

Examples of Cause-Effect Writing

The following essay, referred to on p. 151 and 153, illustrates an essay organized according to an interest in effects. For a sample essay organized according to an interest in causes, see “Sample Essay ‘Causes of Procrastination,’” Chapter 10, website.

Beginning Riding: The Untold Story

Gina Loverso

When a beginning rider mounts a horse for the first time, the rider feels awkward, unbalanced, and unsure of what to do. The horse feels exactly the same way. As a result, a horse develops one of three attitudes to beginning riders: playing dead, taking control, and taking off.

The first attitude is generally the attitude of a middle-aged family pet who belongs to the new rider’s neighbour, best friend, or relative. This horse spends its days dreaming in the field, the carefree succession broken only for the odd pleasure ride. The horse doesn’t much care what gets on its back, so long as the mounted thing doesn’t expect much expenditure of energy. While the new rider tries several times to swing a leg high enough to get on without dislocating a hip, the horse catches a few winks. At an uncertain tap from the rider’s heels, the horse ambles five feet, then lowers its head to graze. This process is repeated several times. Thirty minutes later, the ride ends twenty feet from where it began. The rider is a little frustrated, but no mishaps have occurred and the horse’s state of Zen remains undisturbed.

A higher level of energy and more experience with beginning riders creates a horse with a foreman mentality. This is usually a lesson or trail horse. The horse knows what needs to be done, quickly senses that the rider doesn’t know what needs to be done, and sets out to do it as efficiently as possible. Intelligent new riders realize this and, with great relief, hand over control to the most competent member of the team. This works

great until the horse decides it is time to a) return to its stall, b) visit with friends, or c) clear the three-foot jump in the centre of the ring. The rider may come out of this ride embarrassed, but the worst injury is usually to the ego.

The third attitude belongs to the horse no beginner should ride, and few do for long. This horse may be the “really calm cutting horse” on Uncle Fred’s ranch; the “excellent young prospect” being sold cheap by a dealer; or the high-octane, under-used acreage horse whose owner is sure he’s safe to ride although she’s never been on him because the previous owner was a thirteen-year-old (never mind that she was a thirteen-year-old provincial barrel racing champ). Such a horse has lots of energy, a lively imagination, and complete inexperience with beginning riders. The sensation of 100- to 200 pounds of yanking, wobbling weight on his back brings to life a race memory of killer cougars. He makes an instant, life-saving decision which would win him a berth in the Kentucky Derby if only anyone were there with a stopwatch, and if only he still had a rider on his back. This is definitely the most painful introduction to riding, but strangely enough, there are some riders who don’t give up.

Despite frustration, terror, and/or pain (or perhaps because of them), the stubborn novice rider persists until he or she no longer flops on the horse like a sack of ill-sorted potatoes. The magic day arrives when balance and technique come together. Riding becomes almost effortless; the horse seems to respond to the thought of the rider. Best of all, it is clear that the horse enjoys the experience, no longer feeling the need to play dead, take control, or flee.

For Further Thinking

1. Although we suggested that attention to causes or effects often signals an analytical and critical purpose, does this essay seem essentially expository or critical? Explain.
2. Describe the style and tone of this essay. Do they appear suited to its apparent intentions? Explain.

3. Is there any point at which the writer includes attention to causes in addition to her main attention to effects?
4. Comment on the writer's apparent degree of ethos. Should an essay like this include some citation of sources? If you answer "it depends," explain what it depends on.
5. If the writer were to cite sources, what ones would you suggest, or where would you suggest looking for further relevant information to test and serve the knowledge already presented?

Practice

1. After the style of the essay outlines demonstrated in Chapters 6 and 9, prepare an outline for the above essay. Be sure to articulate the controlling idea and how it is reinforced through linkages in the body paragraphs.
2. Read Willard Dudley's "The Causes of Procrastination" ("Sample Essay: 'Causes of Procrastination,'" Chapter 10, website) and consider how it may be similar to and/or different from "Beginning Rider: The Untold Story." See Chapter 12 "Comparison-Contrast" for ideas on how to develop a discussion that closely compares two essays. In particular, note the sample comparison of "The Lure of the Body Image" and "Canadians: What Do They Want?" and the differences and similarities test (p. 185). Outline your own essay comparing Dudley's essay and Loverso's.