



The Uneven U

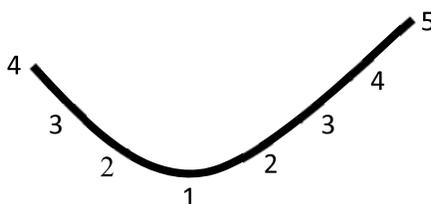
Writers—especially those engaged in academic writing—tend to structure their arguments logically so their readers can follow their thinking. One such model is Eric Hayot’s Uneven U. Using this model a writer can build paragraphs that lead to a broader argument.

In the Uneven U model, the first sentence introduces an idea (the topic), which sets expectations for the paragraph. Then, the thought is explained, evidence is presented and interpreted, and finally a claim about the paragraph or the broader argument is expressed.

The “U” refers to how this paragraph starts with a more abstract idea, moves toward concrete information, and then back to abstraction.

1. Concrete evidence, raw data, or information
2. Description, plain or interpretive summary, paraphrase, or establishing framework
3. Conceptual summary, drawing together two or more pieces of evidence, or introducing a broad example
4. Less general statements, orienting toward a problem, or pulling ideas together
5. Abstract, general statements oriented toward a solution or a conclusion

Using these numbers, a paragraph will begin with a topic sentence at 4 and then move down through 3, 2, and 1 before moving back up to 5 with a concluding sentence(s). Graphically, the sentence would look like this:



The Uneven U in Action

Now, let’s look at the Uneven U in action in this paragraph about Dr. Seuss’ *The Lorax*. The steps are notated.

[4] The Lorax is also effective as an allegory for overconsumption [3] It highlights the impact of self-interest on human actions. The character disregards the implications of deforestation to achieve a material gain. [2] For example, when the main character meets the Lorax he hastily explains, [1] ‘There’s no cause for alarm. I chopped just one tree. I am doing no harm (Seuss 23)’. Seuss uses this foreshadowing to drag the audience into the story and the deep politics behind it. [2] The story thus illustrates the general view of the environment from a utilitarian perspective. [3] The force that humanity has on nature is personified by this perversion of ‘the market’; [4] therefore Seuss provides insights on the greedy nature of humanity. [5] The main character reaches the same realization Seuss hopes for humanity, but not before it is too late.”

On the following page is a paragraph broken up based on the shape of the model to better illustrate how each sentence moves the argument down to more concrete ideas and then up into the abstract.

Level 4 - The intro sentence

When a writer begins a paragraph, that specific sentence usually introduces a topic that will be explored throughout the writing.

This is an important means of introducing a new sub-topic.

Level 3 - Conceptual summary and introduction to evidence

The writer then contextualizes the thoughts presented in the introductory sentence.

This is important for introducing evidence.

Level 2 - Locates evidence and may offer an interpretation

The writer will then usually introduce a quote or point to where the following textual evidence will come from.

Evidence is used to defend the claims of the first sentence.

Level 1 - Concrete evidence

Once evidence has been alluded to, that evidence follows. Level 1 sentences display that evidence.

Further use of evidence to defend claims.

Level 2 – Interpretation of evidence

Once the evidence has been introduced, the next logical step is to explain and interpret that evidence.

Interpretation is key for originality and showing understanding of the evidence's impact on the topic.

Level 3 - Conceptual Summary

Now that the evidence has been explained for clarity, a more abstract conceptual discussion can occur.

Abstract discussion helps with applying the knowledge gained in a real-world or hypothetical setting.

Level 4 - Abstract theoretical concern

This level shapes the former abstraction started in the conceptual summary, usually into a definite statement:

Affirmative statements of argument that should avoid tautology.

Level 5 - Abstract idea that makes the reader think

A level 5 sentence is usually the conclusion sentence to a paragraph, and that sentence will address the theoretical concept of the introductory sentence (and other level 4 sentences) but offer the reader more to think about:

This is important for transitions between topics as well as providing questions for the reader to consider.



Constructing an Uneven U Paragraph

Use this flowchart to create your own Uneven U paragraphs. While it doesn't follow the U shape, it does show how to transition between each step.

