

PEAL: Thinking about the Criteria

Perhaps the most visible – and most frequently called-upon – analytical skill is the PEAL paragraph. Think of it as a vehicle that allows you to communicate your knowledge, understanding and critical thinking. Like a vehicle, it requires certain components, otherwise it won't work; and also, like a vehicle, it needs care, revision and maintenance to ensure that it does not break down.

See below some of the components of a good PEAL paragraph:

- Clear point that explicitly addresses the question or thesis (**criterion A: knowledge and understanding & criterion C: focus**)
- Regular recycling of key terms that address the question throughout response (**criterion C: focus**)
- Clear, insightful understanding of the extract and novel: *What is the writer's message?* (**criterion A: knowledge and understanding**)
- Concise, integrated quotations to support understanding (**criterion A: knowledge and understanding**)
- Clear understanding of how authorial choices are used to communicate the message: *how does the writer communicate their message?* (**criterion B: Analysis and evaluation**)
- Link back to the question or thesis (**criterion C: focus and organisation**)

How does this look in practice?

See below an extract taken from the fantastic novel, *The Great Gatsby*, by F. Scott Fitzgerald. Read the extract, and then the question and corresponding analysis.

Activity 1

- With a partner, annotate the model response using the colour-coding & formatting identified above.
- Ensure that you pay close attention to the criteria; make sure you understand how to address each criterion and what examiners are looking for

Extract, *The Great Gatsby*, p67 F. Scott Fitzgerald

"Over the great bridge, with the sunlight through the girders making a constant flicker upon the moving cars, with the city rising up across the river in white heaps and sugar lumps all built with a wish out of non-olfactory money. The city seen from the Queensboro Bridge is always the city seen for the first time, in its first wild promise of all the mystery and the beauty in the world."

Question

"In what ways, and for what reasons, does Fitzgerald explore the presentation of hope and the American Dream through in this extract?"

Model analysis

In this extract, Fitzgerald presents the allure of hope and the American Dream through the imagery used to present the setting of New York City. The narrator describes the moment that the

characters go over “the great bridge” and how the city “rises up” before them in “white heaps and sugar lumps”. The city appears new, futuristic and beautiful. The adjective “great” presents, not only the size of the buildings, but also their majesty and power. This is underscored through the metaphor of “sugar lumps” and the visual imagery of “white” to describe the buildings themselves, communicating a hopeful message that the city and, by extension, the American Dream itself, represents excitement and novelty, as well as moral rectitude; the city appears sweet and pure – even heavenly. Moreover, the symbolism of these images convey the dual sense of the city’s perceived greatness, through its moral purity (“whiteness”), as well as its potential for physical pleasure and excitement (“sugar”). This sense is furthered through the metaphorical image of “non-olfactory money” which “built [the city] with a wish”, conveying the sense that this city, and the hope of the American Dream that it represents, does not smell at all: it is neutral, it is a “wish” that is free from the taint of moral iniquity. Thus, Fitzgerald uses imagery to present the reader with an idea of the American Dream that is pure and exciting, a vision of the future that is full of hope.

Activity 2

Once you have done the annotation above, click [here](#) to see how your notes compare with mine.

Activity 3

Complete a see, think, wonder routine for the above model response.

What do you see? What do you notice - just describe!	
What do you think? Now you can make a judgement: do you think this is an effective paragraph? Why?	
What do you wonder? What would you like to ask me/an examiner/a classmate about this extract?	

Student examples



Now have a look at some paragraphs written by the students from the HL class of 2025. For each example, ask yourself:

- What is good about this example? Be specific and make your comments criterion-specific.
- What does the student do that you could apply to your own work?
- Is there anything that could improve the students' work?

Question: How does Levy explore the concept of identity in this extract?

Example 1:

In this extract, Levy explores her claim about the need for an individual to resist traditional convention and discover their own identity through the use of syndetic listing and repetition. In line 11, Sofia notes that women were traditionally used for "sex and birth, and for spinning and weaving and lamenting at funerals". This repeated use of "and" seems to reflect the cumulative nature of the traditional female gender roles that are imposed on them, and the lack of pause that results from repeating "and" without commas seems to mimic running out of breath when the sentence is said verbally. The irony that shows from this syndetic listing suggests Sofia's disregard for these gender conventions and implies the need to resist against them and shape their own identity. This use of syndetic listing can also be seen in line 25, where Sofia notes that her silk suntop "smelt of coconut ice cream and sweat and the Mediterranean sea". Here, in contrast to the last example, the use of syndetic listing does not expand on one single point but rather juxtaposes multiple symbols that compose the discovery of Sofia's new identity. More specifically, the symbol of the Medusa, who represents the empowerment of women, reinforce Sofia's desire to deconstruct the social constructs around her, allowing her to become liberated. Additionally, the symbol of the Mediterranean sea connects back into the theme of water that can be found throughout the entire novel, and represents the connection back to Sofia's roots and her identity.

Example 2:

Levy often explores themes of gender roles and how that influences identity. This is clear in the many times she employs symbolism to do so. For example, when she mentions the "Parthenon glow(ing) on the hill" (l.5). The symbol of the "Parthenon" is used to represent her main struggles with her identity, her cultural roots, and her role within modern society as a woman. The use of a Greek temple symbolises how Athena calls for her in a time of trouble to connect with her feminine Greek roots.

Additionally the use of the verb glowing represents the transformation both of her identity, but also of the external world, both of which change and develop throughout the novel. Moreover, it contrasts the coldness present at the beginning of the novel. Moreover glow represents Sofia's feminine image and how she becomes one with her femininity more and more throughout the novel. The use of glow can also be linked to the idea of sexuality, as the word glow is often used in literature as a symbol of the female body and sensuality, relating to Sofia's transformation from an introspective identity into a more physical sense of self. This is also seen later in the extract when she mentions that the Parthenon is "dedicated to athena" (l.7). The symbol of "Athena" which represents the idea of being able to break free from gender norms, while still allowing oneself to be feminine. Athena is the goddess of wisdom as well as war, she represents female wisdom and intelligence in relation to violence and war, she is a contradiction, as she represents female values, while still actively conflicting against gender norms. This mirrors the struggle that Sofia faces, in which she wants to be herself, and understand all parts of her identity, without being restrained to stereotypes and norms.

From this we can surmise that the powerful use of Greek symbols in Levys work are an essential feature in portraying the themes of identity and the role of women in society.

Example 3:

In this extract, Deborah Levy explores the concept of identity by examining traditional roles of women in society and how Sofia subverts them. From lines 7 to 15, Levy uses the figure of Athena as a symbol for Sofia, and as the goddess of war, Athena represents a powerful woman in history who defied expectations and conventional gender norms. She was the 'supreme goddess of war' and had 'worshippers' in Ancient Greece, which juxtaposes to the traditional female role Sofia stepmother is occupying in the previous paragraph, where she serves Sofia's father. Levy emphasizes Sofia's subversion further in this extract through a simile in lines 17 to 19, after Sofia expresses her wish to be the one smoking the cigar, as the simile states, 'I want to blow out smoke. Like a volcano. Like a monster.' She wants to occupy a traditionally masculine role, to smoke the cigar like her father does, and perhaps it is this defiance of femininity that makes her a monster. The repeated similes also allude to typical masculine aggression, which is a reinforcement of the symbol of the cigar as a part of male identity. Further, she is clearly confident in her fluid gender identity, which is underscored by the repetition of "I" and 'I want' statements which reinforces the fact that she is unafraid of adopting normative male traits, like smoking a cigar. Overall, through the use of symbolism, juxtaposition, simile, and repetition, Levy intricately explores how Sofia challenges traditional gender roles and asserts her own identity.

Example 4:

The concept of identity in this extract is explored through the challenging of traditional societal expectations of women. This is first seen through the juxtaposition between women's supposed place in society "for sex and birth, and for spinning and weaving and lamenting at funerals", and Sofia's rejection of that norm by wanting "to smoke the cigar and for someone else to light it". Levy uses this contradiction of masculinity and femininity to suggest that one shouldn't be boxed into a single gender or expectation. Instead, one can be "A snake. A star. A cigar" all at once. Levy's listing of symbols that contradict masculinity and femininity portrays Sofia's desire to not be pressured into one gender, specifically looking at the symbol of a snake. It not only symbolizes masculinity but also strength and power, something that she strives for after Ingrid's axing of the snake in Extract 6. Sofia's certainty in inventing her identity independent of a singular gender's expectations, is further shown through the repeated use of "I", evidenced in line 18, where she says "I want to blow out smoke...I want to fume". Here, the use of "I" manifests her firmness in wanting to find her own individual identity. Her sense of certainty in her individual desires is further demonstrated through the use of short, abrupt syntax. This creates a fast paced rhythm, communicating her firm understanding in becoming the person she wants to be regardless of outsider opinions and expectations. This shows significant development in her character and sense of self as she goes from being an introspective and reflective person, specifically shown in Extract 3, to someone who speaks her mind and is clear in what she wants.

Example 5:

Throughout the novel, Deborah Levy's representation of Sofias identity is subject to a large and polarizing change. At the beginning of the book Levy highlights Sofia's lack of agency, and her uncertainty of the world and community around her. Unable to

"Occupation: [Blank]" Through the use of metaphor, Deborah Levy manifests Sofia's journey from suppression to expression, emphasising the importance and power of identity. This extract begins with a powerful metaphor for the treatment, suppression and lack of identity that women battle with in both historical and modern contexts, in line 11 stating; " Women were for sex and birth, and for spinning and weaving and lamenting at funerals" setting the degrading scene of how women were treated in ancient Athens. Connecting this to Sofias thoughts and experiences with her own identity, and how they have progressed, Sofia then states "I do not want to be the girl whose job it is to wail in a high pitched voice at funerals . Emphasising how she is meant for and strives to break the barriers of what women traditionally are expected to do. "my problem is I want to smoke a cigar and for someone else to light it" emphasises the social norms she is breaking as a woman, not only smoking her own cigar; already a stigma breaking feat. But bolsters this expressive and powerful stand with the line "and for someone else to light it." An empowering statement that almost selfishly puts herself above, not just the societal expectations of servitude, but also expressing herself so vividly to the extent of being above even the modern stigma of what women should be.