

D. Cause-and-Effect Essay

Purpose: To describe the causes or reasons for an event; to describe the effects or consequences of an event

Organization: Three main types

1. **Cause.** If you want to show **why** something happened, then you will discuss **causes**. There may be **direct causes** and/or **indirect causes**. **Direct causes** are those that are clearly linked to the event that occurred. **Indirect causes** are those that may not seem obviously connected to an event but that the writer may choose to focus on to reveal to the reader a more in-depth explanation of why something happened.

Topic: ozone depletion

Direct cause: too many CFCs in the atmosphere

Indirect causes: volcanic release of carbon monoxide into the air, automobile emissions, appliance emissions

2. **Effect.** If you want to show the results of an occurrence, then you will discuss **effects**. These too may be direct or indirect, depending on the desire of the writer.

Topic: drug use

Direct effects: negative impact on the body, negative impact on relationships

Indirect effects: higher crime rate, weaker social structure, higher health care costs

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3. **Causal Chain.** Sometimes causes and effects may be linked in a **chain**. In this case, the writer must show a situation chronologically, moving from cause to effect to cause to effect to cause, and so on.

Topic: effects of stress

Causal chain: example of stress → inability to sleep → poor health → inability to concentrate → difficulty working → more stress → serious health problems → unemployment → financial problems

Useful Words and Expressions for Cause and Effect

WB
Ex. 3.7,
3.8

Cause

Nouns (+ Preposition)

One _____ insomnia is stress. Another _____ may be eating too much before going to bed.

cause (of)

reason (for)

Verbs + Preposition

Serious health problems can _____ stress.

be caused by

flow from

derive from

arise from

originate in

be related to

spring from

result from

Subordinating Conjunctions

_____ you are not getting enough sleep, you will likely have trouble concentrating.

Since

As

Because

If

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Transition + Preposition

Financial problems can occur _____ health issues.

due to

because of

as a result of

Effect

Nouns

One _____ of stress is an inability to sleep.

effect

result

outcome

consequence

Verbs

Insomnia may _____ one's concentration.

affect

have an influence on

impact

have an impact on

influence

Stress often _____ serious health problems.

results in

leads to

contributes to

gives rise to

brings about

is the reason for

Transitions

Mood can be affected by the weather. _____
many people feel sad when there is a long period of
rainy days.

Consequently,

Therefore,

As a consequence,

Thus,

As a result,

Hence,

▶ ▶ ▶ Usage Note

Be careful! Use **effect** as a noun to mean "outcome or result." Use **affect** as a verb to mean "have an influence on."

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Exercise 3.4: Creating a Cause-and-Effect Paragraph

Create a cause-and-effect paragraph on a separate sheet of paper explaining the effects of having too many cars on the road. Use this information to develop your paragraph. Be sure to include transitions from the Useful Words and Expressions box on pages 82–83.

- Too many cars on the road
- Roads need maintenance and expansion more often → taxes go up to help pay for these
- More carbon monoxide released → increase in depletion of the ozone layer → climate changes
- More individuals driving → funding for public transportation goes down → those without cars are negatively impacted
- Prices for public transportation go up → routes are cut → people cannot get where they need to go

Example Essay: Cause and Effect

[adapted from a student essay; useful expressions are in **bold**]

Topic: Chinese society

A tradition of being thrifty is one feature of Chinese culture that **affects** the Chinese consumer's behavior. Most Chinese people spend money only for necessary living expenses—including food, rent, clothes, and insurance—and deposit their remaining money in a savings account.

This situation is partly **because** there is no sound social welfare system, health insurance, or retirement plan in China. **Therefore**, people in China have to save money for the future.

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This means spending is cut down as much as possible. Nice clothes and entertainment are seen as luxuries. **Consequently**, few people spend money on them.

This tradition of thriftiness has also **given rise to** another feature of Chinese consumer behavior: Chinese consumers do not like any debt in their lives. **As a result**, they do not like to purchase or buy anything that is beyond their financial capacity. For instance, most Chinese do not buy a car or house until they are able to pay for it in full.

Thriftiness **has also led** the Chinese to be conservative with spending. They have a low tolerance for risk. This is displayed in the Chinese behavior of saving extra money in a bank rather than taking the risk of investing it in the stock market. **In order to** make their lives more stable and safe, Chinese people usually watch over their money carefully.

In summary, Chinese spend money cautiously and do not like to take financial risks. Being careful with money makes them feel more certain about their future.

Write a Cause-and-Effect Essay

Now it's your turn. Using the suggested phrases and expressions, organizational strategies, and verb tenses, write a cause-and-effect essay. Choose one of these topics, or come up with your own topic (with your instructor's approval).

1. Analyze the effects of an unexpected action taken by someone you know.
2. Present the causes of a significant historical event in your country.
3. Explain the causes of a specific social conflict or an example of social cooperation.
4. Describe the causes and effects of a community problem.