

The MEAL Plan: A Guide for Body/Evidence Paragraphs

The **MEAL plan** is a model that will help you organize body paragraphs (a.k.a. evidence paragraphs) and present supporting evidence and sources from your research. The primary source you cite as evidence will not have a citation, of course, as that is the original material of the author, but you will cite that author and work according to the style and format you are using for your research essay.

1. **Main Idea**—the first sentence: State the topic you are discussing in this paragraph and/or the point you are trying to make.
2. **Evidence**: Paraphrase, summarize, or quote a reputable source that reinforces and supports your main idea. Be sure to cite all your sources.
3. **Analysis**: Explain how and/or why your evidence supports the main idea of your paragraph.
4. **Link to your thesis**—final sentence: Use your last sentence(s) to connect your evidence and analysis back to your thesis statement.



...Flip the page for a sample MEAL paragraph...

Below is a sample paragraph from a primary source with the four elements of a MEAL paragraph identified by the label in parenthesis before each section. The thesis of this section 4.29 from “Strategies to Improve Your Writing” in the 7th edition of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* is that most people can improve their writing skills through consultation with writing experts such as copyeditors and writing consultants.

(M - main idea) Some writers, particularly new writers and those writing in a nonnative language, may benefit from extra help with their writing. (E - evidence) They might hire a copyeditor to review and proofread their paper or visit a tutor at a university writing center. (A - analysis) A copyeditor or writing center tutor can assist with idiomatic language use, organization, and other areas. (L - link) We highly recommend use of these services for authors who consistently face obstacles in getting their work published or students who would like to attain more success in the classroom. Students should check the academic integrity policies of their institution to determine what kinds of assistance are acceptable.

Source: American Psychological Association. (2020). *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association 2020: The official guide to APA style (7th ed.)*. American Psychological Association.

Now, when you cite this evidence in your research paper on “How to Improve One’s Writing Skills” you must give credit to the author of this primary source with an in text citation. Here the author/date method is used. The name of the author is part of the signal phrase, and the publication date follows the quoted material in parenthesis. The page number is also included in APA7 format.

According to the American Psychological Association, writers “. . . might hire a copyeditor to review and proofread their paper or visit a tutor at a university writing center” (2020, p.126).