

PEAS Paragraphs and Transitions

Every piece of writing has its own structure or shape. The most common structure is that of the Body Paragraph, and, for the shape of those, I rely on the **PEAS method**:

P = Point

E = Evidence

A = Analysis

S = So What?

Now, the first rule of paragraphing is **One Paragraph = One Idea**.¹ That idea may be big or small, but you can only discuss one point, idea, subject, or topic at a time.

For the P, offer a Topic Sentence that introduces immediately and directly the one idea on which your paragraph will focus. Often writers need a little time to warm up, and they will wander into their main idea, which actually comes in the third sentence of the paragraph rather than the first. While such a practice can annoy readers who value their time as much as you value yours, not beginning your paragraph with an accurate and direct topic sentence can also confuse readers who do not know what pieces of information actually matter. You need to focus your topic so your reader can follow you and your argument. If you do not know what your paragraph is actually about, no one will.

For the E, provide some perceivable evidence or a fact regarding the topic of that paragraph. In other words, let your readers perceive or experience the idea that your topic sentence introduces. As a lawyer, you should be more aware than most that only facts can establish the validity of opinions, so you need to provide a fact that somehow proves or speaks to the point you want to make in each paragraph. That evidence can be a statistic, fact, description, or quote. Make certain your evidence comes from a reputable source and introduce that evidence as coming from that source so you can gain the credibility of a careful researcher who only cites more credible experts or verified and, ideally, peer-reviewed sources. Do be wary of over quoting, though. Quote when your source is an expert on the matter under discussion or the quote expresses the matter perfectly. Otherwise, try to paraphrase because doing so will make you look like the expert; also, readers tend to skip over long quotes, which then undercuts the value of the quote.

Once you have let your readers see your topic, spend 2-3 sentences pointing out what you want them to see in that Evidence; to what do you want to draw their attention? Those 2–3 sentences where you direct readers to attention and tell them how they should or how you want them to interpret that fact is your **Analysis**. This portion is extremely important because readers believe facts are inalterable, but a good writer knows that the interpretation of fact depends on perspective, and the Analysis section is where you show your readers what you believe is the correct perspective for understanding the fact or facts you provide.

¹ In class, I usually make a bad *Fight Club* joke here that the first rule of paragraphing is you do not talk about paragraphing. You may also use it at your own risk as it usually bombs, but I cannot resist.

Finally, then, tell your reader why you want them to notice the details in your Evidence that you isolate in your Analysis. Why did you bring up the topic on which this paragraph focuses in the first place? How does it contribute to your argument? **Or, in other words, when you finish with your Analysis, imagine your reader asking you, “So What?”** Not every paragraph needs to tie immediately to your main conclusion, but it should point directly to one of the reasons you list as support for the major claim of your argument. Each argument should have a **Thesis Statement** that consists of a main claim, which is the “I believe” portion (though you will often drop the words “I believe” from it), and a “because” statement that lists your support for that argument. Thus, each paragraph need not jump directly to your claim, but it should point immediately to one of the elements of your “because” statement.²

Below is an **example Background** paragraph that follows the PEAS structure (I have labelled the different sections with brackets):

[P] Even at historical moments when the United States found itself struggling, other countries faced much greater hardships. [E] From December 2007 to June 2009, the Great Recession took place in the United States. According to the *Brookings Papers on Economic Activity*, a collection of articles containing in-depth research on economic development, the labor market conditions in the United States during the Great Recession were the worst on record since the late 1940s (Espy, Hobijn, and Sahin 2). Cutbacks in consumer spending led to a collapse in business investments and national employment percentages declined drastically. To point, the average working-age household income decreased from \$61,574 to \$55,276 between the years 2000 and 2010, and the single greatest plummet occurred in the two years of The Great Recession with an average \$2,700 decline in the average worker’s income. [A] Despite the harshness of those losses, The World Bank recorded the yearly household income for Latin America and the Caribbean in 2010 as averaging a mere \$7,428. While The United States considered the Great Recession as having devastating effects on workers’ income, the incomes in struggling regions hardly qualified as livable. [S] Much like the past, then, countries around the world still face greater financial struggles than the United States, and even when we struggle, we still have the means to help those less fortunate than ourselves.

And below are **two consecutive example Main Argument paragraphs** that also follow the PEAS structure for Body Paragraphs. Note how they proceed according to the order of the Thesis (“Thus, the United States and its citizens hold an obligation to help countries in need because our higher education, technological advancements, and financial status set us apart from other nations and enable us to improve the lives of others in our world.”) with a paragraph on “higher education” coming first and then a paragraph on “technological advancements.”

The United States of America’s educational system functions as an essential aspect of its continued economic success and ability to provide a high standard for

² To explain this relationship between each paragraph and one’s main argument, I often refer to the concept of “six degrees of separation” (or “six degrees of Kevin Bacon” if more relatable), which is based on the premise that any person (or Kevin Bacon) can be linked to any other person through no more than six acquaintance links. I then tell my students that each paragraph should be within one to two links or degrees from one of the items listed in their “because” statements.

its citizen's quality of life. According to the article, "Higher education and knowledge for nation-state development: The role of the world bank and U.S. universities in poverty reduction in the developing world," which provides an analysis of several case studies linking higher education to reductions in poverty, countries without an infrastructure for advanced education often lack any opportunity to create solutions for local and global issues (Collins 12). Whereas the United States has developed a sophisticated educational infrastructure that allows its students to then successfully enter and influence the national economy, the citizens of impoverished countries cannot actively participate in their local economies due to a lack of educational preparation. A duty of the United States, therefore, not only includes offering financial assistance to other less-fortunate nations, but also working to implement educational systems that would allow the citizens of those nations to improve their economies from within.

The ability to obtain an advanced education also allows United States citizens to stay abreast of technological advancements in both food and medicine that improve their quality of life and could help those living in poverty around the world as well. According to the American Marketing Association, almost 840 million people in the world lack adequate food security and go hungry. Similarly, 800 million people are unable to receive health services (Hill and Adrangi 135). The United States, however, avoids such harsh conditions through its use of technology. For instance, the United States has a long history of developing genetically modified crops. While people are still learning how modifying these crops affect their nutritional value, the science that allowed us to produce large amounts of food with few resources and in short amount of time will continue to develop and could also help us feed other countries and teach them how to farm in less-than-ideal conditions. Likewise, the medical technologies developed and used in America provide its citizens not just available medical treatment, but the most medical treatments in the world. Thus, much like it can help the rest of the world stay fed, America could use its medical advancements to improve the health and lives of those in other countries.

Note how—despite the necessity of only having one topic, idea, point, or subject per paragraph—that topic can be a single or multifaceted one. Again, in the above examples, the author's first paragraph focuses on a single subject: education. Whereas her second paragraph covers technological advancements in both agriculture and medicine. **To decide whether a paragraph should "zoom in" on a point or "zoom out" to cover multiple points, one must decide how important or potentially damaging that point can be to one's argument.** If the topic is important, the author should focus an entire paragraph on it. If the topic is relatively unimportant or somehow damaging but necessary for one's argument, that topic should be included in a paragraph with other relevant topics so one's readers pass over that information quickly or pay less attention to it than they would if it were the focus of its own paragraph.

Below are two example paragraphs on Rocky IV that illustrate the difference between a large, multifaceted or “zoomed out” paragraph and a focused or “zoomed in” one:

Multiple/Zoom Out:

- Rocky utilized several training methods while preparing to fight Ivan Drago.
- For instance, Rocky ran through the snow, chopped wood, climbed a mountain, and lifted a horse carriage.
- Rocky’s previous success as a boxer granted him access to the most sophisticated training methods, but that success also distanced him from the hunger and passion that helped him find success in the first place.
- To beat Drago, then, Rocky knew he needed to return to both a stripped-down training program and version of himself.

Single/Zoom In:

- Ivan Drago’s training regimen, however, focused primarily on the use of anabolic steroids.
- Even though Drago used high-tech machinery whose functions match the exercises used by Rocky, we also very clearly see Drago receive a shot of steroids in his thigh.
- The training montage makes clear that while Rocky digs deep within himself to find the strength needed to win, Drago turns to artificial and illegal supplements to succeed.
- Thus, with the type of irony that makes Hollywood films successful, Rocky’s rejection of the opportunities provided by success actually allows him to succeed, whereas Drago’s success-at-any-means approach ultimately leads to his downfall.

I find that in the shift from outlining to drafting **the decision between which pieces of evidence will receive their own (zoomed in”) paragraph and which will be grouped into a larger, multifaceted (or “zoomed out”) paragraph is one of the most difficult but essential decisions a writer must make.** One of the hardest things writers need to do is pull their ideas apart for their readers. The mind is powerful and can associate many disparate pieces of information, but the readers are not in the writer’s mind, so the writer must pull those ideas apart for the readers so they can see how those ideas fit together and in what order.

A paragraph can also include multiple pieces of evidence—even from different sources. Sometimes, a single perfect piece of evidence will suffice, but, on other occasions, you may want to use multiple pieces of evidence that point to the same conclusion as a way of reinforcing or furthering your point. Such a choice, is perfectly acceptable, just make sure that if you include multiple pieces of evidence that your topic sentence (P) and Conclusive Statement (S) account for each piece of that evidence. You can also decide whether to offer individual analysis for each piece of evidence or one section of analysis that accounts for all of them. Thus, your paragraph may take the form of either P, E, A, E, A, S or P, E, E, A, S.

If, after you have written it, you want to **check your paragraph to make sure it is focused**, start by getting some distance from it. One of the hardest things writers must do is read what they wrote and not what they meant to write.

Then, ask yourself, **what is the ONE THING I want my readers to take from this paragraph?**
To what do I want them to notice or pay attention?

Once you've identified that ONE THING, continue by following these steps:

- Read your first sentence to see if it introduces the topic you identified as most important. If so, good; if not, rewrite.
- Read your last sentence to see if it explains how specific elements of that topic are relevant to your thesis. If so, good; if not, rewrite.
- Read every other sentence to see if it relates back to your first sentence's topic. If so, good; if not, decide whether that sentence deserves its own paragraph, belongs in a different paragraph, or should be cut because it is irrelevant.
- If the paragraph is in your Rule Explanation, read every sentence again and make sure it is directly relevant to your Application.

TRANSITIONS:

If you have done a good job outlining your paper, you should have already thought through the arrangement and order of your paragraphs, but, if you get stuck and are having a hard time moving from one paragraph to another, you can simply use a **repetition of key terms**.

If one paragraph is about motive and the following one is about intent, therefore, I might simply add a dependent clause at the beginning of my topic sentence for the intent paragraph and write:

“Along with motive, a defendant must also prove intent.”

With that simple repetition of key terms, I have bridged the gap between my paragraphs for my readers, illustrated the logic that links those paragraphs, and brought those readers from one topic to another.

NOTE: Having a hard time transitioning between paragraphs might be a sign that you have not fully thought through the logic connecting those paragraphs or you skipped a step in your argument. You may then want to return to your outline and examine the order and arrangement of your topics and evidence.

PEAS Paragraph Checklist

Body Paragraphs provide specific and concrete evidence to support your thesis statement. Body paragraphs should follow the same order as and address all of your rule's elements that require explanation. In that way, your elements work like a roadmap that previews your argument's course through both the Rule Explanation and Application.

The Body Paragraph:

1: Transition (conditional): Repeat key terms from previous paragraph and link them to this paragraph's topic. This short phrase or clause explains the logic that orders and connects your ideas.

2: Topic Sentence: What is THIS paragraph about? What does it claim? Be Specific and Limit the focus. Remember: One Paragraph = One Topic/Idea

3: Evidence of Topic: List a specific fact that proves or exemplifies the paragraph's topic. The best evidence comes from a credible source that you introduce and cite.

4: Analysis: Perception is relative; show your readers how you see the above evidence. Identify its interesting elements. What do you want your readers to notice about it? What aspects of that evidence are relevant to your argument?

5: Conclusive Statement: Explain what the relevant details in the evidence teach readers about your thesis. Be specific and direct; you can't assume your readers will understand the relationship between the evidence and your thesis. You need not jump to your conclusion, but you should make a point directly related to it.

Helpful Hints:

- Have you thought through the ordering of your elements and evidence? You need consciously to design the logical progression of your argument if you want your readers to follow it.
- Once you finish your paragraph:
 - Get some distance from it. One of the hardest things writers must do is read what they wrote and not what they meant to write.
 - Ask yourself, what is most important about this paragraph? What do I want my readers to know? To what do I want my readers to pay attention?
 - Read your first sentence to see if it introduces the topic you identified as most important. If so, good; if not, rewrite.
 - Read your last sentence to see if it explains how specific elements of that topic are relevant to your thesis. If so, good; if not, rewrite.
 - Read every other sentence to see if it relates back to your first sentence's topic. If so, good; if not, decide whether that sentence deserves its own paragraph, belongs in a different paragraph, or should be cut because it is irrelevant.
 - If the paragraph is in your Rule Explanation, read every sentence again and make sure it is directly relevant to your Application.
- A paragraph may contain more than one element of evidence and analysis.
- If your paragraph does contain more than one element of evidence and analysis, your Conclusive Statement should synthesize that evidence and then explain what the elements of that synthesis teach readers about your thesis.
- Transition at the beginning, not the end, of paragraphs. Let your conclusion linger and then link your ideas when you introduce the subsequent one.