

How to teach cause and effect analysis effectively

Use this resource to help your students understand the effects of various events and actions. Includes guidelines for introducing cause and effect into classroom discussions to help your students understand the relationship in many subjects.

Need a blank cause and effect analysis form? You can find it in our [graphic organizers center](#).

Cause and Effect

What Is It?

A cause and effect analysis is an attempt to understand why things happen as they do. People in many professions—accident investigators, scientists, historians, doctors, newspaper reporters, automobile mechanics, educators, police detectives—spend considerable effort trying to understand the causes and effects of human behavior and natural phenomena to gain better control over events and over ourselves. If we understand the causes of accidents, wars, and natural disasters, perhaps we can avoid them in the future. If we understand the consequences of our own behavior, perhaps we can modify our behavior in a way that will allow us to lead happier, safer lives.

Cause	Effect
Earthquakes Erosion Heavy Rain Poor Drainage Deforestation Steep Terrain	Mudslides
Mudslides	Flooding Property Loss Injury and Death

Why Is It Important?

One of the primary goals of education is to create empowered, analytic thinkers, capable of thinking through complex processes to make important decisions.

Whether students recognize cause-and-effect relationships or not, they are affected by them every day. Students experience them in their own lives, see them occur in the lives of others, read about them in both narrative and expository texts, and are asked to write about them. To be successful, students need to be able to clearly recognize these relationships so that they are able to think analytically in their personal and academic lives. Without the ability to identify these relationships, students are at risk socially and academically. They will not

understand actions and consequences or be able to understand or describe phenomena at a deep level.

How Can You Make It Happen?

Helping students develop the ability to think and talk intelligently about causes and effects will grow naturally over time, as students take part in multiple conversations about why things happen as they do, how one thing leads to another, how a single event can have multiple causes and multiple consequences and how some consequences are intended and some are not. It is not a strategy that can be mastered in a few lessons. It all begins with how you structure classroom discussions.

Here are some general guidelines for introducing cause and effect into discussions:

1. Always ask *why*. Why did the fish in the classroom aquarium die? Why were slaves more important in the South than in the North? Why do people continue to commit crimes after being released from prison? What are the causes and effects of bullying in schools?
2. After students answer the Why questions, ask them, "How do you know? What is your evidence?" Have students find research or texts to justify their position.
3. Encourage students to consider multiple causes of events. Make lists of possible causes of events, and then try to determine which are more likely, or important, than others.
4. Encourage students to consider multiple consequences. How did World War II change life in America? What happens when we waste electricity? What are some of the likely consequences of global warming? What consequences does the behavior of a character in a story have on the lives of other characters?
5. Use graphic organizers, such as cause-and-effect chains, [flow charts](#), and feedback loops, to help students think about complex cause-and-effect relationships.
6. Help students develop the vocabulary of cause and effect. Teach power words such as *consequence*, *consequently*, *influence*, and *as a result*. Also teach qualifiers such as *partly responsible for* and *largely because of*. Encourage students to qualify cause-and-effect statements with words such as *possibly*, *probably*, or *almost certainly*. Explain that whenever there is doubt (as there often is in matters of cause and effect), qualifying words actually strengthen an argument. Compare the following sentences, and ask students to consider which statement is easier to agree with.
 - The author created a happy ending in order to please the reader.

- The author probably created a happy ending in order to please the reader.
- Connect students' understanding of cause-and-effect relationships to their writing. Point out that writers use the language of cause and effect to inform, to persuade, and to provide their readers with an understanding of order. Help students describe cause-and-effect relationships in their writing. Encourage them to use [graphic organizers](#) to illustrate their ideas.