Inquire: It’s Time to Begin!

Overview

You’re now ready to write your own cause and effect essay! Make sure, as with all essays, that you walk through the entire essay writing process from brainstorming to editing. Each step is vitally important in ensuring that you finish the process with a product you are proud of! You’ll begin first by brainstorming before you move into outlining and drafting your essay. Finally, you should engage in the revision and editing process, so you have a completely polished final essay.

Big Question: How can I use the writing process to write my cause and effect essay?

Watch: Writing With Purpose

When you sit down to write a paper, it’s easy to feel lost. Writing something like a cause and effect essay can feel especially difficult, since there are so many kinds of cause and effect arguments. So, what can you do to make sure that you have a clear path moving forward? One thing you should do — as with any essay — is to make sure you go through every step in the writing process: brainstorm, plan, outline, draft, revise, and edit. Walking yourself through this process might feel tedious, but it will be worth it in the end when you have a great paper to turn in that reflects your hard work.

Brainstorming for a cause and effect essay can be troublesome, as there’s not one simple strategy that will always help you. Mostly, to brainstorm a good cause and effect essay, you just need to ask the right questions. Do you want your essay to be based on a causal question or a consequence question?

If your essay is based on a causal question, you will be looking for the root cause of an event or situation. For example, you might try to find out why you always seem to lose one sock in the dryer.

If your essay is based on a consequence question, you will instead be examining the consequences of a particular event or situation. A lot of times, these will be focused on proposed actions. For example, you might ask what the potential consequences would be if we imposed stricter gun laws as a nation.

After you’ve brainstormed, you will draft your thesis and begin outlining your paper. In these steps, it’s important to remember that your paper will need to do a lot of work to show the relationships between different events and the effects they had or will have. After outlining, you can begin drafting your essay! In the drafting process, it’s important to keep in mind that your reader will need help to follow your causal links from one event to the next.
After you have a draft, all you need to do is revise and edit, and then you are ready to submit your cause and effect essay! Are you ready to begin writing?

Read: Beginning Your Cause and Effect Essay

Overview

You’re now ready to begin writing your cause and effect essay, but where do you begin? As with any essay, you will need to walk through the full writing process: brainstorming, planning, outlining, drafting, revising, and editing.

Choosing Your Topic

You can get some ideas for your topic by brainstorming either causal questions or consequence questions.

Causal questions come about when you start asking about strange phenomenons you see in the world around you. These can be silly things like the sudden resurgence of Birkenstocks in American fashion every few years, or it can be something serious like the resurgence of teen smoking with the advent of technology like the e-cigarette and the juul. This is a great opportunity to use a strategy like listing to generate a sizeable list of potential topics. Once you have a list of topics, you can begin considering what potential causes have led to the unusual trend.

Consequence questions come about when you try to predict potential consequences of a proposed course of action. Consider proposals that have been offered up in all aspects of your life:

- Proposals at work
- Proposals at school
- Proposals in your home
- Proposals in politics

Consider, for any one of these proposals, the potential consequences: what policies and procedures might be changed in the near future? Has the person proposing the change considered the full range of potential consequences? Do the benefits outweigh the costs?

Writing Your Thesis

Once you have a potential topic from your brainstorming, you should begin work on drafting a thesis, as your thesis will impact the kind of organization you use in your essay.

Thesis statements for cause and effect essays generally can be phrased as a claim using the word *because*. Generally, this is because you are trying to clarify the relationship between a cause (or a set of causes) and an effect (or a set of effects). So, a thesis might look something like this:

> Students stopped contributing in class because the new seating arrangement made them uncomfortable and made conversation difficult.

In this case, the thesis begins with the effect and makes a claim about the underlying cause. If, however, you are writing something closer to a proposal argument, you might want to place greater focus on the proposal:
If the seating arrangement is altered, it will result in reduced and lower-quality student contributions.

Each thesis statement works to establish the same relationship between the cause and effect, but one is focused on an existing effect, while the other focuses on potential future consequences.

Whether you’re focusing on an event that’s already taken place or a proposed event, the goal of a cause and effect thesis statement is to establish the relationship between the two things.

Organizing Your Essay

You can organize your cause and effect essay in several different ways, depending on the kind of causal argument you employ.

If your argument focuses on explaining how a cause progressed into a particular effect, you might follow what is called a “causal chain.” For this kind of argument, you should structure your paper by first introducing your issue and stating your claim. The body of your essay should spend time explaining how the cause will lead to the effect: you need to explore each element of the chain that leads from cause to effect. Finally, you will conclude your essay.

If, however, your essay argues that multiple causes came together to create one effect, you will have a slightly different structure. Again, you will begin your essay with an introductory paragraph, but the body of your essay will need to discuss the multiple possible causes and it will likely need to address potential counter-arguments from your audience.

Finally, you could write an essay that proposes a surprising cause or consequence. In this case, after your introduction, you would need to take part of the body of your essay to reject commonly assumed causes and consequences in order to spend the remainder of your body paragraphs arguing for your own surprising cause or consequence.

As you can see, the cause and effect essay has many moving parts that will change depending on your overall purpose in writing. Make sure to use the right organizational strategy for your particular type of causal argument!

Once you’ve chosen your organizational strategy, you are ready to make an outline and begin drafting your paper!

Reflect Poll: The Writing Process and You

Which aspect of the writing process do you feel will be most important for you to focus on in this paper?

- Brainstorming
- Thesis Writing
- Organization
- Editing
- Revision
Expand: Revising and Editing Your Cause and Effect Essay

Overview

Now that you have a draft of your essay, you’re almost done! Taking the time to go through the revision and editing process before turning your paper in can go a long way in improving your essay.

Revising Your Essay

Once you’ve written your essay, it’s time to engage in revision. As you read back through your essay, you’ll need to give special thought to the ways in which you are appealing to your audience. Remember the audience for whom you are writing the essay. Which of your claims might they take issue with? How can you make sure that you are not alienating them or pushing them away with any of your claims?

Try to read carefully back through your paper, as if you’re reading it for the first time and as a member of your target audience. Do all of your causal chains link together in a way that makes sense to a first-time reader?

Keep in mind the level of knowledge and understanding your audience has. Is the topic completely new to them? If so, make sure that you take the time to explain important terminology and key concepts. If, however, your audience generally has expertise in the subject, don’t waste your time or their time by explaining things they already know about.

Finally, as you reread your essay, be sure that you’re considering what kind of ethos you are projecting for your readers. Do you come across as knowledgeable? Do you come across as trustworthy? Do you support all of your claims with reasonable and reliable evidence? Is your language professional and courteous?

Revision is also the time for you to review your essay’s structure. Did you choose a method of organization that is easy to follow for your particular causal chain? Does everything flow logically together? If not, consider revising your essay to another method of organization or incorporating more transitions in your writing.

Editing Your Essay

Take the time now to read carefully back through your revised essay for any proofreading or editing errors. Use methods like reading aloud or reading sentences backward to catch mistakes you might otherwise miss. You should also consider handing your essay over to a friend at this point in time, as a fresh pair of eyes can catch a lot of things you miss after looking at your own paper for too long.

Lesson Toolbox

Additional Resources and Readings

The main page of the Purdue Owl website, offering help with writing technique and skill

● Link to resource: https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/purdue_owl.html
Additional guidance on editing and proofreading an essay
  ● Link to resource: https://writingcenter.unc.edu/tips-and-tools/editing-and-proofreading/

A student-written cause and effect essay
  ● Link to resource: https://www.roanestate.edu/owl/NothingButBones.html

Lesson Glossary
None

Check Your Knowledge

1. Cause and effect essays follow one organizational structure.
   a. True
   b. False

2. Editing is the portion of the writing process where you make large revisions to your organization or argument.
   a. True
   b. False

3. Revision is the last stage of the writing process.
   a. True
   b. False

Answer Key:

Citations

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