



# English Society

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# 洋教授寫英文 狗屁不通 錯漏百出

### Judgment Criteria:

1. We need to reassess the letter as if it were written by an average educated adult, not by a professor, let alone by a professor of English.
2. We choose those that have little room for argument and let go of those that may cause even the slightest dispute.
3. A prize is shared among equally good answers to a problem.
4. The letter writer should challenge the authorities quoted, not the participants and the English Society, who are merely messengers delivering information to readers for their own judgment.
5. These are perfect examples of bad English. Our undergraduates are learning the crudest English when our education system consumes 55 billion dollars a year.

以下是香港某大學英文系主管所寫之信件 (A, B, C, X 為真實人名、文章標題和報章名稱的代號) :

### Publication appearing(1) in X X

I am in receipt of(2) your letter(3) reference CIV/01 of 1<sup>st</sup> June, addressed to my solicitor.

**It would appear(4)** that my specific complaints have not been addressed(5). Therefore, I wish to state in my own words, as clearly as I can, precisely what it is **that** I am complaining of, (6)so **that** your client has no doubt about the issue(7) **that**(8) they(9) wish to be decided by the(10) court.

On 1<sup>st</sup> May, (11)there appeared in X X, (11)a half-page advertisement headed "B"... contained a great number of syntactic and **other language errors(12)**. The following day(13), I agreed to appear at a press conference, to speak on behalf of the KE, **and explain** (14) why I considered ... misguided. Some of my comments were incorporated into a **report(15)** on page 2 of the X X X the following day, in an **article(15)** by one John, entitled "C"(16).

The remarks **I identify(17)** tend to(18) tarnish my reputation, and (19)*ipso facto*, that of the department I manage, **in the eyes of the general public(20)**, ... in Hong Kong.

The words of which I complain are not justified as true **statement**, as fair **comment(21)**, or **by virtue of(22)** privilege(23), but rather, (24)constitute false(25) insinuations and damaging personal(26) imputations.

My qualifications and experience have already been outlined to you in my letter to you(27) of 11<sup>th</sup> May. Suffice it to say(28) here that my background and experience as a learner and teacher of languages, as a teacher trainer, and as a researcher in linguistics, (29)have led me to **set great store by(30)** the value of a classical education, and in particular(31) of grammar **in language learning(32)**. **I am reported(33)** as having said at the KE press conference of 30<sup>th</sup> May... Grammmarians describe patterns of **occurrence(34)** and induce the rules governing(35) these. Grammar books and electronic grammar checkers as well as style guides do not legislate,(36) they advise(37).

What I said has been misrepresented by A into(38) the categorical statement(39).

By erroneously(40) stating, ... practical approach with(41) eschews the teaching ...

I do not accept that this right comports(42) a licence to offer erroneous statements purporting to be fact(43), and thereby free rein(44) to damage a person's reputation.

I do not know the significance of this mention, nor do I know which "two occasions" are being referred to here, and so I cannot comment on them; but(45) I fail to discern the relevance of this remark(46), or of(47) allusion to the prizes I have won in(48) previous competitions that A has advertised, **to the matters at issue(49)**.

The second part of your letter concerns the contemptuous(50) words which **occurred** in A's advertisement of 9<sup>th</sup> May, and which clearly **refer(51)** to me as well as to(52) the KE. **I reiterate(53)** that I believe ... this, in turn, reflects negatively on my employer, **those who work under me, and those whom I teach(54)**.

As **stated(55)** in my **solicitor's letter(56)** to A of 6<sup>th</sup> June last, I shall be **claiming**, in addition to **claims(57)** for general **damages**, those for aggravated **damages(57)**, all costs, and interest.

I would ask your client to reconsider their(58) position, (59)and **in view of(60)** the foregoing, reflect whether they really wish to defend before a court of law their statement **that my contention(61) that** "grammar books should ... otherwise you will ..." is "*exactly the same theory*" as **that** advocated by British educationalists "who thought **that** learning grammar destroyed creativity", and, further, **that** (62) such a statement constitutes(63) reasonable criticism.(64)

大學教授之英文，如此拙劣，怎能怪責由  
他教出之中學英文教師，未合『基準』。

1. Capitalize 'Appearing' in the headline. 'In cap-and-lowercase headlines (not book title), capitalize all nouns, pronouns, and verbs, and all other words of four or more letters.' - Manual of Style and Usage. (The New York Times), 1999,57. (Gilbert, 1000)
2. 'Am in receipt of' - wordy. All letter writing books advise writers against using the phrase. Use 'received'. (Fred, Stephen, CP, Ho, 250 each)
3. A wrong noun head - reference CIV/01. 'Letter' with a comma is the real noun head, and the remaining its complement: 'your letter, reference CIV/01 ...'. A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language (Longman), 1999, 62. Letter Writing (A Signet Book), 2000,72. (Billy,1000)
4. Drop it - a wordy bar to writing with precision. Getting the Words Right (Writer's Digest Books), 1990, 11. (Fion)
5. 'Addressed' being close to another 'addressed' in last line can be ambiguous, as it is often used as a cover for inaction. Use more precise verbs like 'consider' and 'tackle'. The Plain English Guide, 1996,32. (Yan)
6. Rewrite: As my specific complaints have not been considered, I wish to state them myself (= in my own words) so that your client is absolutely clear (use positive words and imply to write precisely) about the issue he (not they) wants (no more 'wish') to be decided by court. (Save 2 that's) (Hay, Gilbert, 1000 each)
7. Misplaced modifier. Move the adverb clause of result 'so that ... the issue' close to the verb 'state' it modifies. 'Related words should be kept together.' -The Bedford Handbook for Writer, 1994,146. (Billy)
8. Three 'that's in a length of 16 words. 'Avoid three consecutive clauses. Even two can be a mistake.' -Style (Longman), 1996, 191. (Ho, Fion)
9. Number disagreement. Use 'he or she' for the singular 'client'. Grammatically Correct, 1997, 298. (Stephen, CP, Yeung, Yan)
10. Omit 'the' in 'by the court'. 'Human societies such as church, court, school are referred to without an article.' Cobuild English Guides (Articles), 1996,43. (Yan)
11. No commas after 'May' and 'X X' for 'there appeared'. Cobuild English Usage, 1998, 63. (Yan)
12. Ambiguous. It means errors of other language or other errors of the language. Syntax (Routledge: London), 1998,123. (Ho,Kei)
13. Misplaced modifier. 'To appear the following day', not 'The following day I agreed'. See 7. (Ho, Billy)
14. 'And' is obscure. 'And explain' should read 'and explained' if it links 'agreed', or 'to explain' if it parallels 'to speak'. 'And' joins elements of equal weight -Punctuation and Style, 1995, 21 & 191. (Ho, Kei)
15. Tautology -saying the same thing in the same sentence. 'A report' and 'an article' are two in one. Cross out 'an article'. Getting the Words Right (Writer's Digest Books, 1990, 13). (Ho, peter)
16. Loose syntax. Move 'entitled "C"' , after 'report' it qualifies. See 7. (Ho, Billy)
17. Wordy. 'Drop any writing that unnecessarily talks about writing' - The Little English Handbook (Longman), 1998,57. (Yan)
18. Drop 'tend to' for overqualification. The New Oxford Guide to Writing, 1994, 212. Rewrite: The remarks tarnish my reputation. (Kei, Ho)
19. Missing a comma. 'Ipso facto' as an interruption requires a pair of commas. The Penguin Guide to Punctuation, 1997,21. (Yan)
20. Misplaced modifier. The phrase modifies 'tarnish', not 'manage', and should be put close to the former. See 7. (Billy)
21. Number disagreement. 'Statement and comment' should be 'statements and comments' because their antecedent is 'words'. See 9. (Ching, Yeung, Fred, Peter)
22. Wordy. Use 'by' or 'under'. The Complete Plain Words (Penguin), 1987,55. (Kei)
23. Syntactical collapse. 'By virtue of privilege' is not in tune with 'as true statement, as fair comment'. Queen's English, 1995,162. (Ho, CP, Fred, Peter)
24. Misused comma. There is no comma after 'rather' used as an adverb of degree. Cobuild English Usage, 1998,567. (Yan)
25. Delete 'false' because 'insinuation' by nature must be 'false'. (Lunsfor & Connors, 1989,301.) (Ho,CP, Stephen,Tam)
26. Delete 'personal' as redundant. 'Imputations' is a statement that a person is guilty of a crime or of doing something bad. (Longman Dictionary, 1995.) (CP, Gilbert, Fion, Tam)
27. One 'to you' is enough. (Ho, Yeung, Ching, Fred, Cheung, 200 each)
28. Cross out the CLICHE 'Suffice it to say here'. Longman Guide to English Usage, 1988, 688. (Ho, CP, Stephen, Tam)
29. The comma after 'linguistics' must be missing. 'Do not separate subject and verb with a comma.' Any grammar books. (Ho, Tam)
30. It means to value. Rewrite: '... led me to value a classical education and grammar.' Any dictionaries. (Ho, Fred)
31. 'In particular' needs a pair of bracketing commas. It is an interruption. See 19. (Yan)
32. 'Grammar in language learning' is similar to 'countries in the world'. The underlined is deadwood. 'Don't spell out what is clearly implied.' The New Oxford Guide to Writing, 1988,209. (Yan)
33. Wrong tense. The report was a past event, so a past tense should be used in legal writing. (Ho, Tam)

34. Wrong diction. The correct term is 'utterance'. A Dictionary of Linguistics & Phonetics. 4th ed. Oxford:Blackwell Publishers, 389 & 405. (Ho)
35. Wrong use of participle. 'Induce' is followed by 'to govern', not 'governing'. Any dictionaries. (Kei)
36. Comma fault. 'You cannot join two sentences with a comma.' - The Penguin Guide to Punctuation, 1997,18. (Fred)
37. 'Advise' is a transitive verb. 'You don't use "advise" without an object.' - Cobuild English Usage, 1998,26. (Yan)
38. Wrong use of 'into' for 'as'. 'As a categorical statement' serves as a subjective complement. Cobuild English Dictionary for Advanced Learners, 2001. (Jackie)
39. 'Categorical statement' is a CLICHE. Longman Guide to English Usage, 1996, 117. (Tam)
40. 'Erroneously' is a long-winded word. Use 'wrongly' for simplicity. The Plain English Guide, 1996,28. (Yan)
41. The relative pronoun 'which', not 'with', is the subject of 'eschew'. (Ho, Hay, Stephen, Fred)
42. Archaism. 'Comports' is an archaic word used with 'with' to mean 'accord with' or 'agree with'. The New Oxford Dictionary of English, 1998. (Ho, Tam, Peter, Fred)
43. Number disagreement. 'Statements' is the antecedent of 'fact' which should be 'facts'. See 9. (Ho, Ching, Peter, Fred)
44. Self-invented usage of 'rein'. Longman Dictionary has 'to give somebody (a) free rein'. The New Oxford Dictionary has plural 'reins' when used singly. If 'free rein to' is used, it takes the gerund 'damaging', not the verb 'damage', because 'to' is a preposition. (Ching, Tam, Fred, Peter)
45. Wrong use of 'but' for 'for'. 'But' indicates a contrast between two opposite ideas. (Leech, 1989,68.) 'Cannot comment' is negative, and 'fail to discern = don't discern' is also negative. (Ho, Fred)
46. Number disagreement. 'Two occasions' or 'them' is the antecedent of 'this remark'. Write 'these remarks'. See 9. (Kei)
47. 'The' is present when the adjective phrase 'to the prizes' qualifies 'allusion'. Cobuild English Guide (Articles), 1996,30. (CP, Lily,Yan, Jackie)
48. 'The' is present when an adjective clause qualifies 'competition'. See 47 (CP, Lily, Yan, Jackie)
49. Syntactical collapse. 'To the matters at issue' hangs in the air. It doesn't modify 'has advertised' as the sense is illogical. It can't qualify 'allusion' because of remoteness and because of lack of 'and' to link the similar structure 'to the prizes'. (Ching, Tam)
50. 'Contumelious' is an archaic word. Use 'scornful'. The New Oxford Dictionary of English, 1998. (Tam)
51. Losing unity in tense. 'Refer' should be 'referred' in line with 'occurred'. Any grammar books. (Ho, Peter, Fred, Tam)
52. 'To' is redundant. 'As well as' links nouns, adjectives, and '-ing' forms, but not prepositions. Cobuild English Usage, 1997,42. (CP, Peter)
53. Wordy. Drop it. Just say 'I believe ...'. See 17. (Yan)
54. A shapeless, unbalanced structure. Rewrite it in ascending order with simplicity: 'on my students, my staff and my employer'. Style (Longman), 1996,193. (Fred, Tam)
55. Dangling passive participle. 'Stated' should qualify 'claims' and 'damages', which were stated, not 'I', who was stating them. Any grammar books. (Jackie)
56. You use 'solicitor letter' as a legal letter, not "solicitor's letter", which is a different thing. Cassell Concise English Dictionary, 1995. (CP)
57. Jingles -ineffective repetitions of same words. 'Claiming, claims' and 'damages, aggravated damages'. How to Write English, p.12. (Jackie)
58. Number disagreement. 'Client' is matched by 'he or she' and 'his or her', not 'they' and 'their'. See 9. (Hay, Yeung, Stephen, CP, Cheung)
59. Misplaced comma. Move the comma after 'and'. 'In view of the foregoing' is an interruption, which needs a pair of bracketing commas. See 19. (Ho, Kei)
60. A circumlocution ( a roundabout way of saying something). Use 'because of'. Longman Guide to English Usage, 1996,130. (Tam)
61. Syntactical collapse. 'That my contention' hangs in the air. It misses a finite verb. The quotation which contains a compound sentence is treated as a noun, subject of 'is'. Handbook of good English, 1991, 118. (Ching, Peter)
62. For a sentence to contain 5 that's is inexcusable. See 8. (Fion)
63. Missing 'a'. Cobuild English Guide (Articles), 1996,20. (Ho, Yan)
64. Syntactical collapse. The underlined clause hangs in the air. It isn't in apposition to 'contention' because of remoteness. Even if it were the case, the structure would look very stupid: '... their statement that my contention that such a statement constitutes reasonable criticism'. (Ching, Peter, 1000 each)

評審標準雖已降低，教授函仍錯逾 64 項  
(如照正常標準，錯處逾 100 項)