)

Q5: Have your English teacher used some methods to improve your continuation writing?(table7)

Q6: Do you think that these three strategies are helpful in improving your continuation writing?(table7)

Q7: Which strategy has helped you the most?(table8)

Q8: Which strategy has helped you the least?(table8)

Table 7. Choices

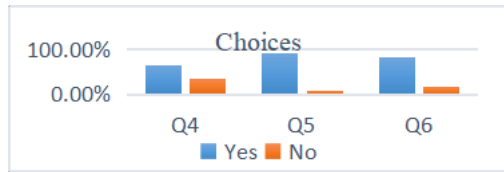


Table 8. Assessment 2



According to the data from questionnaires, the author can conduct some analyses. Firstly, from Question 1 to Question3, the author can find that almost all the students have achieved progress in the continuation writing after learning these strategies. The number of students who have obtained more than 15 points in continuation writing has increased from 42.31% to 57.32%, while the percentage of students who are unable to acquire 15 points has decreased from 58.52% to 42.67%. Additionally, the strategies are rated five or more points by three-quarters of the students or so. Secondly, from Question 4 to Question 6, nearly two-thirds of students have trouble in continuation writing although their teachers have imparted some methods to them in this exercise. Fortunately, more than 80% of students deem the strategies that the author puts forward as conducive and useful. Lastly, from Question 7 to Question 8, its is conspicuous that the second strategy, allocating keywords and associating topic words, gains the most popularity among students, while the first one, reading the passage and classifying keywords, is the least popular one.

#### 4.2 Results of the interview

The author interviews ten students randomly from these two classes about their opinions on these three strategies. A large proportion of them reckon that these three strategies possess various virtues. First and foremost, they have more confidence in writing as they start to write step by step, which helps them control their time more effectively. Besides, by means of classifying the words, they can grasp the mainline of the story and avoid neglecting the main characters or digressing from the theme. In addition, with the assistance of allocating the keywords, the content of the created story becomes more vivid, and they clearly know what should be written in each paragraph. Furthermore, they also manage to associate a diversity of relevant words owing to the third strategy, which allows them to imitate the phrases and sentences provided in the passage.

#### 4.3 The effectiveness of keywords strategies in continuation writing

From the above experimental data, it can be concluded safely that keywords strategies based on the effect of alignment are warmly welcomed by students and can lay a solid foundation for students to create wonderful stories. As a consequence, it can help to expand students' thinking, boost their creativity and enhance their comprehension ability for language usage. In a word, it is conducive to students' comprehension and production in second language acquisition.

### 5. Conclusion

Keywords strategies based on the effect of alignment are beneficial to both instructors and students. On the one hand, from the perspective of instructors, they can make their class more directed and intriguing with the assistance of these strategies. In this way, teachers can arrest students' eyeballs in the class and promote teaching efficiency in the future. On the other hand, from the perspective of students, they are clear about what and how to write after learning these strategies, which can increase their confidence in the examination. Besides, if they find that these strategies help them gain a higher score in continuation writing, they will have a stronger motivation to write and begin to fall in love with writing.

To sum up, confronting with challenges brought by the reform of the College Entrance Examination, instructors should acquire new theories and principles in writing based on previously learned writing models and skills. The three strategies, which involve reading the content and classifying keywords, allocating keywords and associating topic words as well as reviewing keywords and imitating language usage have served as a firm cornerstone for students to strengthen their continuation writing. In the long run, instructions are supposed to exploit new enlightening and effective strategies to combine comprehension and production, enhance students' ability in continuation writing, and promote their

ability for the use of language.

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## Appendix

### A Questionnaire on the Effectiveness of Keywords Strategies in Continuation Writing in Songmen Senior High School at Wenling

1. Gender: Boy/Girl
2. Class: Class1/Class2
3. What's your previous score on continuation writing generally? >20    15-20    10-15    <10
4. Do you find it difficult to continue writing?    Yes/No
5. Have your English teacher used some strategies to improve your continuation writing?    Yes/No
6. Do you think these strategies helpful in improving your continuation writing?    Yes/No
7. What's your score on continuation writing in this monthly examination after learning strategies?  
>20    15-20    10-15    <10
8. Please rate these strategies.    >8    5-7    3-5    <2
9. Which strategy has helped you the most?  
Reading the content and classifying key words  
Allocating key words and associating emotional words  
Reviewing key words and imitating language usage
10. Which strategy has helped you the least?  
Reading the content and classifying key words  
Allocating key words and associating emotional words  
Reviewing key words and imitating language usage
11. Do you have some trouble using these strategies?
12. Can you give me some suggestions on the teaching of continuation writing?

#### The given passage

My dad, George, only had an eighth-grade education. A quiet man, he didn't understand my world of school activities. From age 14, he worked. And his dad, Albert, took the money my dad earned and used it to pay family expenses.

I didn't really understand his world either: He was a livestock trucker and I thought that I would surpass anything he had accomplished by the time I walked across the stage at high school graduation.

Summers in the mid-70s were spent at home shooting baskets, hitting a baseball, or throwing a football, preparing for my future as a quarterback on a football team. In poor weather, I read about

sports or practiced my trombone.

The summer before my eighth grade I was one of a group of boys that a neighboring farmer hired to work in his field. He explained our basic task, the tractor fired up and we were off, riding down the field looking for weeds to spray with chemicals. After a short way, the farmer stopped and pointed at a weed which we missed. Then we began again. This happened over and over, but we soon learned to identify different grasses like cockleburs, lamb's-quarters, foxtails, and the king of weeds, the pretty purple thistle. It was tiring work, but I looked forward to the pay, even though I wasn't sure how much it would amount to.

At home, my dad said, "A job's a big step to growing up. I'm glad you will be contributing to the household." My dad's words made me realize that my earnings might not be mine to do with as I wished.

My labors lasted about two weeks, and the farmer said there might be more work, but I wasn't interested. I decided it was not fair that I had to contribute my money.

Based on the given passage, the author analyzes how to use three keywords strategies in continuation writing as follows.