

The Cause-Effect Essay

Cause-and-effect writing gives reasons and explanations for events, conditions, or behavior. It answers the need most of us have to understand the world around us.

When planning a cause-and-effect essay, begin by listing the event or condition you want to address. Then brainstorm to generate ideas about either its causes or its effects. Do additional research on your topic if necessary.

Think carefully about the causes and effects you have listed. As part of prewriting you may find it helpful to diagram or demonstrate these relationships graphically. Check to be sure you have not drawn any faulty conclusions. Your conclusions are faulty if the cause-and-effect relationship does not exist or if it is unreasonable or not clearly established.

Ask yourself the following questions:

- Have I assumed a cause-effect relationship when there is none?

Causal Relation:

Necessary Cause - one that must be present for the effect to occur.

Ex. Combustion is necessary to drive a gasoline engine.

Sufficient Cause - one that can produce an effect unaided, though there may be more than one sufficient cause of a given effect.

Ex. A dead battery is enough to keep a car from starting--but faulty spark plugs or an empty gas tank will have the same effect.

Contributory Cause - one that helps to produce an effect but cannot do so by itself.

Ex. Running a red light might help to cause an accident....though other facts -- pedestrians or other cars in the intersection -- must also be present.

- Have I assumed only one cause when many causes may be appropriate?
- Have I incorrectly assumed a causal relationship between two events that immediately follow each other?
- Did I distinguish between long-term and short-term causes and effects. A short-term cause or effect is a single, immediately identifiable event; a long-term cause or effect may be less easy to pinpoint but in the long run more important?

- o Did I distinguish between primary (most important) and secondary (ancillary) effects?

When you begin drafting your essay, you may want to use your cause-and-effect diagram as the basis for an outline. Review your notes and identify the most significant causes or effects. It may help to ask yourself the following questions: Who was responsible? Who was affected? Did the event have economic or social ramifications?

Compose a thesis statement that clearly states your topic. Because cause-and-effect essays need a readily identifiable structure, you will almost always write the essay in chronological order. Sometimes, however, you will use reverse chronological order. For example, you might begin with an effect or a series of effects and trace them back to their original cause. Whatever organization you use, write paragraphs with strong, clear topic sentences and relevant supporting details.

As you write, be careful not to overstate your case. Because many causal relationships cannot be proven conclusively, you may want to qualify your statements.

Signal Words in Cause-and-Effect Writing

Cause and Effect	Degrees of Certainty	Levels of Importance
as a result	certainly	above all
because	may	equally important
consequently	necessarily	finally
due to	perhaps	first
if....then	possibly	initially
leads to	probably	last
therefore	undoubtedly	primarily
thus	unquestionably	second

Possible Cause-Effect Topics

1. Explain the effects of stress on you. Focus by limiting to a specific situation.
2. Think about your favorite author. What caused him/her to write as he/she did?
3. What are the effects of television on study habits?
4. Why are you such a good/poor/mediocre student?
5. What were the effects of Sputnik on American education?
6. What are the effects of overcrowding?
7. How can one individual have an effect on the environment?
8. What are the signs of teenage depression? How can teenage depression be prevented or treated?
9. What are the typical causes of poor behavior in the classroom?
10. What are the effects of the computer on the quality of your writing?
11. Would Mt. Hebron be the same without _____?
12. What were the causes of the _____ War?
13. What were the effects of the _____ War?
14. What are the physical effects of anger?
15. Is the media a reflection of society's ills or does it cause society's ills?
16. Why can't Johnny read?
17. What are the effects of illiteracy?
18. Should television cameras be allowed in the court room?
19. What effect has the automobile had on the American society?
20. What is the value of having a pet? a hobby?
21. Can music improve learning?
22. What are the effects of beauty? ugliness? poverty ? wealth?
23. Are good grades an accurate prediction of future success?

24. How does pain affect a person's life?

Please use this topic as I already registered it.



25. Which is more of an influence on a person's life -- genetics or environment?

26. Think of a character from history or fiction. What caused his/her behavior? What were the results of her/his behavior?

27. What influence do you have over your friends and/or family? Why?

28. Does the United Nations have any influence in the world today?
