Developing Paragraphs

Good writers can write clear, concise, and effective paragraphs. A paragraph cannot simply be thrown together; rather, there is a structure to developing a cohesive and coherent paragraph. One way to help think about how to develop a paragraph is to remember the MEAL Plan:

- **Main Idea**
- **Evidence**
- **Analysis**
- **Link**

**Main Idea**
The main idea of a paragraph is called the topic sentence. Everything in your paragraph must connect and support your topic sentence in order to be cohesive. The topic sentence should appear near the beginning of the paragraph and should be directly related to the paper’s main idea or thesis. For example, if the thesis statement for your essay is, “All public buildings should ban smoking on their premises because of its negative effects,” then your topic sentences for your body paragraphs could include the following:

- Smoking is directly connected to dangerous health problems.
- Non-smokers should not be subjected to second-hand smoke.
- By allowing smoking on campus, The University is supporting unhealthy habits.
- When people smoke they irresponsibly discard their cigarettes and ashes all over the campus.

**Evidence**
After the main idea (the topic sentence) is stated, relevant and accurate evidence must be provided to support the debatable claim made in the topic sentence. These forms of evidence will typically be presented in the form of studies, reports, data, statistics, interviews, examples, illustrations, and quotes. Picking one of the topic sentences above, here is what the supporting evidence might look like:

**Topic Sentence:** Smoking is directly connected to dangerous health problems.

**Evidence:** According to the Centers for Disease and Control and Prevention (CDC), smoking is the cause of almost 500,000 deaths a year in the United States. The CDC also states, “More deaths are caused each year by tobacco use than by all deaths from human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), illegal drug use, alcohol use, motor vehicle injuries, suicides, and murders combined.”
Analysis
Following the evidence, the writer must analyze the evidence. Analysis is the writer’s evaluation, interpretation, judgment, or conclusion of how the evidence supports the paragraph’s main idea or topic. As the leading voice in the paper, the writer is required to explain how the audience is meant to interpret the evidence in the context of the writer’s argument. Analysis strategies include description, clarification, explanation, definition, example, analogy, cause and effect, or comparison and contrast. Using the evidence from before, here is how the analysis could be written:

**Analysis:** All evidence clearly states that smoking is dangerous to an individual’s health. With the negative consequences, it is difficult to believe that any public building would support such an unhealthy habit.

Link
The final sentence or sentences of the paragraph link the current paragraph’s main idea to the main idea in the next paragraph. Since most body paragraphs are going to be followed by another body paragraph, the writer should consider using transitional phrases that help to link paragraphs. Now let’s look at a possible linking sentence:

**Link:** Not only does smoking cause serious health problems for the individual, but it also affects others who choose not to smoke.

MEAL
This is how the paragraph comes together:

Smoking is directly connected to dangerous health problems. According to the Centers for Disease and Control and Prevention (CDC), smoking is the cause of almost 500,000 deaths a year in the United States. The CDC also states, “More deaths are caused each year by tobacco use than by all deaths from human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), illegal drug use, alcohol use, motor vehicle, injuries, suicides, and murders combined.” All evidence clearly states that smoking is dangerous to an individual’s health. With the negative consequences, it is difficult to believe that any public building would support such an unhealthy habit. Not only does smoking cause serious health problems for the individual, but it also affects others who choose not to smoke.