

Crafting the Evidence, Analysis, and Transition for Each Paragraph

MEAL Plan (Main idea, Evidence, Analysis, Link)

A clear and effective paragraph is constructed like an essay. Just as an essay has a main idea (thesis statement) that is developed and supported with evidence and analysis in the body paragraphs, a paragraph needs to focus on a single idea that is developed and supported with evidence and analysis. Also, just as an essay ends with a conclusion, a paragraph should close by linking the topic sentence to the main idea in the next paragraph. The chart below illustrates the parallel structure between an essay and a paragraph:

Essay	Paragraph
Introduction/Thesis Statement	Topic Sentence/Main Idea
Body	Evidence and Analysis
Conclusion	Link/Transition to Next Paragraph

To help writers understand how to craft clear and effective paragraphs, writers should remember this formula: **MEAL**. This stands for **M**ain idea, **E**vidence, **A**nalysis, and **L**ink.

Main idea: The main idea of a paragraph is called the topic sentence. Like an arguable thesis statement, the topic sentence is a debatable claim that requires relevant support or evidence. The topic sentence should appear near the beginning of the paragraph since that sentence states the claim or idea to be discussed and developed in the content of the paragraph. This placement assures writers that the audience will not miss the significance of anything being presented and developed in the paragraph. For help with crafting topic sentences, writers should see [Crafting a Topic Sentence for Each Paragraph](#).

Evidence: After the main idea (the topic sentence) is stated, relevant evidence must be provided to support the debatable claim made in the topic sentence. The primary tools of evidence in rhetorical construction are definitions, examples, and opposing views. These forms of evidence will typically be presented in the form of studies, reports, data, statistics, interviews, examples or illustrations. Evidence should be relevant and directly support the writer's topic sentence and the thesis statement for the essay. The writer may choose to present source evidence through summary, paraphrase, or direct quotation, and the writer may also use modes of development such as description, definition, example, analogy, cause and effect, or comparison and contrast.

Analysis: Following the evidence, the writer must provide an analysis of the evidence that has been provided. Analysis is the writer's evaluation, interpretation, judgment, or conclusion of how the evidence supports the paragraph's main idea or topic. The writer should never expect the audience to interpret the evidence provided. In fact, as the leading voice in the paper, the writer is required to explain how the audience is meant to interpret the evidence in the context of the writer's argument. Such an explanation helps the audience to conclude that the topic sentence is a credible claim in the context of the evidence provided.

Link: The final sentence or sentences of the paragraph link the current paragraph's main idea to the main idea in the next paragraph. This type of foreshadowing also prepares the audience for the next main idea. Since most body paragraphs are going to be followed by another body paragraph, the writer should consider using transitional phrases that help to link paragraphs. For example, transitional words such as *however, so, thus, still, despite, nonetheless, although, but, even though* or *in spite of* signal relationships between paragraphs and the relationship between the main ideas of all paragraphs.

For more information on this topic, please visit the Writing Centers at [Colorado](#), [Purdue](#), and [Chapel Hill](#).