

Lecture Three : Cause / Effects Essays

1. What is a Cause/ Effect Essay?

- It is often considered human nature to ask why and how an event happened to understand the causes and the effects behind this event. A cause is the reason that produces an event or condition; an effect is what results from an event or condition.
- Another common method of essay development is called cause and effect which examines causes, describes effects or both i.e. cause and effects. Writers might use cause/effect organization to answer questions or to debate topics such as:
 - **Explain the effects of reading on children.**
 - **Medical Research: Causes and Effects**
 - **Why and to what extent has the integration of technological devices facilitated the learning process?**
- The purpose of a cause/effect essay is not just to list the causes or the effects but rather to determine how various phenomena or events interrelate in terms of origins and results (causal analysis). In some cases, the correlation between cause and effect is clear, but often determining the exact relationships between the two is complex requiring analysis and interpretation.
- Usually causes precede effects, but causality or causal analysis involves more than presenting the sequence of occurrence of causes and effects: cause/ effect analysis explains why a certain event happened or is happening and what possible effects might emerge.
- As causes and effects interrelate, it is logical that many causes can lead to one effect; in the same way many effects may be the result of one reason. This should be taken into account when using this technique in essay writing.

- In some contexts and even if several causes/effects are identified, one cause/effect might be considered as the major or main cause/effect as compared to the other causes or effects perhaps of less importance (contributory).
- Distinction should be made between direct and indirect cause/effects. Direct causes are those that are clearly linked to the event while indirect causes seem not obviously to connect to the event, but the writer focuses on to reveal to the reader a more in depth explanation of the situation.
- Distinction should also be made between immediate and remote causes or effects. An immediate cause closely precedes an effect and is relatively easy to recognize; a remote cause is less obvious perhaps because it involves a past cause.
- Due to the complex nature of phenomena, there is a variety of ways to present causal analysis in that many causes can be responsible for one effect (multiple causes- one effect), many effects can be the result of one cause (multiple effects- one cause), or there is a chain of causes and effects in which an effect becomes the cause (A causes B- effect- B-causes C).
- For a cause/effect to be credible, it needs to sufficiently identify the real causes/effects and more importantly emphasize their interrelatedness.

2. Patterns of Organization in a Cause/ Effect Essay

- Depending on the writing assignment and the writer's purpose, a cause/ effect essay may focus on the causes, the effects or both either in a block manner or in a chain of interrelated causes and effects. A cause/ effect essay can be organized following two main organizational patterns which are the block and the chain patterns.
- Whatever pattern writers opt for, the essay must contain an introductory paragraph with its essential elements, a clear thesis presenting the essay orientation (causes, effects or both), the required number of developmental paragraphs corresponding to the discussion of the selected causes or effects, and an effective concluding paragraph.

2.1 The Block Pattern

- This pattern implies that the developmental paragraphs are arranged in blocks of mini essays. The first block, for instance, discusses all the causes in one, two, three, or more paragraphs depending on the number of causes followed by the second block which discusses all the effects in separate

paragraphs. Of course, the essay might only emphasize the causes or the effects not both. The outlines below will demonstrate each of these patterns.

- **Multiple Causes, One Effect Pattern (focus on the causes of a specific effect)**

Introductory paragraph

- Attention getter
- Context
- Thesis Statement: the topic is the effect

Body Paragraphs

- First body paragraph: First cause (topic sentence+ supporting elements)
- Second body paragraph: Second cause (topic sentence+ supporting elements)
- Third body paragraph: Third cause (topic sentence+ supporting elements)

Concluding paragraph

- Restatement of the thesis
- Summary of the main causes
- Final thought

e.g. Topic: noise pollution (effect)

- Thesis statement: Noise pollution can come from a variety of sources, but the three most noticeable sources are industrial machinery, vehicles, and constructions. (Each of the highlighted causes will be detailed in a paragraph.)

- **Multiple Effects, One Cause Pattern(focus on the effects of a specific cause)**

Introductory paragraph

- Attention getter
- Context
- Thesis Statement: the topic is the cause

Body Paragraphs

- First body paragraph: First effect (topic sentence+ supporting elements)
- Second body paragraph: Second effect (topic sentence+ supporting elements)
- Third body paragraph: Third effect (topic sentence+ supporting elements)

Concluding paragraph

- Restatement of the thesis
- Summary of the main effects
- Final thought

e.g. Topic: balanced diet (cause)

- Thesis statement: Opting for a balanced diet is an important step towards adopting a healthy lifestyle, preventing certain diseases, and having the adequate weight. (Each of the highlighted effects will be detailed in a paragraph.)
- Multiple Causes, multiple Effects Pattern (focus on both)

Introductory paragraph

- Attention getter
- Context
- Thesis Statement: clarifies the topic with emphasis on causes and effects

Body Paragraphs

- Block 1 {
- First body paragraph: First cause (topic sentence+ supporting elements)
 - Second body paragraph: Second cause (topic sentence+ supporting elements)
 - Third body paragraph: Third cause (topic sentence+ supporting elements)

- Block 2 {
- Fourth body paragraph: First effect (topic sentence+ supporting elements)
 - Fifth body paragraph: Second effect (topic sentence+ supporting elements)
 - Sixth body paragraph: Third effect (topic sentence+ supporting elements)

Concluding paragraph

- Restatement of the thesis
- Summary of the main points
- Final thought

e.g. Topic: noise pollution

- Thesis statement: Repeated exposure to the noise produced by different means of transportation and industrial machinery can impact the level of concentration, and efficiency, and can interfere with normal auditory communication. (The first block will discuss the causes of noise –means of transportation and industrial machinery- and the second block will discuss the mentioned effects.)

2.2 The Chain Pattern(Causal Chain)

- The causal chain pattern is used when the writer deals with causes and effects that are too closely related in a chain. One event causes a second event, which in turn causes a third event and so on.

- Each new cause and the resulting effect constitute a link in the chain; therefore, they cannot be dealt with in blocks. Each body paragraph should be devoted to the discussion of a specific cause and its effect.

Introductory paragraph

- **Attention getter**
- **Context**
- **Thesis Statement: the first and the last elements of the causal chain**

Body Paragraphs

- **First body paragraph: First cause and its effect (topic sentence+ supporting elements)**
- **Second body paragraph: Second cause and its effect (topic sentence+ supporting elements)**
- **Third body paragraph: Third cause and its effect (topic sentence+ supporting elements)**

Concluding paragraph

- **Restatement of the thesis**
- **Summary of the main points**
- **Final thought**

e.g. Topic: unbalanced diet (causes and effects in a chain)

- **Thesis statement: Not adopting a healthy lifestyle might have negative health issues on different categories of people. (unbalanced diet \Rightarrow overconsumption of food rich in sugar, fat \Rightarrow overweight \Rightarrow health problems: each body paragraph will discuss the interrelation of the cause and the resulting effect.)**

3. Stylistic Features

- Decide whether the focus will be on causes, effects, or both.
- Choose the appropriate organizational pattern (block or chain) as well as a logical sequencing method (chronological, via importance...).
- Clearly choose the purpose that is directed to meet the intentions of the audience.
- Within each developmental paragraph, ensure that causes and effects are fully explained and supported using enough support and evidence. Illogical interpretations, oversimplified explanation of cause/effect relationship should be avoided.
- All the aspects that relate to unity and coherence should be considered.

- Use a variety of rhetorical devices and structures in writing the essay.