

Chapter 14: The Causal Analysis Essay



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Why Write a Causal Analysis or Cause/Effect Essay?

Causal analysis, or cause and effect, is used in both everyday and professional life, so being able to recognize and incorporate cause/effect data is important as it is used in multiple applications including problem solving. When studying accidents or plane crashes, investigators attempt to determine the sequence of events that led to the crash. What caused it? When deciding to spend all of that taxpayer money to build the train system in the valley, supporters first gather data showing the current effects of all of the traffic on the city. Then they provide the probable effects of the train system on the valley based upon similar results from other cities. These are just a couple of ways that causal analysis is utilized in society, so it is important to be able to understand it.

With the causal analysis essay, students are introduced to source-based writing. If 90% of the papers students will write in college are in third person, 98% of the papers will be source-based. With the causal analysis, students will be expected to identify credible sources for their papers. They will read and assimilate the information, then incorporate it in their work as evidence and support.

Choosing a topic

Many students find the causal analysis essay hard to write. They struggle with a few aspects. First, they struggle to identify an appropriate topic. The topic needs to cover a true cause/effect relationship. Here are some examples:

- Effects of overuse of cell phones
- Effects of air pollution on inner-city children
- Causes of childhood diabetes
- Causes of bullying

These topics identify clear cause/effect relationships. In other words, x most definitely causes y, or y is a direct result of x. These topics are focused enough to provide sufficient information to complete a three to four page essay with in-depth analysis of the topic and support from outside sources.

Students make a few mistakes when choosing a topic. One mistake students make is to pick a topic that is too broad; for example, students choose topics like the causes of climate change or the effects of the Great Depression. Books have been written about topics like this. These topics provide too much information to cover in a short paper. Instead of an in-depth analysis, the essay is shallow and rushed. Students need to avoid broad topics like these.

The second mistake students make is confusing causes and reasons. A cause has a direct effect. It explains how it occurred. For example, let's say that you put a glass of water in a freezer that is cold enough to freeze water; what will the outcome be? You get ice. There are laws of physics that operate in this world, and water must obey them. That is how the world works. However, a reason explains why it occurred. The focus of a reason is why something happens. Let's say that you don't study for a test the night before you take it, what will the outcome be? We don't know. This time the outcome is not automatic. While not studying is a bad idea, it does not mean you will fail the test. It is not an inevitable outcome. The reason you may fail the test is because you chose not to study, but you might be confident about this particular information and feel it is unnecessary to study. Thus, students need to pick topics where the relationship between the cause and effect can be clearly established.

Finally, the third mistake students make is confusing causation and correlation. Things can happen at the same time without there being a direct cause/effect relationship. Let's say that there is a five-year study that covered an increase in inflation in the United States. At the same time, the study noted that sales in flat-screen televisions had increased. Does that mean that the increase in inflation caused an increase in TV sales? Probably not. There may be a relationship between the two, but one does not directly cause the other.

Thus, choosing a topic that shows a clear causal relationship is extremely important.

Organizing the Causal Analysis Essay

The causal analysis essay can be split into four basic sections: introduction, body, conclusion, and Works Cited page. There are three basic formats for writing a cause/effect:

1. Single effect with multiple causes—air pollution is the effect, and students would identify several causes;
2. Single cause with multiple effects—bullying is the cause, and students would establish several effects it has on children;
3. Causal Chain—This is a more complex format. Causal chains show a series of causes and effects. For example, dust storms between Tucson and Phoenix can be deadly causing a chain reaction of accidents. The dust is the initial catalyst. It causes car A to stop. Car B crashes

into Car A. Car C crashes into Car B., etc. Climate change is a good example of a causal chain topic. Population increase is causing an increase in traffic and greenhouse gases. It is also causing an increase in deforestation for housing, roads and farming. Deforestation means less plants to take up the CO₂ and release O₂ into the environment. Each item causes an effect. That effect causes another effect. All of this contributes to climate change.

Introduction

The introduction introduces the reader to the topic. We've all heard that first impressions are important. This is very true in writing as well. The goal is to engage the readers, hook them so they want to read on. One way is to write a narrative. Topics like bullying or divorce hit home. Beginning with a real case study highlights the issue for readers. This becomes an example that you can refer to throughout the paper. The final sentence in the introduction is usually the thesis statement.

Another way to introduce the topic is to ask a question or set of questions then provide background and context for the topic or issue. For example, if you are writing an essay about schizophrenia, opening questions might be "What are the main causes of schizophrenia? Who is susceptible?" The student would then begin a brief discussion defining schizophrenia and explaining its significance. Once again, the final sentence of the introduction would be a thesis statement introducing the main points that will be covered in the paper.

Body Paragraphs

The body of the essay is separated into paragraphs. Each paragraph covers a single cause or effect. For example, according to the National Institute of Mental Health, the two main causes of schizophrenia are genetic and environmental. Thus, if you were writing about the causes of schizophrenia, then you would have a body paragraph on genetic causes of schizophrenia and a body paragraph on the environmental causes. A second example is climate change where separate paragraphs explain each cause/effect relationship: population increases, increases in air pollution due to traffic exhaust and manufacturing, increases in food production and agriculture, deforestation. All are causes for climate change, and all are intricately linked.

A body paragraph should include the following:

- Topic sentence that identifies the topic for the paragraph,
- Several sentences that describes the causal relationship,
- Evidence from outside sources that corroborates your claim that the causal relationship exists,
- MLA formatted in-text citations indicating which source listed on the Works Cited page has provided the evidence,
- Quotation marks placed around any information taken verbatim (word for word) from the source,
- Summary sentence(s) that draws conclusions from the evidence,
- **Remember:** information from outside sources should be placed in the middle of the paragraph and not at the beginning or the end of the paragraph;
- Be sure and use transitions or bridge sentences between paragraphs.

Conclusion

- Draw final conclusions from the key points and evidence provided in the paper;
- Tie in the introduction. If you began with a story, draw final conclusions from that story;
- If you began with a question(s), refer back to the question(s) and be sure to provide the answer(s).

Sample Student Essays

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English 101

16 April 2016

The Rise of Music Streaming

1 There have been many staples to define the music industry’s timeline; Vinyl LP, the 8-track tape, CDs, Digital MP3s, and now music streaming. A quote from a digital blog dives into music streaming: “With a music streaming service, instead of purchasing a track or album, you pay a flat monthly fee to play unlimited tracks that you don’t actually own” (Mitroff). There are many vinyl and physical media enthusiasts, but for the day to day music listener, a streaming service, with access to thousands of albums and no need to download or store them, makes a lot more sense. The Digital Market as a whole has shown incredible promise recently. “In 2014, digital revenue grew nearly 7 percent to \$6.85 billion, while physical sales—of which CDs make up the vast majority—fell 8 percent to \$6.82 billion” (Vincent). Being the first time that digital media has overtaken its physical counterpart, the industry has all but accelerated into outlets of digital, such as streaming music. With

the fall of physical media comes the rise of music streaming, on many different platforms and with creative spins that put a new spark in the music industry.

Numbers don't lie and people seem to want faster and easier ways to listen to the music they love, streaming via a service makes that want tangible at little cost. Going to the store to buy a new album? Why? You could have streamed it to any media device the second it was released and not have spent any more than the subscription to that music streaming service. Growth shows promise especially in a subscription based business, "An estimated 41 million people paid for music subscription services in 2014, five times the level of eight million people in 2010" ("An Industry"). This shows the rapid acceleration in this industry, at the cost of physical media. Subscriptions starting at \$5.99 per month (for students on Spotify) make these services easily reached by many. The average music listening person will only need one copy of an album, not a vinyl, CD, and digital copy. Streaming is growing fast, however "Downloads still account for 52% of digital revenue" (Vincent).

Spotify is one of the most popularly used services, "Spotify debuted in the U.S. in 2011 and has 30 million paying subscribers worldwide as of last month (Carman) which is growing very rapidly. There are multiple competitors to Spotify such as Apple Music, Rhapsody and Rdio, Tidal, Google Play Music, and Xbox Music. Each one with it's own specific perks and benefits over the competition, for the most part they accomplish a very similar goal described as streaming high quality music to you anywhere, any time and at a relatively low cost. With the obvious benefits of physical media, CD's and Vinyl have not become obsolete just yet, "with the sector's share of industry revenues declining from 60 percent in 2011 to 46 percent in 2014" ("An Industry"). Many users still enjoy having the copy tangible that won't disappear when you stop paying the subscription fee.

With massive amounts of users switching to digital media comes a cost of pirated and shared versions of albums and songs. The industry as a whole has been hit massively because of this, "...overall revenue falling just 0.4 percent to \$14.97 billion for the year 2014. (For historical comparisons, this is down from a peak of \$40 billion in 1999)" (Vincent). The industry continues to attempt to squash and eliminate pirated copies and users who share them. Torrenting and file sharing sites make downloading an album extremely easy and mostly undetectable. Which means that a lot of people are doing this, "One report from the International Federation of the Phonographic Industry estimates that 20 million Americans continue to pirate music, as well as about a fifth of the world's population" (Carman). This shows how even though streaming has amplified the digital market pirating is still a problem. There are ways services like Spotify encrypt and protect it's songs so users can't share them, but downloading a song from Apple Music (iTunes) makes it readily available to upload and share.

- 5 With all of the advancements made digitally and the wild demand for instant music, streaming services continue to meet the needs of its listeners. New advancements call for plenty of problem solving like the elimination of pirating—even then that’s a problem the film industry has dealt with for decades. Huge numbers and growth prove that this is the directions digital music is taking, “Revenues from music subscription services—including free-to-consumer and paid-for tiers grew by 39 percent in 2014...” (“An Industry”). Pushing off from physical media as an industry might not be so bad, and diehard fans won’t let the vinyl die.

Works Cited

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- Mitroff, Sarah. “Spotify, Apple Music, Rdio and Rhapsody: Which Music Streaming App is Right for You?” *CNET*, 7 Apr. 2016.
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Grader’s Comments

- Apostrophe errors, especially “it’s” and “its”
- Comma splices and fragments—be careful when you integrate source material quotations
- Avoid “you”
- Conclusion ties back to intro effectively
- Strong use of statistics for support
- Consider stronger word choices

Questions for Discussion and Analysis

Answer the following questions regarding the essay. Be complete in your explanations, and cite examples or quotes in support of your answer. Use complete sentences with proper grammar, spelling and punctuation.

1. Which type of organization did the writer use to develop this causal analysis essay?
2. Evaluate the source material listed on the Works Cited. How credible are the sources used? Why or why not?
3. What causes are attributed to increased popularity of music streaming? What effects?

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English 101

18 June 2016

War of the Worlds

Anytime of the day, Americans can turn on the Television (T.V.), radio, Internet, cell phone and find a number of news stations and watch live coverage from anywhere in the world. Live coverage is current. People from all over the world upload pictures and videos on the Internet of natural disasters. The whole world can view these videos immediately. Yet, most people watch with a keen eye and understand that most of what is said is full of propaganda and other people's agendas. With the help of great resources such as the T.V., radio, Internet and cell phone, Americans today are not as likely to panic as easily as they once were. Halloween Eve, 73 years ago, a bright, young man, by the name of Orson Welles created an all-out panic over America with the radio drama, "War of the Worlds" which was a live production on his *Mercury Theater on the Air* show. This replay of the famous 1898 novel written by H.G. Wells, which in short was about Martians from Mars invading the planet, created so much madness. In a matter of minutes, phone lines were jammed with people trying to get information. Thousands of people were fleeing their homes, crowding the streets, heading to church to be saved while others loaded their guns and locked themselves inside their homes, preparing for a fight. The main reasons that the "War of the Worlds" radio broadcast caused so much panic across America was because of the show's format, the timing of the warning announcements, and people's previous experience with emergency broadcasts. Combine all of this with the lack of resources available to the public to validate the truth, and panic was created.

The *Mercury Theatre on the Air* used intermixed media, realistic sound effects and had intriguing interviews during the "War of the Worlds" radio broadcast. The broadcast was interchanging from an orchestra playing to news bulletins that became increasingly alarming. The first interruption of the program began with reports of explosions on the planet Mars. The next update was about a flaming object, possibly a meteorite touching down on a farm in the Grover's Mill neighborhood in New Jersey. The tone changed with further announcements indicating that there was no meteor, but Martians from Mars unleashing their wrath on spectators and killing them with heat rays. There were interviews with police, military troops, and public officials. Generals, captains, lieutenants, and commanders were interviewed. Even an unnamed man, sounding much like the President began to address the nation. There was also an announcement from the Secretary of the Interior. The intense accounting of events along with the screams of men, women and children added

to the drama. Sounds of guns, muffled voices, airplane motors, sounds of heat rays, boat whistles, and fog horns were all used by Orson Wells and his cast to set the mood that played into the panic that night (Estrin 178). People were advised the broadcast was a drama, yet it all seemed so real.

3 Another great influence that contributed to the depth of the panic was timing and placement of announcements stating the radio play was fiction. Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS) announced on three separate occasions during the 60 minute broadcast that it was the shows reenactment of the “War of the Worlds” by H.G. Wells (“War”). However, the real-life, action packed drama still caused one woman to disregard the notification, and she wound up spending all of her savings on a train ticket to go some 60 miles before understanding that what she heard was only a play (Estrin 15). The use of the Emergency Broadcast System’s announcements, “we interrupt this program” were adding to the drama and realistic feel. The show started off indicating this was a fictional story, and there wasn’t another mention until 40 minutes later. The last announcement was given by Orson Welles himself at the end of the script (“War”). The *Mercury Theatre on the Air* had a huge competitor on the NBC Network, The *Charlie McCarthy Show*, and most people tuned to this program regularly. What added to the mood was that during a dull moment on the rival’s show, approximately ten minutes in, listeners tuned to the “War of the Worlds” reenactment. The late tuning to the show caused nearly 50% of the listeners to miss the opening disclosure there by giving more authenticity to the story, which added to the panic (Frank, Reuven). The drama being played out in this way really set the tone; it also gained the realistic feel because it reminded people of previous events in time.

4 The audiences’ past experiences with radio broadcasts helped heighten the panic that ensued this evening. It was not long before this Halloween Eve that America was listening to President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s “Fireside Chats.” These broadcasts brought the voice of authority and politics to the radio. This built the foundation and gave stability for Americans to believe that what they hear is real. Welles knew the feel he wanted when preparing with his cast for the show. America will never forget the chilling voice of announcer Herbert Morrison, giving minute-by-minute reports of the horrible crash of the Hindenburg airship in May 1937. The “War of the Worlds” broadcast had a similar tone. Welles gathered his crew together and played the recording of Morrison revealing step-by-step accounts of this horrible tragedy that left 35 people dead (Rankin 294). The radio airwaves were constantly covering groundbreaking news events during the months leading up to the “War of the Worlds” broadcast. Author Reuven Frank wrote about the non-stop coverage of Hitler’s occupation of Austria that was flooding the Networks in March of 1938, and in May of that year, it was round the clock talk of the Munich Crisis and Germany beginning to invade Czechoslovakia. With all the talk of Germany invading these countries, it is no wonder that Americans were uneasy

and could easily panic if given word of an invasion of any kind, even those of Martians from Mars.

Back in the 1930s and 1940s, having the radio was a great source for information. Most people relied on the radio for important updates during emergencies. Not many people had telephones and even less had televisions (T.V.). During this time T.V. was in the beginning trial stages. If more resources were available, like the ones that are available today, things could be verified much more readily. Word of a Martian invasion would not be as alarming, and people could validate the information with the resources available. Orson Welles created the feeling of doubt for people with the after effects of this broadcast. Once people found out that the radio broadcast was fiction and a “War of the Worlds” reenactment, they were upset and began to criticize Orson Welles. Some people say that Orson Welles knew the broadcast would create drama. Some say that he wanted to teach people a lesson to not always believe everything that is heard on the radio. Orson Welles possibly created more doubt than what he may have initially intended. Many people today do not believe anything they hear on the radio or read on the Internet. People do not listen as closely and do not have trust in news reports as they once did. Having doubt to this extent can cause tremendous damage if a real tragedy were to unfold. People may ignore important bulletins for a real tragedy and not take them seriously. If there was an announcement of a shooter on the loose and people did not believe it, what would happen? People could get hurt and possibly killed by not believing these updates.

The truth is that most people take for granted what they hear or see in the news. Some believe Orson Welles was the one to create this skepticism over 70 years ago this Halloween Eve (Frank, Rich).

Works Cited

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- “War of the Worlds.” *Columbia Broadcasting Systems*. 30 Oct. 1938. www.sacred-texts.com/ufo/mars/wow.htm.

Grader's Comments

- Fascinating topic
- Opening paragraph a bit wieldy
- Excellent examples of human nature
- Maybe add a few lines of description of historical events that are no longer well known
- Conclusion does a nice job tying the present day to the past

Questions for Discussion and Analysis

Answer the following questions regarding the essay. Be complete in your explanations, and cite examples or quotes in support of your answer. Use complete sentences with proper grammar, spelling and punctuation.

1. What is the thesis statement?
2. What type of causal analysis essay is this? Single cause with multiple effects or single effect with multiple causes?
3. List the main points that are covered in the paper (would be the causes of a single effect or the effects of a single cause)
4. Examine the in-text citations and the Works Cited page.
 - a) What types of sources are used in the essay?
 - b) Can you easily find each source in the Works Cited page?
5. Do these sources seem appropriate to the type of paper she is writing? How reliable are these sources?

Tips for Writing the Causal Analysis Essay

Many times topics are really categories in which multiple issues are present. One popular example is immigration. However, immigration as a topic for an essay is too large, as books on immigration policy, history, cause and effect have been written.

Consider what issues exist under the big umbrella of immigration? What other cause/effect relationships can you think of regarding immigration?

- border security
- children born in U.S to undocumented immigrants (often called “dreamers”)
- uneven or outdated laws and classifications (economic, family, refugee, student, fiancé)

Topic Ideas

- Homelessness
- Social media: causes of overuse; effects on relationships
- Bullying/cyberbullying
- Addiction(s)
- College student stress
- Rising college tuition

Chapter Questions for Comprehension

Answer the following prompts regarding the causal analysis essay referring to the previous information presented here. Be sure to use complete sentences.

1. Explain the three mistakes students can make in writing the causal analysis essay.

2. How might you need to analyze causes of a problem or situation in your lives outside of school? Provide two examples.
3. What are the three organizational patterns used to organize cause?