

## Mastering the Essay

### Lesson 9 – Cause & Effect Essay

#### Readings

- **Cause and Effect Essay** (Essay Info Writing Guides)
- **Slippery Slope Fallacy** (The Nizkor Project)
- **Post Hoc Fallacy** (Fallacy Files)
- **Spurious Correlations** (Tyler Vigen)

#### CAUSE AND EFFECT

- The cause and effect essay is an exploration of the reasons for or results of things or events. This type of essay can include both causes and effects, but generally contains only one of the two. When brainstorming a C&E essay, decide whether you want to discuss causes or effects. Often a topic will be better suited to one or the other.
- **Make sure your thesis statement indicates whether the essay will discuss causes or effects (or both—if you choose both, make sure that you have a clear purpose).**
- Examples of thesis statements:
  - The chief causes of dissatisfaction among the workers at Stirlitz Inc. are low wages, isolation, and boredom.
  - The beneficial effects of an annual canoe trip include reduced stress, increased fitness, and improved family relationships.
- What is the order of the causes/effects you are writing about? (i.e. the least important to the most important, or vice versa)
- **Avoid faulty logic.** Make sure that there is an actual link between the causes and effects being presented (ask yourself if you have assumed a cause/effect relationship where there is none).
  - Discuss how post hoc, slippery slope, and faulty correlation can pop up in essay writing, and ask students for strategies to verify the connections between the causes and effects they examine are sound.
  - Be sure not to over or understate the strength of your arguments. You also want to use words to indicate the level of importance of your points.
- **Consider the topic of causes and effects of home schooling!** How many reasons can you think of why people home school? How many effects does home schooling have? If you tried to list all of them in depth, you would write an enormous series of books! Even just one of the causes or effects could be a full essay in itself. Therefore, it's important to narrow your discussion to the most important causes/effects, the most worthwhile causes/effects to discuss, or the ones that you consider to be most overlooked (yet still important).
- Your goal should be to try to **organize your information into three or four main points**, if possible, so it may be presented to the reader clearly and concisely.

- **You may want to save your most important cause or effect until last.** There is often one major cause or effect that is the most important. By saving it until last, you leave your reader with a very strong impression.
- There is not so much to discuss when it comes to the cause and effect essay, so this would be a great class to “build an outline” of a cause and effect essay together in class as a way of reviewing the outlining process—which will be helpful for the students in their end-of-semester project, but also reviewing essay writing aspects we have talked about before, like structure, argument, evidences, and so on. Focusing on the strength of evidence can be particularly important for this topic. The topic of the outline is the effects of engaging in Socratic discussion. Ask the students to brainstorm effects, and write them down on the board as the students list them. Ask them to decide which effects are most worthy to be examined in an essay. Then together, build an outline on the board including an intro and conclusion.

### Assignment

Write a cause or effect essay (choose one). The topic should be one about which you believe more ought to be known in terms of its causes or effects. Try to choose a topic that you believe many people might not have a full understanding in terms of causes or effects. Use proper MLA style throughout. The essay should have at least seven paragraphs. Try varying paragraph length and including brief paragraphs to transition. Try breaking up one of your major points into two or more paragraphs.