

Cause-and-Effect Essay Course

for High School Students

Welcome to a three-part cause-and-effect essay lesson designed especially for you and your high school student. Sit back and relax. This lesson will do the teaching. You facilitate by checking in with your student and reviewing the correct answers on page 10 with him or her.

*A three-part
mini-course!*

Here's what your student will be doing:

- Lesson 1:** Learning about cause and effect p. 2
- Lesson 2:** Examining and evaluating a student's cause-and-effect essay. .p. 6
- Lesson 3:** Writing a cause-and-effect essay p. 9

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Lesson 1: Learning about Cause and Effect

What is “cause and effect”?

You probably are very familiar with this pair of words, especially in your life experiences. When you place seeds in the ground and water them, plants eventually begin to grow. When you get angry with a friend, she ignores you for two days. When you help your team win that important game, teammates treat you like a hero.

In other words, you *caused* something to happen. Your “cause” made an “effect” in the world, much like an old shoe thrown into a lake makes ever-widening ripples. Another word for “effect” is “result.”

When a plane crashes in the United States, the Federal Aviation Administration, the National Transportation Safety Board, and assorted other agencies begin to investigate. They need to know what caused the crash, which, of course, helps to avoid others.

If you were to put it into a chart, this is what the situation might look like:

Effect (result)

A plane crash



Photo from accident-pictures.com

Possible Causes

Pilot error
Mechanical failures
Weather conditions
Engine trouble
Control tower error
Terrorist attack

Car accidents are treated to similar investigations: Was the driver distracted? Going too fast? Were icy road conditions or fog to blame? Did an animal or an object in the road contribute in some way?

These are questions police officers and insurance investigators have to answer. They already know the effect or result: the accident. Now they have to find the possible causes.

This cluster of symptoms has been called digital dementia, and you can read more about it [here](#) (Foxnews.com, June 26, 2013).

You likely have encountered cause-and-effect discussions in your classes.

History: What caused WWII?

History: Why was there a burst of European exploration from 1450-1750?

Earth science: What are the factors that lead to sinkhole formation?

Literature: Why did Lady Macbeth kill the king?

Health: What causes ptomaine poisoning?

You get the point. Figuring out why something happened, how it happened, or what is causing a cluster of problems is a worthy endeavor, one that can make you smarter as you use your noodle to examine the world around you and put some puzzle pieces together.

Now it's your turn: I

By now, you have a good idea of what cause and effect is, which is a good thing because it's your turn to fill in the two charts below, one on this page and one on the next. Choose effects (results) that interest you, something like "My room is a mess" or "My best friend just snubbed me" or "Crop circles in my backyard." If you choose something of interest to you, it will be easier to come up with possible causes.



Effect (result)

Possible Causes



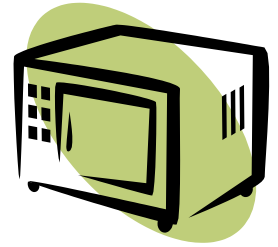
Effect (result)

Possible Causes

This is the end of Lesson 1.

Lesson 2: Examining and evaluating a student's cause-and-effect essay

In this lesson, you'll read a cause-and-effect essay written by a high school student. Her assignment was to prove to the reader that a piece of modern technology has been either beneficial or harmful to society. Read her essay and be ready to answer the questions that follow.



Instant Gratification

We all have one. We all use it. What is it? It is the microwave oven. In 1967, Amana introduced the microwave oven to the common household. Food is produced, cooked, and consumed differently because of the microwave. We have become a society of convenience and instant gratification. The microwave has undermined our families, our habits, and even our health.

Have you ever heard the phrase you are what you eat? Well, if that is true then you most definitely do not want to be a microwave meal. Microwave meals are full of sodium and processed foods. Eating microwave meals instead of cooking a real meal may sound like a good way to save time. However, when you eat a microwave meal instead of a home cooked meal, you are compromising your health. Swapping good whole foods for processed microwave meals has given rise to diabetes in children and adults, high blood pressure, cholesterol problems, and obesity in people of all ages. Eating a microwave meal may be fast and easy, but which do you value more: your time or your health? Eating a healthy home cooked meal over a microwave meal is a smart switch to make.

With the convenience of the microwave, people do not cook as much as they used to. Most teenagers do not know how to make simple things like chocolate chip cookies. How can we expect a person who cannot make a simple dessert to know how to cook and fend for themselves out in the real world? Cooking is a necessary skill to have in order to raise children or even survive on your own. You must know more about cooking than just entering a time and pressing start on a microwave. You probably do not want to eat microwaved food all the time. Moreover, your family does not want to either.

Imagine Thanksgiving dinner. Everyone in your family is sitting around the table eating delicious food while talking and laughing. What a beautiful picture. Now the question is, why does this only happen on holidays? Families used to eat dinner together every night. Why did we stop? All signs point to the microwave oven. Because of the microwave, people can be gone over dinnertime and forgo this important part of the day. Eating dinner together as a family is beneficial. Without family dinners, families lose all of the connection and memories that they would have had together around the dinner table.

We have lost so much over the years because of the microwave. What can we do to get it all back? The answer is simple. Close the microwave door, throw out that frozen dinner, cook a healthy meal, sit down with your family, and enjoy each other's company and the delicious, freshly made meal.

Now it's your turn: 2

Please answer the following questions about the student's essay.

1. In this student's opinion, is the microwave beneficial or harmful to society?

2. Do you agree that the microwave has had this effect on society? Explain.

3. Her thesis statement is where it should be: the last sentence in the introduction. A thesis statement is sometimes called the "controlling idea" and tells readers what direction you are taking your topic. Write three effects on society (her three points) in the space below. Put them in the order she presents them in her thesis statement.

4. Write her points in the space below. This time, though, put them in the order she actually wrote about them in the body of her essay. NOTE: When you write, the order you use in your thesis statement should match the order you use in the body of your essay.

5. Which order makes a stronger impact on readers—the order she uses in her thesis statement or the order she uses in her essay? Explain.

6. Fill in the chart below with this student's information about microwaves.



7. Add one other negative effect of microwaves to her cluster of results. Even if you do not believe that microwaves have had a negative effect on society, think creatively and add one here:

Her cause-and-effect sentence might be summed up as this:

Because of the microwave, these three negative things have happened.
The cause *The effect (the results)*

Here's a strange thing: You could take any of her problems (worsening health, loss of cooking skills, and compromised family time) and work backwards to find out what might have caused each of *them*.

Take worsening health, for instance. You could write a whole paper on what has caused the worsening health of Americans today, and you would find many causes that are at the root of the problem.

➡ The microwave is not the only factor that has contributed to the problem of worsening health. In the space below, write one other factor in society that has caused an overall drop in health:

When looking at a problem (the effect) and working backwards to find out what might have caused it, avoid pinning the problem on only one cause. Insisting that a problem has only one cause is a logical fallacy called **reductionism**. Problems are multi-layered and have many reasons for cropping up, so address more than one cause in your essays.

This is the end of Lesson 2.

Lesson 3: Writing a cause-and-effect essay

We can't put it off any longer. It's time to write a cause-and-effect essay. Choose **one** of the writing prompts below:

- Choose a piece of modern technology and decide whether it has been beneficial or harmful to society. Write an essay to show at least three positive or negative effects it has had on our culture.
- Choose a problem or event. In an essay, identify at least three factors that caused it.

If you write about a piece of modern technology, don't select something as broad as the Internet or computers. Narrow it down to something like the microwave that can be shown to be beneficial or harmful. NOTE: Most likely, the item you choose will have beneficial *and* harmful qualities, but for this essay choice, you are defending only one side of the issue.

If you write about what caused a problem or event, your topic can be anywhere from serious (the Oklahoma Dust Bowl in the 1930s) to silly (why you keep failing levels in Candy Crush Saga). Avoid reductionism.

Before you write, organize your material (your points) by using either chart below.

Effect (result)

Possible Causes

Effects

The Cause

Cluster of results

*Because of Google Glass, all of these beneficial things have happened.
Because I cleaned up my room, all of these negative things happened.*

This is the end of Lesson 3—except, of course, for your actually writing the essay!

Answers

Now it's your turn: 1

By now, you have a good idea of what cause and effect is, which is a good thing because it's your turn to fill in the two charts below. Choose effects (results) that interest you, something like "My room is a mess" or "My best friend just snubbed me" or "Crop circles in my backyard." If you choose something of interest to you, it will be easier to come up with possible causes.

Effect (result)

My room is a mess.

Possible Causes

I don't take care of my clothes when I take them off.

I don't have adequate storage space for my stuff.

My little brother scatters my clothes around every day.

Cluster of results

Effects (results)

Mom gets mad at me.

Mom grounds me from something fun.

I get behind and don't understand the next lesson.

Cause

I didn't finish my homework.

Now it's your turn: 2

Please answer the following questions.

1. In this student's opinion, is the microwave beneficial or harmful to society? *Harmful.*
2. Do you agree that the microwave has had this effect on society? Explain. *Student opinion.*
3. Her thesis statement is where it should be: the last sentence in the introduction. It's sometimes called the "controlling idea," and tells readers what direction you are taking your topic. Write three effects on society (her points) in the space below. Put them in the order she presents them in her thesis statement. *Negative effect on our families, our cooking habits, and our health.*
4. Write her points in the space below. This time, put them in the order she actually wrote about them in the body of her essay. NOTE: When you write, the order you use in your thesis statement should match the order you use in the body of your essay. *She reversed them: health, cooking, and then family.*
5. Which order makes a stronger impact on readers—the order she uses in her thesis statement or the order she uses in her essay? Explain. *The order she uses in her essay has a stronger impact because she finishes with the most important point last. This is called the climactic order.*
6. Fill in the chart below with this student's information about microwaves.

Cluster of results

Effects

worsening health

loss of cooking skills

breakdown of family togetherness

The Cause

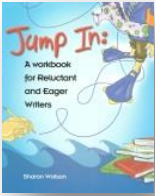
the microwave

7. Add one other negative effect of microwaves to her cluster of results. Even if you do not believe that microwaves have had a negative effect on society, think creatively and add one here: *Student opinion*



The microwave is not the only factor that has contributed to the problem of worsening health. In the space below, write one other factor in society that has caused an overall drop in health: *One possible answer is the availability of fast food.*

If you and your student liked this lesson but would like a full writing curriculum for middle school or high school students, consider these options from Writing with Sharon Watson:



*Jump In: A workbook for
Reluctant and Eager Writers*
Middle School
Nonfiction and Fiction



*The Power in Your Hands:
Writing Nonfiction in High
School*



Writing Fiction [in High School]