

Module: Written Expression.

Level: Second Year

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Cause and Effect Essays

Causes and effects focus on why things happen and what their results or consequences are. Causes are the reasons why something happened; they answer the question “Why did the event happen?” The causes of a car accident might be bad weather conditions, inattention on the driver’s part, or faulty brakes. Causes occur before the event and make the event happen. Effects are the direct results or consequences of an event; they respond to the question “What happened because of the event?” The effects of a car accident might be injury, litigation, or increased insurance premiums. Effects come after the event and are the direct results of the event.

The study of causes and effects is central to many disciplines. For example, historians analyze causes and effects of historical events. What were the causes of the Civil War? What were the results of the Treaty of Versailles? Scientists attempt to unravel causes and effects as well. What causes cancer cells to multiply in the body? What effect do they have on healthy cells? What effect does shade have on plant growth? What are the effects of overfishing, pollution, or dams on the salmon population?

Cause/Effect Organization

The main purpose of a cause-and-effect essay is to explain to your audience (1) the causes of a particular event, problem, situation or phenomenon; (2) the effects of an event, problem, situation or phenomenon; or more rarely, (3) a combination of both.

The type of cause-and-effect essay you write will depend on the topic you choose and the main point you wish to communicate. If, for example, your purpose is to tell readers about the

impact a special person had on your life, your essay would focus mainly on the *effects* of that person. However, if your purpose is to explain why you moved out of your family home, your essay would focus on the *causes* of your decision. Be sure to make your main point clear so that your audience can follow the cause-and-effect relationship you've chosen to develop.

Depending on the topic, there may be *three* patterns of organization:

I. Multiple causes-->effect

In this pattern, the organization is as follows:

➤ *Thesis statement:* Air pollution is caused by the following factors: exhaust gases from cars, uncontrolled factory releases, and burning of low-quality coal for heating.

i. Exhaust gases from cars

A. Government does not have enough control

B. Citizens are not conscientious

ii. Uncontrolled factory gases

A. No regular checks on gases released

B. Factories are inside the borders of residential areas

iii. Burning of low-quality coal for heating

A. No governmental control

B. Other forms of energy too expensive

Each developmental paragraph is devoted to one of the causes of air pollution. Each cause is supported by two minor supports. While writing, these major and minor ideas should be adequately explained and exemplified as well.

II. Cause-->Multiple effects

In this pattern, the effects of a certain situation are explained in separate paragraphs, with the following organization:

➤ *Thesis statement:* Watching too much TV is one of the major sociological issues of this century, which has many effects on the physiology and psychology of people.

i. Eating disorders

A. TV meals

B. Obesity

ii. Communication problems

A. More violence

B. No interpersonal talk

Again, we have grouped related effects under two main points: physiological and psychological. Then, we have supported each effect with two minor supports (A and B). While writing, we should explain these major and minor supports by giving examples and/or defining what we mean, as well.

III. Causal chain / Domino

In this pattern, the events lead to one another, as in the following organization:

➤ *Thesis statement:* Using deodorants with chlorofluorocarbon gas will bring the end of world.

i. Chlorofluorocarbon gases are contained in most deodorants and released by some factories into the air.

ii. This gas causes the ozone layer to become thinner and finally disappear in patches.

iii. The unfiltered ultraviolet rays of the sun cause overheating in the poles of the earth, where the icebergs start to melt.

iv. The huge amount of water released from the poles leads to a rise in the sea-level.

v. The sea will cover the land and this will be the end of the world.

Again, each major point should be supported with examples, statistics that show that there are some factories and deodorants that release chlorofluorocarbons, that there is a rise in the sea-level, etc.

Thesis Statement

In a cause/effect essay, the thesis statement announces whether cause, effects, or both will be examined, and the supporting paragraphs develop those causes or effects. You might even announce specific causes or effects by signaling them to readers: “One effect drug use has on athletes is to ...”

Transitions

There are no transitions specific to cause or effect. Use those transitions that show you are adding causes to the ones already discussed or those that show sequence.

Addition

Also	in addition
as a matter of fact	in fact
besides	likewise
for instance	moreover
furthermore	similarly

Sequence

afterward	in the end
at last	meanwhile
at the same time	next
at this point	soon after
by this time	subsequently
eventually	then
finally	to begin with
first, second, third, etc.	

FOUR BASES Checklist for Cause and Effect

➤ **About *Unity***

- Does the essay have a clearly stated thesis?
- Is there any irrelevant material that should be eliminated or rewritten?

➤ **About *Support***

- Is each of my main points supported by solid, specific details?

➤ **About *Coherence***

- Have I used transition words to help readers follow my train of thought?
- Have I provided a concluding paragraph to wrap up the essay?

➤ **About *Sentence Skills***

- Have I used a consistent point of view throughout my essay?
- Have I used specific rather than general words?
- Have I avoided wordiness and used concise wording?
- Are my sentences varied?
- Have I checked for spelling and other sentence skills, as listed on the inside back cover of the book?
- As you revise your essay through one or more additional drafts, continue to refer to this list until you can answer yes to each question.

Sample Cause and Effect Essay

Effects of Watching too Much TV

Discoveries and invention of devices are always welcome till we, humans, find a way to abuse its benefits and be adversely affected by it. This was the case when Wilhelm Roentgen discovered x-ray and within five years, the British Army was using a mobile x-ray unit to locate bullets and shrapnel in wounded soldiers in the Sudan. TV was also invented with

positive thoughts in mind – there would be no national borders, education and communication would be worldwide, etc. However, we are now trying to overcome its physiological and psychological adverse effects on human beings.

One of the physiological effects of watching TV in excessive amounts is eye-strain. It is true that there are specifications for watching TV; TV should be 5 m. away from the eye, the room should be adequately lit, TV should be placed at the same height with our eyes, etc. However, these do not prevent our eyes from getting tired if we keep watching TV for a long time. Another effect is obesity, which is widely observed in people who like watching TV and eating snacks everyday (there is even a term “TV snacks” to refer to fast food that is suitable for eating in front of the TV). TV is such a powerful machine that people cannot get away from it – it is addictive.

Apart from the physiological effects, TV also causes psychological effects. One is a result of being exposed to violence. After seeing so many violent scenes on TV, people start considering violent actions normal and they lose their sensitivity to their environment. Partly connected to this effect, the interpersonal communication among people decreases. Being insensitive to the suffering of other people causes people to become alienated. Also, after coming home from work people seek to relax in front of the TV, and generally people prefer watching TV to talking to each other. This issue is very important since lack of interpersonal relationships mostly end with divorces.

Shortly, inventions are meant to be beneficial for human beings, if we know how to benefit from them. TV is one of such inventions that need to be used for the right purpose only – being educated and entertained for a reasonable (according to age) period of time. We may, then, be safe from or at least reduce the adverse physiological and psychological effects of watching too much TV.