

## Constructing Arguments about Claims of Cause and Effect\*

In Chapter 3 we discussed four types of propositions: definition, description, relationship, and evaluation. This chapter discusses constructing arguments for claims of relationship. As the name implies, claims of relationship focus on how one or more phenomena are related to one another. Things (including people, ideas, concepts, governments, businesses, institutions, etc.) in the world are related to one another in a variety of ways. Two of the most common kinds of propositions of relationship are those involving relations of causality and similarity. In the first instance, two things are related to each other via cause and effect; in the second, they are related to each other because of their similarity or dissimilarity. In this chapter we focus on the discussion of claims about cause-and-effect relationships.<sup>1</sup> In the first part of the chapter we explore ways debaters can develop cases supporting claims of cause and effect; in the second, we discuss ways debaters can argue against such claims.

### **ARGUING ABOUT CAUSE AND EFFECT<sup>2</sup>**

Cause-and-effect reasoning is common not only in formal debate but also in everyday discussions. Questions of causality examine the reasons certain actions, events, or conditions (causes) create specific consequences (effects). Causation helps explain why we feel, think, or behave in certain ways, why historical or natural events happen, whether and why government actions lead to specific changes in society. Cause-and-effect analyses are common when an arguer proposes a particular plan of action and maintains that it will bring certain benefits. In other words, proponents may claim that their causes (a new education program, for instance) will lead to specific effects (more empowered youth, for instance).

In formal debates, cause-and-effect reasoning can be useful in a variety of propositions. For instance, the value proposition “Resolved that censorship is harmful in democratic societies” requires the affirmative to demonstrate the negative causal relationship between censorship and a certain aspect of democracy.

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