

TRAIT FOCUS: ORGANIZATION

Lesson Objective

Students write thesis statements and organizational outlines for a cause-effect essay.

Narrowing the Writer's Topic

The more individual writing assignments a student completes, the more he or she will become comfortable experimenting with a variety of different organizational patterns. It can be argued that most student writers' default patterns are either chronological or main idea with support. However, they should be encouraged to try to find an organizational pattern that best suits their purpose for writing.

Cause-effect expository writing explains the causes of a particular situation and the significance of the resulting effects. It is a useful way to better understand important events in history, problems and how they are solved, and explanations of why things are the way they are. If your curriculum calls for students to write with one of these purposes, coach them on applying the cause-effect organizational pattern to their writing.

The short story "The Worn Path" by Eudora Welty is an excellent mentor text with which to illustrate cause-effect organization. Integrate the following Literature/Writing Connection lesson into your discussions on expository writing as a way of instructing students on employing this organizational pattern.

Story Overview

Phoenix Jackson is on her way through the woods one December day to get medicine from the doctor in town for her sick grandson. She is very old and quite blind, and even the simple task of walking across the fields is a difficult journey for her.

She arrives at the doctor's office and gets the medicine, and what follows is one of the puzzling mysteries of the American short story: Is Phoenix Jackson's grandson really dead?

Stacking Dominoes

1. As part of your instruction on prewriting and organizing details for an expository essay, discuss how the cause-effect organizational pattern is useful when you want to explain the causes of a particular situation and the significance of the resulting effects.
2. Explain that some essays are organized by having the cause as the main idea and the effects as the details. A second option, however, is to have the main effect act as the topic and give the causes as the points covered in the essay. It's important to note that sometimes effects become causes to other effects, but for the sake of a narrow topic, it's best to limit the essay's scope.
3. Read and discuss the story "The Worn Path" with your class. This tale is deceptively simple: an old woman goes into town. Underlying this, however, are a number of thematic causes and effects.
4. Some examples might include—Cause: Phoenix's grandson is sick. Effect: She must trek into town. Cause: She is going blind. Effect: The journey is difficult.
5. Apply this discussion to the following essay topic: the obesity epidemic in America. Allow your students 10 to 15 minutes to freewrite on this topic to gather their thoughts.
6. Next, have them write out a thesis statement for a possible essay. This thesis should establish the focus or direction of the writing. Then, have your students outline a mental plan for organization: I will start with _____, then discuss _____, and wrap up with _____.