

PIE format

What is PIE format?

The format is based upon the scholarship of Dr. Anne Marie Hall at the University of Arizona. PIE is an acronym for Point, Illustration, and Explanation. It is used in body paragraphs to help students figure out how to include examples and quotes. PIE also forces students to engage in analysis and to fully and to logically develop their ideas. It is an ideal model for any student who has a lot of trouble organizing a paragraph.

Is this similar to essay structure?

PIE is a part of the structure of an essay. An essay is defined by an introduction, body, and conclusion. PIE helps to develop the body paragraphs of the essay. You can consider PIE to be the structure for each individual body paragraph.

Do I apply PIE to my introduction and conclusion?

No. PIE is used for body paragraph development only.

So, what exactly do Point, Illustration, and Explanation mean?

Point: This is the main idea sentence, or topic sentence, of the paragraph. It establishes the topic and stance that you are taking in the paragraph. To unify the essay, it also needs to link directly to the thesis statement.

Illustration: The Illustration is the example, the direct quote from a source, a detailed example from a film, or a personal example that helps to prove your point. In other words, this is your piece of evidence. The Illustration is intended to be objective; it is telling facts of some kind to the reader.

Explanation: The Explanation is the analysis. It explains to the reader why you included the Illustration that you did by answering the question “so what?”. The Explanation also shows how the Illustration connects to the Point of the paragraph and to the thesis of the essay. As a result, the Explanation is the most important, and probably the longest, part of the PIE structure. It is the “how” and the “why” of the analysis

Sample PIE Outline:

Point #1: King uses emotionally-charged language

Illustration #1: Occurs when King repeats various phrases. Evident when he says “Now is the time.” “*Now* is the time to make real the promises of Democracy. *Now* is the time to rise from the dark and desolate valley of segregation to the sunlit path of racial justice. *Now* is the time to open the doors of opportunity to all of God’s children. *Now* is the time to lift our nation from the quicksands of racial injustice to the solid rock of brotherhood” (706).

Explanation #1: With each repetition, I get the sense that King is placing more emphasis on the phrase itself. The word “Now” is also italicized, so that helps. I feel myself being drawn into what he is saying and feel his passion toward this particular subject.

Sample PIE Paragraph:

One of the most prominently used types of language in King’s speech is his use of emotionally-charged language, which is language used to evoke a sharp emotional response in the reader. The most obvious method by which King uses this language is through his repetition of key phrases in the speech. For instance, King states,

Now is the time to make real the promises of Democracy. *Now* is the time to rise from the dark and desolate valley of segregation to the sunlit path of racial justice. *Now* is the time to open the doors of opportunity to all of God’s children. *Now* is the time to lift our nation from the quicksands of racial injustice to the solid rock of brotherhood. (706)

The fact that the editor of the speech has italicized the word “Now” calls extra emphasis to the importance of each new phrase that King speaks. The relatively short sentences serve to stimulate the passions of the reader, so that we may share in the same passion that King felt as he delivered these words in 1963. The fact that he uses repetition multiple times throughout the speech serves to call our attention to the urgency of the issue being discussed. This form of emotionally-charged language serves to establish an emotional bond between the reader and King; however, King’s mastery of emotive language does not end here.

Variations: The PIE format can also be applied when creating longer, more complex paragraphs that you might see in scholarly journals. Writers may sometimes combine 2 or more PIE structures together in a single paragraph if they have several examples to reinforce their claim.

Empty PIE Outline for Your Use:

Point #1:

Illustration #1:

Explanation #1:
