Writing a Cause/Effect Essay

What is a cause/effect essay?
A cause and effect essay deals with explaining, examining or exposing two events or actions (which could be thought of as topics) and how each has an effect on the other and/or the results of these events or actions. Topics always have a number of possible causes and effects.

Example: Marriage and happiness

When marriage is the cause, most people assume that the effect is happiness. However, what if the marriage was arranged, or was the result of a pregnancy, or done out of pure convenience? Would the cause and effect follow a logical sequence? Or could the cause be happiness and marriage the effect?

Some other examples: drug addiction and crime, weight and television, ethnicity and professional success.

Have a clearly focused topic
Consider the required length for the essay when choosing your topic. If the essay should not exceed 500 words, keep your topic simple. Don’t have too much information to cover or introduce into your argument(s) because you are not writing a dissertation. Avoid falling into a never-ending cycle of ideas; be concise, get to the point.

Some useful guidelines:

- Some topics may have many causes and effects with which to deal. Therefore, give some thought to how many and which ones you want to use; some may be more useful than others.
- Don’t assume that events have a chronological order; sometimes one thing that usually happens before another doesn’t. For example: if a black cat walked in front of you and seconds later you hit your head, fell down, and broke your ankle, having a black cat cross your path doesn’t mean that you will hit your head, fall down, and break your ankle every time.
- Identify the causes and the effects: breaking up with your boyfriend or girlfriend could be the cause of a fight or the result of one.
- Sometimes special circumstances may not be the causes. For example: A child involved in gangs and/or mischief may come from a broken family. Although it’s a fact that this child’s parents are divorced, that may not be the direct cause for the child being involved with gangs and mischief.