



**Academic Support Center
Writing Center**

Organizing a Cause and Effect Essay

Resource: California State College website

Explaining Cause and Effect

Purpose

Often, writers are asked to explain how certain conditions or events are related to other conditions or events. When a writer argues that "one thing leads to another," he or she is making a cause-and-effect argument.

Example

In an economics class, students might be asked to explain the impact of increasing oil prices on the nation's economy. Inherent in the question is the assumption that increasing oil prices is a cause, which produces specific effects in the rest of the economy, so higher oil prices produce higher gasoline prices raising the cost of shipping goods. Higher oil prices produce higher jet fuel costs raising the cost of travel, and so on. "Higher oil prices" is the cause, and increased shipping costs and travel expenses are among the effects.

Types

Writing tasks involving cause and effect analysis usually take one of two forms:

- explaining how a known cause produces specific effects or explaining how specific effects are produced by a previously unknown cause (which the writer has discovered).
- The second type of analysis is commonly referred to as root-cause analysis. The first type of analysis is what the technology and privacy topic requires.

Format

The writer needs to explain what this cause-and-effect relationship means. This type of essay then has five parts (not paragraphs!), with each part corresponding to a specific task the writer needs to perform, and each part consisting of one or more paragraphs.

Organizing the Essay

Instead of the “five paragraph essay,” students should see that the form of an essay (its organization) needs to match the purpose of the essay. To begin with, we should look at one of the most common tasks students are asked to perform and one of the organizational strategies effective for this task.

Essay Parts

Introduction

- Background for the topic
- Setting out the issues
- Focusing the argument—the purpose of the essay

Description of the "Cause"

- What are the specific conditions?
- What are the specific illustrations of these conditions?
- How are these specific illustrations representative of (can stand in for) other situations?

In this first part of the analysis, the writer needs to provide enough detail for the reader so the reader can understand the present situation. In addition, the writer needs to focus the description of the situation in such a way as to prepare for the "effect" that the writer is arguing. For example, if the writer wants to argue that the loss of privacy has led to (or will lead to) a loss of individual freedom, then the description of how technology affects our privacy

Description of the "Effect"

- What is/are the specific effect(s)?
- How can we get from the specific conditions to the specific effects?
- What are the specific illustrations of these effects?
- How are these specific illustrations representative of (can stand in for) others?

In this second part of the analysis, the writer needs to walk the reader through the logical steps the writer has used to move from cause to effect. For example, if the writer argues that loss of privacy leads to loss of individual freedom, the writer needs to explain carefully how privacy and freedom are linked. So perhaps the writer might claim that privacy allows an individual to be free from the observation of others. With our privacy becoming increasingly limited by surveillance, we are no longer free from the observation of others. If we believe that we are always being watched, we will probably change our behavior and be

less willing to take chances or act independently. If we feel we cannot act independently, then we are no longer free.

Explanation of the meaning of the cause-and-effect relationship

- Why is this analysis important?
- How might we act upon the ideas the writer has presented?

In this third part of the analysis, the writer argues for the importance of the argument's findings, often by putting in perspective the short-term or long-term consequences of the "effect." In addition, in this part the writer usually makes some sort of recommendation (what we should do). So if the writer is arguing that loss of privacy leads to loss of freedom, in this part the writer might speculate on what might happen if this trend towards further loss of privacy continues. In addition, the writer might describe some of the specific actions we can take to safeguard our existing privacy, or how legislation might provide such safeguards.

Conclusion

- Summing up
- How might our understanding of the larger issue be changed by the writer's analysis?
- Explain to the reader how this situation affects us.