

12 The Cause or Effect Essay

The cause of Effect essay can be particularly difficult, which is why we have included it here. Causes are terribly difficult to nail down. For example:

Last night it was snowing and I went outside without a coat. Today I have a cold. Going outside without a coat caused my cold.

I had a cold, but I ate a bunch of chicken soup yesterday. Today I feel better. Therefore, the soup cured my cold.

Here we have a faulty cause and a faulty effect. We know that going out without a coat does not cause colds. A virus (the rhinovirus—cool name, right?) causes colds. Also, we know that chicken soup does not cure colds. But that was not always the case. Did your mother ever tell you not to go out in the cold without a coat or with wet hair? This was based on faulty causal analysis.

Because people get more colds in winter than summer, people used to assume that the cold was related to catching a cold. Thus, don't go out without a coat.

Here's the great irony: people get more colds in winter than summer because they spend more time indoors around sick people, which increases the chance they will be exposed to the virus these sickies are carrying. So it's actually healthier to go outside (even without a coat) than to stay indoors!

So your main goal here is to look for REAL causes, not assumed causes. You may want to review our chapter on logical fallacies (especially note the post hoc ergo propter hoc fallacy) to learn more about this.

Note also that you could be assigned to write and cause AND effect essay, but usually you will be assigned to just do one or the other, because they both require time and space to accomplish.

A Basic Cause OR Effect Assignment

This paper should be at least three pages (750 words) in length. Your job is to point out either the causes or effects of a specific event:

1. Select a topic of interest to you. Select an event (your decision to attend college, get married, have a child, etc.)
2. Detail either the causes of this event, or the effects of the event
3. Expand those causes or effects beyond yourself to others who may have caused the event, or been affected by it.

Basic Organizational Pattern

Most cause or effect essays follow a basic pattern like the **sample** outline below:

1. Introduction: Setting up some context for the issue is a great way to open a position paper. You **MUST** name the event in your introduction. End this introduction paragraph with your **thesis statement** that summarizes the causes or effects of this event. Feel free to identify if the causes or effects were positive or negative.

2. Reason 1: Set up the first cause or effect.

3. Reason 2: Set up the second cause or effect.

4. Reason 3: Set up the third cause or effect.

5. Conclusion: Think about how you can lead the reader back out of the paper.

Revising/Editing: Your final essay should be well polished and easy to read, make a strong argument, and contain no grammar, usage, punctuation, or other mechanical errors.

GUN CONTROL SAMPLE ESSAY

Richard Carbon
Professor Michael Jensen
ENG 101
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Spread the Word

The media's job is a very simple one: garner ratings, however possible. At best, this means using misleading titles to keep the viewer or reader interested in sticking around; at worst, it often means capitalizing on tragedy. After every violent shooting—whether perpetrated against a member of congress, patrons of a theater, or schoolchildren—the media's immediate reaction is to identify the assailant and spend weeks or even months focusing entirely on who they were, why they did what they did, and what lies ahead for them. These criminals are fodder for media outlets, which see tragedies as reasons to no longer need to look for new, interesting stories. Little does the media realize that they perpetuate the very heinous acts that they are reporting. The sensationalizing of violence by the media has the effect of bringing about further violence.

Since the Vietnam era, the media has focused a disturbing amount of attention on horrible violence, rarely as a means of giving those affected justice and recognition. In reality, they do it for the purpose of “profiting off of the fear and entertainment value such stories perpetuate” (Sainato). Sadly, it's a proven method; immediately following the Newtown shooting in 2012, news outlets saw a surge in their ratings (O'Connell). Less than two months after the tragedy, an independent filmmaker announced he would be making a movie that was influenced by the shooting (Puchko). These send very clear messages to potential criminals: doing so will net media attention for months and years to come.

When the media first receives news about a violent crime committed, their first goal is to find the perpetrator. Once that person has been located, the media “lets loose” on description, speculation, and comparison. By doing this, they only serve to empower and promote the person who committed the crime, and they incite others to do the same. Joseph Grenny attributes this sensationalizing to causing a series of shootings that occurred in 1996. A young man entered his junior high school and killed three people; media coverage that followed obsessed about how he looked, what he used, and even how he used it, essentially giving a how-to guide on concealing a weapon. Within days, says Grenny, “the invisible adolescent was a cultural icon. Within a week, another shooting occurred that clearly echoed that of Feb 2. Then another on February 19. Another on March 11. Yet another on March 13” (Grenny). The overblown coverage by the media had the effect of worsening the devastation, convincing others that they, too, could become famous just by letting out their emotions in this way.

The film *Natural Born Killers*, released in 1994, provides a rich satirization of the media regarding their sensationalism of violence. Within the film, the media’s attention of the two killers promotes them to the status of “cult heroes”, and it eventually incites a riot that leads to the killers’ escape from prison (mytum21). This film is very representative of the media mindset, where the most important focus is on ratings, not on the effects that those reporting practices can have. By identifying the murderers in a tragic crime, the media singlehandedly promotes them to a level of celebrity that most of them would never have known otherwise. Of the most recent massacres committed, none of the culprits were particularly special. They were quiet, unassuming, not well-known, and overall unimportant. It was not until the media plastered their face for the world to

see that they became a household name, and by the media doing that, the next unassuming, quiet person who wants fame now knows exactly how to get it.

Works Cited

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