

Cause & Effect



A Brief Guide to Writing Cause and Effect Essays

The cause and effect essay includes some elements of writing that might be considered more professional than those a descriptive or narrative essay might include. It is very important, for instance, that your tone be reasonable, and that your presentation be factual and believable. [Sources](#) are often required in a cause/effect paper, and your choice of these sources is important as they reflect on the validity of your paper. Additionally, the first-person point of view does not work as well in professional essays. Consider the following sentences:

I believe that gun control measures should be taken in every hamlet in America.

Gun control measures should be taken in every hamlet in America.

In the first sentence, the first person is used. This would work in a narrative, but here it actually limits the meaning of the sentence to just the writer, and it makes the writer sound weak--as if he is justifying him or herself. The second sentence is much more forceful. It makes a statement and does not limit itself just to what the writer believes. The purpose of a cause and effect paper is to be as convincing as possible, and to convince readers to accept the cause/effect as plausible.

Features

1. A presentation of the event, phenomenon, or trend. Your reader must first understand what you are talking about and be given a thorough background. The degree of explanation depends on the complexity of the issue. If it's a simple issue, a writer might be able to explain it in the introduction. If it's a complex issue, a writer might need a

paragraph after the introduction which goes into more detail. You may have to prove that a trend exists, for instance, before you can argue what its cause/effect is.

2. A convincing argument is necessary to persuade your readers that the proposed causes or results are at least as plausible as their own. To present such an argument, the writer must use sources which state facts and evidence. Examples and anecdotes can also be used. A convincing argument [anticipates reader objections](#) in advance.

3. A professional, reasonable voice. It is never wise to lose one's cool and state:

It's obvious that the changes in our weather patterns are due to industry's refusal to control their pollution. These slick business people have bought and paid for our Congresspersons.

In this example, by stating "It's obvious," the writer has insulted the reader's intelligence in advance. Then the writer goes on to name-calling ("slick") and a further insult of our elected officials. It could all be true, but why should we accept it? Compare:

The changes in our weather patterns could certainly be due to a number of factors, in particular, the heavy pollution created by our industry and the confusing and contradictory information touted by industrial lobbyists on the one hand and environmentalists on the other.

It's important to be fair and to keep your writing voice modulated, reasonable, and professional. It can be playful, but it must be authoritative. You must not sound uncertain or be insulting.

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The Cause and Effect Essay

What is a cause and effect essay?

Cause and effect essays are concerned with why things happen (causes) and what happens as a result (effects). Cause and effect is a common method of organizing and discussing ideas.

Follow these steps when writing a cause and effect essay:

1. Distinguish between cause and effect. To determine causes, ask, "Why did this happen?" To identify effects, ask, "What happened because of this?" The following is an example of one cause producing one effect:

Cause	Effect
You are out of gas.	Your car won't start.

Sometimes, many causes contribute to a single effect or many effects may result from a single cause. (Your instructor will specify which cause/effect method to use.) The following are examples:

Causes	Effect
liked business in high school	choose to major in

salaries in the field are high	accounting
have an aunt who is an accountant	
am good with numbers	

Cause	Effects
reduce work hours	less income
	employer is irritated
	more time to study
	more time for family and friends

However, most situations are more complicated.

The following is an example of a chain reaction:

Thinking about friend...forgot to buy gas...car wouldn't start...missed math exam...failed math course.

2. Develop your thesis statement. State clearly whether you are discussing causes, effects, or both. Introduce your main idea, using the terms "cause" and/or "effect."

3. Find and organize supporting details. Back up your thesis with relevant and sufficient details that are organized. You can organize details in the following

ways:

- Chronological. Details are arranged in the order in which the events occurred.
- Order of importance. Details are arranged from least to most important or vice versa.
- Categorical. Details are arranged by dividing the topic into parts or categories.

4. Use appropriate transitions. To blend details smoothly in cause and effect essays, use the transitional words and phrases listed below.

For causes	For Effects
because, due to, on cause is, another is, since, for, first, second	consequently, as a result, thus, resulted in, one result is, another is, therefore

When writing your essay, keep the following suggestions in mind:

- Remember your purpose. Decide if your are writing to inform or persuade.
- Focus on immediate and direct causes (or effects.) Limit yourself to causes that are close in time and related, as opposed to remote and indirect causes, which occur later and are related indirectly.
- Strengthen your essay by using supporting evidence. Define terms, offer facts and statistics, or provide examples, anecdotes, or personal observations that support your ideas.
- Qualify or limit your statements about cause and effect. Unless there is clear evidence that one event is related to another, qualify your statements with phrases such as "It appears that the cause was" or "It seems likely" or "The evidence may indicate" or "Available evidence suggests."

To evaluate the effectiveness of a cause and effect

essay, ask the following questions: What are the causes? What are the effects? Which should be emphasized? Are there single or multiple causes? Single or multiple effects? Is a chain reaction involved?