Northcentral University Writing Center
MEAL Plan (Main idea, Evidence, Analysis, Link)

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Writing Center

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

As discussed in Crafting a Topic Sentence for Each Paragraph and Crafting the Evidence, Analysis, and Transition for Each Paragraph, a clear and effective paragraph should parallel the structure of a clear and effective essay. The chart below illustrates how the structures of an essay and a paragraph are parallel:

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

The **MEAL Plan** (Main idea, Evidence, Analysis, and Link) is an effective strategy for constructing paragraphs. The Meal Plan is also an effective strategy for the writer to employ in the review and revision of each paragraph. This guide demonstrates how the writer may verify that each component of the MEAL Plan is intact or how each component may be effectively revised for each and every paragraph in the body of the paper:

Main Idea: *Just as an effective essay focuses on one main idea (the thesis statement), an effective paragraph should also focus on one main idea (the topic sentence).* The writer should locate the topic sentence for each paragraph (usually the first sentence) and then, paragraph by paragraph, verify that each topic sentence accurately and effectively describes and emphasizes the main idea that is supported and analyzed in that paragraph.

Evidence: *Just as an effective essay provides evidence to support the main idea, an effective paragraph should also provide evidence to support the main idea or claim.* The writer's topic sentence is typically a claim related to the thesis statement; therefore, each topic should be supported by relevant and credible evidence. Evidence typically includes summaries, paraphrases, quotations, definitions, and examples from primary and secondary sources. The writer should verify that relevant, credible evidence is presented to support the claim. If the writer determines that the evidence provided is weak or needs further development, that evidence should be revised or replaced with proper evidence to support the paragraph's main idea.

Analysis: *Just as an effective essay provides analysis to explain and connect the evidence to the thesis, an effective paragraph should also provide analysis to explain and connect the evidence to the topic sentence or claim.* Evidence alone does not speak for the writer. Evidence is not analysis. Analysis is the writer's perspective on the evidence that may not be immediately evident to the audience. If the writer expects the audience to be persuaded or convinced, to recognize the connections and relationships between the writer's claims and the evidence, then the writer should verify that the analysis is present and is revised to accurately explain how the evidence should be interpreted and how that evidence is connected to the paragraph's main idea.

Link: *Just as an essay ends with a conclusion that links all of its main points, a paragraph should close by linking the topic sentence to the main idea in the next paragraph.* The writer should verify that each paragraph's conclusion is revised to *link* the current paragraph's main idea to the next paragraph's main idea. This foreshadowing prepares the audience for the next main idea and for what might be expected from the writer's research. The writer's revisions may include transitional phrases such as *however, so, thus, still, despite, nonetheless, although,* or *in spite of*

Main Idea Graphic Organizer (adapted from Berkowitz, 1986)

Main Idea 1:

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Main Idea 2:

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Main Idea 6:

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Title:

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Main Idea 3:

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Main Idea 5:

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Main Idea 4:

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