14.2: 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).