Understanding causal arguments

- Casual arguments: heart of many major policy decisions both national and international
- Arguments about causes and effects also inform many choices people make every day
- Casual arguments exist in many forms and frequently appear as part of other arguments such as evaluations and proposals
- Arguments that state a cause and then examine its effects
  - Cause A leads to effects B, effect C, and effect D
- Arguments that state an effect and then trace the effect back to its causes
  - Effect D results from cause A, cause B, and cause C
- Arguments that move through a series of links A causes B which leads to C and perhaps D
  - Cause A leads to cause B leads to cause C leads to effect D
- Arguments that state a cause then examine the effects
  - Possible effects of “cause” could be examined in detail, imagine very different causes/consequences presented by people on various sides of a hot button issue. You would be successful if you could show compellingly that the cause would indeed lead to the effects you describe or you could challenge causal assumptions of people you don’t agree with
- Arguments state an effect and then trace its causes
  - May examine a certain effect then trace effect(s) back to the most likely causes
- Arguments that move through a series of links: A causes B which leads to C and perhaps D
  - Fourth link ties previous points together to argue from effects unless X than Y

Characterizing causal arguments

- Often part of other arguments
  - Many causal arguments stand alone and address questions that are fundamental to our well being
- Causal analysis often work on further arguments – especially proposals
- Causal analysis provides a rationale that motivates the proposal
- Causal analysis can be useful in establishing good reasons for arguments in general
- Almost always complex
  - Complexity of most causal relationships make it difficult to establish causes and effects
  - Show that X defiantly causes Y you will make a powerful argument at your disposal because causal arguments must take into account an enormous number of factors conditions and alternative possibilities
- Often definition based
  - One reason causal arguments are complex is because they often depend on careful definitions
  - Until you can provide definitions that answer such questions you should proceed cautiously with a causal argument
- Usually yield probable rather than absolute conclusions
- Seldom can yield more than a high degree of probability and are almost always subject to critique of charges of false causality
- To demonstrate that A causes B you must find the strongest possible evidence and subject it to the highest possible scrutiny
- Causal arguments are often most effective when they help readers appreciate how entangles our lives and landscapes really are

**Developing causal arguments**

- **Formulating a claim**
  - Most of the causal reasoning you do, however, will take a serious approach to subjects that you, yourself, and your family and friends talk about
  - To begin creating a strong causal claim try listing to the effects events or phenomena that you’d like to know causes about
  - Or try moving in the opposite direction listing some phenomena or causes that you’re interested in and then hypothesizing what kinds of effects that they may produce
  - Map out a rough statement about the causal relationship you might explore
  - Such a statement could be tentative because writing a causal argument will often be a research exercise in which you uncover facts, not assume them to be true
  - Early assumptions might be undermined by the facts you later discover
- **Developing an argument**
  - Once you have drafted a claim you can explore cause and effect relationships drawing out reasons warrants and evidence that can support the claims most effectively
  - In further developing a causal argument you can draw out many strategies that you already touched on
  - Another way to support/undermine causal arguments is through the use of analogies the strength in such an argument is in how closely you can relate two phenomena being compared
  - Establishing causes for physical effects (diseases) often calls for another means of support – testing hypothesis of theories about plausible causes
  - Not all evidence is compelling causal arguments need to be strictly scientific man causal arguments rely on ethnographic observations – the systematic study of ordinary people in their daily routines
  - May want to consider why personal experiences to support a causal argument peoples experiences generally lead them to seek out or avoid variable causes and effects
  - Personal experiences can also help build your credibility as a writer gain the empathy of your readers and thus support your conclusion
  - Still argue eloquently for causal relationships
  - All those strategies can help you support a causal argument or undermine a causal claim you regard as fallacy, still have to convince readers that the reasons you offer are indeed compelling this may mean distinguishing among immediate necessary and sufficient reasons
  - Even everyday casual analysis can draw on this distinction among reasons
- **Considering designs and visuals**
- You may find the best way to illustrate a causal relationship is to present it usually can make a point clearly and emphatically.
- Intriguing ways that editorial cartoonists embed causal relationships in some of their pieces inviting readers to find causal connections as they interpret images.

❖ Key features of causal arguments
  ➢ See page 356