

Although the proposition asks debaters to discuss the values of free speech, self-expression, or social order, causal reasoning helps them to analyze the interaction between these values.

Cause-and-effect reasoning is also integral in debating a policy proposition. For instance, the proposition “Resolved that affirmative action should be implemented to protect women’s rights” would require the affirmative to analyze the reasons why present policies do not protect women’s rights sufficiently (in other words, present policies cause harm to women’s rights). Furthermore, the affirmative would need to demonstrate that its action would better protect women’s rights. Regardless of the kind of resolution debated, cause-and-effect reasoning is a crucial analytical tool for you to understand and use.

The proposition “Resolved that the separation of public and private is detrimental to women’s rights” is a very straightforward cause-and-effect resolution. It suggests a cause (separation of private and public) and an effect (detriment to women’s rights). Although you could also argue it as a resolution of value, the focus of this resolution is on the relationship between the supposed cause and the purported effect. The resolution does not require the teams to debate whether women’s rights are valuable or not; rather it requires them to discuss the reasons for violations of women’s rights. We use this example throughout this chapter to illustrate many facets of cause-and-effect argument.

THEORETICAL ELEMENTS OF CAUSAL REASONING

Understanding how to create cause-and-effect arguments requires an explanation of methods and types of causal argument. Before we explore different types of causal arguments, you need an understanding of the methods useful to support all types of causal arguments.

THREE PARTS OF A CAUSAL ARGUMENT

A cause-and-effect argument frequently involves three parts: the description of the cause, the description of an effect, and the demonstration of the causal relationship between the two. Arguers frequently *describe an alleged cause* by observing some sort of phenomena. For instance, in discussing the resolution “The separation of public and private is detrimental to women’s rights,” the affirmative might observe that women primarily participate in the private sphere whereas men are the majority of actors in the public. Thus, you might argue that the separation of private and public dictates who can participate in each of these spheres.

Second, the arguers should demonstrate and *describe an effect*. Again, the effect may be another observed phenomenon. You might observe that women either work in the home or are employed in positions that do not involve high power or command high salaries, and these phenomena show how women’s rights are violated. Thus, the observation of the incidence of women’s participation in certain professions becomes the basis for the argument about the effect.

Third, after having described both the cause and the effect, you are now obliged to *demonstrate that the relationship between the two described phenomena is causal*.