

# Cause-and-Effect Essay

Attention-grabbing beginning

Background information and definition

Main idea statement

Effect 1

Support and elaboration

Effect 2

Support (fact)

## Dry Seasons: The Effects of Drought

Tornado! Flood! Hurricane! Almost every evening, television and radio news report a natural disaster that has occurred somewhere in the world. Like their more violent and immediately destructive cousins, droughts—periods of unusually dry weather—are also natural disasters. The main cause of drought is simple: a lack of precipitation in the form of rainfall or snowfall. However, because drought is an ongoing condition rather than a single occurrence such as a tornado, it can be difficult to measure its long-term effects on people, environments, and economies.

One of the earliest noticeable effects of drought is the loss of crops and livestock that are needed for food. In countries or areas where the soil is already poor, it does not take long for soil to turn into dust and simply blow away if there is no rain. Without topsoil, crops cannot grow. Neither can the grasses that cattle, sheep, and other livestock eat. Streams stop running, and lakes and ponds dry up. Without water, crops, livestock, and wildlife, people cannot survive. Widespread malnutrition and even starvation can occur, causing numerous deaths in affected regions.

If a drought is very lengthy, the threat of starvation may motivate people to migrate. Large numbers of people from rural areas move to cities during droughts. Often, even after a drought has ended, they do not return to their original homes. In just thirty years, for

## Cause-and-Effect Essay *continued*

Elaboration (example)

Effect 3

Support (expert opinion)

Restatement of main idea

example, nearly 5.5 million people moved out of drought-prone northeastern Brazil. Consequently, farms were left unworked, and increasing numbers of poor and hungry people in cities led to disease and other problems related to poverty and overcrowding.

Once cities become crowded with sick, hungry people, citizens begin to pressure their governments for relief. Political conflicts and even wars can result if governments fail to provide adequate assistance. In fact, the World Bank, an organization dedicated to fighting poverty and improving living standards, suggests that poverty has led to major conflicts in nearly one-half of the world's low-income countries since 1980.

According to the Department of Commerce, the average annual cost of droughts in the United States alone is over six billion dollars, more than twice the cost of floods. However, it is hard to put a price tag on the human suffering, political upheaval, and environmental damage caused by droughts—especially in developing countries. Unlike other weather phenomena, droughts tend to go on and on, spreading their effects far beyond dusty farms and dried-up wells. As complicated as the effects may be, author John Updike summed up the cause very simply: "Rain is grace; rain is the sky condescending to the earth; without rain, there would be no life."

# Cause-and-Effect Essay

## Definition

A **cause-and-effect essay** explores the causes and effects of an event or situation. A good cause-and-effect essay clearly explains the relationship between actions and reactions.

Many cause-and-effect essays use the structure illustrated in the framework below. Print this framework and use it as a guide when you write your own cause-and-effect essay.

## Framework

## Directions and Explanations

**Introduction**

- Attention-grabbing beginning
- Main idea statement
- Definitions and/or Background information

**Get your readers' attention** It may help to start with ideas that are familiar to your readers.

**Include a main idea statement** Clearly state the cause-and-effect relationship you will be exploring.

**Provide background information** If your topic is unfamiliar to readers, include background information and definitions of terms your readers may not know.



**Body**

- Cause or Effect 1  
Support with elaboration
- Cause or Effect 2  
Support with elaboration

**Explain each cause or effect** Write a separate paragraph for each cause or effect.

**Elaborate on each cause or effect** Include explanations, facts, and examples to support each statement. Use a sensible order and cause-and-effect clue words to create coherence.



**Conclusion**

- Summary of causes or effects and/or
- Restatement of main idea

**Sum it up** Remind readers of the main causes or effects you have explored. You may also want to restate your main idea.