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

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** (**M**ain idea, **E**vidence, **A**nalysis, and **L**ink) 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* to help signal relationships between paragraphs and connections to the main idea in the paragraph to follow.

MEAL Paragraphs

A MEAL paragraph is a format that helps guide you in your literary analysis writing. It is an acronym for:

Main Idea - the paragraph's central focus, what you are trying to prove within the paragraph

<u>Evidence</u> - examples that help prove the main idea (and, in a longer paper, the thesis). In an English paper, your evidence is generally made up of quotations from the text. For a history paper, you might be using a quotation or paraphrased fact.
      REMEMBER: EACH SOURCE MUST BE CITED AND CREDIBLE!

Do not place a quotation alone as a sentence. Be sure to give at least a signal phrase ("According to…" or something of that sort) that explains to the reader how/where the quotation comes from or who is speaking.

Analysis - This section is the most important part of the paragraph; it is where you dig deep into your evidence and explain how and why it proves your thesis.

"Quote clips" (specific words or phrases from quotations) can be extremely useful when analyzing. Transcend what the quotation, or any other form of evidence, says and explain connections that you personally come up with.
      REMEMBER: EXPLAIN HOW AND WHY!

<u>Last Thought/Linking Sentence</u> - If you're just writing a paragraph, use this sentence to restate the Main Idea (in a different way!) and wrap up your thoughts. For a longer paper, connect your main idea back to your paper's thesis. Sometimes teachers will tell you to transition to the next paragraph's idea.

Here is an example of a MEAL paragraph:

In the novel The Great Gatsby by F. Scott Fitzgerald, Myrtle Wilson demonstrates how members of the working class cannot achieve the American Dream. <u>Myrtle, a working-class citizen, associates herself with the wealthy in order to appear rich. During her apartment party, Myrtle changes into a party dress and, "with the influence of the dress her personality had also undergone a change. The intense vitality that had been so remarkable in the garage was converted to impressive hauteur…until she seemed to be revolving on a noisy, creaking pivot through the smoky air" (Fitzgerald 39-40).</u> *Myrtle strives to be someone she is not by changing into an outfit she thinks implies she is wealthy. She tries to be rich by dressing the part, but the less wealthy side of Myrtle still lurks within her, as displayed through the term "smoky air." "Smoky air" relates to the Valley of Ashes, yet at this point in the novel, Myrtle is in New York. By revealing that the "smoky air" of the Valley of Ashes follows Myrtle to New York, a wealthier location, Fitzgerald demonstrates how simply associating with the wealthy is not enough for Myrtle to actually obtain the American Dream.* <u>Her attempt to transcend class structures ultimately leads to her death, which reveals that the working class cannot grasp the American Dream.</u>

Bold: Main Idea   <u>Underlined</u>: Evidence   *Italics*: Analysis   <u>Wiggly underlined</u>: Link/last thought