

# Prewriting

## Understand the assignment

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### Descriptive Essay Prompt

*Describe a cause-effect relationship. You will choose either to explain the causes of a topic OR the effects of a topic.*

Additional Instructions:

Make sure to narrow your topic. A broad topic loses strength, and it is harder to keep the supporting details focused and specific. Narrow in on the *who*, *where*, and *when*.

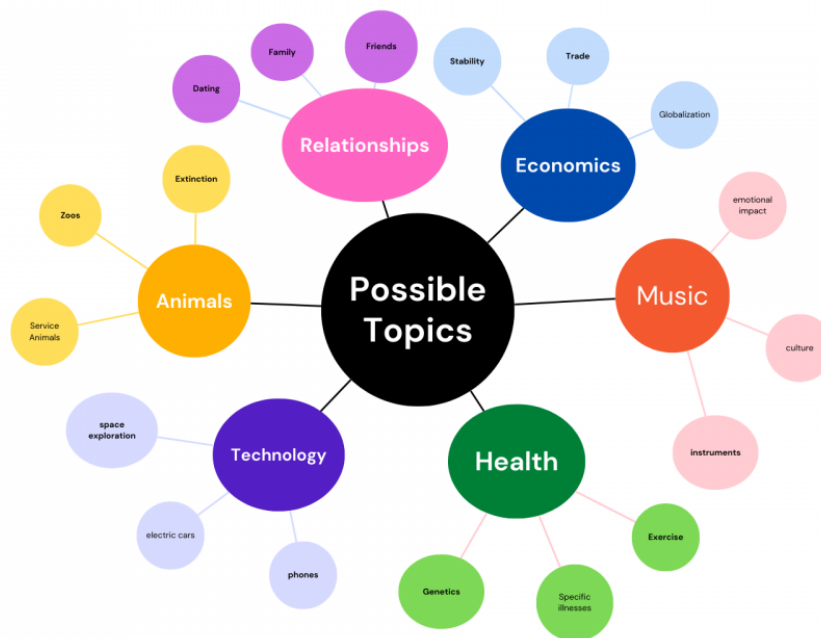
If you choose to talk about the effects, you will want all of your supporting details to be positive, neutral, or negative. It is challenging to effectively combine effects with different perspectives of the impact. It will be much simpler to identify your perspective and address the topic from that angle., This is not an opinion essay, but you can show your perspective in the supporting ideas you choose.

Remember to include adequate background information so that your teacher and classmates that read your essay will understand the context. What specific vocabulary do you need to define or avoid for your audience to understand?

## Brainstorm

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First choose a general topic that you are interested in. Then narrow down that topic into more specific topics. You should have a list similar to the one below. Each of the smaller circles can be a topic that you can discuss the causes of or the effects of.



Simple Google searches with either "causes of" or "effects of" might be a good place to start if you aren't sure what to write about.

## Choose your focus

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Having a topic that you can explain the causes or effects of is often just the first step. You will need to focus even more by thinking about the *who*, *where*, and *when* you want to discuss. This combines with the controlling idea of causes or effects to create the purpose of your essay.

## Research

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Wikipedia can be an excellent place to begin looking for information causes or effects of your topic. The information is usually explained simply on that website, but most academic writing will require you to find a different type of source that is more trustworthy. However, Wikipedia usually links references to the specific information it includes. You can use that reference list at the bottom of the page to begin your official search.

As you are developing your supporting ideas and finding sources, thinking about the following questions:

- Why does this topic have this effect/cause?
- Are there effects/causes that I don't know about?
- Are my effects/causes the main ones I find when I search?
- Are the sources I find challenging my information or supporting it?

Depending on your topics, an internet search for "CAUSES TOPIC and NARROW WORD" or "EFFECTS TOPIC and NARROW WORD" (ex. causes depression and teenagers) might give you

helpful results.

## Outline

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Start with your topic sentences and thesis. Add questions or quotes to help you develop each of your ideas.

### Example Outline

Thesis: The arts have a massive effect in the economic, cultural, and social life of the society, not only for just a single country but for the world too.

TS 1: The society have a economically grown thanks to the effect that arts produce on it.

- Research questions: Benefits of the Arts in the Economy? How it helps? How it help is related to next topics?
- Source: <https://edtechbooks.org/-SZw>

TS 2: The influence of the arts can change how we see a community and how we behave.

- Research question: Benefits of the Arts in the Culture? How it helps? How it help is related to next topics?
- Source: <https://edtechbooks.org/-tHLg>

TS 3: The society can make huge changes because of the effect that the arts have on it, making it better in many way related to the with the aforementioned topics.

- Research question: Benefits of the Arts in the Society? How it helps?
- Book Source: Managing Art Projects with Societal Impact: A Book for Studetns Stakeholders and Researchers (Bast, G. et. al., 2014)

Restated Thesis: The impact of the arts can be seen in the economic, cultural, and social changes in a community.

*Note: This example explores one cause (arts) and the impact it has on one topic (society) and it explores that one effect relationship in detail (three different ways arts cause change in a society).*

## Introduction

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Your introduction should describe in general terms the topic you will write about in your essay. At the end of your introduction paragraph, you should write your thesis. The thesis should clearly state a cause or effect relationship.

## Example Thesis Statements

1. A poor diet, excessive stress, and sleep deprivation cause attention problems in school.
2. Some of the effects of social media include having more access to information, easier communication, and an ability to share photos and videos.
3. The most common reasons for the insomnia are physiological conditions, mental conditions, and lifestyle.
4. The companies that generate a lot of profits are using technology in commerce as a tool, and as a result are making more software investment, developing business to customers, and internationalizing companies.
5. Good stress has many ways such as motivating, cognitive enhancer, and physically enhancing.
6. If the polar ice caps melt continuously, we will face severe sea level rise, climate change, and habitat loss of animals.
7. Aging is a natural and unavoidable process in people's lives affects their physical and mental condition, and social status.
8. Although it sometimes makes confusion to customer, airlines expect alliances to reduce their expenses and create new advantages to customer.

Here are some phrases that are useful for writing a cause/effect thesis:

X is **caused by** Y

**The effects of** X include Y

**Due to** X,

X often **affects** Y

X occurs **as a consequence** Y

## Body

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Your body paragraphs should explain how or why your thesis sentence is true. As you plan each of your body paragraphs, remember that using sources will make your writing more credible and interesting.

Use sources properly so that you do not plagiarize. Each of your body paragraphs should have citations.

## Conclusion

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Your conclusion paragraph should start by restating your thesis. Then, you should speak about the person/event in more general terms and apply their situation to the world more generally. End with a concluding statement.

As you outline your body paragraphs and choose research, make sure the quotes you use support your topic sentence (see pages 19 and 52). Read the example outline below. Notice how the selected quotes support the first topic sentence by answering the questions that were based on it.

### **Example: Outline with sources for a body paragraph**

TH: Stress affects our body's muscular, cardiovascular, and chemical systems.

TS: One of the most obvious effects of stress is muscle tension.

#### **What muscles are affected?**

"For example, both tension-type headache and migraine headache are associated with chronic muscle tension in the area of the shoulders, neck, and head" (APA, n.d., "Musculoskeletal," para. 2).

#### **What happens to the muscles?**

"When the body is stressed, muscles tense up. Muscle tension is almost a reflex reaction to stress — the body's way of guarding against injury and pain" (APA, n.d., "Musculoskeletal," para. 1).

## **Exercises**

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### **Exercise 1: Discussion**

*Use the questions below to discuss this assignment before you begin.*

1. In what situations do we usually talk about causes and effects? Why do we talk about causes? Why do we talk about effects?
2. There are many different causes and effects within any topic. Choose a general topic. Make a list of causes and effects.
3. Why do you think the instructions in the prompt mention that this is not an opinion essay? What does it mean by "show your perspective in the supporting ideas you choose"?
4. Who do you think your audience is for this essay? Why would that person be interested in reading your writing? How will your style be impacted by your audience?

## Exercise 2: Brainstorm

Make a brainstorm idea map similar to the one above. Now that you have some options, choose your favorite. If aren't sure which one to talk about, consider the following questions:

1. Which topic am I most interested in learning more about and writing about for a few weeks?
2. What option on the list would be the easiest/most challenging for me to write about?
3. Would it be easier to find English sources that describe the causes or the effects of that topic?
4. Are there causes or effects that I think the audience should know more about?
5. Are there any options I can eliminate because they are too commonly used as topics?

## Exercise 3: Focusing the Topic

Now that you have selected a topic to write about, continue prewriting by deciding what causes or effects you want to discuss. Create a chart like the one below to help you make your topic more specific.

Topic	Narrow Topic	Cause or Effect	Who	Where	When
Relationships	Problems	Causes	Coworkers	Work in the US	you are from a different country
School	Bullying	Effect	Children	Schools everywhere	Elementary School
Environment	Air Pollution	Causes	Big companies	Cities with the biggest populations	Now
Politics	Revolution	Effect	Citizens	My country	1800s

*This will help you generate the list of supporting details*

- *What are the causes of problems with US coworkers when you are from another country?*
  - *Communication: Language limitations/differences*
  - *Culture: Expectations or ways of talking about problems*
  - *Roles: Power/responsibility over coworkers*

*Look at each list and decide which points are strongest or most interesting. For example, you might decide that last point is difficult to explain or not common enough to talk about. It would be better to divide communication and culture into smaller parts and focus just on those ideas. Remember that you will be talking about how these points cause problems. You will not be talking about how problems with US coworkers effect international workers.*

## Exercise 4: Looking for Sources

Use the list from Exercise 3: *Focusing the Topic* to identify what type of information you need to learn from another source. You can do this by making a list of information you know off the top of your head and a list of things you need to learn (or double-check) to explain the points you chose.

Note: Wikipedia is an ok place to start. However, when you look for sources, try to make sure your source list is:

- from multiple websites/books (not just one perspective)
- in English
- from an author or institution you can trust
- actually related to your ideas
- focused on neutral comparison, not an opinion

## Exercise 5: Revise thesis statements

Revise the theses to be more effective for a cause/effect essay. Write the revised theses on a piece of paper.

1. Here are the three negative effects of overfishing.
2. Homelessness is caused by unemployment, but we can find many solutions for this problem.
3. What kind of effects and benefits are there?
4. An unstable economy is a significant economic issue.
5. Everyone can become addicted to alcohol, and the most important thing is to be able to admit it to yourself and know where to start looking for help.
6. Every country should have free trade laws because there are many benefits.

## Exercise 6: Complete an outline

Use the topic sentences to create the thesis for this outline.

TH:

TS: Depression can be caused by genetics.

TS: Another cause of depression is chemicals in the brain.

TS: A final cause of depression is due to circumstance.

## Exercise 7: Choose sources that support a topic sentence

*Using the following research, choose quotes that would support the topic sentence below.*

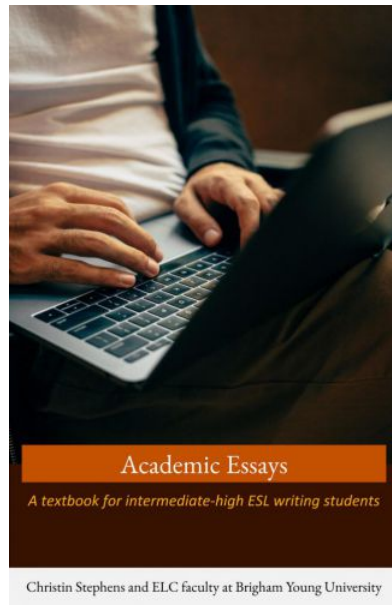
TS: Additionally, stress impacts the heart and blood pressure.

"Acute stress causes an increase in heart rate and stronger contractions of the heart muscle, with the stress hormones acting as messengers for these effects. In addition, the blood vessels that direct blood to the large muscles and the heart dilate, thereby increasing the amount of blood pumped to these parts of the body and elevating blood pressure" (APA, n.d., "Cardiovascular," para. 1).

"Chronic stress, or a constant stress experienced over a prolonged period of time, can contribute to long-term problems for heart and blood vessels. The consistent and ongoing increase in heart rate, and the elevated levels of stress hormones and of blood pressure, can take a toll on the body. This long-term ongoing stress can increase the risk for hypertension, heart attack or stroke" (APA, n.d., "Cardiovascular," para. 2).

"Repeated acute stress and persistent chronic stress may also contribute to inflammation in the circulatory system, particularly in the coronary arteries, and this is one pathway that is thought to tie stress to heart attack" (APA, n.d., "Cardiovascular," para. 3).





Stephens, C. (n.d.). *Academic B Writing*. BYU Open Textbook Network.  
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