

# **Paragraph Power: PEE(L) & Beyond**

## **A Comprehensive Guide to Effective Paragraph Writing**

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# Chapter 1: Foundations of Paragraph Writing

## Understanding Paragraph Purpose

Paragraphs are the building blocks of effective writing, serving as containers for ideas and arguments that guide readers through complex thoughts and analyses. Each paragraph should present a unified idea, supported by evidence and explanation, whilst connecting seamlessly to the broader argument or narrative.

The fundamental purpose of paragraph structure is threefold: to organise thinking, to support comprehension, and to strengthen persuasion. When writers understand these purposes, they can choose appropriate structures that serve their specific goals rather than simply following templates.

**Key Principle:** A well-constructed paragraph is unified (focused on one main idea), coherent (logically organised), and adequately developed (containing sufficient detail and explanation).

## The Role of Structure in Writing

Paragraph structures provide scaffolding for developing writers, offering a framework within which to organise thoughts and evidence. However, these structures should be understood as tools rather than rigid rules, designed to support clear thinking and effective communication.

Effective paragraph writing requires understanding both the mechanics of structure and the flexibility to adapt these structures to specific contexts, audiences, and purposes. The most successful writers use structural frameworks as starting points, then modify and combine them to create sophisticated, engaging prose.

## Chapter 2: The PEE(L) Method - Core Principles

### Breaking Down PEE/PEEL

The PEE/PEEL structure remains one of the most widely taught paragraph frameworks in academic writing. Understanding its components and applications provides a solid foundation for paragraph construction.

#### **PEE Structure:**

**Point** - Make and introduce your main argument

**Evidence** - Support with examples, quotations, or data

**Explanation** - Analyse how evidence supports your point

#### **PEEL Structure:**

**Point** - Make and introduce your main argument

**Evidence** - Support with examples, quotations, or data

**Explanation** - Analyse how evidence supports your point

**Link** - Connect to the next paragraph or overall argument

### The Point

The opening point should clearly establish the paragraph's main argument whilst connecting to the broader thesis or question. Effective points are specific, debatable, and directly relevant to the overall argument.

*Example Point: "Shakespeare employs dramatic irony in Act 1, Scene 5 to heighten the tragedy of Romeo and Juliet's first meeting."*

### The Evidence

Evidence should be carefully selected to support the specific point being made. This might include quotations, statistical data, historical examples, or scholarly opinions. The key is choosing evidence that directly substantiates the claim.

*Example Evidence: "When Romeo declares, 'Did my heart love till now? Forswear it, sight! / For I ne'er saw true beauty till this night,' the audience knows he has just abandoned his supposed love for Rosaline."*

### The Explanation

Explanation is often the weakest element in student writing, yet it's crucial for demonstrating understanding and analysis. This section should explore how the evidence proves the point, considering implications, effects, and broader significance.

*Example Explanation: "This sudden shift in Romeo's affections, witnessed by the audience, creates dramatic tension as we recognise the impulsive nature of his character whilst the other characters remain unaware of his fickleness."*

### **The Link**

Effective links serve multiple purposes: they can connect to the following paragraph, return to the main argument, or broaden the discussion to consider wider implications.

*Example Link: "This use of dramatic irony establishes a pattern that Shakespeare will employ throughout the play to intensify the audience's emotional engagement with the tragic outcome."*

### **Variations and Extensions**

#### **PEELC - Adding Critical Analysis**

Some institutions extend PEEL to include Critical analysis, creating PEELC. This addition encourages students to evaluate their evidence more rigorously.

#### **PEELC Structure:**

**Point** - Make your main argument

**Evidence** - Support with examples or data

**Explanation** - Analyse the evidence

**Link** - Connect to broader argument

**Critical Point** - Evaluate limitations, methodology, or alternative interpretations

The critical component might address research limitations, consider alternative interpretations, or evaluate the reliability of sources. This extension encourages deeper analytical thinking and academic rigour.

# Chapter 3: Alternative Paragraph Structures

## Understanding Different Frameworks

Various educational systems and institutions have developed alternative paragraph structures, each designed to serve specific writing purposes and contexts. Understanding these alternatives allows writers to choose the most appropriate framework for their needs.

Structure	Components	Best Used For
TEEL	Topic, Evidence, Explanation, Link	General academic essays
OREO	Opinion, Reason, Evidence, Opinion	Persuasive writing
STEEL	Statement, Technique, Example, Effect, Link	Literary analysis
PETAL	Point, Evidence, Technique, Analysis, Link	Text analysis
PETER	Point, Evidence, Technique, Explain, Reflect	Advanced literary criticism

### TEEL - Topic, Evidence, Explanation, Link

TEEL substitutes "Topic" for "Point," sometimes creating a subtle shift towards broader thematic discussion rather than specific argumentative claims. This structure works well for exploratory essays and thematic analysis.

**Caution:** Research has shown that formulaic approaches like TEEL can become restrictive when applied too rigidly, potentially limiting students' ability to develop sophisticated writing skills.

### OREO - Opinion, Reason, Evidence, Opinion

The OREO structure is particularly effective for persuasive writing, bracketing the paragraph with opinion statements that reinforce the writer's position. This framework emphasises persuasion over analysis.

**OREO Application Example:**

**Opinion:** "School uniforms should be mandatory in all secondary schools."

**Reason:** "Uniforms reduce social inequality and bullying."

**Evidence:** "Studies show a 23% reduction in reported bullying incidents..."

**Opinion:** "Therefore, implementing uniform policies benefits all students' wellbeing."

## **STEEL - Statement, Technique, Example, Effect, Link**

STEEL focuses specifically on literary analysis, requiring students to identify authorial techniques and analyse their effects. This structure is particularly valuable for developing close reading skills.

## **PETAL - Point, Evidence, Technique, Analysis, Link**

PETAL combines traditional point-evidence structure with technical analysis, making it suitable for texts where authorial craft is central to meaning. The technique component ensures students consider how meaning is constructed, not just what meaning is present.

## **PETER - Point, Evidence, Technique, Explain, Reflect**

PETER represents a more sophisticated approach, particularly in its reflection component, which encourages students to consider broader implications, context, and multiple interpretations.

### **PETER Reflection Components:**

- Reference back to the question
- Comment on the text as a whole
- Consider historical/social context
- Explore different reader interpretations
- Link to key themes and authorial intentions

## Chapter 4: The Great Debate - Criticisms and Concerns

### Death by PEEL: Research Perspectives

Recent research has raised significant concerns about over-reliance on formulaic paragraph structures. Studies from both the UK and Australia suggest that rigid adherence to structures like PEEL and TEEL may actually hinder writing development rather than support it.

#### Key Research Findings

**Research Alert:** A comprehensive study published in "English in Education" found that formulaic paragraph structures, whilst providing initial scaffolding, can become counterproductive when used as end-points rather than starting points for writing development.

The primary concerns raised by educational researchers include:

- **Intellectual Limitation:** Formulaic structures may restrict students' ability to develop complex arguments and sophisticated reasoning
- **Reduced Creativity:** Rigid templates discourage experimentation and innovation in writing
- **Artificial Constraints:** Real-world writing rarely conforms to these prescribed patterns
- **Surface Learning:** Students may focus on following the formula rather than developing genuine understanding
- **Assessment Distortion:** Teaching to formulaic structures can prioritise compliance over quality of thinking

### When Formulas Become Limitations

The transition from scaffold to straitjacket occurs when paragraph structures are treated as rules rather than tools. Expert writers understand that effective paragraphs may begin with evidence, contain multiple points, or employ circular rather than linear reasoning.

**Real-World Example:** In Sathnam Sanghera's "Empireland," many paragraphs begin with contextual evidence before introducing the main claim, using a structure that would be considered "incorrect" according to rigid PEEL guidelines but which serves the author's persuasive purposes effectively.

### The Problem with Prescription

Professional writers vary their paragraph structures according to:

- Rhetorical purpose (persuasion, explanation, analysis)
- Audience expectations and knowledge
- Genre conventions

- Emphasis and flow within the larger argument
- Stylistic preferences and voice

When students are required to follow formulaic structures regardless of these contextual factors, their writing becomes mechanical and potentially less effective.

### **The Assessment Problem**

External assessment regimes have sometimes prioritised easily-marked structural compliance over genuine writing quality. This has created pressure on teachers to emphasise formula adherence, potentially at the expense of developing authentic writing skills.

**Assessment Concern:** Reviews of standardised testing have found that formulaic writing approaches may actually disadvantage students in higher-level examinations where originality, sophistication, and authentic engagement with texts are valued.



# Chapter 5: Beyond the Templates

## Advanced Argument Structures

Moving beyond basic templates requires understanding the components of effective argumentation and learning to combine these elements flexibly according to purpose and context.

### The Eight Components of Argument

Based on advanced rhetoric and argumentation theory, effective arguments comprise eight key components that can be combined in various ways:

**Advanced Argument Components:**

1. **Issue** - The problem or question to be resolved
2. **Claim** - The answer or position taken
3. **Reason** - Justification for the claim
4. **Evidence** - Support for reasons (data, examples, testimonies)
5. **Assumptions** - Unstated beliefs underlying the argument
6. **Backing** - Support for assumptions
7. **Rebuttal** - Acknowledgement and response to counterarguments
8. **Limits** - Qualifications on the scope or certainty of claims

### Flexible Paragraph Architecture

Advanced writers learn to combine these components dynamically. A single paragraph might include multiple pieces of evidence, address potential objections, or build complex chains of reasoning.

**Advanced Structure Example:**

*Statement → Elaboration → Evidence → Analysis → Counter-evidence → Analysis → Qualification → Evidence → Analysis → Synthesis → Link*

### Seven Types of Arguments

Understanding argument types helps writers choose appropriate structures and reasoning patterns:

Argument Type	Key Question	Common Features
Factual	Does this exist? Did this happen?	Criteria-based reasoning, multiple sources
Causal	How did this happen?	Causal chains, temporal sequences
Proposal	What should we do?	Multiple argument types combined

Valuational	What is this worth?	Criteria and comparison
Definitional	What is it? Who are they?	Classification and examples
Resemblance	What is this like?	Analogies and precedents
Ethical	Is this right or wrong?	Principles and consequences

### **Dynamic Structure Selection**

Expert writers choose structures based on their specific argumentative goals. A proposal argument might begin with a problem (issue), present a solution (claim), offer justification (reason), provide supporting examples (evidence), acknowledge concerns (rebuttal), and specify conditions (limits).

This dynamic approach allows for much more sophisticated and persuasive writing than rigid adherence to templates.

## Chapter 6: Practical Applications

### Subject-Specific Approaches

#### English Literature and Language

Literary analysis benefits from structures that emphasise technique and effect, such as STEEL or PETER. However, advanced students should learn to vary their approaches depending on the specific text and analytical focus.

##### ***Literature Example - Flexible Structure:***

*Context → Quotation → Language Analysis → Effect → Alternative Interpretation → Synthesis → Thematic Connection*

#### History

Historical writing often requires causal reasoning and evaluation of significance. While PEEL provides a foundation, advanced historical writing incorporates chronology, causation, and historiographical perspectives.

#### Science

Scientific writing emphasises evidence and methodology. Paragraph structures should reflect scientific reasoning: hypothesis, method, results, analysis, implications.

#### Geography

Geographical analysis combines case studies, processes, and evaluation. Effective paragraphs might integrate multiple examples to demonstrate pattern recognition and spatial thinking.

### Assessment and Progression

#### Developmental Stages

##### **Progression Framework:**

**Novice:** Simple PEEL structures with basic evidence

**Developing:** Consistent application with some variation

**Competent:** Flexible use with attention to purpose

**Advanced:** Dynamic structures adapted to context

**Expert:** Seamless integration of multiple components

#### Assessment Criteria Beyond Templates

Effective assessment should evaluate:

- Clarity and precision of argument
- Quality and relevance of evidence

- Depth of analysis and explanation
- Coherence and flow
- Appropriate structure for purpose
- Engagement with complexity and nuance

## Chapter 7: Teaching Strategies

### Scaffolding to Independence

#### Phase 1: Foundation Building

Introduce basic structures like PEEL as scaffolding tools. Emphasise that these are starting points, not end goals. Use colour-coding and graphic organisers to help students visualise paragraph components.

#### Phase 2: Conscious Application

Students practice using structures whilst beginning to understand their purpose. Introduce variations and discuss when different structures might be more appropriate.

#### Phase 3: Flexible Implementation

Students learn to adapt structures to specific contexts. Introduce more complex models and encourage experimentation with paragraph organisation.

#### Phase 4: Independent Mastery

Students create their own paragraph structures based on purpose and context. They can articulate their structural choices and adapt their approach to different writing situations.

### Common Pitfalls and Solutions

#### **Pitfall 1: Formula Dependency**

Solution: Regularly discuss why structures work and when they might not. Analyse professional writing that doesn't follow templates.

#### **Pitfall 2: Mechanical Application**

Solution: Focus on purpose and audience. Ask students to justify their structural choices.

#### **Pitfall 3: One-Size-Fits-All Thinking**

Solution: Teach multiple structures and help students understand when each might be most effective.

### Progressive Teaching Activities

#### Deconstruction Exercises

Analyse paragraphs from published writing to identify how professional authors structure their arguments. This helps students see beyond formulaic approaches.

## **Purpose-Based Writing**

Give students the same information but different purposes (persuade, explain, analyse) and help them see how paragraph structure should adapt accordingly.

## **Flexible Frameworks**

Introduce advanced students to component-based thinking rather than sequence-based templates. This allows for more sophisticated argument development.

## **Moving Students Beyond Templates**

The ultimate goal is developing writers who can structure paragraphs purposefully and effectively without relying on rigid templates. This requires:

- Understanding audience and purpose
- Recognising different types of reasoning
- Developing voice and style
- Learning from expert models
- Practicing flexible approaches
- Reflecting on effectiveness

## **Conclusion: Empowering Student Writers**

Paragraph structures like PEEL serve an important function as scaffolding tools for developing writers. However, they should be stepping stones to more sophisticated writing, not permanent constraints.

The most effective approach combines the security of structural frameworks with the flexibility to adapt and innovate. By understanding both the strengths and limitations of formulaic approaches, teachers can guide students towards becoming confident, purposeful writers who can structure their paragraphs to serve their specific communicative goals.

Paragraph power comes not from rigid adherence to templates, but from understanding how to organise ideas effectively for maximum impact. When students master this understanding, they can move beyond PEEL to create writing that is both structurally sound and genuinely engaging.

*This guide represents current research and best practice in paragraph writing instruction. Teachers and students are encouraged to use these frameworks flexibly, always prioritising clear communication and effective argumentation over rigid structural compliance.*