



WRITING A CAUSE-EFFECT ESSAY

A cause-effect essay shows why or how something happened (the causes) and the results of that situation or event (the effects). **The focus of your essay will be on either the causes or the effects, or not both.**

Like all essays, a cause-effect essay has three parts.

THE CAUSE-EFFECT ESSAY

- INTRODUCTION
- BODY
- CONCLUSION

WRITING TASK:

Identity theft is a growing problem in our society. Discuss either the causes or the effects of this crime.

Step 1 PREWRITING

For a cause-effect essay, the prewriting step involves selecting an issue that has clear causes and effects and deciding whether you want to focus on the causes or on the effects. It also involves brainstorming ideas to develop specific points of cause and effect.

Step 2 WRITING THE FIRST DRAFT

You have also learned that the introductory paragraph in an essay gives background information to help the reader understand the thesis statement. In a cause-effect essay, you will first need to decide whether you will focus on causes or on effects.

You can ask yourself several questions. *What happened? What factors caused that situation or event to happen? What were the effects or results of that situation or event?*

THE INTRODUCTION

You have practiced two opening strategies for essays by using:

- an interesting or surprising fact
- a thoughtful question

Another effective way to open an essay is to use an interesting example.

The background information in this type of an essay introduces the situation. If the body of your essay focuses on effects, the background in your introductory paragraph will likely mention the causes of this situation. On the other hand, if the body of your essay focuses on the causes of a situation, your introductory paragraph will likely mention the effect(s).

Essay Focus on Causes → Summarize effects in the introduction.



Before reading about the causes of a crime or other phenomenon, your reader will want to know why it is important. A brief summary of the effects in the introduction establishes the importance of the analysis of the causes.

Essay Focus on Effects → Summarize causes in the introduction.

Before reading about the effects of a crime or other phenomenon, your reader will want to know what has caused this to happen. A brief summary of the causes is a good way to introduce the analysis of effects.

The thesis statement states the controlling idea of the whole essay and tells the reader whether you are focusing on cause or effect.

A successful thesis statement for a cause-effect essay:

- presents the controlling idea of the entire essay, focusing on either causes or effects.
- responds to the assignment.
- contains an idea the writer will develop and support.
- does more than state a fact. It usually presents an arguable assertion or claim.

Sample Thesis Statement

1. Thesis Statement: The current rise in identity theft is caused by several technological and social changes in our society.
2. Thesis Statement: The crime of identity theft has many negative effects on individuals and society.

Sample Introductory Paragraph

When thieves steal your identity, it ends up costing you a lot of money and your peace of mind. Why is this crime on the rise? At the same time that problems in the international economy are leading more people toward lives of crime, the growth of the Internet is leading us to transact more and more of our business electronically. We love the convenience of banking and shopping online, but it can leave a trail that thieves from all over the world can follow. The people who assume our identities hack into our accounts, steal as much as they can, and then rack up more charges, spreading fear. It is clear that the crime of identity theft has many negative effects on individuals and society.

THE BODY

- Body
 - Topic Sentences
 - Development and Support
 - Types of Evidence for Cause-Effect Claims
 - Organizing and Connecting Body Paragraphs
 - Words for Expressing Cause-Effect Relationships

In the body paragraphs of a cause-effect essay, it is important to:

- make the analysis of the causes or effects as clear and complete as possible; illustrate these causes or effects with specific descriptions, facts, and examples.
- organize the causes or effects into categories rather than listing several minor, unrelated causes or effects.



- use words and phrases that clearly express cause-and-effect relationships.

You will need at least two body paragraphs in your essay. Here are examples of two ways that you can structure your cause-effect essay.

Examples:

Focus on Causes	Focus on Effects
Introduction - Background information on effects - Thesis Statement on causes	Introduction - Background information on causes - Thesis Statement on effects
Body Paragraph 1: Cause 1 Body Paragraph 2: Cause 2 Body Paragraph 3: Cause 3 (optional)	Body Paragraph 1: Effect 1 Body Paragraph 2: Effect 2 Body Paragraph 3: Effect 3 (optional)
Conclusion	Conclusion

Writing Topic Sentences

Each body paragraph begins with a topic sentence that states the main idea of that paragraph. If the focus of your cause-effect essay is *causes*, each topic sentence will state a cause or a reason something has happened. Likewise, if your essay focuses on *effects*, each topic sentence will state an effect or result of something that has happened.

The topic sentence may also have certain types of transition words such as, *the first*, *in addition to*, or *not only ... but also* that help connect the main idea of the body paragraphs.

Developing Body Paragraphs

In a cause-effect essay, it is important to support your claims of cause-effect relationships with as much evidence as possible. Your support needs to come from reliable sources such as reputable newspapers, journals, or experts in the field.

An effective way to report supporting details is by *paraphrasing*. When you paraphrase, you put someone else's ideas into your own words. A paraphrase includes only the original ideas, not your personal thoughts or opinions on the topic. Paraphrasing can be challenging. Sometimes it will take you several tries to get your writing to match the original idea without copying it word for word. Look at this example.

Example:

Paraphrase: Professor Stone believes that more studies should be done to determine why people seem to become happier after they turn 50 years old.

In academic writing it is essential that you credit the source of the ideas, that is, the person or text you are talking the ideas from. A common way to refer to a source is with *according to*.



source	information
According to a recent Gallup poll,	people seem to get happier as they get older.

You can also use several other expressions to name your source and include any relevant identifying information.

Examples:

In Professor Oswald's opinion, ...
A recent Gallup poll shows that people seem to become happier as they get older.
Dr Stone, a psychology professor at the State University of New York at Stony Brook, believes that these findings raise other questions that should be studied in the future.
It is Professor Oswald's belief that the findings of the Gallup poll are significant and encouraging.

Here are some other examples of types of evidence for cause-effect claims:

Facts: Those most likely to miss fraud are usually 18 to 24 years old.

Statistics: That figure is up 12 percent over 2008 and is 37 percent ahead of 2007.

Statements from Authorities: Identity thieves steal mostly through two means, according to Michael Stanfield, chief executive of Intersections Inc., a risk-management firm.

Examples and Personal Stories: In fewer than six months, some \$900,000 in merchandise, gambling and telephone-services were charged to Crouse's debit card.

When you read the body paragraphs below, you will see the difference between weak and strong supporting evidence.

Weak Support

The evidence in this paragraph is weak because it is only one personal example that doesn't prove the claim that identity theft is growing because of the Internet.

The crime of identity theft is growing because of the increased use of the Internet for financial transactions. Just six months ago, my aunt, who can't drive anymore, bought her first computer. I thought it would be convenient for her to do her shopping and banking at home, so I set up accounts for her. Unfortunately, Aunt Mary didn't know how to protect her privacy on the Internet, and soon her credit card was being used for mysterious purchases all over the country.

Stronger Support

The evidence in this paragraph is stronger because it includes facts and a statement from an authority. The personal example is now introduced by a sentence that explains its connection to the claim.

The crime of identity theft is growing because of the increased use of the Internet for financial transactions. Most personal banking is now conducted on the Internet, providing a rich resource for those who know how to illegally hack into accounts. "The odds have never been higher for becoming a fraud victim, said James Van Dyke, of Javelin Research. The most likely victims are those who don't know or don't bother to protect their information. Just six months ago, my aunt, who can't drive anymore, bought her first computer. I thought it would be convenient for her to do her shopping and banking at home, so I set up accounts for her. Unfortunately, Aunt Mary didn't know how to protect her privacy on the Internet, and soon her credit card was being used for mysterious purchases all over the country.



Organizing and Connecting Body Paragraphs

As you explore the crime you are writing about, you may discover some minor causes or effects. First, create a list of the causes or effects you want to include in your essay. Then group the causes or effects into paragraphs rather than writing several short paragraphs discussing a single cause or effect.

Next, decide on the order of your paragraphs. There are a number of ways to order paragraphs:

- Chronological order works well when the time order of the causes or effects is important.

For example, in an essay about the causes of identity theft, you might write first about the technological changes that made the crime possible and then about the subsequent economic problems that pushed people into a life of crime.

- Order of importance generally moves from the least important cause or effect to the most important, ending the essay with its strongest point.

For example, if you are discussing the crime of illegal graffiti (spray-painting gang signs on buildings), you might begin by discussing the unattractiveness of graffiti and the cost of its removal and save your most important effect for the last body paragraph: the research showing that high levels of graffiti (and other property destruction) often encourage more serious crimes to increase in a neighborhood.

- Order of specificity moves from the specific (particular) to the general. This organization works well when something affects individual victims and, through them, affects society as a whole.

For example, in an essay on the effects of the crime of identity theft, it might be most effective to move from the particular effects on the individual victim to the general effects on technology and society.

You can show the organization of your essay in the sentences that begin and connect your paragraphs.

Examples:

Chronological Order: After the technological changes that made identity theft easier, the subsequent economic downturn pushed more people to use the new technology in a life of crime.

Order of Importance: Even more serious than the unattractiveness and cost of illegal graffiti is its tendency to increase levels of more serious crime in a neighborhood.

Order of Specificity (moving from specific effects on individuals to more general effects on society):

Can all these attacks on your computer be avoided by careful attention to Internet security? Probably not, but Internet security is becoming big business. Note the technique of beginning a paragraph with a question connecting to the previous paragraph.)

Body Paragraph 1: Effects on Individuals

- a. financial effects
- b. psychological effects

The immediate effects on the victim are financial, and they only grow worse. In 2009, 1.1 million Americans lost \$57 billion to identity theft, and the losses are growing every year. Victims typically find that their bank accounts, sometimes even retirement accounts, have been completely or partially emptied. Their credit cards have multiple charges, often delivered to different addresses around the country and the world, so it is difficult to trace the identity of the thieves. In less than six months Crouse had \$900,000 in



mysterious charges on his credit cards. When these bills go unpaid, the victim's credit score, which is important for borrowing money or renting an apartment, is often lowered to a dangerous level. Some victims have even had to declare bankruptcy. The random misfortune of identity theft can result in psychological problems such as depression or cause marital and family problems.

Body Paragraph 2: Effects on the use of technology

- a. necessity to buy Internet security
- b. necessity to encrypt all information

Can all these problems be avoided by careful attention to Internet security? Probably not, but Internet security is becoming big business. Symantec, the largest manufacturer of security software, saw record profits in recent years. Even though antivirus software can slow down older computers, many people tolerate the inconvenience. They are afraid of computer invaders, such as keystroke malware that can copy all of a user's keystrokes, including account numbers and passwords. Most sensitive information is encrypted before it is sent over wireless networks, but the fear now is that even encryption won't stop the thievery. According to the Wireless Safety website, 'This can only provide enough security to make a hacker's job more difficult.'

Body Paragraph 3: Effects on society

- a. distrust of technology
- b. growing social distrust

The technical costs of identity theft are accompanied by growing social costs. The Internet brings people around the world together in many ways, with Skype calls and large international Internet retailers such as Amazon. But now it has also made people feel vulnerable to attacks from around the world. Some older citizens are too fearful to use the Internet. My mother, for example, who received a series of virus-infected spam after she did some Internet shopping, has given up using the Internet and advises me to do the same. This is regrettable because the elderly, with their limited mobility, could benefit greatly from in-home shopping and banking. Some of the elderly may begin to feel even more separated from a highly technical society.

Words for Expressing Cause-and-Effect Relationships

The English language has many ways of showing cause-and-effect relationships.

Verbs that Introduce a Cause		
The drop in attendance	was caused by	the high ticket prices.
Many bad feeling	will result from	the cancellation.
The sports budget	is affected by	alumni donations.

Verbs that Introduce an Effect		
The star player's graduation	caused	the team to lose focus.
The high cost of travel	has resulted in	the cancellation of many games.



The cancellation	has made	the players depressed.
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Subordinating Conjunctions		
The school was fined	since	the players cheated.
Female athletes are choosing other schools	because	the college cancelled women's basketball.

Introductory Adverbs		
There is no women's basketball.	Therefore,	men's basketball is becoming more popular.
Women's basketball didn't attract enough fans.	Consequently,	it was cancelled.
Sports are important for all students.	For this reason,	the college should consider another sport for women.
Women's sports are usually not as popular.	Thus,	they are more easily cancelled.

Prepositional Phrases	
As a result of the budget problems,	the college has cancelled several programs.
Because of the laws on fairness in college sports,	the college will need to consider another sport for women.

THE CONCLUSION

<p>CONCLUSION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Restated Thesis - Significance of the Cause-Effect Analysis
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A cause-effect essay needs to leave the reader with a sense that the issue and the writer's cause-effect analysis are important. You have learned several strategies for concluding an essay, including

- looking to the future
- a call to action

In a cause-effect essay, you can use these or other strategies to leave your readers with a clear sense of your cause-effect analysis and its significance to the reader and society.

In your conclusion, return to your thesis statement and brainstorm reasons for the significance of the analysis. Ask yourself why the ideas in your essay are important and make a list of reasons.

Example:

Return to Thesis Statement

With the crime of identity theft growing, it is frightening that any of us could become victims. It is also disheartening to see the ways that this fear affects society as a whole.
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Brainstorming List of Reasons

Why are the ideas in my essay important?

- The Internet is becoming more popular all the time, so the crime could continue to grow.
- Other forms of technology could promote crime.
- We don't want a society in which we are all afraid.



- We need to do more to protect ourselves.

Read the following conclusion to a cause-effect essay.

With the crime of identity theft growing, it is frightening that any of us could become victims. It is also disheartening to see the ways that this fear affects the society as a whole. All of us need to do more to protect our information on the Internet, but we also need to pay attention to new forms of technology and the ways they can be exploited by criminals. If we carry all our information and passwords on our smart phones, will this make us vulnerable to forms of theft that weren't possible when the criminals only took our wallets? Because we don't want to live in an atmosphere of fear, we need to consider the weaknesses as well as the strengths of the technology in which we invest.

Revising and Editing

Revising your work is an essential part of the writing process. This is your opportunity to be sure that your essay has all the important pieces and that it is clear.

Revising and Editing Checklist

Did you ...

- express the controlling idea of the essay in your thesis statement?
 - give enough background information in your introduction?
 - clearly state time and cause-effect relationships?
 - focus each body paragraph on a cause or effect?
- give enough details, such as facts and examples, to support and develop your controlling ideas?
- restate the controlling idea of the essay in your conclusion?
 - connect the parts of your essay?
 - use an effective concluding strategy?
 - use any collocations in your essay? give your essay a good title?
 - cite any sources that you used in your essay?

Sample Essay

You have read parts of this cause-and-effect essay already. Now read the entire essay to see how the parts fit together.

IDENTITY THEFT

When thieves stole Dave Crouse's identity, it ended up costing him \$100,000 and his peace of mind (Waters). Why is this crime on the rise? As problems in the international economy are leading more people toward lives of crime, the growth of the Internet is leading us to transact more and more of our business electronically. We love the convenience of banking and shopping online, but it can leave a trail that thieves from all over the world can follow. The people who assume our identities hack into our accounts, steal as much as they can, and then rack up more charges, spreading fear. It is clear that the crime of identity theft has many negative effects on individuals and society.



The immediate effects on the victim are financial, and they only grow worse. In 2009, 1.1 million Americans lost \$57 billion to identity theft, and the losses are growing every year. Victims typically find that their bank accounts, sometimes even retirement accounts, have been completely or partially emptied. Their credit cards have multiple charges, often delivered to different addresses around the country and the world, so it is difficult to trace the identity of the thieves. In less than six months Crouse had \$900,000 in mysterious charges on his credit cards (Waters). When these bills go unpaid, the victim's credit score, which is important for borrowing money or renting an apartment, is often lowered to a dangerous level. Some victims have even had to declare bankruptcy. The random misfortune of identity theft can result in psychological problems such as depression or cause marital and family problems.

Can all these problems be avoided by careful attention to Internet security? Probably not, but Internet security is becoming big business. Symantec, the largest manufacturer of security software, saw record profits in recent years (Madway). Even though antivirus software can slow down older computers, many people tolerate the inconvenience. They are afraid of computer invaders, such as keystroke malware that can copy all of a user's keystrokes, including account numbers and passwords. Most sensitive information is now encrypted before it is sent over wireless networks, but the fear is that even encryption won't stop the thievery. According to the Wireless Safety website (wirelessafety.org), "This can only provide enough security to make a hacker's job more difficult."

The technical costs of identity theft are accompanied by growing social costs. The Internet brings people around the world together in many ways, with Skype calls and large international Internet retailers such as Amazon. But now it has also made people feel vulnerable to attacks from around the world. Some older citizens are too fearful to use the Internet. My mother, for example, who received a series of virus-infected spam after she did some Internet shopping, has given up using the Internet and advises me to do the same. This is regrettable because the elderly, with their limited mobility, could benefit greatly from in-home shopping and banking. Some of the elderly may begin to feel even more separated from a highly technical society.

With the crime of identity theft growing, it is frightening that any of us could become victims. It is also disheartening to see the ways that this fear affects the society as a whole. All of us need to do more to protect our information on the Internet, but we also need to pay attention to new forms of technology and the ways that criminals can use them. If we begin to carry all our information and passwords on our smart phones, will this make us vulnerable to forms of theft that weren't possible when the criminals only took our wallets? Because we don't want to live in an atmosphere of fear, we need to consider the weaknesses as well as the strengths of the technology in which we invest.

WRITING TASK

Choose one of the topics below to write a well-organized cause-effect essay within 250-300 words.

1. The causes of / The effects of changes in face-to-face communication and interpersonal relationships.
2. The causes of / The effects of the increased availability of fast food.
3. The causes of / The effects of the rise of online learning.

taken and adapted