



The Writing Center

UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO

DENVER | ANSCHUTZ MEDICAL CAMPUS

Paragraph Development: M.E.A.L.

After entering into an academic conversation with an effective introduction, writers must then sustain their thesis statement with well-supported reasons—or claims—in body paragraphs. Typically these body paragraphs follow the M.E.A.L. plan:

M: MAIN IDEA

Each paragraph should begin with a topic sentence that introduces the subject of the new paragraph. The topic sentence (or main idea) should make a specific claim (think of it as a mini-thesis for your paragraph) and accurately forecast the rest of the paragraph. The best claims will be specific and detailed.

- Weak Example (Vague Claim): There are many reasons to shower in the morning.
- Strong Example (Specific Claim): Showering in the morning not only helps with wakefulness but also improves physical hygiene.

E: EVIDENCE

After establishing the claim, each paragraph should present evidence to support the point. Evidence can include quotations/paraphrased information from reliable publications, firsthand observation/evidence (if appropriate) or other descriptions/explanations. Evidence should be clearly distinguished from Analysis (below) with signal phrases, such as “According to the American Lung Association...” or “Dr. Janice Smith, author of a widely cited text on child behavior, claims...” or something similar. Some disciplines (such as Business Writing) and citation styles prefer evidence is presented without a signal phrase.

A: ANALYSIS

Following every piece of evidence should be Analysis, which explains why the evidence is important or how it is related to the main point of the paragraph. Strong analysis will make a clear connection between the Main Idea and the Evidence. Analysis may begin with phrases such as, “This passage shows...” or “This research proves” If it helps, think of Analysis as the answer to the questions, “So what?” or “What’s the point?” Discuss relevance and make key connections here.

L: LINK (either backward to the thesis or forward to the next paragraph)

The final step when writing a paragraph is to link the Evidence and Analysis back to the main purpose of the paper. If this connection is obvious from the Analysis, then a Link (or transition) to the next paragraph may be more appropriate.

An important note: the Evidence and Analysis steps can be repeated as many times as necessary in a paragraph but only if the Evidence is closely related to the paragraph’s Main Topic. Generally, though, body paragraphs do not exceed one page, double-spaced.