

Chapter 9

Reading and Writing Cause and Effect

Key Terms

cause, effect, reason, result, inference, tone

When you are asked to read or write a cause and effect passage or essay, your instructor wants you to gain an understanding of an incident. Mainly, you should be focused on the reason something happened and the results or consequences that followed. Therefore, when you find out the reason something happened, that is the “cause,” and when you learn what the results are because of what happened, that is the “effect.”

Why did Mom say she wanted to divorce Dad? Why did I not complete my homework? Why is it hard to balance school and work? The answer to all of these questions is connected to the “cause.”

What would happen if Mom and Dad went to marriage counseling? What if I had done my homework a day in advance? What were the results when I worked less and enrolled into more hours at school? The answer to these questions is the “effect.”

While reading cause and effect, most of the time the wording in the passage will hint to a cause and effect connection. Often-times, you will see signal words, such as “therefore,” “because,” “as a result of,” “the cause of which,” and similar phrases. As you read, be sure to annotate both the causes and effects in a passage and utilize the PAUSE strategy to actively engage with the text. Also, look for the organizational pattern that shares its name with the rhetorical mode covered in this chapter.



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➤ Read Write! Tip

Science and history textbooks often utilize the cause and effect organizational pattern. For example, a chemistry textbook might explain the causes and effects of a specific chemical reaction, and a history textbook may have you analyze the causes and effects of a war, such as World War I.

When you write a cause and effect essay, you must provide the reader with the cause(s) and effect(s) of an incident. For example, transitional devices like “so,” “because,” “as a result,” “therefore,” “due to,”

and similar phrases are all indicators that cause and effect exist. Thus, such transitional devices will play an important role in any cause and effect essay you write.

Something that is important to note is that cause and effect passages and essays can be about real incidents or hypothetical situations.

CAUSE AND EFFECT ELEMENTS

When you write any essay, you want to make certain that you maintain unity throughout the entire essay. It is important that you make a point and stick to it in order to convey meaning to the reader. In cause and effect writing, the supporting details expound upon the causes and/or effects of an occurrence.

Organizational Patterns

There are two organizational patterns that can be used in cause and effect writing: cause and effect, which means the passage is organized to show specific causes or effects or both, and emphatic, which means the passage is organized in order of emphasis or importance. This can be from most important to least important or vice versa. Below is a chart of transitional devices that can be utilized when reading or writing cause and effect.

Cause and effect transitions **show the cause and effect of something.**

Therefore, as a result, as a consequence of, because, since, consequently, so, thus, ultimately, in conclusion

At times, you may be asked to only dwell on the “cause” or the reason something happened, or you may be given the reasons something occurred and be asked to make an **inference** or draw a conclusion about the effect or the results. Then, there will be times when you are asked to do both. Keep in mind that including both causes and effects will lengthen the essay considerably.

Tone

The **tone** of a cause and effect essay or reading passage can be either humorous or serious; it depends on what is being discussed. Whether you are reading a cause and effect passage or writing a cause and effect essay, you must be able to identify the reasons and the results for an occurrence. Consider the following cause and effect questions:

- ♦ What is the cause for violence in low economic neighborhoods? *This is asking about the reasons.*
- ♦ What are the effects of parents working in the evening from 6 p.m. until 6 a.m.? *This is asking about the results.*
- ♦ What are some reasons teenagers run away from home? *This is asking about the causes.*

READING CAUSE AND EFFECT

When you read a cause and effect passage, make sure to look for the reasons something occurred and what happened as a result of what occurred. You should utilize PAUSE as you read in order to decipher the causes

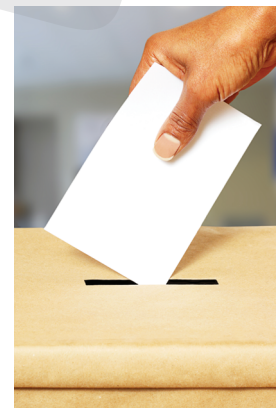


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and/or the effects. Also, you should summarize each paragraph so that you are sure you comprehend what the author is trying to convey and to ensure you are retaining the important details you will need later. Remember to look for signal words that will indicate when a cause or effect is being discussed, such as “as a result,” “because,” “the cause of,” and similar phrases.

Read Write! Activity 9.1

Read the following cause and effect passage entitled “Voting: A Right Hindered.” Then, answer the questions that follow.

Voting: A Right Hindered

Lillian Vaughn, an African-American woman, was walking home from work one evening in rural Georgia in 1958. She knew there was a local election occurring for mayor and decided that she would attempt to vote. Unfortunately, once at the voting booth, she overheard a city official laughing about how he would make sure her ballot was never counted. Demoralized, Lillian turned around without voting and headed home. During the 50s and 60s, many individuals of all races fought for the right for minorities to exercise their right to vote. Freedom riders traveled from the North to the South to educate misinformed citizens about the voting systems in place that made it legal for them to vote. Today, many people will vote in state and national elections for positions like governor of a state or President of the United States but refuse to vote in local elections. Many people do not vote in local elections because they feel due to unethical

voting practices their vote will not count, they do not know about local issues, and they are discouraged by new voting laws.

First, citizens refuse to vote in local elections for fear that their vote will not count. Recently, the media has depicted local officials practicing less than ethical voting practices. For example, ballots being found in the trash at some voting sites have raised concern among many voters. Some voters have given accounts of how as they were voting using the computerized system, glitches would emerge making it impossible for them to submit their ballots. Also, the treatment of voters once at the polls has deterred many citizens from taking the time to vote locally. Furthermore, it has been rumored that people in high positions are the only individuals whose votes really count. Before, during, and after the election, many citizens feel that decisions have already been made regarding local candidates and regardless, if they vote or not, it would essentially not matter. Voters refuse to participate and vote at the local polls because they believe their vote will not count.

Second, voters choose not to vote in local elections because they do not know enough about local issues. Some people have expressed that they are more interested in state and national government because what is decided on those levels is filtered down to the local levels. For example, when mandates are created by the federal government

about education, those mandates are then given to the states and then distributed locally. Some voters believe it is more important to vote for candidates on the state and national level hoping that these candidates will make a difference on the local level. Also, several citizens have complained that local candidates are not visible until it is an election year, hence making it difficult to discuss local issues in-depth. Additionally, to some voters, the issues on the local level do not seem as important as the issues on the state and national level. Due to lack of knowledge, many citizens opt not to vote in local elections.

Lastly, people exclude themselves from the voting process because of the new voting laws that are in place. For instance, several states have implemented a Voter ID law that requires citizens' state issued IDs match their voter registration IDs. As a result, if they do not match, it may impede voters at the polls. Some people have voted for over 50 years using their drivers' licenses and now, if their middle initials are on their state issued IDs but are not on the voter registration IDs, the voters will be rejected at the polls because of this discrepancy. Furthermore, many voters refuse to vote locally because they think the new voting laws are in place to weed out certain people and deter them from voting. Voter suppression laws have been put in place to discourage fraud at the polls, but many voters think it is just another way to suppress their right to vote, and

consequently, they refuse to go to the polls. These new laws that are being practiced on the local level are the primary reason for the decrease in voter participation in local elections.

The right to vote is seen by some as one of the most important rights American citizens possess. The fact that many registered voters have given up voting in local elections has been an issue of concern. Voters refuse to vote locally because of rumored unethical practices that make them feel as if their vote will not count. Others will not vote because they do not know enough about local issues to make an intelligent decision about a candidate running for local office. Also, the fact that new laws have been put in place that actually hinder voters and cause them to cancel their voting plans in local elections are all issues many believe must be addressed and rectified if the democratic process is going to continue to be exercised successfully at the local level.

1. What is the main idea of the passage?

2. What three causes does the author list in the thesis statement?

3. What should the reader be able to infer from the title?

4. List several transition words the author chooses to include in order to move the reader from one point to the next.

5. What organizational pattern is used in this essay? Explain your answer.

6. What do you think about voting for local candidates? Do you participate in local elections? Why or why not?

WRITING A CAUSE AND EFFECT ESSAY

When you write a cause and effect essay, you will include at least three causes or three effects. Depending on whether you discuss the causes, effects, or both causes and effects will determine how you organize your writing and the length of the essay. Be mindful that some writing assignments may ask you to take a position in addition to citing causes and effects. The conclusion should restate the thesis statement and bring the essay to a close. It is important that you stay on topic throughout the entire essay and do not offer new information in the conclusion.

Cause and Effect Prewriting

Before you begin a cause and effect essay, you should complete several prewriting strategies, such as free writing, listing, clustering, asking questions, outlining, and building a pyramid, to help you generate ideas

Cause and Effect Thesis Statement

The thesis statement states the topic and provides three causes or effects that will be developed in the rest of the essay.

Cause and Effect Body Paragraphs

Each body paragraph will begin with a topic sentence that includes a transitional word and one of the causes or effects. Several supporting sentences will follow. Transitional words and phrases should be included throughout the paragraph in order to move from one piece of information or idea to the next. A concluding sentence reiterating the cause or effect should summarize and bring closure to the paragraph.

Cause and Effect Conclusion

The conclusion paragraph lets the reader know that the cause and effect essay is coming to an end. Various techniques can be used to end the essay.

Cause and Effect Outline

- I. Introduction
 - a. Introduction method
 - b. Thesis statement containing the three topics that will be developed
- II. Body 1
 - a. Topic sentence for cause/effect 1
 - b. Supporting details
 - c. A concluding sentence
- III. Body 2
 - a. Topic sentence for cause/effect 2
 - b. Supporting details
 - c. A concluding sentence
- IV. Body 3
 - a. Topic sentence for cause/effect 3
 - b. Supporting details
 - c. A concluding sentence
- V. Conclusion
 - a. Thesis restatement
 - b. Conclusion method

Read Write! Activity 9.2

Read the following cause and effect essay entitled “9/11” by student Christian Ramirez. This is a cause and effect essay that includes research, so you will see citations and a Works Cited at the end. After you have read the essay, answer the questions that follow.

9/11

By Christian Ramirez

If there was one moment in history that changed America forever, it would be the events that took place on September 11, 2001. When America was ambushed by terrorists that day, the nation realized that it was vulnerable to outside attacks. America's whole mindset changed from that day on, and suddenly the country was at war with a group of people who despised American values. The effect of 9/11 was that America had to make a change as a nation. Therefore, the United States had to renovate its airport security, its economy changed forever, and a new war on terrorism began.

As a direct effect of the attacks, the nation had to make many security changes at airports. The first act of the government to ensure security at airports was to create the Transportation Security Administration on November 19, 2001. The TSA, "which is responsible for overseeing security at 450 airports nationwide . . . has deployed nearly 3,000 behavior-detection officers, 800 explosives-detection canine teams and thousands of federal air marshals to airports across the country" (Iorfino). One important requirement of the TSA is that all baggage is screened before it is allowed on a plane. In the past, this was not the case. In fact, "Prior to Sept. 11, only 5 percent of checked baggage was screened for

explosives at airports nationwide” (Iorfino). Now, 100 percent of bags are checked. Moreover, before 9/11, boarding a plane was easy. It used to be a matter of getting the ticket issued and leaving the bags with the airport employee. Today, there are several security check points, and it sometimes takes two hours to board a plane. Some may think the process has become too complicated, but these security changes were deemed necessary in the aftermath of 9/11.

America also saw an economic change after the attacks. Most do not realize or think about it, but there are monetary consequences in regards to a terrorist attack. The United States “saw an insurance cost of 40 billion dollars,” and transforming the ruins of the Twin Towers into a memorial “cost roughly 700 million dollars” just on its own (Grabianowski). There was an economic effect in the airline industry, as well. Airlines reported losing billions annually, and several went bankrupt after 9/11(Grabianowski). New York City took a major hit to its economy, too. The city had a loss “totaling \$23.7 billion through the end of 2002, with tax losses adding another \$2 billion” (Grabianowski). The destruction of the buildings that day also hurt the economy; “an estimated 10,000 jobs were lost in Manhattan alone, and 18,000 businesses were destroyed, disrupted or forced to relocate” (Grabianowski). Moreover, New York was not the only state to have a high number of job losses due to the attacks. “The U.S.

would lose 1.8 million jobs because of the attacks, trimming as much as 5 percent, or \$500 billion, from the gross domestic products” (Grabianowski). These attacks were planned to weaken the United States and its world power, and the terrorists’ desired effect was achieved; the United States’ economy was heavily impacted.

Finally, with security changes and the American economy shaken up, there was no choice but to start a war on terrorism. At 11 a.m. on 9/11, the Bush Administration was informed that al-Qaeda had attacked New York. “That same evening at 9:30 p.m., a ‘War Cabinet’ was formed, integrated by a select number of top intelligence and military advisers. And at 11:00 p.m., at the end of that historic meeting at the White House, the ‘War on Terrorism’ was officially launched” (Chossudovsky). In the coming months and years, the U.S. invaded Afghanistan and defeated the Taliban government. Additionally, Osama Bin Laden, leader of al-Qaeda, was killed. Hence, this new war, which started with four planes being hijacked, will have everlasting effects.

America was never the same after September 11, 2001. The country has changed drastically because of these attacks. America had to create and implement stricter laws in order to ensure something like this will never happen again. Security at airports changed, the economy was negatively affected, and the ongoing war on terrorism began. Citizens still continue to feel the repercussions of these attacks today.

Works Cited

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1. True or False: this essay is about the causes of 9/11.
2. What are the three points of development for this essay?

3. Which pattern of organization is used in this essay?

4. Based on context clues, what does the word "repercussions" mean in the last sentence of the essay? _____
5. True or False: MLA parenthetical citations have been used in this essay.

Read Write! Review Questions: Cause and Effect

1. When the reason something occurred is referred to, you are being asked to examine what?
2. When the effects of an incident are examined what is this referring to?
3. Define Inference.
4. What are the signal words/transitional words for the organizational pattern used in cause and effect writing?
5. List some other signal words or transitional devices that may be used when writing a cause and effect essay.

Suggested Cause and Effect Essay Topics

1. What are some effects of an economic recession or depression?
2. What are the effects of cellphone use while driving?
3. What are the causes/effects of America's obesity epidemic?
4. What are the reasons for your chosen major?
5. What are some of the effects of completing a degree or certificate program?
6. What are some reasons a student might drop a college course?

Read Write! Connection: Chapter 9

Read the following ethical dilemma. Then, complete the following exercises working with cause and effect.

You have been employed at the same company as the assistant manager for three years. Lately, business has been slow, and management has approached you and asked you for suggestions on increasing business. As the assistant manager, you and other employees have noticed your immediate supervisor, the manager, is the reason the business is failing. The manager's behavior has been different lately. You have been wanting a promotion because you need the money. You are scheduled to meet with the owner to discuss the issue. What will you do?

- ♦ Without defaming the manager, write a hypothetical letter to the business owner about the causes for why the business is not doing well. Remember, words have a denotative and a connotative meaning. Your tone should remain neutral. Therefore, choose your words carefully.
- ♦ Write a one page summary, including the causes and some possible results (solutions), for the problem.

➤ **Read Write! Tip**

The skills used in the Read Write! Connection can be applied in the workplace. In the professional world, you should refrain from using tactless language that defames others. Think of ways to convey your point without insulting others. In school, using tactless language could negatively affect your grade. In your career, you may be demoted, fired, or not hired in the first place.

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