



# Writing a Cause or Effect Essay

“Every action has an opposite and equal reaction” (Newton).

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(Adapted for Grade 9 and 10 Writing, Olympiads School)



## What is Cause & Effect?

- When writing about a **cause**, the writer looks at events that occurred and how they led up to something occurring:
  - What were the causes that led up to Trump's victory?
- When writing about an **effect**, the writer looks at events that occurred after an event to analyze what has occurred as a result:
  - How has American society been affected by the Trump's victory?

## Beyond Events

- A cause or effect essay often examines more than just events.
- The essay may give reasons or explanations for
  - events (e.g., elections),
  - conditions (e.g., extreme weather), or
  - behaviors (e.g., a student's behavior in class).

## Remember the Timeline

- When writing this essay, writers who decide to focus on the **cause** need to write about what happened **before** a specific event. Writers who decide to focus on an **effect** need to discuss what happened **after** a specific event.





## Make Sure to Avoid Correlation

- Correlation is different from causation.
  - Correlation means: “Is there is a connection between two or more things?”
    - While there may be a correlation between children receiving vaccines and autism, that does not mean that the vaccine causes autism.
      - Think carefully about various types of fallacies – is this “cause” a hasty generalization? Is it *non sequitur*? Is it *post hoc*? If it is any of these, it’s a correlation and not a cause.
  - Causation means *something makes something else happen or exist*.
    - A loud noise may be a causation for a baby crying.



## Neeld’s Heuristic Questions for Cause/Effect:

- These questions will help guide the writer on how to look at the specific topic deeply:
  - What causes females to perform better in school than males?
  - What causes people to choose to go to college/to choose not to go to college?
  - What are the effects of people earning a liberal arts degree instead of a more specialized degree?
  - What are the effects of colleges prejudging students who are considered “street smart”?
  - What is the purpose of attending college in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?
  - Why does increased job growth in college graduates happen?
  - What is the consequence of colleges maintaining traditional instructional methods?
  - What comes before deciding whether or not to go to college?
  - What comes after going into debt to earn a college degree?

## Playing the “Why” Game

- When writing a Cause/Effect Essay, the writer is often answering **why** something occurred.
- After asking **why** the first time, the writer should continue to ask **why** in order to drill deeper into the subject:
  - Malcolm X said, “Education is the passport to the future, for tomorrow belongs to those who prepare for it today.” **WHY?**
  - Malcolm X noticed that life takes preparation. **WHY?**
  - More than likely, in their family lives, some people were taught that they would go to college and some were taught that college was not in their future **WHY?**
  - Some parents were unfulfilled in their educational pursuits, so they have become cynical about the need for further education. **WHY?**
  - The writer continues to play this game until he/she can go no further. The game reveals how certain events may be related and reveals deeper thought instead of surface thought.

## Organizing Thoughts with a Modified Venn Diagram

Causes	Topic	Effects
Record what happened BEFORE the topic. The writer should make certain the list contains at least 6 items so the best 3 can be chosen for the essay.	Record the THESIS STATEMENT here. The writer needs to keep his/her eye on the topic, so recording the thesis statement will help assure the lists are on point.	Record what happened AFTER the topic. The writer should make certain the list contains at least 6 items so the best 3 can be chosen for the essay.

- Once the lists above are recorded, review each list carefully.
- Which list has the most potential to intrigue the audience?
- Which list interests the writer most?
- Choose the list, and then writer either a Cause OR an Effect Essay.
- A 5 paragraph essay will not give the writer enough room to write about both causes AND effects.



## Characteristics to Include in the Essay

- Present the event or issue.
  - The audience needs to understand the problem or issue. Without this explanation, the analysis will fall apart.
- Use strong, assertive language that does not reflect negativity or bias.
- Use factual evidence and direct quotes. Treat the writing scientifically – make a hypothesis and then prove it through direct information from the sources.



## Other Questions to Consider:

- Does the essay have an effective introduction? (E.g, a hook, transition, interesting thesis)
- Is the thesis clear, effective? Does it preview the main points?
- What are the causes/effects discussed?
- Does the writer focus on cause or effect?
- Is there a good conclusion?



## Avoiding Bias and Negativity

- Biased or negative statements steal the authority of the writer. Which of the following feels more convincing and has more authority?
  - The American public has long been blind to the horrible effects of student debt on our children's futures. Student debt must be avoided or the consequences will be dire.
  - In order for students to succeed in their lives, student debt needs to be studied and considered. Managing the amount of debt taken on will help to assure a college education has the desired effect on one's life.



## 3<sup>rd</sup> Person REQUIRED

- For this essay, ALL paragraphs, including the introduction and conclusion, must be in 3<sup>rd</sup> person.
  - 3<sup>rd</sup> person adds a sense of authority and makes the writing more forceful.
    - I believe college should be made affordable for all Americans.
    - By implementing policies that make college more affordable for today's college student, America will be better equipped to compete in a global economy.





## Double Check

- The writer should not state something that is obvious.
- The writer should make sure to demonstrate the **significance** between the causes or the effects in the paper.
- Surface thought is boring; deep thought is informative and interesting.



## The Pattern

- For effect:
  - Many causes might lead to one effect:
    - Cool kids didn't study.
    - Few kids went to college from neighborhood.
    - College tuition rose faster than inflation.
      - Effect: College not deemed plausible.
- For cause:
  - One cause might lead to many effects:
    - Cause: More jobs require college.
      - Effect: More students attend community college.
      - Effect: More students carry massive student debt.
      - Effect: More students consider which major has best chance of leading to a job.

## Sources:

- Maldonado, Christina. “Writing Cause and Effect Essays.” Roxbury, MA: Roxbury Community College Writing Center, Fall 2008. Web. 20 March 2013.
- Lindeman, Erika. *A Rhetoric for Writing Teachers*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. NY: Oxford UP, 1987. 82-3. Print.

### Look for effects that are also causes.

Effects can form chains where one effect goes on to cause a second effect, which may then cause a third effect and so on.

#### Example:

When people pollute rivers, they destroy the habitats of fish. This reduces the number of fish that can reproduce. As a result, fewer fish are born in fresh water, and the fish population declines.

**Cause1:** People pollute rivers .

Effect 1: The habitats of fish are destroyed.

Effect 2: Fewer fish can reproduce.

Effect 3: Fewer fish are born in fresh water.

Effect 4: The fish population declines.





## Understanding Cause and Effect Relationships

- You use cause and effect every day when you solve problems and make decisions.
- As a result, understanding causes and effects is extremely important in day-to-day living.
- Learning to identify cause and effect relationships helps you understand what is happening in the world around you.

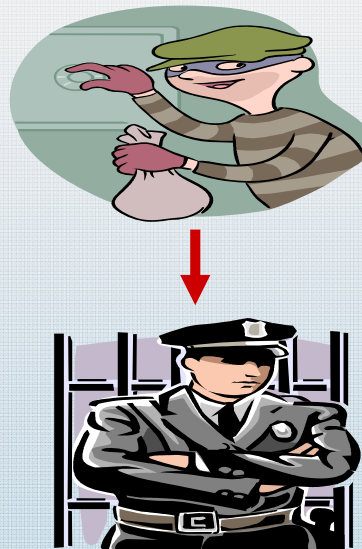


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## Clue Words for Cause

**These expressions indicate cause -**

- Because...
- Since...
- Cause..
- Reason..
- So that
- Unless..
- The main reason...



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**Let's see how this works –**

**As a result of** his bad fall, Professor Green is wearing bandages and a cast.



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## Helpful Tip

**Try this idea when you are not sure.**

When you answer a question that begins with **why**, try putting the word **because** in front of your answer choices. Then read the choices this way to help figure out the correct answer.

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## Example

The crime rate in Mr. Leon's neighborhood was very high. Many houses had been robbed and cars vandalized. All the neighbors were upset. The mayor ordered the police to patrol the neighborhood. Within two weeks, the neighborhood's crime rate dropped drastically. Finally, everyone felt safe again.



## Why did the crime rate drop?

- A. All the neighbors were upset.
- B. Houses and cars were robbed and vandalized.
- C. The mayor called for added police protection.
- D. Everyone in the neighborhood felt safe again.





## Why did the crime rate drop?

- A. **Because** all the neighbors were upset.
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See how easy this is?

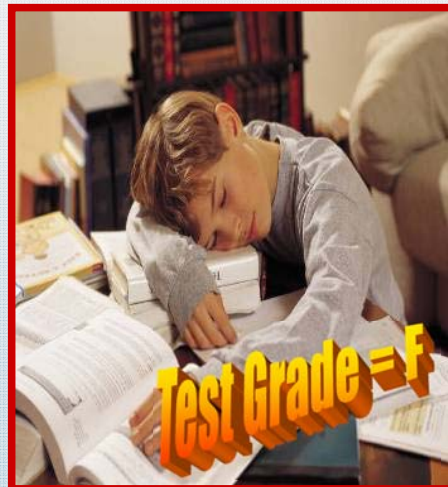
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## Clue Words for Effect

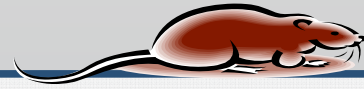
These expressions indicate **effect** -

- As a result of
- If
- Consequently
- Effect
- Therefore
- Thus



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## Read this Paragraph.



About 75 million people died from the bubonic plague during the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Half of the population of Italy fell victim to the disease. The plague caused high fever, swollen glands, dark bruises or sores on the face, and spitting of blood. Most people who got the disease died within five days. The disease was spread by fleas from rats. Lack of sanitation and poor medical knowledge account for the continuous plague epidemics throughout the 14<sup>th</sup> century.

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## Practice Question

What caused so many people to die from the bubonic plague?

- A. Lack of sanitation and poor medical knowledge account for the continuous plague epidemics.
- B. The dead were buried without the usual prayers.
- C. Italy was constantly at war.
- A. The victims got large bruises or sores on the face.



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The phrase account for was your clue.

## Practice Question

Marcia was a skilled and capable driver. She had driven all the way from New Mexico in her brand-new car without any problems. Suddenly, because she hit a long patch of frozen ice, she lost control and the car ended up in a ditch. As she climbed out, she realized that the car was demolished.

What was the cause of Marcia's accident?

- A. She was very tired from the long drive.
- B. The road was icy.
- C. The car was new.
- D. She landed in a ditch.



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**How did you do?**

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## Practice Question

The simple sneeze is actually a complex reaction. The impulse to sneeze comes from irritation of a group of nerves in back of the eyes. When the signals reach the brain, the body takes a quick breath, then muscles contract violently. Finally, the sound “kerchoo” comes out.

**What is the initial cause of sneeze?**

- A. Nerves are irritated.
- B. The brain is signaled.
- C. Eyes are irritated.
- D. Muscles contract violently.



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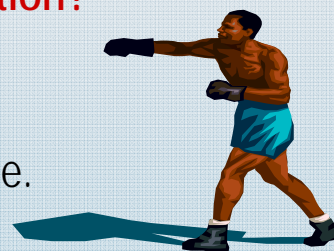


## Practice Question

Carlos Palomino was a champion boxer. Yet he gave up boxing and earned a degree in recreation. He chose this field because he wanted to work with kids. Not everyone can become a paid athlete, he says. That's why school is so important for all young people. Carlos hopes his example will help others set high goals in education as well in sports.

**Why did Carlos get the degree in recreation?**

- He had earned many honors.
- He wanted to work with kids.
- Not everyone can become a paid athlete.
- He was an ideal boxer.



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