

VOCABULARY MODULE #3

CAUSE and EFFECT

Special Notes:

Words marked with an asterisk [*] are also covered in the on-line document titled, *Active Vocabulary Notes*.

See the on-line *Active Vocabulary Sheet #1* for more examples of “cause and effect” sentence patterns.

Both of these documents can be found by accessing the Text Skills web page link at: **Intensive English Program/inside pages/self-access materials**

affect* (v.t.)

cause (v.t.), cause (n)

consequence (n), consequent (adj)

contribute to (v.t. + prep)

determine* (v.t.), determinant* (n)

effect (n)*

factor* (n)

impact* (n)

influence* (v.t.), influence* (un; n. singular), influential (adj)

lead to (v.i. + prep; v.t. + prep)

make (v.t.)

mean (v.t.)

reason (n)

responsible for (adj + prep)

result (n)

result in (v.i. + prep)

result from (v.i. + prep)

Notes:

Cause and effect expressions are commonly associated with explanation in scientific contexts. These scientific contexts include those of the physical sciences (e.g., chemistry, medicine and environmental science) and those of the social sciences (e.g., economics, business studies, and sociology).

affect (v.t.): This verb is often confused with **effect (v.t.)**. Note the difference in meanings. **Affect** means “have an impact on” (usually in a negative way) and **effect** means “implement in a planned way.” **Effect** is a formal verb that is little used today. However, the noun, **effect**, is a very common noun.

“The economic slowdown adversely **affected** sales.”

“The cost reductions were **effected** by making 10% of the staff redundant.” Also note the following sentence pattern:

“The economic slowdown **affected** the company's sales **in several ways**: **by** reducing overall consumer demand; **by** persuading wholesalers to delay making fresh orders until economic prospects became clearer; and **by** increasing the ratio of bad debts”

Note that, when we use the verb, **affect**, and we want to identify the specific effect, we often use these patterns:

(1) The increase in the money supply **affected** ordinary people **by** increasing prices.

(2) The increase in the money supply **affected** ordinary people **because** it increased prices.

cause (v.t.) This verb appears in two common sentence patterns:

- (1) The recent increase in inflation **has caused** several problems. [simple]
- (2) The recent increase in inflation **has caused** some investors **to sell** (+infinitive verb) government bonds.

consequence (n), consequent (adj): These are simple words with simple meanings. Check your dictionaries for the meanings and sentence examples.

contribute to (v.t. + prep): Note that in its “cause and effect” use, the verb, **contribute**, means that there are other causes in addition to the cause that is identified. Also note the presence of the preposition, **to**, in all the sentence examples below.

“...an increase in money supply **contributes to** a rise in commodity prices ...”

“Low incomes **contribute to** low savings, limiting the ability of this group to self-finance economic activity.”

“A co-operative approach to inventory management **contributes to** the success of supply chain management.”

determine (v.t.): Note that in its “cause and effect” meaning, the verb, **determine**, is used when the cause and effect relationship is common, repetitive and proportional. The proportional nature of the relationship explains why **determine** often appears in social science contexts and why **determine** does not require a specific object. Look at the examples below:

“In a free market, supply and demand relationships determine prices.”

“The structure of an industry determines the profitability of a company in that industry to a large extent. If an industry is very competitive, even efficient companies will tend to enjoy thin profit margins.”

effect (n), impact (n), influence (un; n. singular): **Effect** and **impact** have the same basic meaning and grammar though **impact** suggests a stronger than average effect. This note focuses on the sentence patterns in which these three words usually appear. The first pattern is the simplest:

(1a) Inflation **has** a negative **effect/impact on** economic and social stability.

(1b) Karl Marx’s theories still **have an influence on** modern political thinking.

The second pattern is used for highlighting and for identifying the specific effect(s):

(2a) The main **effects/impacts of** inflation **on** society **are** an increase in business uncertainty and the destruction of individuals’ savings.

There are other sentence patterns, but the two patterns above are the most common.

See the note about **influence** below for some discussion of the specific meaning of **influence**.

factor (n): This noun means an agent which has causal power. Because of this definition, **factor** has the most general use of all the words in the list. Notice the contrast in scope of the two sentences below.

(1) The money supply is an important economic factor.

(2) A sudden increase in the money supply is one of the causes of inflation.

Sentence (1) is simple and general in scope, but sentence (2) is more complex and more specific in scope.

influence (v.t.), influence (un; n. singular): The most important point to note is the small, but significant, difference in meaning between **influence** and “harder” words such as **effect** and **impact**. Whereas **effect** and **impact** (and other words) suggest a direct relation between cause and result and indicate that this relationship is clearly visible, **influence** suggests nothing about the directness of the relationship and definitely indicates that this relationship is not clearly visible. The most obvious example of the use of **influence** to indicate a mostly opaque relationship is its use in political contexts. The lack of visibility in the relationship may also be due to the cause and effect relationship’s complexity, which is the case for the “Karl Marx’s theories” sentence example above. For more information, see the note about **influence** in the online *Active Vocabulary Notes*.

lead to (v.i. + prep; v.t.+ prep): This is a convenient verb because it connects a cause (subject) with a final effect (object) when the cause & effect relationship is a *chain* of causes and effects. For example, the sentence,
“Releasing large amounts of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere **leads to** global warming,”

n=countable noun **un=**uncountable noun **v.i.=**intransitive verb **v.t.=**transitive verb

connects the initial cause with the final effect. As the example below shows, identifying the complete chain of causes and effects may be tedious for both the writer and the reader:

“Releasing large amounts of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere causes the atmosphere to retain more heat from sunlight, which causes surface temperatures to increase. Increasing surface temperatures reduce the area of land covered by snow and ice, which means that the amount of sunlight reflected back into space declines. Rising surface temperatures and less reflected sunlight result in global warming.”

make (v.t.): This is a common and flexible cause and effect verb. Look at the four sentence patterns below:

- (1) Strong competition among companies **makes** profitability **decline** (+ **base verb**)
- (2) Strong competition among companies **makes** profitability **lower** (+**adj**)
- (3) Strong competition among companies **makes it difficult** (+**adj**) **for** the companies **to prevent** (+**infinitive verb**) declines in profitability.

Sentence pattern (3) can be understood by dividing it into two sentences that represent the cause and the effect:

- (3a) Strong competition among companies. [**cause**]
- (3b) It is difficult for the companies to prevent declines in profitability. [**effect**]

Note that **make** is NOT an exact synonym for **cause**. Thus, we can write, “... this **causes** a problem” but we cannot write, “... this **makes** a problem.”

mean (v.t.): This verb has a number of meanings, but its most important meaning is the identification of **significance** in something. Often the identification of significance in something is achieved by identifying a significant and/or meaningful **effect** that **results from** the “something.” In all cases, the effect is specific. Look at the sentence examples below:

“Unemployment **meant** hunger for many of the adults and their families.”

“Unemployment **meant** that many of the adults and their families suffered hunger.”

Unemployment has a lot of effects, but the writer has decided to focus on one very significant effect.

reason (n): Note the following grammatical patterns:

- (1) A desire to become rich is my **reason for** choosing the MBA Program. (**reason+for+noun/gerund**)
- (2) The **reason why** I chose the MBA Program is my desire to become rich.
- (3) The **reason that** I chose the MBA Program is my desire to become rich.

responsible for (adj + prep), result (n), result in (v.i. + prep), result from (v.i. + prep):

These are simple words with simple meanings. Check your dictionaries for the meanings and sentence examples.

Questions: - do not look at the notes above when answering the questions!

1. What is the special feature of the meaning of lead to?

2. Look at the following words:

effect (n)
impact (n)
influence (n)

2a What is the simplest sentence pattern in which they appear?

2b When we use these words, is it easy to include the specific effect in the same sentence?

3. What is the special feature of the meaning of contribute?

4. What are the differences between affect and effect?

5. Which preposition usually follows reason and which preposition usually follows consequence?

6. What is the difference in meaning between result in and result from?

7. What are the common sentence patterns associated with the verb, cause?

8. Which sentences below are wrong? Why are they wrong?

- a. Lack of good food negatively affects people.
- b. Lack of good food affects health problems.
- c. Lack of good food causes people.
- d. Lack of good food causes health problems.

9. Can you identify three sentence patterns associated with the verb, make? Include the following “results” in your three sentences:

Result 1 a company’s profits increase

Result 2 students sleepy

Result 3 easy for a company to make a profit