

# Cause and Effect Writing

**Academic Writing**

# What Questions Does It Answer?

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- Why did A happen? (discovering the causes of A)
- What happened as a result of A? (discovering the effects of A)
- What might happen as a result of A? (predicting further effects of A)

# But How Can I Be Sure?

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You do not need to be! Use the complex nature of cause and effect to your advantage. Often it is not necessary, or even possible, to find the exact cause of an event or to name the exact effect. So, when formulating a thesis, you can claim one of a number of causes or effects to be the primary, or main, cause or effect. As soon as you claim that *one cause or one effect is more crucial than the others*, you have developed a thesis. Just make sure you can build a solid argument for your choice.

# Typical Structure

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- In the paragraph's topic sentence, make your claim that x (or x and y, etc.) was/will be the cause(s) for the event (effect).
- In the paragraph's body, use evidence and commentary to describe the process of how these causes (x, y, and z) led up to the effects.
- In the paragraph's conclusion, describe the resulting effect(s).
- This structure can be expanded, with the introductory paragraph introducing the topic and the claim, and each paragraph addressing one aspect.

# A Simple Example

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Kevin woke up with a hangover this morning because he drank both beer and hard liquor last night.

Everyone knows that mixing both kinds of alcohol is a bad idea. When Kevin drinks only beer, he almost never has a hangover the next day. Last night, however, he had ten large beers, plus four shots of vodka, and two frozen margaritas. Clearly, this mixing of alcohol types is what led to his hangover.

# A More Complex Example

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While many teachers and parents offer rewards to entice children into behaving in a specific manner, recent research indicates that providing rewards may have negative effects on the child, including delayed egocentric growth.

Rewards are detrimental to a child's ego development because they manipulate the very basic foundations of the ego's function. According to Smith (2004), development of the ego relies on allowing one to choose and control situations for oneself subliminally without outside pressure. When that ability to choose and control for oneself is taken out of a child's life and is manipulated with a concrete reward, some degree of meaning is lost (Smith 2004). Quite clearly, rewards, much like punishments, seek to control an individual's behavior.

Therefore, these rewards inhibit egocentric growth by taking the aspect of choice away from the child and placing the control of the child's ego into the hands of the person with the reward.

## Practice 7.1: Structure

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*Read the short essay and analyze the structure. What is the function of each paragraph?*

## Practice 7.2: Cause & Effect Markers

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*Now, skim the essay and underline the various use and phrases the author uses to show cause and effect. Do they indicate that something is a cause or that something is an effect?*



## Practice 7.3: Write a Cause/Effect Paragraph

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*Choose one of the questions on the handout and write a cause/effect paragraph inspired by it. Remember, you do not need to mention every cause or explore every aspect of the problem, and you do not need to follow the prompt exactly.*