

PEEL PARAGRAPH STRUCTURE GUIDE

For Cause and Effect Essays

What is the PEEL Method?

PEEL is a proven paragraph structure that ensures every body paragraph in your cause and effect essay is complete, logical, and well-supported.

P = Point (Topic Sentence) **E = Evidence** (Data, Statistics, Research) **E = Explanation** (Analysis of How/Why) **L = Link** (Connection to Thesis or Next Paragraph)

Why Use PEEL for Cause and Effect Essays?

✓ **Ensures complete paragraphs** - Nothing gets left out ✓ **Proves causation clearly** - Evidence + explanation shows HOW causes produce effects ✓ **Creates logical flow** - Links connect ideas throughout your essay ✓ **Prevents summary writing** - Forces you to analyze, not just describe ✓ **Makes grading easier** - Professors can quickly see your analysis and evidence

The PEEL Structure in Detail

P - POINT (Topic Sentence)

What it is: One clear sentence stating the cause or effect you'll discuss in this paragraph.

Purpose: Tell readers exactly what this paragraph will prove.

Formula for Cause Paragraphs:

- "One major cause of [result] is [specific cause]."
- "[Specific cause] significantly contributes to [result]."
- "The primary factor leading to [result] is [specific cause]."

Formula for Effect Paragraphs:

- "One significant effect of [cause] is [specific result]."
- "[Cause] directly produces [specific result]."

- "As a result of [cause], [specific effect] occurs."

Example (Cause Paragraph):

"The primary cause of rising childhood obesity rates is the proliferation of ultra-processed foods in American diets."

Example (Effect Paragraph):

"One major effect of excessive social media use is severely disrupted sleep patterns among teenagers."

E - EVIDENCE (Supporting Data)

What it is: Facts, statistics, research findings, expert testimony, or documented examples that prove your point.

Purpose: Provide credible proof that your cause or effect actually exists and functions as you claim.

What counts as strong evidence:

- ✓ Statistics from reputable studies
- ✓ Expert quotes from qualified professionals
- ✓ Research findings from peer-reviewed journals
- ✓ Data from credible organizations (CDC, WHO, universities)
- ✓ Documented case studies or real examples

What does NOT count as evidence:

- ✗ Your personal opinion ("I think...")
- ✗ Generalizations ("Everyone knows...")
- ✗ Unattributed claims ("Studies show..." without citing which studies)
- ✗ Hypothetical scenarios without data backing them

How to introduce evidence:

- "According to [source], [statistic/finding]..."
- "Research from [organization] demonstrates that [data]..."
- "[Expert name], a [qualification], explains that '[quote]'..."
- "A [year] study published in [journal] found that [finding]..."

Example (Cause Paragraph):

"According to the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition, ultra-processed foods now comprise 67% of calories in the average child's diet, up from 35% in 1980 (Miller et al., 2024). These foods are engineered with sugar, salt, and fat combinations that override natural satiety signals, encouraging overconsumption."

Example (Effect Paragraph):

"The National Sleep Foundation reports that teenagers who use social media within one hour of bedtime experience 40% less REM sleep—the restorative stage crucial for memory consolidation and emotional regulation (Martinez et al., 2024)."

E - EXPLANATION (Analysis)

What it is: Your analysis explaining HOW the evidence proves causation—the mechanism connecting cause to effect.

Purpose: Show you understand the causal relationship, not just that you can find data.

This is the most important part - it's where you prove you're thinking critically, not just reporting facts.

Key questions to answer:

- HOW does this cause produce this effect?
- WHAT is the mechanism of causation?
- WHY does this relationship exist?
- WHAT makes this evidence significant?

Formula:

"This demonstrates causation because [explain the mechanism]... When [cause occurs], [describe the process], which results in [effect]."

Example (Cause Paragraph):

"This demonstrates causation because processed foods bypass the body's natural hunger regulation. When children consume products engineered for maximum palatability, their brains receive reward signals that encourage continued eating regardless of caloric needs. The combination of high sugar and fat content triggers dopamine release similar to addictive substances, creating eating patterns that persist even when nutritional needs are met. Unlike whole foods that signal fullness through fiber and nutrient density, processed foods lack satiety cues, allowing children to consume 500-800 excess calories daily without feeling physically satisfied."

Example (Effect Paragraph):

"This sleep disruption occurs because blue light from smartphone screens suppresses melatonin production, the hormone signaling the body to prepare for sleep. When teenagers scroll through social media in bed, their brains receive stimulation signals—whether from exciting content, stressful interactions, or emotionally charged posts—precisely when they should be winding down. The brain remains activated, preventing the natural transition through light sleep stages into deep, restorative REM sleep. Even when these teenagers achieve eight hours in bed, the quality is so poor that they wake feeling unrested, creating a cycle of daytime fatigue and compensatory caffeine consumption that further disrupts sleep patterns."

L - LINK (Connection)

What it is: One or two sentences connecting this paragraph to your thesis or transitioning to your next point.

Purpose: Show how this paragraph fits into your overall argument and create smooth flow between ideas.

Two types of links:

Type 1 - Thesis Link (reinforces main argument):

- "This cause demonstrates how [connect back to thesis]..."
- "As this evidence shows, [reiterate thesis connection]..."
- "This effect illustrates the significant impact of [thesis topic]..."

Type 2 - Transition Link (moves to next paragraph):

- "Beyond [current point], [next point] also contributes significantly..."
- "While [current point] affects [aspect], [next point] impacts [different aspect]..."
- "In addition to [current point], another major [cause/effect] is..."
- "This [cause/effect] combines with [next point] to create..."

Example - Thesis Link (Cause Paragraph):

"This dietary shift demonstrates how modern food systems have fundamentally altered childhood eating patterns, creating an environment where obesity becomes the default outcome rather than the exception."

Example - Transition Link (Cause Paragraph):

"Beyond dietary changes, reduced physical activity in both school and home environments compounds the caloric imbalance driving childhood obesity rates upward."

Example - Thesis Link (Effect Paragraph):

"These sleep disruptions demonstrate the profound physiological impact of excessive social media use, extending far beyond simple tiredness to affect fundamental biological processes."

Example - Transition Link (Effect Paragraph):

"While sleep disruption affects physical health, social media use also produces significant psychological effects, particularly regarding self-esteem and anxiety levels."

Complete PEEL Paragraph Examples

EXAMPLE 1: Cause Paragraph (Block Structure)

Topic: Causes of Rising Student Loan Debt

P - Point:

One primary cause of escalating student loan debt is the dramatic increase in tuition costs that has far outpaced inflation and wage growth.

E - Evidence:

According to the College Board, average tuition at public four-year universities increased by 180% between 2000 and 2024, while median household income rose only 25% during the same period (College Board, 2024). A student attending a public university in 2024 pays \$28,000 annually in tuition and fees, compared to \$10,500 in 2000 when adjusted for inflation.

E - Explanation:

This demonstrates causation because when tuition growth dramatically exceeds income growth, students have no choice but to borrow more to bridge the gap. A family that could have covered 40% of college costs from current income in 2000 can now cover only 15%, forcing students to finance the remaining 85% through loans. The math is simple but devastating: if tuition costs \$28,000 annually and median family income is \$75,000, families cannot possibly save enough while covering basic living expenses. Federal loan limits haven't increased proportionally, pushing students toward higher-interest private loans that compound the debt burden. This tuition-income gap creates a structural necessity for borrowing that didn't exist when costs were more aligned with family earning capacity.

L - Link:

This tuition crisis combines with reduced state funding for higher education to create a perfect storm of escalating student debt.

EXAMPLE 2: Effect Paragraph (Block Structure)

Topic: Effects of Remote Work on Urban Population

P - Point:

One significant effect of widespread remote work adoption is the accelerated migration of workers from expensive urban centers to more affordable suburban and mid-sized cities.

E - Evidence:

U.S. Census data reveals that major cities like San Francisco, New York, and Boston lost a combined 1.2 million residents between 2020 and 2024—the first sustained urban population decline in 50 years (U.S. Census Bureau, 2024). Simultaneously, mid-sized cities like Austin, Boise, and Raleigh experienced population increases of 12-18% during the same period.

E - Explanation:

This migration occurs because remote work eliminated the primary reason workers tolerated high urban costs: proximity to offices. When a software engineer earning \$120,000 no longer needs to commute daily, the choice becomes clear: a \$3,200/month one-bedroom apartment in San Francisco or a \$1,900/month three-bedroom house with a yard in Austin. The financial advantage compounds when considering that remote workers maintain their urban salaries while enjoying suburban or mid-sized city costs of living. Beyond economics, remote work allows workers to prioritize quality of life factors—outdoor access, larger living spaces, proximity to family—that were previously sacrificed for career advancement. Once employers proved that productivity doesn't require physical presence, the incentive structure maintaining urban concentration collapsed, triggering the largest voluntary population redistribution in decades.

L - Link:

This population shift creates cascading consequences for urban commercial districts that depended on office workers for their economic vitality.

EXAMPLE 3: Cause-Effect Pair (Chain Structure)

Topic: How Sleep Deprivation Creates Health Problems

P - Point (Cause):

Chronic sleep deprivation (less than six hours nightly) disrupts hormonal regulation, particularly hormones controlling hunger and stress responses.

E - Evidence:

Research published in the journal *Sleep* demonstrates that sleep-deprived individuals produce 15% less leptin (the satiety hormone) and 15% more ghrelin (the hunger hormone), creating constant hunger signals even when caloric needs are met (Taheri et al., 2024). Additionally, cortisol levels remain elevated throughout the day, signaling the body to store fat.

E - Explanation:

This demonstrates causation because sleep deprivation fundamentally alters the body's regulatory systems. When the brain doesn't get adequate rest, it can't properly regulate hormone production. Leptin, which signals fullness after eating, drops because the brain conserves resources during exhaustion. Simultaneously, ghrelin—which triggers hunger—increases as the body desperately seeks energy to compensate for fatigue. The elevated cortisol creates a third problem: it signals the body that it's under stress, triggering fat storage as a survival mechanism. These hormonal changes aren't psychological—they're physiological responses to sleep loss that override conscious willpower and decision-making.

L - Link (showing this effect becomes the next cause):

These hormonal disruptions directly cause increased caloric intake and weight gain, which in turn create the conditions for developing insulin resistance and sleep apnea.

[Next paragraph would show how weight gain (Effect 1) becomes Cause 2 leading to Effect 2]

PEEL Paragraph Template (Fillable)

Use this template for each body paragraph:

P - POINT (Topic Sentence):
[One major cause/effect of _____ is _____.]

E - EVIDENCE (Data/Research):
According to _____, _____.

E - EXPLANATION (Analysis):
This demonstrates causation because _____.
When _____, [describe mechanism], which results in _____.

L - LINK (Connection):
[Connect to thesis OR transition to next paragraph]

Common PEEL Mistakes and Fixes

✗MISTAKE 1: Weak or Missing Point

Problem: Topic sentence is vague or doesn't clearly state a cause/effect.

"Another thing about student debt is tuition."

✓ **FIX:** Make it specific and clear.

"One primary cause of escalating student loan debt is the dramatic increase in tuition costs that has far outpaced inflation and wage growth."

✗MISTAKE 2: Evidence Without Source

Problem: Making claims without citing where information came from.

| "Studies show that social media affects sleep."

✓ **FIX:** Always attribute evidence to specific sources.

| "According to the National Sleep Foundation, teenagers who use social media within one hour of bedtime experience 40% less REM sleep (Martinez et al., 2024)."

✗MISTAKE 3: Skipping Explanation

Problem: Jumping from evidence to link without analyzing HOW causation works.

| [Evidence about processed food consumption] → "This shows childhood obesity is rising."

✓ **FIX:** Explain the mechanism connecting cause to effect.

| "This demonstrates causation because processed foods bypass the body's natural hunger regulation. When children consume products engineered for maximum palatability, their brains receive reward signals that encourage continued eating regardless of caloric needs..."

✗MISTAKE 4: No Link to Bigger Picture

Problem: Paragraph ends abruptly without connecting to thesis or next idea.

| [Point, Evidence, Explanation] → [End of paragraph]

✓ **FIX:** Add a sentence showing how this fits into your overall argument.

| "This dietary shift demonstrates how modern food systems have fundamentally altered childhood eating patterns, creating an environment where obesity becomes the default outcome."

✗MISTAKE 5: Too Much Evidence, Not Enough Explanation

Problem: Three statistics but only one sentence of analysis.

✓ **FIX:** Use evidence → explanation ratio of approximately 1:2 (twice as much explanation as evidence). Your thinking matters more than data dumping.

PEEL Checklist for Each Paragraph

Before moving to the next paragraph, verify:

- **P** - Clear topic sentence stating one cause or one effect
 - **E** - At least one piece of credible evidence with source attribution
 - **E** - Explanation that is LONGER than the evidence (at least 3-5 sentences)
 - **E** - Explanation answers "HOW does this cause produce this effect?"
 - **E** - Explanation shows mechanism, not just restates the evidence
 - **L** - Link connects to thesis OR transitions to next paragraph
 - **L** - Link is present (paragraph doesn't just stop after explanation)
 - Paragraph focuses on ONE cause or ONE effect (not multiple)
 - Causation is proven, not just correlation mentioned
 - No first person ("I think") unless specifically allowed
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PEEL for Different Paragraph Types

For CAUSE Paragraphs:

- **Point:** State the specific cause
- **Evidence:** Data showing this cause exists and matters
- **Explanation:** HOW this cause produces the effect (mechanism)
- **Link:** Connect to next cause or to effects section

For EFFECT Paragraphs:

- **Point:** State the specific effect/result
- **Evidence:** Data proving this effect occurs
- **Explanation:** WHY this effect matters, what its impact is
- **Link:** Connect to next effect or to conclusion

For CHAIN Paragraphs:

- **Point:** State cause OR effect in the sequence
- **Evidence:** Data for current link in chain
- **Explanation:** HOW this link connects to previous AND next
- **Link:** Show explicitly how this effect becomes next cause

Word Count Guide for PEEL Components

For a standard 200-250 word paragraph:

Component	Word Count	Percentage
P - Point	20-30 words	10-12%
E - Evidence	50-70 words	25-30%
E - Explanation	100-120 words	45-50%
L - Link	20-30 words	10-12%

Key takeaway: Explanation should be your longest section—nearly half the paragraph.

Quick Reference Card

PEEL in 4 Steps:

1. **POINT** = What am I proving in this paragraph?
2. **EVIDENCE** = What data backs up my claim?
3. **EXPLANATION** = HOW does this cause produce this effect?
4. **LINK** = How does this connect to my bigger argument?

Remember: The two E's are different!

- First E = Facts from research
- Second E = Your analysis of those facts

Practice Exercise

Try writing a PEEL paragraph on this topic:

Topic: "Effects of Regular Exercise on Mental Health"

Point: _____

Evidence: _____

Explanation: _____

Link: _____

