

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. MEAL is an acronym that reminds us of the elements that paragraphs need and helps us structure those elements in a way that makes sense for readers.

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

- 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.

Notes

- 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.
- Sometimes a paragraph might look like MEEAAL or MEAAAL, or even EAEA if you're using MEAL across a whole section. Make these choices with purpose.

Writing Tip

Highlight MEAL in each of your body paragraphs, assigning each element a different color.
Then, review: Are all 4 colors present in each paragraph? What's missing, or out of balance?

Model Paragraph

(M) One way of measuring equality between genders is assessment of women's roles in a society's upper economic echelon, allowing us to see whether the push for equality between the genders has penetrated to the most influential levels of society. In such measurements, we can see that economic parity is a distant prospect and should continue to be an area that receives much consideration. (E) In June of 2014, Caroline Fairchild reported in Fortune Magazine, encouragingly, that women are seeing the highest representation on America's Fortune 500 since the magazine started keeping track in 1998. She also reported, however, that despite this modest rise, women still make up only 4.8% of the people on that list. (A) Regardless of whether the middle and lower classes are seeing more comparable economic success between genders, sites of economic power, it seems, are still largely unavailable to women. Such numbers urge that one of the major focuses of feminist theory should continue to be establishing economic equity between genders, especially because of the massive, societal power differential between genders that such an economic divide suggests. (L) The continuing wage gap, especially in the upper economic levels, suggests that economic gender inequality continues to be a legitimate concern.