



## Cause and Effect Essay

### Objectives:

- To learn how to write a cause-effect essay
- To use effective transitions in cause-effect writing
- To use verb tenses consistently
- To recognize and avoid sentence fragments



### What Is a Cause-Effect Essay?

We all understand cause-effect relationships; for example, lightning can cause fire. As a student you know that if you stay up late the night before a test to watch a movie and do not study, you may not perform well on the test the following day. A **cause-effect essay** tells how one event (the cause) leads to another event (the effect).

A cause-effect essay can do one of two things:

- It can analyze the ways in which one or more effects result from a particular cause.  
**(Focus-on-Effects Method)**
- It can analyze the ways in which one or more causes lead to a particular effect.  
**(Focus-on-Causes Method)**

In other words, your essay may focus more on the effects of a cause or more on the causes of one effect. Either approach provides a useful means of discussing the possible relationship between the two events. It is not a good idea to mix several causes and several effects in an essay because your focus may become unclear.

In cause-effect essays, it is easy to suggest that because one event preceded another event, the former event caused the latter. Simply because one event follows another one sequentially does not mean that the two actions are related. For example, people often complain that as soon as they finish washing their car, it starts to rain. Obviously, washing a car does not cause rain. Writers need to be sure that the causes and effects they describe are logically connected.



## How Is a Cause-Effect Essay Organized?

There are two basic ways to organize a cause-effect essay: **focus-on-effects** or **focus-on-causes**. If your assignment is to write a cause-effect essay on the topic of global warming, you could write two kinds of essays:

- In a **focus-on-effects essay**, you would write about the threatened habitat of polar bears as a result of global warming and the melting of large parts of the Arctic Circle. Your essay might include five paragraphs and look like this:

<b>Introduction</b>	Paragraph 1	hook connecting information Thesis
<b>Body</b>	Paragraph 2	Effect 1: dangerous swimming conditions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• sea ice platforms farther apart</li> </ul>
	Paragraph 3	Effect 2: scarcity of food <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• fewer hunting opportunities</li> </ul>
	Paragraph 4	Effect 3: reduced population <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Females with less body weight have lower reproduction rates.</li> </ul>
<b>Conclusion</b>	Paragraph 5	restated thesis suggestion/opinion/prediction

- In a **focus-on-causes essay**, you would write about the causes of global warming, such as excessive carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. In this case, the organization for this essay could have five paragraphs and look like this:

<b>Introduction</b>	Paragraph 1	hook connecting information Thesis
<b>Body</b>	Paragraph 2	cause 1: human activities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• carbon dioxide from vehicles</li> <li>• not recycling (requires creating more products from scratch)</li> </ul>
	Paragraph 3	cause 2: increased industrial activity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• greater carbon dioxide from burning fuels to run factories</li> </ul>
	Paragraph 4	cause 3: deforestation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased human population requires more space, so trees are cut down.</li> <li>• Fewer trees mean less oxygen, which causes a higher percentage of</li> </ul>
<b>Conclusion</b>	Paragraph 5	restated thesis suggestion/opinion/prediction



## Great topics for Cause-Effect Essays

What is a great topic for a cause-effect essay? This type of essay may focus more on the causes or more on the effects, but most writers answer this question by thinking of an effect or a final result. The brainstorming stage then requires thinking about one or more causes of that effect.

When selecting topics for this type of essay, a good writer should consider relevant questions such as:

- What is the end effect?
- Is there one primary effect, or are there several effects?
- Is there one primary cause, or are there several causes?

As you read this list of some general topics that lend themselves well to a cause-effect essay, notice that the last two in each group do not use the obvious words *cause* or *effect*:

Focus on Causes	Focus on Effects
the causes of the high divorce rate in some countries	the effects of pollution in Great Lakes
the causes of World War I	the effects of high salaries for athletes
the causes of low voter participation in elections	the effects of the Internet on how businesses are run
the reasons new teachers quit	the impact of technology on education
why only a small percentage of people read newspapers today	what happens when a large percentage of adults cannot read well

### Supporting Details

After you have selected a topic, your task is to determine whether you will focus more on the causes of the issue or the effects of it. This process will also help you to select and develop supporting details for your essay, which is an important step in constructing a solid essay.

When you brainstorm your plan for this essay, a useful technique is to make two lists. One list has as many causes as you can think of. The second list has as many effects or results as you can think of. The list that is bigger—the causes or the effects—should determine the primary focus of your essay.

here is an example for an essay about the difficulty of learning English:

Causes	Effects
14 vowel sounds	some people study it for years.
unpredictable spelling system	People spend time & money to learn it.
12 verb tenses	There are many jobs for teaching English.
phrasal verbs	Some people never learn it well.
vocabulary from German and from Latin	Some people have a weak vocabulary.



## Brainstorming for two Methods

**STRESS!** In this activity, you will use the space in the boxes to brainstorm ideas for an essay on the topic of stress. In the first box, your organization will address the focus-on-effects method. In the second box, your organization will address the focus-on-causes method. After you complete these tasks, we'll work with a partner or a small group to discuss your answers.

### Focus-on-Effects Method

Cause:

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Effects:

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### Focus-on-Causes Method

Causes:

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Effect



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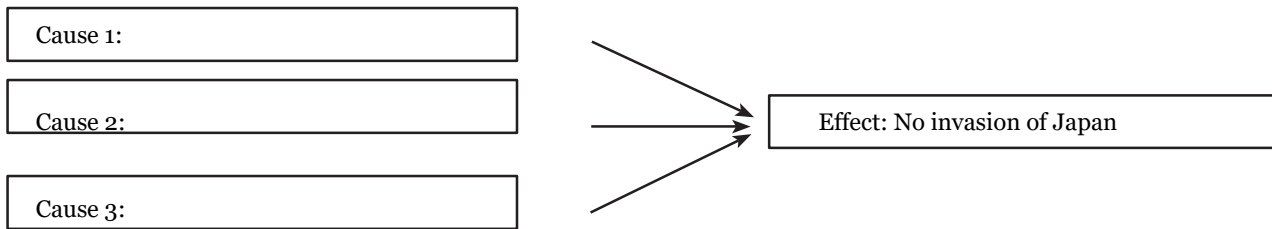


### Studying an example cause-effect essay

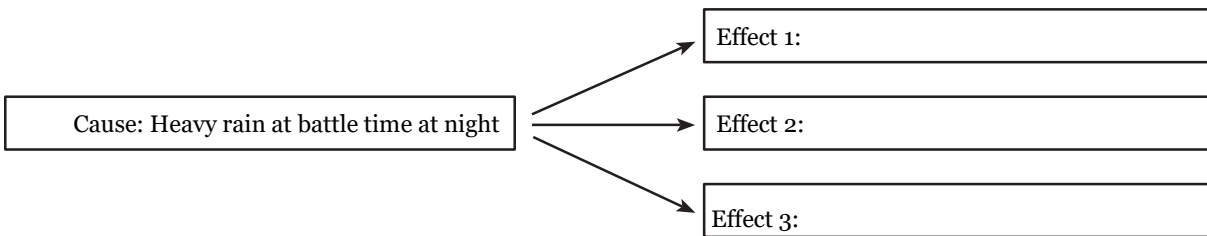
This essay discusses some effects that weather has had on events in history. Discuss the Preview Questions with a partner. Then read the essay and answer the questions that follow.

#### Preview Questions

1. Can you name a time when the weather had an effect on an event that you attended? Was it a positive effect or a negative effect?
2. In the 1200s, the warrior Kubilai Khan tried to invade Japan by sailing from the Asian mainland to Japan. A certain kind of weather event prevented the invasion. Write three guesses in the diagram about what this weather was. Do not consult the Internet, a book, or a person.



3. Go back in time. Imagine you are a captain of a troop of 500 soldiers and you want to attack your enemy at night. However, it is raining heavily. What are three possible effects of the rain?





## **Sample Essay and Outline:**

### **How Weather Has Changed World History**

It is tempting, and often comforting, to think that humans control their fates. The decisions that people make in their daily lives can affect many things, and the course of their lives cumulatively reflects these many small decisions. On the other hand, people cannot control every aspect of their environments, and forces beyond human control frequently intervene in human affairs. Notwithstanding many people's opinion that the weather has little influence in their lives besides determining what clothes they wear on a particular day, the weather has in fact caused world history to radically shift in important ways that are still felt today.

Numerous examples from world history document the long-term effects of weather in the formation of cultures and nations. In the thirteenth century, Khubilai Khan ruled over the vast Mongol empire, which spanned from the Pacific Ocean in the east to the Black Sea in the west, from present-day Siberia in the north to Afghanistan in the south. To expand his reign further, Khubilai Khan mounted two invasions of Japan. Two monsoons, however, caused him to end his attacks. Delgado (2008) describes legendary accounts of this event: "The legend, oft repeated in countless history books, speaks of gigantic ships, numbering into the thousands, crewed by indomitable Mongol warriors, and of casualties on a massive scale, with more than 100,000 lives lost in the final invasion attempt of 1281" (p. 4). Because of this unexpected defeat, Khubilai Khan decided to stage a third invasion of Japan, but he died before he could fulfill this ambition. Without these monsoons, Japan might have been defeated by the Mongols and thus lost its identity as a unique culture, with far-reaching consequences for Asian and world history.

In the early years of America's Revolutionary War, which began in 1775, it appeared likely that the British would crush the armies of her colonial territory and incorporate it back into the empire. The British troops were a well-trained and disciplined army that was feared worldwide. In contrast, the American troops were newly trained, sometimes poorly organized, and lacked sufficient resources to fight effectively. General George Washington could have easily been defeated in the Battle of Long Island on August 22, 1776. Historical records show that Sir William Howe, the British commander, was clearly defeating Washington on Long Island and was actually winning handily (Seymour, 1995). Nonetheless, the weather intervened when a heavy fog rolled in, so the American forces were able to retreat, regroup, and survive to fight another day. Because of this fog, the United States was not defeated in its struggle for freedom. Consequently, today's United



Kingdom of England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland does not include the United States. The United States is not a commonwealth of a mother country, as Canada and Australia are, though the United States still has strong ties to its colonial past.

When Napoleon Bonaparte invaded Russia in the early nineteenth century, he met with early successes that appeared to guarantee that he might eventually rule the world as his personal domain. His soldiers captured Moscow and destroyed the city, which encouraged him to push farther in his military campaigns. However, because of his dreams of glory, Napoleon overlooked the simple fact that Russian winters are extremely cold. When the temperatures fell below freezing, many of his soldiers and their horses died in the brutal weather. As Belloc (1926) writes in his classic study of the Napoleonic wars, “The cold was the abominable thing: The dreadful enemy against which men could not fight and which destroyed them” (p. 217). As a result of the failure of Napoleon’s Russian campaigns, his own rule ended relatively soon after. His defeat led to a reorganization of power throughout the European nations, as well as to the rise of Russia as a major world power.

As these three examples unambiguously demonstrate, the weather has caused numerous huge shifts in world history as well as in power balances among cultures and nations. Without the rainy storms of the monsoon season, Japan might be the eastern outpost of Mongolia; without the appearance of dense fog, the United States might still be a territory of the United Kingdom; and without winter snow, Muscovites might speak French. Today weather forecasters can usually predict with a high degree of accuracy when thunderstorms, hurricanes, tsunamis, and tornadoes will strike, but the course of history cannot be fully isolated from the effects of the weather.

### References

Belloc, H. (1926). *Napoleon’s campaign of 1812 and the retreat from Moscow*. New York: Harper.

Delgado, J. (2008). *Khubilai Khan’s lost fleet: In search of a legendary armada*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Seymour, W. (1995). *The price of folly: British blunders in the War of American Independence*. London: Brassey’s.



# Outline

Title: How Weather has Changed World History

## I. Introduction

- A. Describe how people think they control their fates.
- B. Suggest, however, that people cannot control every aspect of their environments.
- C. Thesis statement: The course of history cannot be fully isolated from the effects of weather.

## II. Body Paragraph 1

- A. Provide the example of Khubilai Khan and his invasion of Japan.
- B. Cite the study of J. Delgado, who describes Khubilai Khan's failed invasion.
- C. Discuss how Japan's cultural identity would have changed if Khan had succeeded in his invasion.

## III. Body Paragraph 2

- A. Provide the example of the Battle of Long Island in the American Revolutionary War, during which fog helped the American forces to retreat
- B. Cite the study of W. Seymour, who documents the circumstances of the battle.
- C. Discuss how the United States might have remained a member of the British Commonwealth, if not for a heavy fog.

## IV. Body Paragraph 3

- A. Provide the example of Napoleon Bonaparte's invasion of Russia.
- B. Cite the study of H. Belloc, who documents the effect of the Russian winter.
- C. Discuss the consequences of Napoleon's defeat in relation to Russia's rise as a world power.

## V. Conclusion

- A. Summarize the three examples from the body paragraphs.
- B. Suggest that, although weather forecasters can predict the weather with more accuracy than in the past, The weather has changed world history in important ways still felt today



## thesis statements

A strong thesis statement for a cause-effect essay indicates whether the essay focuses on causes or on effects. Sometimes the thesis statement uses the words *cause(s)* or *effects(s)*, but this is not necessary if either the cause or the effect is implied in the statement. In addition, a thesis statement sometimes includes a number, such as *three causes* or *two effects*, but this is also optional.





Focus	Example thesis statement
on causes	Many customers prefer to shop online for <b>three</b> important reasons.  The increase in obesity in our country is due to food commercials, cheap fast food, and video games.
on effects	This essay will discuss the <b>effects</b> of watching too much TV on children’s family life, interpersonal skills, and school life.  Most people are not aware of the positive <b>effects</b> of simply walking for 20 to 30 minutes per day.



## Transitions and Connectors

Transitions and connectors are important in cause-effect essays because they help indicate causation or effect regarding the topic. Perhaps the most familiar cause-effect transition word is *because*: “X happened **because** Y happened.” Precise use of transitions helps the reader to follow the writer’s reasoning about cause-effect relationships.

The transitions for both a focus-on-causes essay and a focus-on-effects essay are the same because both kinds of essays discuss one or more causes or one or more effects.

transitions and Connectors Commonly used in Cause-Effect Essays		
as a consequence	due to	on account of
as a result	(the) effect (of X)	owing to (for this)
(X can be) attributed to (Y)	(a key) factor of (X)	(X is the) reason for (Y)
because	for this reason	(X is a) result of (Y)
because of	furthermore	(X) resulted in (Y)
caused	if (X), then (Y)	since
(X is the) cause of (Y)	in addition (to)	so
(X is) caused by (Y)	in order to	therefore
(one) consequence of this (is that)	(X) influences (Y)	this means that . . .
consequently	(X) leads to (Y)	thus

### Identifying transitions and connectors in an essay

Glance back over “How Weather Has Changed World History” to note the transitions and connectors.



# Original student Writing: Cause-Effect Essay

## step 1: choose a topic

Your first step is to choose a topic for your essay. For a cause-effect essay, you want to choose a topic for which you can develop three causes of one effect or three effects from one cause. Your teacher may assign a topic, you may think of one yourself, or you may choose one from the suggestions in the chart. As you consider possible topics, ask yourself, “What do I know about this topic? What do my readers know? What else do I need to know? How do I research this topic?”

<b>Humanities</b>	<i>Literature:</i> The effects of writing a novel on a computer <i>History:</i> The causes of an important historical event such as World War I <i>Philosophy:</i> The effects of Socrates on modern thought
<b>Sciences</b>	<i>Biology:</i> The causes of cancer <i>Geology:</i> The effects of burning oil and gas <i>Meteorology:</i> The causes of climate change
<b>Business</b>	<i>Economics:</i> The causes of inflation

## step 2: brainstorm

Brainstorm a list of possible causes and effects for your topic. Now carefully consider the causes and effects. Which focus do you think would be better for your essay? If you have more causes, then you should write a focus-on-causes essay with one effect. If you have more effects, then you should write a focus-on-effects essay with one cause

## step 3: Outline

Prepare a simple outline of your essay. Focus either on causes or on effects.

## step 4: Write the First Draft

Use the information from Steps 1–3 to write the first draft of your cause-effect essay. Use your outline as a guide. Make sure you have integrated your sources.

## step 5: Peer Edit

## step 6: Revise the First Draft

## step 7: Proofread the Final Draft. Print. Submit

### Cover page

**Title in all caps in header (appears on every page--even the references)**

### APA Formatting

**OWL @ Purdue <https://owl.english.purdue.edu>**