



The Writing Center

UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO
DENVER | ANSCHUTZ MEDICAL CAMPUS

Outlining an Essay & M.E.A.L.

Introduction Paragraph

Just as every story needs a beginning, every essay needs an introduction. The purpose of an introduction is to: a) catch the audience's attention and compel them to keep reading; b) provide a basic overview of the topic and/or any background information that may be necessary to understanding the subject (though this background is often a distinct, second paragraph); c) present the thesis statement, which is the main argument in 1-2 sentence form. Typically, the information in the introduction moves from general to specific.

Body Paragraphs

Each body paragraph in an essay should be a complete M.E.A.L.

M: MAIN IDEA

Each paragraph should begin with a topic sentence that introduces the subject of the new paragraph. The topic sentence should make a specific claim (think of it as a mini-thesis for your paragraph) and accurately reflect 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 with 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 description/explanation. 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.

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. Analysis may begin with phrases such as, "This passage shows that..." or "This research proves that..." 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 back to the thesis or on 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. However, if the pieces of Evidence aren't related enough to belong in a single paragraph, each new piece of Evidence and Analysis should become a new paragraph. Similarly: Longer, more complex essays might use entire paragraphs for each element of MEAL above (and not one paragraph for everything).

CONCLUSION

The objective of the conclusion is to move from the specific main points of the body paragraphs to a more broad analysis of why the information provided is important to the reader. To do this, the conclusion should first revisit the main points presented in the thesis, including any strong arguments made in the body of the essay. The conclusion should then make a strong final impression on the reader. One of the following approaches may be effective:

- Standard Academic – iterate the thesis statement in different words and restate any supporting ideas/points. Most effective when many ideas have been presented and readers legitimately need a reminder (or another approach isn't appropriate).
- Call to Action – directly address an interested audience and compel them to follow action or advice. Most relevant for editorials or other arguments that establish a problem that needs a solution.
- Call for More Research/Understanding – emphasize the value of the present ideas but acknowledge the need for more work or contributing ideas.
- Hypothesize Results/Consequences – predict success, disaster or some other outcome when action isn't necessarily required.

One thing the conclusion absolutely should not include is any new information or ideas that were not discussed in detail in the body of the essay. New ideas in the conclusion could confuse readers or cause them to wonder, "Why is this just being discussed now?" While a Call to Action or Hypothesis of Results or Consequences may seem like new information, these approaches should be so closely related to information presented in the body paragraphs that readers won't be confused or frustrated.