

Cause and Effect

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?

Examples of Cause and Effect

Peer Example



Beth

Cause Paragraph

My decision to return to school was motivated by my desire to better myself. After working for minimum wage for two years, I realized that without a degree, I couldn't earn enough money to support myself, let alone support a family. My salary barely covered my living expenses, and I had no hope of getting for emergencies, extras, or savings. Without a degree, I had no hope of getting a promotion or a raise. My job and my life were going nowhere, and I was beginning to feel like a loser. I needed to make a change; I needed to do something to turn my life around and have a brighter future. When I found out I could take classes part-time and still keep my job, I decided that going back to school was the perfect solution. It would allow me to work toward a degree while supporting myself.

Going Nowhere

Writing about the reasons I decided to return to school helped me remember how much I want a degree and helped me stay motivated.

Peer Example

Beth

Effect Paragraph

My decision to return to school has had a big impact on my life. First, because of the added expense of books and tuition, I have even less spending money than I did before I came back to school. This has meant that I've had to postpone making big purchases such as replacing the dishwasher when it broke, and I've had to cut back on small expenses such as going out to eat and going to the movies. Not only do I have less money than before I went back to school, but I also have less time. Rather than watching TV after dinner, I now study. Gone are the days when I could spend hours hanging out with my friends. These days most of my free time is spent studying and completing reading and writing assignments for my classes. By far the most important effect on my life, however, has been the change in the way I see myself. Through my experiences in school, I have gained a new respect for myself. I have learned I can set my mind to something and do it, and this new confidence in myself far outweighs the temporary inconveniences of not having as much time or money as I once did.

Poor but Proud

Returning to school has changed my life, and writing this paragraph helped me analyze the effects, both good and bad.

Organization of Cause/Effect

Cause/effect paragraphs and essays generally focus on the causes or the effects of an event, problem, or phenomenon. Some longer essays examine both causes and effects. The topic sentence or thesis announces whether

cause, effects, or both will be examined, and the supporting sentences or paragraphs develop those causes or effects.

Thesis Statements for Cause/Effect

The topic sentence or thesis should present the event or phenomenon that will be analyzed and announce whether causes, effects, or both will be examined.

Salmon populations have dwindled due to overfishing, pollution, and the presence of dams on spawning runs.

World War II devastated the economy of Germany.

Acid rain is an environmental catastrophe with complex causes and devastating effects.

This thesis examines the causes of the decline in the salmon population. Since it announces the three causes the essay will examine, we call it a blueprinted thesis.

This thesis announces a focus on the effects of World War II on the German economy.

This essay will examine both the causes and effects of acid rain in an attempt to persuade the reader to do something about the problem.

Transitions

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

Addition

also

as a matter of fact

besides

for instance

furthermore

in addition

in fact

likewise

moreover

similarly

Sequence

afterward

at last

at the same time

in the end

meanwhile

next

soon after

subsequently

then

eventually

by this time

finally

first, second, third, etc.

There are three transitions especially useful in effect:

as a result
consequently
therefore

Tips on Planning Cause or Effect

1. Keep the purpose and length of your paper in mind as you decide whether to focus on causes, effects, or both. It would be difficult to do justice to the causes and effects of World War I in a short essay.
2. List all the causes and/or effects you can think of for your event or phenomenon.
3. Examine each cause or effect to determine whether it is a *direct* cause or effect of your event. If you can discuss the cause or effect without having to discuss any other causes or effects, then more likely it is a direct cause. For example, the direct causes of your car accident might be the slick road, the bad condition of your brakes, and your slow reaction to the car stopping in front of you. Indirect causes might be the lack of funds that led to your not getting your brakes fixed and the fact that you stayed up all night writing a paper. You may wish to discuss secondary or indirect causes in your essay, but do not present them as direct or primary causes.

4. If there are numerous causes and/or effects to discuss, group them into related categories (political, economic, social, physical, emotional, etc.).
5. Clearly establish or demonstrate the cause or effect relationship present. Make sure the reader can understand how A caused B or how C was the result of B.

1. **Avoid mistaking coincidence (two unrelated things happening together) for cause or effect.** Just because something happened before an event doesn't mean it caused the event to happen. Similarly, just because something happened after an event doesn't mean it is a result or consequence of the event.
2. **Avoid oversimplification.** Many problems have complex causes and complex effects. It would be an oversimplification to say that any one change would solve all the problems we face in our country. Politicians often want to convince the public that they have the solutions to all the problems of society while their opponents are the cause of all the problems.



