Cause and Effect

Aim:
This exercise introduces the vocabulary and grammar needed for the function of describing causes and effects.
(Teachers: Click here for a printable version of this document.)

Instructions:
Read the 'Background' and 'Vocabulary and Grammar' sections, then complete the exercise.

Background

Although it is possible for one cause to lead to one effect, academic subjects are rarely this simple. One cause can lead to more than one effect, for example heavy rain can cause landslides and flooding. Also, more than one cause can lead to one or more effects, for example, eating too much pizza and drinking too much coke for lunch can cause you to get fat and be late for class!

Vocabulary and Grammar

Cause-effect	Example Sentences
...because of...	There was flooding because of the heavy rain.
...caused by	The flooding was caused by the heavy rain.
...cause of	The heavy rain was the cause of the flooding.
...reason for	The heavy rain was the reason for the flooding.
...attributed to	The flooding was attributed to the heavy rain.
...on account of	There was flooding on account of the heavy rain.
...owing to	Owing to the heavy rain there was flooding. (These cause-effect phrases are all followed by noun phrases; i.e. 'the heavy rain'.)
... because	There was flooding because heavy rain fell all night. ('Because' is followed by a verb phrase, 'heavy rain fell all night'.)

Grammar Note: don't use 'Because' as the first word in a sentence: it's bad style.
There are a number of alternatives. You can use:
- 'Due to...'; e.g. 'Due to the heavy rain there was flooding.'
- 'Owing to ...'; e.g. 'Owing to the heavy rain there was flooding.'
- 'As...'; e.g. 'As there was heavy rain, there was flooding.'

Verbs	Example Sentences
may	The heavy rain may have caused the flooding.
could	The heavy rain could have caused the flooding.
might	The heavy rain might have caused the flooding.
can	Flooding can be caused by heavy rain.

Grammar Note: modal verbs such as 'may', 'could', and 'might' must be followed by infinitive verbs, such as 'have' and 'be'.

Time & Certainty	Example Sentences
Always true	Flooding is caused by heavy rain.
Present	The flooding is caused by the heavy rain.
Less certain present	The flooding may be caused by the heavy rain.
Past	The flooding was caused by the heavy rain.
Less certain past	The flooding may have been caused by the heavy rain.

Adverbs	Example Sentences
possibly	The rain may possibly cause flooding.
certainly	The rain will certainly cause flooding.
perhaps	Perhaps the rain will cause flooding.
definitely	The rain will definitely cause flooding.
probably	The rain will probably cause flooding.
undoubtedly	The rain will undoubtedly cause flooding.

Grammar Note: use 'will' with adverbs that show a high probability, such as 'undoubtedly', 'definitely' and 'probably'. For other adverbs, which show a smaller possibility, use 'may', 'could' or 'might'; e.g. The rain could, perhaps, cause flooding.' or 'The rain may possibly cause flooding'.

Also, the position of the adverb is usually just in front of the verb for adverbs of possibility and probability. This is because the adverb gives more information about the verb. This is different from adverbs like 'Unfortunately', which give information about the whole sentence; e.g. 'Unfortunately, the heavy rain caused flooding.'

Other Cause and Effect Phrases:

Causes

- There are several reasons for this. Firstly, ...
- Other causes played a part. Firstly,
- A key factor was... ('key' means 'important')
- This is due to ...
- This is a reflection of...

Effects

- As a result, ...
- Consequently, ...
- This meant that...
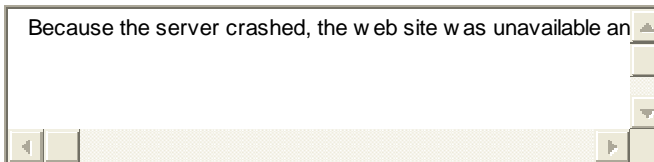- One consequence of this is that ...
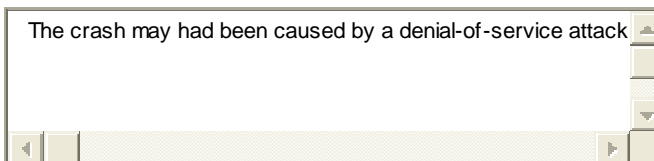
  Grammar Note:
  Don't write 'are lacking of ...' as a cause or effect. Use 'there is <u>a lack</u> of ...' OR 'they are lacking <u>in</u> ...'
  For more information on how to use 'lack (of)' correctly, see ['Lack' or 'Lack of'?](#) - an explanation and an exercise.

Exercise

The following sentences have grammatical and meaning mistakes. Correct the grammatical ones and write a comment about the meaning ones:

1. Because the server crashed, the web site was unavailable an

2. The crash may had been caused by a denial-of-service attack

3. The attack was attributed by an ex-employee who had been fi

4. Owed to the financial losses and the reduced confidence in the

5. To prevent further losses, the company may implementing a dis

6. Possibly this will solve the problem.

7. Owing to a lack of evidence, the hacker may probably not be a

8. I am a patriotic person, so Hong Kong is the best place in the w

9. In the 1998 economic downturn, Hong Kong's economy may be