

M.E.A.L.

Plan:

Paragraph Construction

Main assertion: an arguable claim that relates to or expands upon the thesis.

→The “C” paper, the rubric specifies, must enlist “one clear assertion in each paragraph”

Evidence: in the form of examples, reasons, illustrations, observations—use the most salient examples to support the thesis; think of examples as a springboard into substantial analytical inquiry

→The “A” and “B” papers support most *if not all* points with appropriate textual examples.

Analysis: probing “so what;” drawing compelling conclusions; interpreting significance and relevance of ideas; unpacking meanings (i.e., figurative vs. literal; connotative vs. denotative); addressing “how” and “why”

questions; arguments, assumptions, assertions, deductions, etc.

→In the “B” paper, analysis shows “evidence of serious consideration,” recognizing complexities and offering “intelligent arguments”; in the “A” paper, analysis is “compelling,” driven by “insightful arguments,” provocative assertions, and interesting conclusions that probe the depth of the thesis.

Link (to thesis)

STUDENT EXAMPLES

Thesis: I believe it is imperative for Professor Vivian Bearing to narrate her own story in *Wit* due to her insatiable desire for her accomplishments to be the center of attention at all times and to her need to be in total control of all aspects of her life, which, arguably, stem from a lifetime of being ignored by those surrounding her.

Even from the earliest times in Vivian Bearing’s life she was made to feel unimportant and not worth listening to. [\[mm1\]](#) Vivian’s father, Mr. Bearing, began this treatment that continues throughout the remainder of Vivian’s life by others [\[mm2\]](#). For example, when Vivian is only a mere five years old her father nearly ignores her altogether and shows her no sort of compassion or love on her birthday, but instead carries on a cold conversation of sorts in the same professorial tone that Vivian soon adopts in her own life. Instead, he sits reading a newspaper while Vivian tries unsuccessfully to gain his attention and carry on a conversation. Mr. Bearing never lets the conversation move into a warm, familiar tone but is instead “disinterested but tolerant,” subtly urging Vivian to cease talking and “read another” of the books in front of her (41). [\[mm3\]](#) These types of impersonal situations become commonplace in Vivian’s life both at work, in her personal and social life, as well as in her treatment period at the university hospital. [\[mm4\]](#) This has a great connection with Vivian’s need to tell her own story [\[mm5\]](#). Vivian uses the last of her time on earth to gain the attention from the audience

Comment [mm1]: Main assertion

Comment [mm2]: Claim

Comment [mm3]: Evidence: extended illustration

Comment [mm4]: Analysis

Comment [mm5]: Link

that she has been lacking for the majority of her life from those close to her. Most certainly, being ignored by one's father has deep psychological consequences. [\[mm6\]](#) Whether consciously or unconsciously on Vivian's part, being ignored by her father plays an important part in understanding her need to tell the audience her story herself rather than having a generic, emotionless narrator [\[mm7\]](#).

Comment [mm6]: Analysis: astute conclusions

Comment [mm7]: Analysis and link

Thesis: Through the experience of her illness, Vivian discovers that severe intellectual training hinders important emotional development, and the only way to redeem her humanity is to break the cycle of training by making known its flaws [to her listeners].

It is arguable that feelings, habits, and overall lifestyles are learned [\[mm8\]](#). This concept is shown in the drastic differences between cultures and individual families. It is normal human mentality to lead by example. As a small child, Vivian is introduced to this idea through the relationship she has with her father. On her birthday, Mr. Bearing is "disinterested but tolerant" (*Wit* 23) of his five year old, and is "never distracted from his newspaper." Not only is there an emotional barrier between them, there is also a tangible item separating them. It is Mr. Bearing's newspaper, a piece of literature, that comes between he and his daughter [\[mm9\]](#), [\[mm10\]](#). Simply by maintaining that barrier, Mr. Bearing shows his daughter it is more important to obtain knowledge than to gain personal level relationships. Furthermore, their entire conversation is about books and reading, indicating what relationship they have revolves around their intellect [\[mm11\]](#).

Comment [mm8]: Main assertion: an arguable claim that must be proven

Comment [mm9]: Very salient observation: ripe for interpretation, which ensues in the next sentence.

Comment [mm10]: Evidence: extended illustration

Comment [mm11]: Analysis: the writer draws some conclusions here; implicitly, the writer links ideas back to the central claim the thesis: the implication is that personal relationships are hindered by his intellectual grooming of Vivian.

Vivian also learns incredible independence from her father. [\[mm12\]](#) Instead of talking about Vivian's book, Mr. Bearing instructs her to "read another" (23) to keep himself from further interacting with her. [\[mm13\]](#) In addition, when Vivian asks what a certain word in her book is, her father responds by saying, "Sound it out" (*Wit* 23). He is molding her to rely on no one, emotionally or mentally. He is teaching her self-reliance through intelligence. More specifically, he is training her through example of his own actions. Her father, consequently, establishes a pattern she will follow throughout her

Comment [mm12]: Main assertion

Comment [mm13]: Note that this sentence combines evidence with analysis in the form of posing an interpretive conclusion.

life.^[mm14] It is with literature that Mr. Bearing separates himself from his daughter, and it is with literature that Vivian, in turn, separates herself from the world.^[mm15]

Comment [mm14]: Analysis

Comment [mm15]: Link

^[mm15]

Vivian's passion for literary knowledge stems from her father's teachings.^[mm16] This passion strengthens with her experience. Mr. Bearing, having died only two years prior, always pushed Vivian for excellence. With her father no longer able to encourage her, Vivian looks to E.M. Ashford as her mentor. While critiquing Vivian's essay about one of John Donne's Holy Sonnets, Ashford states, "Nothing but a breath—a comma—separates life from life everlasting" (*Wit* 25-26). Later Vivian asks herself, "...just a comma? Simple human truth, uncompromising scholarly standards? They're connected?" (26). Vivian determines that, like her paper, her intellect is also inadequate.^[mm17] By comparing the relationship of Donne's poem to the relationship of her life, Vivian reveals that her thirst for knowledge has grown to a greedy hunger. In her mind, simple human truth is life, while uncompromising scholarly standards is life everlasting! To reach such standards of intelligence is an acceptance of power for Vivian. To have power is to be in control. Vivian needs to become a scholar to achieve life everlasting. She wants to guide others to that higher intellect and at the same time, keep them below her. If others were to reach her level of importance, she would not be remembered or admired as greatly, thus stripping her of her immortality.^[mm18] This desire becomes overwhelming to Vivian, and once again she declines an opportunity to establish good relationships with her peers.^[mm19]

Comment [mm16]: Main assertion, the "outcome" to ideas explored in above paragraphs. There is a clear logic and progression to these ideas which build upon one another.

Comment [mm17]: Evidence

Comment [mm18]: Very astute analysis: provocative conclusions drawn

Comment [mm19]: Link

Peer Critique Worksheet:

Name of Person who wrote paper: _____

Name of Peer Reviewer: _____

Instructions:

- 1) Take home one copy of a peer's draft. Read it carefully through once, without marking it. Then, read it again, this time with a more cautious, evaluative eye. Underline the thesis with a pen or pencil.

- 2) Go through and diagram each body paragraph, with an eye for each component of the M.E.A.L. plan.
 - a. Circle O the main assertion of each paragraph: Is it a viable topic sentence? (remember, it must be an assertion, an arguable claim, *not* a statement of observation or of mere plot summary).
 - b. In brackets [], separate all evidence. Comment upon the evidence: Is it enough? Too much? Is it related to the topic?
 - c. Highlight (in any color) all analysis: Evaluate the analytical strength of each paragraph: is it compelling? Interesting? Thorough? Or is it limited, scanty, "shallow"? Raise questions to deepen/expand the author's interpretive findings.
 - d. Place parentheses () around the link part of the paragraph, *if* there is an identifiable "link" sentence. If there isn't one, would one be useful?

- 3) Bring the draft back to the next class, with commentary attached, ready to submit to peer. Each individual will be given a grade based upon completion of the assignment (all terms noted above) upon submission to the writer.