

Essay Format: Cause and Effect

Introduction

In the introduction, provide the necessary background to introduce your reader to your topic, and then write a thesis statement that clearly indicates whether your essay will discuss causes or effects.

The introduction of a cause paper will usually contain a brief description of the effect. In an essay with the following thesis statement the introduction would discuss the fuel shortages that resulted from government policies:

Government policies have made fuel shortages more severe than they used to be.

The introduction to an effect paper will naturally reverse the procedure of a cause paper by briefly describing or discussing the cause. In an essay with the following thesis statement the introduction would discuss the health insurance program.

Passage of a national health program will result in heavy burdens on doctors.

Provide in your thesis statement an indication of the nature of the (typically three or four) causes or effects that you will discuss.

Examples

A paper on the causes of the popularity of disco dancing might provide the following:

Background material: Disco dancing started in Europe, spread to the United States several years ago, and is currently popular all over the U.S. among all age groups.

Thesis statement: Disco dancing has become the most popular form of entertainment because it . . .

A paper on the effects of the popularity of disco dancing might use much the same material in its introduction.

Thesis statement: The effects of the current craze for disco dancing are . . .

Body

Analyze the causes or effects, giving a paragraph to each major cause or effect.

Discuss causes or effects in a logical order:

1. least obvious to most obvious,
2. most obvious to least obvious,
3. most important to least important,
4. least important to most important, or
5. sequence (first, second, third [or final]).

Begin with indirect causes or effects if you must discuss both indirect and direct causes or effects.

Use proper word indicators to show causes or to show effects.

Poor: Minority quotas in the job market are bad. They discriminate against the white male.

Better: Minority quotas in the job market are bad because they discriminate against the white male.

Use appropriate transitions:

because, therefore, the reason is, as a result, consequently, hence, thus, the first cause (reason) is, the second cause is . . ., the third (or final) cause is . . .

Explore each cause or effect thoroughly; don't just write a list.

Don't shift away from the causes or effects. For instance, don't discuss ways to avoid sunburn in a paper if the purpose is to discuss the causes of sunburn.

Regularly remind your reader of your main idea or restate the importance of the topic.
Raise a question about the causes or the effects.
Give a prediction about the causes or the effects.