

• An Assignment and Student Paper

Below, you'll find the complete text of a writing assignment I gave in a freshman composition class at the University of Texas in Spring, 1994, and a student's first-draft response exactly as she submitted it on a computer network for editing by me and her classmates. Questions follow the student text.

E306 Rhetoric and Composition
Ruszkiewicz
Paper #4 Cause and Effect

For your next paper, you'll write a cause-and-effect argument as described on pp. 243-44 of *Writing Arguments*. The first draft of this paper is due (on disk) at the beginning of class on April 5. The draft should be about 600 words. Final version of the paper will be due April 21.

Here's how to write a CAUSE / EFFECT ANALYSIS . . .

• **Find a subject by identifying a circumstance that needs to be explained causally.** You can approach the assignment in at least two ways, either by writing a paper about some phenomenon that is genuinely puzzling or by looking at a familiar situation in a new light.

• **List possible subjects.** Try brainstorming on a sheet a paper captioned "Why . . .?"

- do people grow old?
- do teenagers rebel?
- do students procrastinate?
- hasn't a cure for cancer been discovered?
- has the divorce rate increased tenfold in this century?
- is smoking increasing among women?
- have student fees on campus increased five times faster than the rate of inflation?
- did NASA decide to build the Space Shuttle in its present configuration?
- do high school athletes experiment with steroids knowing they're harmful?
- do most people dislike opera?
- do Americans eat so much meat?

• **Select a topic interesting to both you and your audience.**

• **Explore the subject to uncover both immediate and deep causes** (see *Writing Arguments* for an explanation of these terms). Immediate, obvious, or apparent causes are those that present themselves to a writer or reader without much serious thought. They are either immediately evident or generally accepted as true: *Why did England and France go to war against Hitler in 1939? The immediate cause was Hitler's invasion of Poland.*

Tracing deeper causes usually requires more thought, research, and analysis. Because they are less apparent, they must be presented in more detail and supported with greater evidence. So, in analyzing the deeper reasons for the Allies' response to Hitler's invasion of Poland, you might explore the economic, political, social, and historical conflicts between Germany and its European rivals.

• **Consider how you will convince readers that a phenomenon or situation deserves attention.** Just claiming that something has happened isn't enough to make readers appreciate a phenomenon. You want give the problem a presence—in effect, convince readers that a given situation is puzzling enough to merit a cause-and-effect study.

• **Organize the paper strategically.** A cause-and-effect paper will usually have two parts, whether you begin with an effect and work to explain possible causes or begin with forces in operation and imagine their consequences or effects. The first part typically introduces and explains a prevailing situation while the second (and lengthier) part of the essay interprets the circumstances described in the opening. In a typical cause-and-effect essay, the second part will be of a list of causes.

• **Research the subject.** Back up conjectures with secondary sources, authorities, and data.

• **Carefully evaluate the cause-and-effect relationships you have suggested.** Faulty causality can be much more dangerous when it leads to stereotyping people — attributing their successes or failures to their race, ethnicity, religion, gender, social or economic class, or physical traits. This does not mean that no conclusions can be drawn about the behavior of people in groups, but that such analyses must be undertaken with enormous care and great sensitivity to the many variables in human behavior. In short, don't rush to judgment. Look carefully at your data, your warrants, and your premises to be sure that any causal connections you make are, in fact, plausible.

• **Be sure to present causes, not just facts.** Writers sometimes confuse information with analysis. Providing facts is not the same thing as establishing causes—though facts can be made to serve cause-and-effect analyses.

• **Check that you have stated causes clearly.** When you describe a cause, be sure you present it as a force that might actually do something; relate a cause to its effect in language as direct as the facts will allow.

• **Consider the ending.** The conclusion of a cause-and-effect essay can be quite abrupt when you leave readers with such a thought-provoking idea that they are compelled to consider its implications. In cases where you don't have so provocative a conclusion, you need to explore the implications of the analysis on your own. If you have discovered something significant about your subject, what should readers think or do next? What additional research becomes necessary as a result of your thinking? Spend a paragraph exploring such possibilities.

• **Check the style.** Check that the style of your analysis matches the seriousness of its subject matter. A cause-and-effect paper can be serious, comic, or anything in between. It's quite possible for a paper to begin quite humorously and move toward a more sober appreciation of a phenomenon.

Below is a paper a student wrote in response to the detailed assignment above. It was posted on a computer network, enabling classmates to comment on it.

Rough Draft
Cause/Effect
April 12, 1993

Why Do People Believe In God?

[1] I have found that people believe in God for different reasons. Sam believes in God because he was brought up in church and never had the chance to believe differently, Joe believes because he survived a car accident that no one thought he would, and Mary needs the assurance that something higher is in control. Yet, I have found the Bible to be true and have a personal relationship with God.

[2] First, Sam has gone to church since he was born. His parents have always taught him that God is real and that God loves him. Sam, like most children, believed what his parents told him about God. He never considered the fact that God might not exist or that his parents were wrong. He has believed in God all his life. Sam, in a way, has been brainwashed by his parents. Sam was always told that God was real. He never got the opportunity to decide for himself because by the time he was old enough to make such a serious decision, he did not doubt that there was a God. He believed God existed because the people at church and his parents had always told him that God was real.

[3] Next, Joe lived through a car wreck that no one thought he would. All the doctors said he would not live through the night, or if he did survive, he would be helpless the rest of his life. But the doctors were wrong, because Joe is alive and doing well today. He is very active in school sports and with his church's youth group. Joe believes God saved him from death and restored his health. He cannot think of any other way that he could have survived except that God had mercy on him and let him live.

[4] Additionally, Mary believes in God because she needs to feel like there is a higher power in control. She is not comfortable thinking that we are in control of our own lives or that there is nothing after death. She also cannot accept the fact that we evolved from nothing but feels that everything is a creation of God. Mary finds it comforting to know that there is a God in Heaven who watches over His children and takes care of their needs. She also likes to believe that when she dies that she will go to Heaven and be rewarded for the good things she has done in her life. She finds peace and comfort in these beliefs.

[5] Finally, I believe in God because of personal experiences through which I discovered that what the Bible says is true. When I was in the seventh grade, my best friend took me to a Bible study class. In this class, I learned that God loves and cares about me. I also learned that Jesus Christ, God's son, had come to earth as a man and died on the cross as a sacrifice for my sins. Jesus' death on the cross is just one of many examples that God loves the people of the world because He "gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life," (NIV). Because Jesus died on the cross as a

sacrifice for our sins, we can have eternal life in Heaven. All we have to do is ask for forgiveness and confess Christ is Lord. Another way I have experienced God is the changes He has made in my heart. The most obvious example of this is with my mother. I disliked my mother because of a lot of hurt and anger that has built up over the years which caused me not even to want to talk to her, but over the past year, God has changed my heart so that my mother and I have a much better relationship. Furthermore, Philipppians 4:13 says "I can do everything through Him [Christ] who gives me strength," and Proverbs 3:6 states "He [God] will make your paths straight," (NIV). I have found both of these scriptures to be true in my life. When problems arise, I can turn to God for guidance on how to handle the situation and depend on Him to provide me the energy and self-control to make it through whatever the problem may be. He guides me with the Bible and supernaturally gives me strength. Last, God answers my prayers. One example of Him answering my prayers happened on April 3, 1994 when I was provided with a family to live with in Austin this summer so I do not have to pay rent. Another example of God's answer to my prayers and that he changes hearts occurred in March. My Bible study group was trying to have an open discussion on MTV's Seven Deadly Sins at Dobie. The head resident adviser would not allow us to put up flyers advertising the event. After much prayer, he changed his mind and allowed us to put the flyers up. My list of answered prayers is a very long list. Love, changing hearts, strength, guidance, and answered prayers are just a few reasons that I believe in God.

6] People have different reasons for believing in God. Sam was raised to believe, Joe lived out a miracle, Mary is comforted by her faith, and I have seen God through my own experiences. Belief in God does not have to come from one specific place. Different people, who live lives different from one another, see God from different points of view and their belief that He exists comes for different reasons.

Work Cited

New International Version of The Holy Bible. (1988). Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House.

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- 1. What is your initial reaction to this paper?**
 - 2. Does the student's paper fulfill the assignment? Is it comparable to the sample suggested topics on the assignment sheet? Would you advise the student to change the topic or to develop it in a different way?**
 - 3. Does the paper explore cause/effect relationships effectively?**
 - 4. What specific advice would you give the student on this draft?**
 - 5. What problems might the paper pose in a peer-editing session? How would you deal with them?**