

A TROUBLESHOOTING GUIDE

A Well-Presented Subject

My readers don't understand the subject or see why it is important.

- Reconsider what your readers already know, and provide additional background if necessary.
- Try providing examples or an anecdote to interest readers in the subject.
- Quote authorities and explain research findings, including statistics, to demonstrate the subject's importance — that it is widespread and significant.
- Use visuals — graphs, tables, photographs, or screen shots — to make the subject more vivid.
- Review your research to see if you can add anything to help clarify the subject for your readers, or do some additional research.
- Pose the subject directly or indirectly as a *why* question, and then answer it.

A Well-Supported Causal Analysis

My readers don't understand which of the causes or effects I am arguing are the most plausible.

- Be explicit about which causes or effects are the ones you think are most plausible, and why you think so.
- Use a thesis and forecasting statement followed by topic sentences with key terms to announce your main causes or effects.

My readers do not find my causal argument convincing.

- Whenever possible, explain how the cause-effect relationship works, backing up your explanation with appropriate support.
- Cite more credible experts, being sure to give their credentials.
- Cite research studies and statistics rather than limiting yourself to examples and anecdotes.
- Review your sources to make sure they are varied, or do additional focused research to fill in where your analysis is weak.
- Make sure your sources are cited properly.

An Effective Response to Objections and Alternative Causes or Effects

My readers do not think my responses are effective.

- Respond directly to criticism of your reasoning by showing that you are not mistaking correlation or chronology for causation.
- Demonstrate that you understand the complexity of the cause-effect relationship you are analyzing, for example, by indicating how your cause relates to other contributing causes.
- If your readers think you have overlooked an objection, consider it seriously and do further research to respond to it if necessary.

A Clear, Logical Organization

My readers think my analysis is not clear or logical.

- If readers have difficulty finding the thesis statement or topic sentences, consider revising them.
- Add a forecasting statement early in the essay to help guide readers.
- Review your use of transitions, and consider adding transitions to make the logical relationships among sentences and paragraphs clear to readers.
- Refer to visuals explicitly (for example, by adding the direction, “see fig. 1”), and include a caption tying each visual to the text discussion.
- Outline your essay to review its structure, and move, add, or delete sections as necessary to strengthen coherence.