

The Grammar and Vocabulary of the Cause and Effect Essay

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 <u>because of</u> the heavy rain.
... caused by	The flooding <u>was caused by</u> the heavy rain.
... cause of	The heavy rain <u>was the cause of</u> the flooding.
... reason for	The heavy rain <u>was the reason for</u> the flooding.
... attributed to	The flooding <u>was attributed to</u> the heavy rain.
... on account of	There was flooding <u>on account of</u> the heavy rain.
... owing to	<u>Owing to</u> 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 <u>because</u> 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.

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, ...
- 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 a lack of ...' OR 'they are lacking in ...'

Cause and Effect – Answer Key

Correct the grammatical mistakes and comment on the meaning mistakes in these sentences:

1. Because the server crashed the web site was unavailable and the company lost a lot of money.
The server crashed, so the web site was unavailable and the company lost a lot of money. (Don't start a sentence with 'because'.)
2. The crash may had been caused by a denial-of-service attack by hackers.
The crash may have been caused by a denial-of-service attack by hackers. (Use an infinitive verb after modal verbs such as 'may'.)
3. The attack was attributed by an ex-employee who had been fired for using pirate software.
The attack was attributed to an ex-employee who had been fired for using pirate software. (Use the preposition 'to' after 'attributed', 'by' for people.)
4. Owing to the financial losses and the reduced confidence in the company's security, the stock price of the company went down.
Owing to the financial losses and the reduced confidence in the company's security, the stock price of the company went down. ('Owing to' does not change to past tense.)
5. To prevent further losses, the company may implementing a distributed computing approach by using thousands of PCs rather than a small number of servers.
To prevent further losses, the company may implement a distributed computing approach by using thousands of PCs rather than a small number of servers. (Use an infinitive verb after modals like 'may'.)
6. Possibly this will solve the problem.
This may possibly solve the problem. (For adverbs of degree, such as 'possibly', it's better to put the adverb just in front of the verb that it defines; i.e. 'possibly solve'. Only use 'will' for very high probability adverbs such as 'will definitely' and 'will undoubtedly'.)
7. Owing to a lack of evidence, the hacker may probably not be arrested.
Owing to a lack of evidence, the hacker will probably not be arrested. (Don't use 'may' for situations where the probability is high.)
8. I am a patriotic person, so Hong Kong is the best place in the world to live.
I am a patriotic person, so I believe that Hong Kong is the best place in the world to live. (Don't confuse personal beliefs with facts.)

Cause and Effect

Correct the grammatical mistakes and comment on the meaning mistakes in these sentences:

1. Because the server crashed the web site was unavailable and the company lost a lot of money.

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

3. The attack was attributed by an ex-employee who had been fired for using pirate software.

4. Owing to the financial losses and the reduced confidence in the company's security, the stock price of the company went down.

5. To prevent further losses, the company may implementing a distributed computing approach by using thousands of PCs rather than a small number of servers.

6. Possibly this will solve the problem.

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

9. I am a patriotic person, so Hong Kong is the best place in the world to live.

Produced by the Center for Independent Language Learning.