



## **IMPROVING ESSAY WRITING SKILLS THROUGH STRUCTURED PARAGRAPH TECHNIQUES IN B1 EFL STUDENTS**

**Hamdamova Umida Muhammadi qizi**

Shahrisabz State Pedagogical Institute

**Abstract:** *this research paper investigates the efficacy of deploying structured paragraphing methodologies, specifically the PEEL (Point, Evidence, Explanation, Link) and TEEL (Topic, Explanation, Evidence, Link) frameworks, to enhance the argumentative writing proficiency of B1-level English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students. Writing at the intermediate level often suffers from structural fragmentation and a lack of discursive coherence. Through a longitudinal quasi-experimental study involving sixty undergraduate participants, this paper evaluates the cognitive and linguistic transition from rudimentary sentence-level production to sophisticated academic discourse. The results demonstrate a profound improvement in rhetorical organization, thematic unity, and metalinguistic awareness among the experimental group. The study posits that explicit scaffolding of paragraph architecture significantly reduces cognitive load and fosters the development of higher-order thinking skills essential for the transition to B2 proficiency.*

**Keywords:** *EFL Writing, B1 Proficiency, PEEL Method, Rhetorical Coherence, Cognitive Load Theory, Scaffolding, Paragraph Architecture, Academic Discourse, Argumentative Competence.*

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.1 The Complexity of EFL Writing**



Writing is arguably the most cognitively demanding of the four linguistic macro-skills, requiring the simultaneous coordination of orthographic, lexical, syntactic, and sociolinguistic competencies. For learners at the B1 (Intermediate) level of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), writing represents a critical threshold. At this juncture, learners are expected to transcend the realm of concrete description and personal narrative, venturing into the demanding territory of abstract argumentation and systematic exposition. However, many EFL practitioners observe a persistent phenomenon: students who possess a robust vocabulary and accurate grammar nonetheless fail to produce persuasive or coherent essays. The primary deficit lies not in linguistic "bricks" (vocabulary), but in the "architectural blueprints" (structure).

### 1.2 Theoretical Foundations: Cognitive Load and Scaffolding

The pedagogical challenge of writing is best understood through the lens of Cognitive Load Theory (CLT) (Sweller, 1988). When a B1 student attempts to write an academic essay, their working memory is saturated with sentence-level concerns—verb tenses, prepositional choices, and spelling. This "intrinsic load" leaves insufficient cognitive resources for "germane load"—the construction of logical schemas and thematic progression.

To mitigate this, the concept of Scaffolding (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976) becomes paramount. By providing students with a structured paragraph technique like the PEEL model, educators provide a temporary external framework that supports the learner's cognitive architecture until the skill of logical organization is internalized.

### 1.3 The Rationale for Structured Paragraphing



Structured paragraphing is not merely about aesthetic organization; it is a rhetorical strategy that mirrors the linear logic of English academic discourse. Many EFL students come from cultural backgrounds with "circular" or "indirect" rhetorical traditions (Kaplan, 1966). Explicitly teaching the "Point-Evidence-Explanation-Link" sequence serves as a bridge, aligning the student's output with the expectations of the target academic community.

## **II. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 The Transition from B1 to B2 Proficiency**

According to CEFR descriptors, B1 writers should be able to "write straightforward connected texts on a range of familiar subjects." However, the leap to B2 requires the ability to "develop an argument, giving reasons in support of or against a particular point of view." This transition necessitates a shift from knowledge-telling to knowledge-transforming (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987). Structured paragraphing is the essential tool for this transformation.

### **2.2 The PEEL and TEEL Paradigms**

Research by Hyland (2003) emphasizes the importance of genre-based approaches. The PEEL framework (Point, Evidence, Explanation, Link) has emerged as a dominant pedagogical tool in L1 contexts (UK and Australia) and is increasingly adapted for EFL.

**Point:** Establishing the thematic anchor of the paragraph.

**Evidence:** Providing empirical or anecdotal validation.

**Explanation:** The critical analytical step where the writer synthesizes the evidence with the thesis.



Link: Ensuring discursive continuity and reinforcing the overarching argument.

### 2.3 Metacognition in Writing

Mastering a structure fosters metalinguistic awareness. When students follow a structured technique, they move from writing intuitively to writing intentionally. This metacognitive shift allows for self-regulation and more effective peer-editing (Macaro, 2001).

## III. METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Research Design

This study employed a quasi-experimental, mixed-methods approach conducted over an academic semester (16 weeks). The goal was to quantify structural improvement while capturing the qualitative shifts in students' rhetorical strategies.

### 3.2 Participants

The cohort consisted of sixty (n=60) second-year university students enrolled in an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) program. All participants had been assessed at a B1 level via the Oxford Online Placement Test (OOPT). They were randomly assigned to:

1. Experimental Group (EG, n=30): Received the "Structured Architecture Intervention."

2. Control Group (CG, n=30): Received traditional "Process Writing" instruction without formulaic structural scaffolding.

### 3.3 The Pedagogical Intervention



The EG underwent a rigorous 8-week training module focused exclusively on the PEEL architecture.

Phase 1 (Deconstruction): Students analyzed high-scoring B2/C1 essays, color-coding the Point, Evidence, Explanation, and Link.

Phase 2 (Joint Construction): The teacher and students collaboratively wrote paragraphs on the whiteboard, debating the strength of the "Explanation" component.

Phase 3 (Individual Scaffolding): Students wrote paragraphs using mandated templates that forced them to include all four elements.

### 3.4 Data Collection and Instruments

1. Pre-Intervention Essay: A 250-word argumentative essay on the impact of social media.

2. Post-Intervention Essay: A 250-word argumentative essay on environmental sustainability.

3. Rubric Analysis: Essays were blinded and graded by two independent raters using the IELTS Task 2 Band Descriptors (Cohesion/Coherence and Task Achievement).

4. Semi-structured Interviews: Conducted with 10 students from the EG to explore their cognitive experiences with the PEEL model.

## IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Statistical Analysis: The Quantitative Surge

The data analysis revealed a statistically significant disparity between the two groups. While both groups showed slight improvement in lexical range and

grammatical accuracy, the EG exhibited a dramatic surge in Cohesion and Coherence (CC) scores.

Table 1: Comparative Mean Scores (Scale 1–9)

Criteria	Group	Pre-test Mean	Post-test Mean	Variance
<b>Cohesion &amp; Coherence</b>	EG	4.2	7.1	+69.0%
	CG	4.1	5.3	+29.2%
<b>Task Achievement</b>	EG	4.5	6.8	+51.1%
	CG	4.4	5.1	+15.9%

A paired-sample t-test for the EG indicated a p-value of  $< 0.001$ , confirming that the improvement was not a result of chance but a direct consequence of the structured paragraph intervention.

#### 4.2 Qualitative Evolution: From "Listing" to "Analyzing"

A comparative analysis of student scripts reveals the qualitative nature of this improvement.

Pre-test Sample (EG Student 14): "Air pollution is bad. Cars make a lot of smoke. This is not good for health. We should use buses. Also, factories make pollution too."

Analysis: This is a classic "list" paragraph. It has points but no evidence or explanation.

Post-test Sample (EG Student 14): "The most significant solution to urban pollution lies in the expansion of public transportation networks (Point). For example, cities like Copenhagen have reduced emissions by 30% through massive investment in cycling lanes and electric buses (Evidence). By providing a reliable and eco-friendly alternative to private vehicles, governments can incentivize



citizens to abandon high-emission cars (Explanation). Therefore, infrastructure reform is the cornerstone of any successful environmental policy (Link)."

Analysis: The student has successfully moved to a C1-level academic tone. The logical progression is airtight, and the "Explanation" provides the necessary analytical depth.

#### 4.3 Discussion: The Reduction of Cognitive Anxiety

Interview data suggested that the PEEL model served as an "anxiety reducer." Students noted that the "blank page syndrome" was mitigated because they had a checklist to follow. One student remarked: "I used to worry about grammar. Now I worry about my 'Link.' Grammar seems easier when I know where my sentence is going."

This supports the Schema Theory (Rumelhart, 1980); by internalizing the PEEL schema, students develop a mental template that facilitates the retrieval of vocabulary and syntax more efficiently.

## V. PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 5.1 Redefining the Syllabus

The study strongly advocates for a "Structure-First" approach in B1 writing classes. Instead of teaching grammar in isolation, tenses and connectors should be taught within the context of their structural function (e.g., using the Present Perfect in the 'Evidence' section or Conditionals in the 'Explanation' section).

### 5.2 Feedback Strategies

Teachers should move away from purely "corrective feedback" (fixing typos) towards "structural feedback." Using the PEEL acronym in margins (e.g.,



"Where is your E?") provides students with actionable advice that promotes autonomy.

## VI. CONCLUSION

The journey from a B1 to a B2 writer is not merely a linguistic accumulation but a rhetorical evolution. This research has demonstrated that structured paragraphing techniques—specifically the PEEL paradigm—act as a catalyst for this evolution. By providing a cognitive scaffold, these techniques allow students to manage the complexities of academic discourse without being overwhelmed by the cognitive load of sentence-level mechanics.

While critics may argue that such frameworks stifle creativity, the evidence suggests the opposite: structure provides the security necessary for students to eventually explore more creative rhetorical flourishes. For the B1 EFL student, the PEEL model is the master key that unlocks the door to academic success in the global English-speaking community.

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