

Paragraphing with the MEAL Plan

M

Main Idea

Every paragraph should have one main idea. If you find that your paragraphs have more than one main idea, separate your paragraphs so that each has only one main point. The idea behind a paragraph is to introduce an idea and expand upon it. If you veer off into a new topic, begin a new paragraph.

E

Evidence or Examples

Your main idea needs support, either in the form of evidence that buttresses your argument or examples that explain your idea. If you don't have any evidence or examples to support your main idea, your idea may not be strong enough to warrant a complete paragraph. In this case, re-evaluate your idea and see whether you need even to keep it in the paper.

A

Analysis

Analysis is the heart of academic writing. While your readers want to see evidence or examples of your idea, the real “meat” of your idea is your interpretation of your evidence or examples: how you break them apart, compare them to other ideas, use them to build a persuasive case, demonstrate their strengths or weaknesses, and so on. Analysis is especially important if your evidence (E) is a quote from another author. Always follow a quote with your *analysis of the quote*, demonstrating how that quote helps *you* to make *your* case. If you let a quote stand on its own, then the author of that quote will have a stronger voice in your paragraph (and maybe even your paper) than you will.

L

Link

Links help your reader to see how your paragraphs fit together. When you end a paragraph, try to link it to something else in your paper, such as your thesis or argument, the previous paragraph or main idea, or the following paragraph. Creating links will help your reader understand the logic and organization of your paper, as well as the logic and organization of your argument or main points.