

Chapter Objectives

The sample essays and invention prompts in this chapter will help you to:

- Examine a range of possible conditions (behavioral, economic, social, psychological) related to a social phenomenon.
 - Develop an analytical/argumentative essay that ties a specific cause to a social phenomenon.
 - Develop the essay with a range of support strategies, counterarguments, and concessions.
 - Express or enrich your argument with a collage of images.
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“One great cause of failure is lack of concentration.”

—Bruce Lee

INTRODUCTION

When something happens in a community, everyone wants to know why. Why did the apartment building catch on fire? Why did the incumbent mayor’s campaign lose momentum? Why are so many kids absent from school? What causes the traffic jam on I-95 every day? Why did the stock market suddenly drop? Why did the terrorists attack? Of course, everybody has guesses, but it takes a close analysis to discover the possible causes of such phenomena. Fire officials inspect the ashes of a burned apartment building; political scientists examine candidates’ speeches and poll results; civil engineers look closely at travel patterns and highway capacity; economists deliberate over consumption trends and overseas markets. In all these cases, the people searching for causes are detectives attempting to find answers amid a dizzying array of possibilities.

The search for causes constitutes much of the workload in many occupations. Doctors diagnose patients looking for the cause of particular symptoms. Psychologists try to understand the causes of personality disorders or behavioral problems. Business executives hold weekly meetings and discuss the causes of production failures. Education specialists work with children to find the cause of scholastic problems.

The search for such causes is not easy. Any number of factors can contribute to an effect. Take, for example, low proficiency test scores in public schools: School