



Academic Center

Tutoring and Testing at UHV.

Drafting Body Paragraphs: CECC: An Internal Organization Strategy

While many writers know that paragraphs begin with a topic sentence, they may not be able to remember the other essential parts of a body paragraph. This handout is designed to help you organize the internal structure of the body paragraphs in your paper by using a formula known as CECC.

The CECC formula may be used in combination with other purpose-based organizational strategies, including the cause-effect, problem-solution, comparison-contrast and chronological approaches to paragraph development, which are discussed in the Academic Center handout series entitled *Drafting Body Paragraphs: Purpose-Based Organization Strategies*.

The **CECC** approach, designed by Penn State University writing tutors Trent Mikesell and Jamie Steck, is one of the most basic ways to organize the information in a body paragraph. This technique is easily adapted to most writing situations, and it works particularly well for literary analysis papers and persuasive research papers.

CECC may also assist writers who have trouble deciding when and how to integrate source material into their papers.

So, what does the abbreviation CECC stand for? Let's take a look at the model that follows.



Visit us on the web at www.uhv.edu/ac

Email at tutor@uhv.edu University West, room 129 (361) 570-4288

Claim

- The first C is the paragraph's **claim**. Claim may be an unfamiliar word, but it is the assertion that you make about the subject of the paragraph. The claim usually states that the subject of the paragraph *is* a certain way, *does* something or *is* true. The "claim" correlates to the controlling idea or main idea. The claim is, in effect, the paragraph's topic sentence, a sentence which all of the other sentences in the paragraph must support.

Evidence

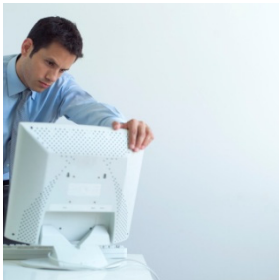
- The next part of the paragraph will develop the idea asserted in the claim and will be composed of two items, **evidence** and **commentary**, which may be rotated throughout the middle portion; for example, for every section of evidence that is used in the paragraph, there will be a section of commentary which follows it. The middle portion of the paragraph should follow this pattern until you feel, as a writer, that you have developed all of your main points. Let's take a closer look at how these two items operate.
- The **E**, or **evidence**, allows you to establish "proof" for your claim. When the word "proof" is mentioned, most writers automatically assume that outside material is needed; however, this is not always the case. Evidence, or proof, may take the form of outside material such as statistics or quotations from other sources, but the writer's own evidence in the form of explanations, examples or reasons may also be valid, depending on your audience's needs and expectations.

Commentary

- The third item **C**, or **commentary**, allows you to include your own information about the evidence presented in the previous section. **According to Mikesell and Steck, the commentary acts as a bridge, connecting the evidence with the claim made in the paragraph's topic sentence.** Commentary is not necessarily the same thing as personal opinion. In contrast to opinion, commentary requires you to look closely at your evidence and establish your own voice by further explaining, interpreting, analyzing, synthesizing or evaluating it. In other words, in your commentary you are making an assertion or observation about *how* the evidence relates to and/or supports the paragraph's claim.

Conclusion

- The last **C** is the **conclusion**. The conclusion is the sentence or sentences that tie the middle section of the paragraph, evidence and commentary, to the main claim of the paragraph or to the thesis of the paper. In other words, the conclusion ties all three points of the paragraph together in one or two sentences; this "tying together" ensures that there are not any loose ends that leave the reader with a feeling of lack of closure. **The conclusion often answers the question "So what?"** to establish the significance of the paragraph's topic.



How can I generate effective commentary for the evidence in my paragraph(s)?

One technique that you can use to generate commentary is to ask yourself questions. For example, after using statistical evidence that shows the increasing frequency of plagiarism at the college level, you could ask yourself *"What do these statistics mean in relation to the paragraph's claim that technology plays a definite role in plagiarism's increasing frequency?"* In this case, an appropriate response, or commentary, would be a section that reveals *how the statistics show that the occurrence of plagiarism has increased dramatically during the years the Internet has become more readily available to students.*

While closely following the CECC pattern may be the best technique for beginners, there are ways to incorporate some variety into this paragraph organization strategy. For example, instead of using the traditional alternating pattern, **claim-evidence-commentary-evidence-commentary-conclusion**, the paragraph can follow a block-style format where there is a **claim-block of evidence-block of commentary-conclusion**. Or, the paragraph might present a brief piece of evidence that requires several sentences of commentary for explanation. The most useful thing to remember is that you will not usually have only one sentence for each part of the paragraph. After you become familiar with the CECC approach, there are a variety of ways that you can experiment with its organizational pattern.

Now, let's take a look at a general example of a CECC paragraph.



Visit us on the web at www.uhv.edu/ac

Email at tutor@uhv.edu University West, room 129 (361) 570-4288

Claim/Controlling Idea

- What underlay the divisive relationships between English faculty and engineering faculty in the early 1900s (and lasting well into the 1930s) was primarily a matter of perceptions concerning status.
- *Explanation: This first sentence, the topic sentence, reveals the paragraph's main idea or claim. Here the reader is able to see the claim that the conflict between English and engineering faculty was brought about because of perceptions about their status.*

Evidence

- From Kynell we can learn that English instructors were generally not involved in the discussion "on the role of English in an engineering curriculum," and English faculty themselves assigned "technical communication [. . .] second class status" to literature (p. 93). Miller takes Kynell's point another step. She suggests that technical writing courses were associated with the 'world of work' and "thus associated with what were low forms of practice from the beginning" (p. 15).
- *Explanation: This second section provides concrete evidence from outside sources in the form of direct quotations. However, keep in mind that direct quotations of observations are not the only way to provide evidence. Statistics, definitions, examples and anecdotes are some other ways to support your claim.*

Commentary

- Miller and Kynell together paint a picture like the following: Practice = World of Work = Low Form (technical writing) versus Theory = World of Academia = High Form (academic writing). As we can see, English instructors teaching engineering students had little motivation to keep teaching engineering students; they had little say in what they taught and technical communication courses were likely to be of more detriment than benefit to their career opportunities. Technical communication courses were associated with the world of work rather than the world of academia.
- *Explanation: Note that the writer's commentary uses the evidence (quotations) in conjunction with the paragraph's claim (faculty divisions resulted from perceptions of status) to do two things: 1. develop a clear model in the form of equations about the disciplines and 2. explain why/how the perceptions revealed in these equations led to a division between the two faculty groups.*

Conclusion

- These perceptions about the low status associated with teaching engineers clearly divided the English department within itself, but the perceptions also divided English faculty from their students and from engineers.
- *Explanation: Note how this conclusion ties all three of the paragraph's sections into a single sentence. This sentence restates the claim that divisions were caused by perceptions of status, relying on the evidence section simultaneously, and also includes the writer's commentary ("both divided faculty from their students and from engineers") based on this claim.*

In the previous example the CECC method functions on a very general level. However, because the CECC pattern is so basic, it may be used in combination with many different types of development strategies that are based on the paragraph's **purpose**, including the cause-effect, problem-solution, comparison-contrast and chronological patterns.

In order to see how the basic CECC pattern may be used in combination with one of these purpose-based approaches, let's take a look at how the previously-discussed example paragraph **simultaneously** fits the foundational model of CECC and purpose-based cause-effect model.



Visit us on the web at www.uhv.edu/ac

Email at tutor@uhv.edu University West, room 129 (361) 570-4288

Claim/Controlling idea/Establishment of cause and effect relationship

- What underlay the divisive relationships between English faculty and engineering faculty in the early 1900s (and lasting well into the 1930s) was primarily a matter of perceptions concerning status.
- *Explanation: This first sentence, the claim, reveals the paragraph's main idea: the relationship between English faculty and engineering faculty. However, this sentence also sets up how the paragraph will justify this claim by using a cause and effect approach. In order to clearly introduce the relationship that will be explored, the claim reveals both the cause (perception of status) and effect (divisive relationships between English and engineering faculty).*

Evidence/Explanation of process (details on cause)

- From Kynell we can learn that English instructors were generally not involved in the discussion "on the role of English in an engineering curriculum," and English faculty themselves assigned "technical communication [. . .] second class status" to literature (p. 93). Miller takes Kynell's point another step. She suggests that technical writing courses were associated with the 'world of work' and "thus associated with what were low forms of practice from the beginning" (p. 15).
- *Explanation: This second section uses evidence (source material) in the form of quotations to describe the process leading to the differing perceptions of status between English faculty and engineering faculty.*

Commentary/Explanation of process (how cause leads to effects)

- Miller and Kynell together paint a picture like the following: Practice = World of Work = Low Form (technical writing) versus Theory = World of Academia = High Form (academic writing). As we can see, English instructors teaching engineering students had little motivation to keep teaching engineering students; they had little say in what they taught and technical communication courses were likely to be of more detriment than benefit to their career opportunities. Technical communication courses were associated with the world of work rather than the world of academia.
- *Explanation: In the third section, the writer's own equations and justifications explain how the cause (different perceptions of status) leads to multiple effects (little motivation; lack of communication) which will eventually lead to an overall effect described in both the paragraph's claim and its conclusion.*

Conclusion/Statement of overall effect

- These perceptions about the low status associated with teaching engineers clearly divided the English department within itself, but the perceptions also divided English faculty from their students and from engineers.
- *Explanation: This conclusion sentence ties the overall cause (different perceptions of status) directly to the overall effect (divisive relationship).*

Note that when the CECC formula is used within the context of a cause-effect paragraph, the cause and effect approach is evident, but its parts function within the four foundational sections of a CECC paragraph (claim, evidence, commentary, conclusion). However, also note that the cause-effect approach that is used here is a slightly varied version of the one that is presented in our series of handouts entitled *Purpose-Based Organization Strategies*. This particular example paragraph shows the many layers that can make up a cause and effect paragraph; not only are the overall cause (differing perceptions of status) and overall effect (divisive relationship) explored, but an explanation of the cause and an illustration of the smaller effects are also identified. This explanation of the cause and illustration of multiple, smaller effects together composes the process section. So, although upon first glance this paragraph may not seem to fit the basic cause-effect pattern, it does fulfill the three major sections of this pattern: identifying the cause, explaining the process and revealing the effect.

Keep in mind that the cause and effect approach is only one of several purpose-based organization strategies that can be adapted to the CECC format. More information on this topic is available in our handouts in the *Drafting Body Paragraphs: Purpose-Based Organization Strategies* series.

Copyright 2008 by the Academic Center, the University of Houston-Victoria,
and Candice Chovanec Melzow.
Created 2007 by Candice Chovanec Melzow.



Visit us on the web at www.uhv.edu/ac

Email at tutor@uhv.edu University West, room 129 (361) 570-4288