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The Cause-and-Effect Paragraph

'Cause' refers to a person or thing that produces an effect and 'Effect' is the result or outcome of a cause. For example, a bus-driver is driving his bus recklessly and a road accident takes place. Here the recklessness of the driver is the cause and the accident is the effect. So 'effect' stands for an event and 'cause' stands for the reasons behind it. In every case, a cause helps something happen.

The purpose of a cause-and-effect paragraph is to state an effect or event and give reasons why that event comes about. It is important for the students to note that the scope of the paragraph is to deal with only one event. But it gives several causes of that event. However, a cause-and-effect paragraph does not deal with the consequences of an event.

It is a common practice to start a cause-and-effect paragraph by stating the effect and then to indicate the number of causes in a separate sentence. In this case, the paragraph will have two topic sentences. However, stating the effect and indicating the number of causes may also be done in a single sentence.

The topic sentence of a cause-and-effect paragraph may be phrased in the following manners. Let us suppose, 'floods' is the effect. The controlling idea in each of the following models is shown in Bold Type.

- * There are **three main causes** of floods.
- * Floods may be attributed to **three causes**.
- * There are **several reasons** why floods occur.
- * Floods are caused by **four general factors**.
- * **Four factors** cause floods.
- * **Three factors** are responsible for floods.

The function of the developers in a cause-and-effect paragraph is to present the causes responsible for the effect in

question. As usual, this section is guided by the controlling idea contained in the topic sentence. If the topic sentence indicates any definite number of causes, the development section follows the technique of listing and the linkers used in it are all taken from the list paragraph. On the other hand, if the topic sentence indicates an indefinite number of causes, the method of examples is used and in that case the linkers also change accordingly.

The terminator of a cause-and-effect paragraph may or may not refer back to its topic sentence. It may give a dramatic ending to the paragraph by giving a new cause or restating a preceding one. The conclusion becomes effective, if it is able to make the reader think of its implications.

Read the following model paragraphs and pay close attention to the way one differs from the other.

1. Loss of Crops

Loss of crops is a recurring occurrence in Bangladesh. This loss can be attributed to four major causes. Firstly, the growth of crops is hampered by the devastating effect of drought. Secondly, they are often damaged by excessive rain. Thirdly, they are sometimes washed away by flood. And fourthly, they are at times destroyed by harmful insects. These are the main causes of the loss of crops.

2. Poor Performance of the Students of English

There are several reasons why the students of English do comparatively badly in their examinations. Initially, because of their poor proficiency in the language, they write their essays in bad and incorrect English. Another related factor is that they do not understand the

questions well and hence their answers become inconsistent and irrelevant. The third reason for their poor performance is the aversion to reading their texts. However, a very important cause behind this poor performance is that at the time of teaching the teachers of English do not give their students any idea of the questions to be set for them in their examinations.

In the first paragraph above there are two topic sentences. Of them, the first one states the effect and the second one announces the number of causes to be given in the paragraph. The developers in this paragraph present the selected number of causes of the effect in the manner of listing and the terminator here refers back to the second topic sentence. On the other hand, the beginning of the second paragraph is rather straight-forward. It has a single topic sentence which alone serves the purpose of stating the effect and giving the plan of the causes. The number of reasons spoken of here is not definite and hence the developers in this paragraph follow the technique of examples. You have also noticed that the ending of this paragraph is rather unconventional. It does not refer back to the topic sentence. It rather gives an important cause of the effect and its implication is serious.

The students should remember that the relationships between causes and effects are not always equally close. There may be several causes of unequal importance of an effect or several effects to a cause. So the development of a cause-and-effect paragraph may not be as clear-cut as that of the models above. It has great flexibility.

MAIN POINTS

- i) Cause is what produces an effect and Effect is what is produced by a cause.
- ii) A cause-and-effect paragraph states an effect and gives its causes.

- iii) There may be one or two topic sentences in a cause-and-effect paragraph.
- iv) The technique of a cause and effect paragraph has great flexibility.

VOCABULARY ENRICHMENT

aversion – strong dislike

(to) come about – happen; take place

consequence – that which is brought about as the effect of something

(to) devastate – ruin; make desolate

dramatic – sudden or exciting

drought – continuous dry weather causing distress; want of rain

implication – the implied meaning; something hinted at or suggested

(to) phrase – express in words

practice – usual way of doing something

proficiency – skill; expertness

recklessness – rashness; not thinking of the consequences

(to) recur – happen again

scope – range of action or observation

straight-forward – direct; easy to follow

EXERCISES

1. Read the following paragraph carefully and answer the questions below it:

Drug Addiction

Drug addiction is now a serious social problem. There are many reasons why the young people of the present generation become addicted to drugs. For example, they take drugs when they fail to fulfil their ambition and suffer from deep

frustration. They also take drugs when they do not get their expected love and affection from their parents. The unhappy relationship between the parents is another reason why their children become drug-addicts. Of course, some people take drugs only to satisfy their perverted curiosities. However, the society as a whole is responsible for this fatal degeneration of the young.

- a) How many topic sentences does this paragraph have? What is the function of each of these topic sentences?
- b) Which sentence in this paragraph tells you that it is a cause-and-effect paragraph?
- c) What is the effect in this paragraph? Which sentence is it stated in?
- d) What purpose does the last sentence serve? Does it refer back to the topic sentences?
- e) How many causes of the effect have there been given in the paragraph?
- f) What are the sentence linkers used in this paragraph?

2. Develop each of the following effects and their causes into a paragraph:-

- a) Road accidents take place generally for three reasons: mechanical failures, adverse environmental conditions and reckless driving.
- b) Dropping out of schools: poverty; aversion to studies; fear of punishment; lack of teachers' love and sympathy.
- c) People commit suicide for many reasons including (a) disappointment in love (b) failure in the examinations (c) unhappy married life and (d) overall frustration in life.

3. Write a cause-and-effect paragraph on each of the following effects:

- i) Flood in Bangladesh
- ii) Violence in the University Campus
- iii) Postponement of Examinations
- iv) Launch Accidents
- v) Low Literacy Rate in Bangladesh.

The Description Paragraph

This category of paragraph is developed by using the technique of description. This indicates that the function of the development section of a description paragraph is to describe a person, a place or an object. In other words, it gives a picture of anything in words. It gives relevant and significant details to make the description lively and vivid.

As usual, a description paragraph also contains a topic sentence, some developers and a terminator. The topic sentence in this case makes an overall comment on the subject to be described and its controlling idea is generally expressed in descriptive adjectives or adverbs. The developers present necessary details to support the comment and the terminator strengthens the comment by restating it.

Here are two model description paragraphs. Read them with close attention to see how they are organized and developed.

1. Rajshahi University Campus

The University of Rajshahi has a beautiful campus. Far from the din and noise of the city, it enjoys a calm and quiet natural atmosphere. It is quite a big campus with an area of about 750 acres. It is bordered by a road in the south and a railway in the north. The Administration Building of the university with a nice garden in front of it faces the main gate and is surrounded by many other buildings. The buildings are all connected with one another by a vast network of streets. The rows of different kinds of trees on each side of the streets contribute greatly to the beauty of the campus. It is further enhanced by the green fields,