

Cause and Effect

Using a cause-effect pattern of writing.

This handout explains when and how to use a cause-effect pattern of writing in formal essays.

What are causes? What are effects?

Examining CAUSES means looking for why something began or started.

Example: In Dorris' "The Broken Cord," an alcoholic mother caused her child to suffer from fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS).

Examining EFFECTS means looking at the results of a process and considering its impact on someone or something.

Example: In Dorris' "The Broken Cord," the effects of Adam's FAS are seizures, faulty memory, and impaired consciousness.

When is writing about causes and effects useful?

Writing about causes is useful when we want to better understand and pinpoint the origin of some type of phenomena such as coral bleaching, global warming, earthquakes, health concerns such as cancer or disease, or to better examine practical matters like a leaky roof or a bug infestation.

Examining causes can lead us to an educated course of action to remedy the situation.

Writing about effects is useful when we want to examine interrelated phenomena such as why a wooden step crumbled (cause: termites / effect: wood crumbles), why the Earth is habitable but the Moon is not (cause: Earth's water and atmosphere / effect: sustains life), or why we crave horror movies (cause: society is too polite / effect: people crave horror films for catharsis). **Examining effects can also lead to better courses of action or contribute to human knowledge and understanding.**

How do I use cause-effect in writing?

You write a causal analysis for one of three main purposes:

(1) to prove a specific point relying on facts in order to arrive at a conclusion (2) to argue against a widely held belief using facts and educated opinions (3) to speculate on a theory by presenting a hypothesis, providing opinion, and also using facts.

Here is an example of using the cause-effect pattern in a paragraph:

I returned to college for several reasons. For one, I struggled to pay bills and feel job satisfaction laboring at a minimum-wage job. Due to not graduating from college, I was limited in my job and career options. Another factor was my sister encouraged me to go back to college; she continually nagged me to go and even offered to help me pack my belongings and travel cross-country to college. Finally, given that my grandfather provided housing rent-free, I could also afford to return to college. For these reasons, I was able to go back to college and complete my bachelor's degree.

Spotlight Writing Skill: Using Transitions

In order to not confuse your reader when switching between causes and effects, be sure to use lots of transition words.

Words emphasizing CAUSES:

- because
- since
- due to
- owing to
- given that
- seeing that

Words emphasizing EFFECTS:

- as a result
- for
- thus
- consequently
- therefore
- accordingly

Tips & Advice!

1. Organizes your ideas by BRAINSTORMING
2. Consider all possibilities related to your topic while brainstorming - go for volume - LOTS of ideas!
3. Then, follow an OUTLINE
4. Organize your body paragraphs according to **level of importance from most important to least important**
5. FOR EXAMPLE: The greatest contributing factor causing me to return to college was lack of job satisfaction.
6. Use lots of TRANSITION WORDS
7. Try to be objective and not biased in your thinking
8. Understand your audience and the purpose of writing a cause-effect essay
9. Avoid logical fallacies such as making a cause or effect oversimplified or over-exaggerated
10. For further information please consult The Prose Reader, 10th edition, edited by Flachmann and Flachmann.

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