



MEAL Plan

What is a MEAL plan?

The MEAL Plan is an acronym—which was coined by Duke University—that stands for **M**ain idea, **E**vidence, **A**nalysis, and **L**ink. This strategy is used to construct an effective paragraph. The MEAL plan can be used as a guide for writing body paragraphs.

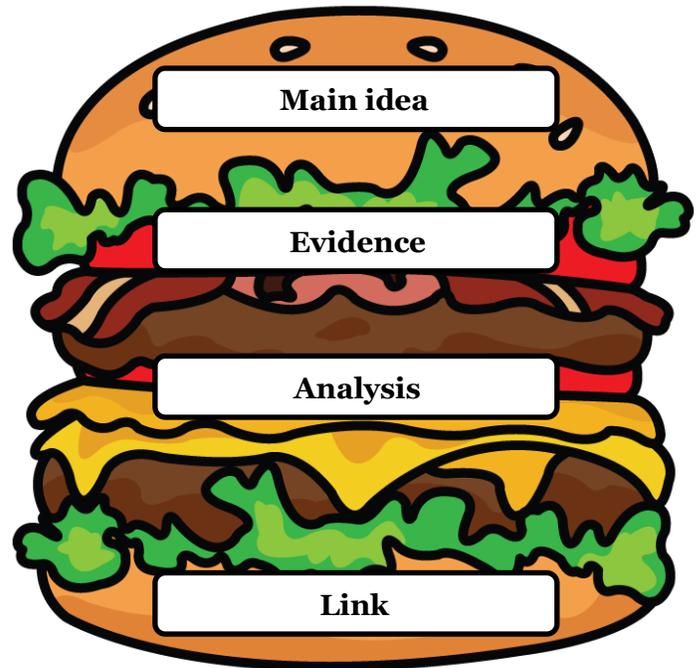
Parts of the MEAL Plan

Main Idea: This is the paragraph's central focus. The main idea is usually located in the beginning of the paragraph as the *topic sentence*, which establishes what the paragraph will entail. However, there are some exceptions to where the main idea is placed within a paragraph. Regardless of its placement, the reader should be able to understand the main idea after reading the paragraph.

Evidence: This generally consists of textual evidence (such as quotations, paraphrases, or summaries) from the text that you are writing about or any other resources that support your main idea. When you are quoting or paraphrasing your evidence, you *always* need to make sure you are providing an in-text citation. This establishes credibility and also acknowledges the author(s) of the source you are using.

Analysis: This section is very crucial since it is where you insert your own ideas to further explain how the evidence you have provided supports your main idea. This part of the paragraph is where you, as a writer, can insert your own voice in the paper since it articulates your interpretation of the evidence. Your analysis should answer why the evidence you have included in the paragraph is important.

Link: This is a concluding sentence that links back to your larger claim and sums up what you have discussed. The sentence should also serve as a transition to the paragraph that follows it.



MEAL Plan Checklist

Can you point out the main idea of the paragraph?

- The main idea of the paragraph is usually located in the first sentence, but it can also be placed after a transitional sentence, in the middle of the paragraph if the main idea requires extensive support, or at the end of the paragraph to serve as a dramatic tool.
- Placing the topic sentence in the beginning of the paragraph is more advantageous because it provides the reader with a guide of what will follow.

Does the main idea correlate to the thesis of the paper?

- The main idea should always connect to your *thesis** so your paragraphs are in conversation with each other. By having your main ideas—or *topic sentences**—refer back to the thesis, your paper as a whole will sound more cohesive.

*For more information on thesis statements and topic sentences, please see [Creating Effective Thesis Statements](#) and [Topic Sentences](#).



Is the evidence provided credible?

- Depending on the assignment, the evidence can be pulled from a range of mediums including a scene from a Shakespearean play, an excerpt from a criminal justice textbook, or scientific statistics from a peer-reviewed article. It is important to make sure that the evidence you provide is credible so your paper is more scholarly and effective.
- Evidence should *always* be properly cited, regardless if it is paraphrased or not*. If you are directly quoting the source, quotation marks should come before and after whatever excerpt you include.

Does the evidence support the main idea?

- Just as how the main idea needs to connect to the thesis, your evidence also needs to support the main idea to further reinforce your stance on the topic. The evidence used should be relevant to your main idea so your audience has a better understanding of the paragraph and, ultimately your paper as a whole. The evidence reiterates what you are trying to propose in the main idea and also strengthens your argument in a more concrete way.

Do you analyze the evidence provided?

- Your analysis should answer at least one of the following questions: Why is the evidence important? How do you interpret the evidence? How does the evidence support your main idea? What purpose does the evidence have in the paragraph?

Do you link back to the main idea at the end of the paragraph?

- The concluding sentence(s) should simultaneously wrap up the content that you have mentioned in the paragraph and reiterate the main idea proposed earlier on. The link between the last sentence(s) and the main idea further emphasizes the relevance of the paragraph and also helps the reader clarify why the paragraph is necessary in the essay.

Does the paragraph smoothly transition into the next?

- The final sentence(s) of the paragraph should foreshadow what will be discussed in the next paragraph. This gives your audience the opportunity to prepare themselves for the following claims. By providing these transitions, the paper as a whole will be more cohesive and fluid.

What does the MEAL plan look like?

The **main idea** is usually located in the first sentence and it should state the purpose of your paragraph. The **evidence** can either be a paraphrase or a direct quote from any primary or secondary sources. Primary sources consist of materials such as statistics, creative literature, interviews, memoirs, autobiographies, or government documents. Secondary sources are interpretations based on primary sources. They are composed of scholarly and/or peer-reviewed articles, magazines, dictionaries, documentaries, and newspapers. Make sure you provide a proper in-text citation at the end of this section. After you have presented the evidence, you should input your own **analysis**. In this section, you are explaining how the evidence relates back to your main idea and why the evidence is important for the audience to understand. This part of the paragraph gives you a chance to exercise some creative freedom, especially since you are integrating your own voice through your interpretation of the evidence. Once you have provided a substantial analysis, you should **link** back to the main idea mentioned earlier on in the paragraph. By reiterating the main idea, the paragraph has now come full circle. After establishing a sense of cohesiveness, the linking sentence(s) should introduce the topic you will be discussing in the next paragraph. The flow and effectiveness of your paper will elevate with the help of this transition.

*For more information on quoting and/or paraphrasing evidence, please see [Using Evidence](#) and [Citing Sources](#).



MEAL Plan Example

Introduction*:

[Attention Getter]

[Thesis]

[Main idea(s)]

[Transition]

Body Paragraph(s):

Main Idea

Evidence

Analysis

Link

This introduction is provided to give you some context on how the main idea(s) of the body paragraph should always relate back to the thesis. This example is an excerpt from an argumentative research paper.

The Shutdown of Feminine Insurgency: A Character Analysis of *A Raisin in the Sun*

[Attention getter:] Within the time frame of the late 19th and 20th century, the rejection of traditional gender roles was becoming more commonplace. The rise in the women's rights movement correlated with the development of feminist scholarship and more attention to women's works, which included feminist texts. A text that can be examined in these ways is Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*.

[Thesis:] The push-and-pull relationship that all women have in *A Raisin in the Sun* pertaining to the gender roles forced upon them shows how difficult it is to fully break away from sexism. **[Main idea(s):]** I will argue that all of the female characters in this particular work have contributed to patriarchal standards, whether it be Lena and Ruth Younger standing behind Walter's place to be the head of the household or Beneatha's fate to become a traditional wife. **[Transition:]** Hansberry has integrated sexist language throughout this piece of literature in the representation of each womanly convention, proving the rigidity of systemic oppressions and perpetuating the limitations enforced on women.

[In *A Raisin in the Sun*, the battle between the sexes is rooted in the male protagonist, Walter Younger, versus the women in his life.] **[His mother Lena, wife Ruth, and sister Beneatha Younger all conflict with Walter in various ways, all of which revolve around whose dream shall become the champion among the dreams forcibly deferred when the family is set to receive Lena's late husband's insurance money. From these conflicts with the male protagonist, Hansberry "raises the issues of black man-black woman relationship, gender roles, women's right to education and better living conditions, the role of males in the black matriarchal society, black woman's identity, poverty, and abortion" (Ghani 1296).]** **[The "wars" that the women wage against the men in each text demonstrates the sexist oppression they experience. The female characters in *A Raisin in the Sun* seem to only have a purpose stemming from their roles in relation to the males of the text. The sexism and the revolt against it are integrated within Hansberry's work through the interactions between the female characters and their male counterparts, who represent patriarchal values, such as "the man of the house" motif.]** **[Regardless of the women's sense of empowerment throughout the play, their desires to be autonomous is "a dream deferred" due to the systemic patriarchal constraints they remain shackled to.]**

*For more information on writing introductions, please see [Effective Introductions](#).

Further Assistance: For more detailed help or if you have questions, visit the Writing Center located in the Lewis University Library or call 815-836-5427.

Sources Consulted: Duke University's Thompson Writing Program, Defiance College Library, American University Library, and thinkSRSD.