

Topics for Cause-effect Essays

The following topic suggestions connect to page 157 of *Acting on Words*, where the discussion of cause-effect strategies concludes.

Expository

1. Discuss two or three things you believe from reasoning and research contribute to academic success as a student.
2. Identify a business or other organization that you know well. For confidentiality, you may wish to change names. Identify and discuss two or three things that you believe have contributed to the success or failure of this organization.
3. Think of an activity or skill, like riding, and discuss two or three effects of being a beginner at this undertaking.
4. Discuss two or three benefits that you believe result from practising a certain method of spiritual awareness, e.g., yoga, meditation, attending ceremonies, escaping into nature, etc.
5. Discuss the effects of TV. Are they mostly all bad? Do they have to be?
6. Discuss an attitude, perhaps an unconscious one, that you believe prevents people from making necessary change.

Critical

1. Critical analysis and argumentation depend on cause-effect thinking and organization. Read Chapters 14 and 16. Discuss what you believe may be the strengths and weaknesses or limitations of this typical Western university mode of exploring and knowing.

2. Novelist Charles Dickens, hailed by some critics as the second greatest imaginative writer in the English tradition after Shakespeare, is well known for using what critics call “plot coincidences.” Characters will “just happen” to cross paths unexpectedly and, as some readers would argue, improbably. The common criticism of plot coincidence is that the writer manipulated the events (as if all the other content has not been selected and manipulated). Those who deplore plot coincidence seem to argue, implicitly or explicitly, that “real life” does not contain apparent chance encounters, correspondences, and experiences that appear in some way meaningful and designed by some higher or mysterious force. Are causes and effects random results of blind mechanistic forces or do things happen for reasons we cannot see and, sometimes, cannot fully understand? You might wish to read Carl Jung’s “On Synchronicity” (p. 426) as you develop your answer.
3. In 1686, Japanese poet Matsuo Bashô wrote the haiku “A Frog,” which some consider the most famous poem in Japanese. Numerous translations exist, but here is one, by Sam Hamill:

At the ancient pond

a frog plunges into

the sound of water

This version of the poem expresses the paradoxical idea that the sound exists before the frog jumps; cause and effect, conceivably, are reversed. Perhaps the sound makes the frog’s jump happen. Such thoughts are familiar in various Western philosophical speculations about time, an idea, often reflected in science fiction, that time travels backwards, that today’s events cause yesterday’s. Once considered fantasy, the idea of time travel is now being genuinely contemplated, at least in theoretical terms, by leading physicists. Saint Augustine once suggested that “miracles” are simply events whose

causes we do not yet understand. Discuss one or two examples of events that seem to have defied our understanding of cause-effect physics. What implications might you draw from your consideration?