
CAUSE AND EFFECT ESSAY

The cause and effect essay is an exploration of the *reasons for* or *results of* things or events. This type of essay can include both causes and effects, but generally contains only one of the two.

Pre-Writing

1. **Choose your topic.** Make sure that the topic is not too large or too small. For example, a 500-word essay on the causes of World War II will not be able to cover all relevant information.
2. **Decide whether you want to discuss causes or effects.** Often a topic will be better suited to one or the other.

Brainstorming and Outlining

Brainstorming on your topic from the perspective of cause and effect is crucial to ensuring that your outline and essay drafts is clear. For the best results, start by brainstorming causes then followed by the associated effects. Consider the topic “*Air Pollution in Mexico*” as an example. What are the causes of air pollution in Mexico? Here are some examples:

- exhaust from automobiles and trucks
- smoke from industry’s smokestacks
- geography
- speed bumps
- corruption at emission stations
- more high pollution as a result of no-drive days
- insufficient public transportation

Any of these ideas about the causes of air pollution may be developed into essay. It would be possible to write about just one cause - the main cause - and explore it in depth. Or you could write about the three main causes. With the causes done, consider the effects of air pollution in Mexico, which might look like this:

- poor visibility
- headaches
- emphysema



- allergies
- runny nose and eye
- shorter life span for Mexico's residents
- lower quality of life for Mexico City's residents
- necessity to stay indoors
- more sitting in front of the television
- destruction of wildlife
- negative world attention
- decrease in tourism

Any of these ideas may be developed into an essay. As above, it would be possible to write about just one effect - the main effect - or it would be possible to write about the three main effects.

Once you have decided on the strongest causes and effects, you should **create a rough outline**. This will help improve organization and coherence in your essay. Your goal in this should be to organize your information into three or four main points so it may be presented to the reader clearly and concisely.

Also, consider saving your most important cause or effect until last. There is often one major cause or effect that is the most important. By saving it until last, you leave your reader with a very strong impression.

Writing Tips

1. Make sure your **thesis statement** indicates whether the essay will discuss causes or effects (or both).

Thesis statement examples

- a) The chief causes of dissatisfaction among the office workers where I spent my placement were low wages, sexual harassment and boredom.
- b) The beneficial effects of my annual canoe trip include reduced stress, increased fitness, and improved family relationships.

2. Understand the **order** of the causes/ effects that you are writing about (i.e. the least important to the most important, or vice versa.)
3. Make sure that there is an **actual link** between the causes and effects that you are presenting. (i.e. ask yourself if you have assumed a cause/effect relationship where there is none.)
4. Fully **support your statements** by backing up your main points with clear examples and



facts (statistics or quotations may also be used).

5. Conclude by **re-emphasizing** the importance of your main point.

When moving between causes and effects in your essay, the following **transitional** words/phrases may be used.

Essay Transitions

Transitions for Causes: is a result of, results from, the reason for, since, because (of), due to, leads to, is caused by

Transitions for Effects: so, so that, so then, a consequence of, consequently, therefore, thus, then, for this reason, as a result

You can also use words to indicate the certainty of your statements and to indicate the level of importance of your points. However, be sure not to over or understate the strength of your arguments.

Signal Words

Degrees of Certainty: certainly, may, necessarily, perhaps, probably, undoubtedly, unquestionably

Levels of Importance: above all, equally important, finally, first, initially, last, primarily, second, third

Remember that signal words allow you to transition between the different ideas in your paper succinctly and organically.



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