Level 5 English - Essay Structure: Points to Paragraphs

PEEL in Practice: 1300 ideas for quality teaching
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Many students find it difficult to grasp the idea that writing needs structure, especially the dreaded 'essay'. There are many different ways of approaching teaching 'the essay', which work very well for many students. For those students who have trouble with the concept of topic sentences and paragraphs, I have found this planning procedure very effective. It helps students to avoid getting stuck, and to avoid premature closure. It also helps students to make links between different pieces of information and data, and their own ideas and views.

(Some teachers may object to the formulaic nature of the procedure. My view is that some students need formulae like this, in order to help them understand the 'mystery' of 'academic' writing. The formula is a means to an end - it helps the student understand the process expert writers often use. Once the process is understood and the student can write in the genre, then the student is free to choose to use it or not. A certain confidence comes with mastering what to many students is a 'trade secret', a trick teachers know but never show them, and this confidence allows the student to move beyond the genre and experiment - if he or she wishes to do so. I call formulae such as this 'liberatory formulae'.)

I have reproduced the handout I give my students below. There is the front page with the 'formula', followed by the same formula set out so that students can fill in their own points, examples etc. I have also included an example of a Year Nine essay.

Points to Paragraphs - An Essay Planning Strategy

1) Turn your TOPIC into a question (if it isn't one already)

2) Answer the topic question in point form. You should have four or five points. These points should be yes or no answers, with a reason for each one.

   Yes, because……………………
   Yes, because……………………
   Yes, because……………………
   No, because……………………
   No, because……………………

   (NB, it is OK to have all Yes answers, all No answers, or some of each. An argumentative essay would have all yes or all no answers, an expository essay would have some of each.)

This list of points becomes your INTRODUCTION.

3) Each point becomes a PARAGRAPH - this is the BODY of your essay. Take each point separately and turn it into a paragraph. You should include the following four 'E's' in your paragraph, after the topic sentence, which is your POINT.

   Topic Sentence - This is your POINT from above
Elaboration - say your point again in different words.
Explanation - explain what you mean by your point, or define a word,
Evidence - give some evidence that your point is true, or correct, or can be backed up. (Facts, statistics, expert opinions, quotes etc.)
Examples - tell some stories of your point happening.

(Try to include both evidence and examples, but sometimes you may not be able to find one or the other. Include as much as you can to help support your point.)

4) CONCLUSION
If what you have said in your points is true (so you believe), what then? So what? Try to make a final point, that follows on from what you have argued, but does not introduce new material. If you cannot think of anything relevant and different, then sum up what you have said, but avoid repeating your introduction.

ESSAY PLANNING SHEET (POINTS TO PARAGRAPHS)

TOPIC (as a question)

Introduction

Point One

Point Two

Point Three

Point Four

Paraphrash One

Topic Sentence (Point One)

Elaboration or Explanation
Paragraph Two

Topic Sentence (Point Two) ____________________________________________

_________________________________________________________

Elaboration or Explanation __________________________________________

_________________________________________________________

Evidence _________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________

Examples _________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________

Paragraph Three

Topic Sentence (Point Three) _________________________________________

_________________________________________________________

Elaboration or Explanation __________________________________________

_________________________________________________________

Evidence _________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________

Examples _________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________

Paragraph Four

Topic Sentence (Point Four) _________________________________________

_________________________________________________________
Should abortion be legal?

I think abortion should be legal. One reason is because the woman could be poor and can't afford to have kids. Another reason could be that the woman was raped and doesn't want to keep the baby. A third reason is that if the woman keeps the baby, but has to give it up for adoption, the situation may be upsetting. The last reason is that the mother may miss out on an important part of her life if she has the baby at a young age.

Abortion should be legal because you may be too poor to look after kids properly. Some woman cannot afford to bring up a child without them being disadvantaged. To bring up a child proper it costs a lot of money, you have to feed them, clothe them, take them places, buy toys. Also if the child is sick you have to pay hospital bills and if they have a disease like diabetes or asthma, you have to pay for their medicines. If you want them to have a good education you may want to send them to a private school which costs alot.

Abortion should be legal because the mother may have been raped and doesn't want to keep the baby. If she has the baby she will be reminded of the rape whenever she looks at her child and she won't love it and the child will have an unhappy life. The mother may pay more attention to her other children waiting to pretend her other baby doesn't exist and may not even love the child.

Abortion should be legal because if the mother has the baby, she may miss out on an important part of her life. She might miss out on some of her education and won't have time to start a good career. She may have trouble finding a job and may then end up poor and won't be able to provide for her children.

As I am sure there are some good reasons for abortion being legal, the reasons for it being legal outweigh them. Abortion should be legal.
VARIATION - CUT AND PASTE

Another version of this activity is to take an existing essay and cut it up into the various components: points, elaborations and explanations, examples and evidence. The components are then put together on separate sheets of different coloured paper. (The four points are put together on a green sheet, the four elaborations and/or explanations put together on a yellow sheet, the four (or more) pieces of evidence on a blue sheet, the four (or more) examples on a pink sheet). The students (in pairs or groups) get two sheets of points (green), and one each of all the others. They then have to cut them up and reassemble them into an essay with four paragraphs. Each paragraph will then have a green point, a yellow explanation, a blue piece of evidence and a pink example. The introduction will consist of the four green points. They can add a conclusion if they wish.

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