EFFECTIVE PARAGRAPHING

Figure 1 – The body paragraph of a typical academic essay:

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explanation.) Claim claim claim claim claim claim claim claim claim claim claim claim claim.
Claim claim claim claim claim claim claim claim claim claim claim claim claim. Etc.

Note: This is only a rough guide to the structure of a body paragraph in an academic essay. The lengths of each section are somewhat flexible, but in general they should look similar to the lines above. See the next page for an explanation of each section.

The Color Coding Decoded:
**TOPIC SENTENCE:** The topic sentence should always be your own claim – not a quote, a summary, or a paraphrase of another author or text. It should also clearly relate to the thesis statement. For body paragraphs other than the first one, your topic sentence should begin with a transitional phrase that explains the connection between the previous paragraph’s main claim and this paragraph’s main claim.

**EXPLANATION AND TRANSITION:** Sometimes (ok – almost always) it is a good idea to write a line or two linking the claim in the topic sentence to the evidence that you’ll present to support that claim. Use this space to clarify your claim, to explain your reasons for making it, and to transition into the evidence.

**INTRODUCTION OF EVIDENCE:** If introducing an article or an author for the first time, give their full name and the full title of the work that you’re drawing from. Often the introduction can be linked with the evidence in the same sentence.

**EVIDENCE:** The reason we get out of bed in the morning (well, some of us…). The job of any piece of evidence is to support the claim in the topic sentence (and thus the thesis as well). Evidence may take the form of a quotation, a summary, a paraphrase, a fact or statistic, a personal experience (in certain contexts), or a piece of common knowledge. The more specific the evidence, the more persuasive it will be.

**LINK/EXPLANATION:** Evidence cannot speak for itself. Even if you find the perfect quotation to support your claim, you still must explicitly state for your reader how it supports your claim. This is also called the warrant, and it is usually – if not always – as long as or longer than the evidence itself.

**INTRODUCTION OF FURTHER EVIDENCE:** After explaining the first piece of evidence, you now have the option of introducing further evidence (remember not to overburden the reader with evidence – sometimes less is more). There are several ways of ordering evidence within a paragraph, but generally speaking it is best to save the better example for last. If the second piece of evidence is coming from a different source than the first one, be sure to introduce the second source here.

**EVIDENCE 2:** Follow the same guidelines as above.

**LINK/EXPLANATION:** Same as above. With the second piece of evidence, however, it is also necessary to show how it relates to the first piece of evidence (if the connection isn’t immediately obvious).

**CLAIM:** The last step: here you need to restate your topic sentence claim in a new way so that you can drive home the main point of the paragraph and prepare your reader for the next paragraph. These sentences can be tricky, but the main point to bear in mind is that you never want to end a paragraph with a quotation, which can confuse your reader. Instead, use this space to summarize the main point of your paragraph before you transition into the next claim (the topic sentence of the next paragraph). One strategy for smooth transitions: when revising, make sure that the first sentence of each paragraph repeats keywords or synonyms from the last sentence of the previous one.