

- **Evidence (first point in support of thesis):** Provides a short definition of the term as well as an extended definition (if necessary)
- **Evidence (second point in support of thesis):** Shows how the term does or does not fit the definition
- **Refutation of opposing arguments:** Addresses questions about or objections to the definition; considers other possible meanings (if any)
- **Conclusion:** Reinforces the main point of the argument; includes a strong concluding statement

☺ The following student essay includes all the elements of an argument by definition. The student who wrote this essay is trying to convince his university that he is a nontraditional student and is therefore entitled to the benefits such students receive.



## WHY I AM A NONTRADITIONAL STUDENT

ADAM KENNEDY

1 Ever since I started college, I have had difficulty getting the extra help I need to succeed. My final disappointment came last week when my adviser told me that I could not take advantage of the programs the school offers to nontraditional students. She told me that because I am not old enough, I simply do not qualify. This is confusing to me because I am anything but a "traditional" student. In fact, I am one of the most nontraditional students I know. In spite of my age—I am twenty-two—I have had experiences that separate me from most other students my age. The problem is that the school's definition of the term *nontraditional* is so narrow that it excludes people like me who should be able to qualify.

Introduction

2 According to the National Center for Educational Statistics Web site, the term *nontraditional student* is difficult to define. For this reason, the center uses an operational definition to define the term. In other words, the definition is based on whether a student has any of the following characteristics ("Special Analysis"):

Thesis statement

Evidence: Operational definition of a *non-traditional student*

- Did not enter college right after high school
- Is a part-time student

- Has a full-time job
- Has children or a spouse
- Has a GED instead of a high school diploma

Many colleges use similar criteria to define *nontraditional student*.

Evidence: School's definition of a *nontraditional student*

For example, Northern Illinois University provides special services for commuters as well as for older students. In fact, it has a special department—Commuter and Non-Traditional Student Services—to meet these students' needs. The university Web site says that a nontraditional student is someone who lives off campus, commutes from home, has children, is a veteran, or is over the age of twenty-five ("Commuter").

According to the criteria listed above, I would have no problem qualifying as a nontraditional student at Northern Illinois University. Our school, however, has a much narrower definition of the term. When I went to Non-Traditional Student Services, I was told that my case did not fit into any of the categories that the school had established. Here, a nontraditional student is someone who is twenty-five or older, period. The person I spoke to said that the school's intention is to give special help to older students who are matriculating into the university. I was then told that I could appeal and try to convince the dean of Non-Traditional Student Services that I do not fit the definition of a traditional student.

Evidence: How writer fits the definition of *nontraditional student*

By any measure, I am not a "traditional student." After getting married at seventeen, I dropped out of high school and got a full-time job. Soon, my wife and I began to resent our situation. She was still a high school student and missed being able to go out with her friends whenever she wanted to. I hated my job and missed being a student. Before long, we decided it was best to get divorced. Instead of going back to high school, however, I enlisted in the Army National Guard—just to get my head together. After two years, I had completed a tour in Iraq as well as my GED. As soon as I was released from active duty, I enrolled in college—all this before I turned twenty-one.

Refutation

I can see how someone could say that I am too young to be a nontraditional student. However, I believe that my life experiences should qualify me for this program. My marriage and divorce, time in the army, and reentry issues make me very different from the average first-year student. The special resources available to students who qualify for this program—tutors, financial aid, special advising,

support groups  
to college a lot  
first-year studen  
The focus on a  
younger than  
paths to college  
determining w  
The univer  
include young  
paths and have  
younger than  
older students  
numbers. Our  
that is exactly

"Commuter a  
Affairs a  
12 Oct. 2  
"Special Ana  
Conditio  
Web. 11

## GRAMM AND IS

When you  
definition  
to which t  
term from  
In a fir  
is where o  
the term's  
an exampl  
making su

support groups, and subsidized housing—would make my adjustment to college a lot easier. I am only four years older than the average first-year student, but that doesn't mean that I am anything like them. The focus on age to define *nontraditional* ignores the fact that students younger than twenty-five may also have followed very untraditional paths to college. Life experience, not age, should be the main factor in determining whether a student is nontraditional.

The university should expand the definition of *nontraditional* to include younger students who have followed unconventional career paths and have postponed college. Even though these students may be younger than twenty-five, they face challenges similar to those faced by older students. Students like me are returning to school in increasing numbers. Our situation may be different from that of others our age, but that is exactly why we need all the help we can get.

\* Conclusion

Concluding statement

#### Works Cited

"Commuter and Non-Traditional Student Services." *Division of Student Affairs and Enrollment Management*. Northern Illinois U, 2009. Web. 12 Oct. 2009.

"Special Analysis 2002: Nontraditional Undergraduates." *The Condition of Education*. Natl. Center for Educ. Statistics, 2002. Web. 12 Oct. 2009.

### GRAMMAR IN CONTEXT: AVOIDING *IS WHERE* AND *IS WHEN*

When you write an **argument by definition**, you often include a **formal definition**, which is made up of the term that you are defining, the class to which the term belongs, and the characteristics that distinguish your term from other items in the same class.

In a formal definition, you may sometimes find yourself using the phrase *is where* or *is when*. If so, your definition is incomplete because it omits the term's class. The use of *is where* or *is when* signals that you are giving an example of the term, not a definition. You can avoid this problem by making sure that the verb *be* in your definition is always followed by a noun.

(continued)

## What Is Causal Argument?

**Causal arguments** attempt to find causes (Why don't more Americans vote?) or identify possible consequences (Does movie violence cause societal violence?). A causal argument identifies the causes of an event or situation and takes a stand on what actually caused it. Alternatively, a causal argument can focus on results, taking a position on what a likely outcome is, has been, or will be.

Many of the arguments that you read and discuss examine causes and effects. In an essay on one of the following topics, you would search for the causes of an event or a situation, examining a number of different possible causes before concluding that a particular cause was the most likely one. You also could consider the possible outcomes or results of a given event or situation and conclude that one possible result would most likely occur:

- Why don't more Americans vote?
- Does movie violence cause societal violence?
- Is autism caused by childhood vaccines?
- Is fast food making Americans fat?
- Is human activity responsible for climate change?
- Does the death penalty discourage crime?
- Do single-sex schools improve students' academic performance?
- Does profiling decrease the likelihood of a terrorist attack?

### ⊖ EXERCISE 13.1

Causal arguments are all around us—for example, on cigarette packages, in public-service advertisements, and on bumper stickers. Look at the visuals on the pages that follow, and consider the causes and effects you might discuss if you were writing a causal argument developing one of the statements listed below. List as many possible causes and effects as you can.

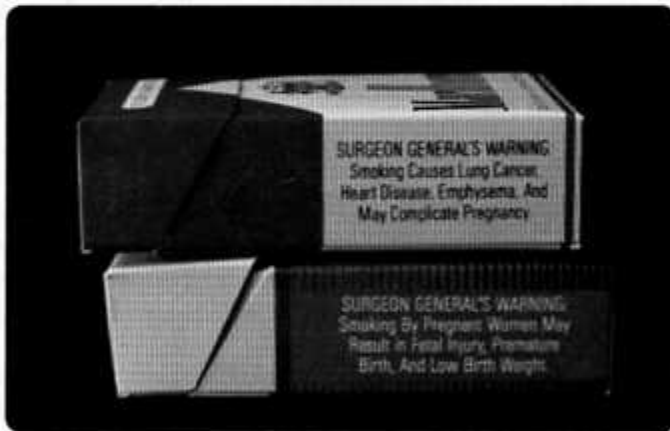
- Guns don't kill people; people kill people.
- Caution: Cigarette smoking may be hazardous to your health.
- Friends don't let friends drive drunk.

Americans  
use soci-  
or situ-  
a causal  
outcome  
  
ses and  
rch for  
ifferent  
e most  
its of a  
d most



Guns don't kill people;  
people kill people.

ges,  
the  
you  
e of  
as



Surgeon general's  
warning

Friends don't let  
friends drive drunk.

This bracelet was a gift Amber Apodaca received from the center where she helped teens with drug and alcohol problems. She was wearing it when an underage drunk driver took her life.

**Friends Don't Let Friends Drive Drunk.**



Photo by Michael O'Connell

U.S. Department of Transportation

Ad  
Council



## Unders Relatio

Before you c  
of cause-and  
one thing, a  
not all of t  
causes can  
have multi  
Americans  
causes.)

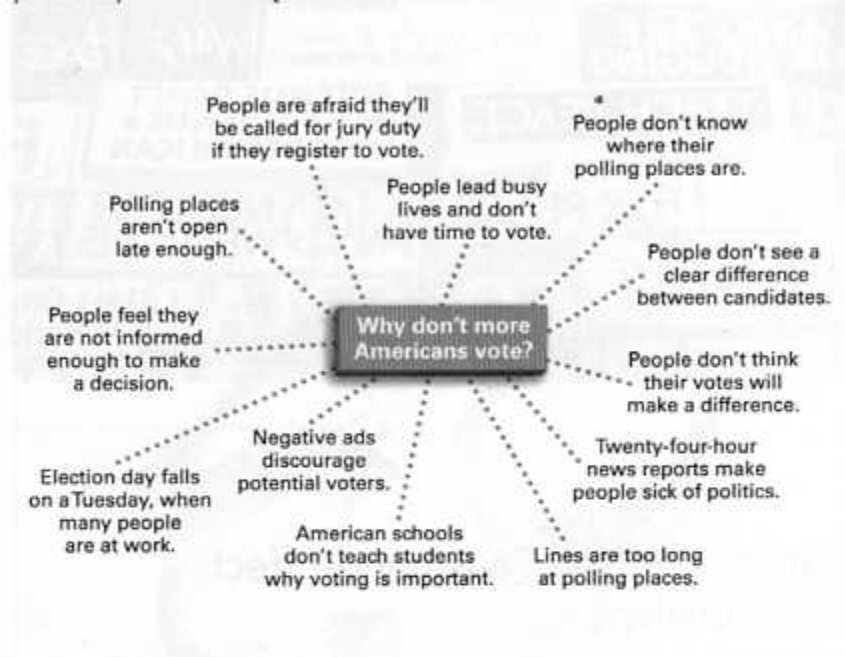
## Main ar

In a causa  
the most  
readers w  
important

The r  
are contr  
your key

contributory causes elsewhere in your argument. (You may also identify factors that are *not* causes and explain why they are not.)

Identifying the main cause is not always easy; the most important cause may not always be the most obvious one. However, you need to decide which cause is most important so you can structure and support your essay with this emphasis in mind.



### EXERCISE 13.2

Look at the diagram above. Which causes do you see as the most and least important? Why? Do you think that any of the factors presented in the diagram are not really causes? Can you suggest any additional causes? If you were writing a causal argument on the topic of why many Americans do not vote, which cause would you focus on? What kind of evidence would you use to support your argument?

### Immediate and Remote Causes

As mentioned earlier, one reason that identifying the main cause of a particular effect can be difficult is that the most important cause is not necessarily the most obvious one. Usually, the most obvious cause is the **immediate cause**—the one that occurs right before an event. For example, a political scandal that erupts the day before an election might cause many disillusioned voters to stay home from the polls. However, this immediate cause, although it is the most obvious, may be less important than one or

more remote  
have had a g

### EXERCISE

Look once  
remote cau  
back at you  
you consid  
Are there a  
(less impor

### Causal C

A causal c  
which in t  
Americans

High  
Stude  
medi  
Stude  
You  
less i

Whe  
causal ch

Thes  
fal

Ca

**more remote causes**—factors that occurred further in the past but may have had a greater impact.

### EXERCISE 13.3

Look once more at the diagram on page 358. Which causes do you consider remote causes, and which do you consider immediate causes? Now, look back at your response to Exercise 13.2. Are there any remote causes that you consider nevertheless to be main causes (of primary importance)? Are there any immediate causes that you consider to be only contributory (less important) causes?

### Causal Chains

A **causal chain** is a sequence of events in which one event causes the next, which in turn causes the next, and so on. For example, the problem of Americans who do not vote can be described as a causal chain:

High schools do not stress the importance of elections →  
 Students are not encouraged to follow election coverage in the media →  
 Students have little knowledge of the issues →  
 Students do not understand why their votes are important →  
 Young adults do not develop a habit of voting →  
 Americans are less likely to vote.

When you write a causal argument, you can organize your essay as a causal chain, as the following outline illustrates:

*Thesis statement:* U.S. secondary education is at fault for Americans' failure to see voting as a civic duty.

- High schools do not stress the importance of elections.
- As a result, students do not follow election coverage in the media.
- Because they do not follow election coverage, students have little knowledge of the issues.
- With little knowledge of the issues, students do not understand that it is important to vote.
- Because they do not see voting as important, young adults do not develop a habit of regular voting.
- As a result, American adults are less likely to vote.

*Concluding statement:* Because the habit of voting is established early, high schools need to take responsibility for encouraging students to vote.



## TEXTING: A BOON, NOT A THREAT, TO LANGUAGE

KRISTINA MIALKI

1 Certain technological developments of the last two decades have a lot of people worrying about the state of the English language. Emailing, blogging, instant-messaging, and texting are bringing with them new ways of writing and communicating. The fear is that these new technologies will encourage a sloppy, casual form of written English that will eventually replace proper English altogether. Texting, in particular, has people concerned because it encourages the use of a specialized, nonstandard form of English. However, the effects of this new “textese” are misunderstood. Texting will not destroy the English language; in fact, it is keeping the language alive.

2 A text message is a brief written note sent via a cell phone or a similar device. Texting has become extremely popular because sending text messages is instant, mobile, and silent. To make texting more efficient, texters have developed a shorthand—an abbreviated form of English that uses numbers and symbols in addition to letters. In textese, common phrases such as “see you later” or “talk to you later” become “cul8r” and “T2YL.” Feelings and phrases are also expressed with emoticons, such as “\*:-o” (meaning “alarmed”) or “>:-<” (meaning “angry”). Today, texting is the preferred method of communication for many young people, who are the most enthusiastic users of this technology. Not surprisingly, unwarranted fears that texting will destroy the language often focus on this group.

3 Some people say texting will destroy the English language because it encourages use of an overly simplified form of written English that does not follow standard rules of spelling, grammar, and punctuation. The implication is that people who text, particularly children and teens, will not learn proper written English. However, there is no evidence that texting is having or will have this effect. In fact, *Newsweek* recently reported on a British study that found just the opposite to be true. The more children texted, the better they did on reading, writing, spelling,

• Introduction

Thesis statement

Background

Opposing argument

Refutation

and vocabulary tests (Huang). If, in fact, young people's language skills are weakening, then researchers should seek out the real cause for this decline rather than incorrectly blaming texting.

Evidence: First point in support of thesis

Texting is a valuable way of communicating that actually encourages more writing and reading. Texters often spend hours each day engaged with language. This is time that would otherwise probably be spent on the phone, not reading or writing. Textese may not be standard written English, but it is a rich and creative form of communication, a modification of English for a particular purpose. For this reason, standard English is not in danger of being destroyed or replaced by textese. Just as most young people know not to talk to their teachers the way they talk to their friends, they know not to write papers the way they write text messages. Texting simply broadens young people's exposure to the written word.

Evidence: Second point in support of thesis

Another reason texting is so valuable is that it encourages creative use of language. The small screen size and limited number of keys require texters to be inventive, so the need for new and clever abbreviations is constant. Texters are continually playing with words and coming up with new ways of expressing themselves. Texting does not, as some fear, encourage sloppy, thoughtless, or careless writing. On the contrary, it rewards ingenuity and precision. One recent study of text messages sent between Toronto teenagers confirmed this. The researchers found imagination and skill in the teens' messages and praised what they saw as "an expansive new linguistic renaissance" ("OMG!"). In other words, these researchers recognized that texting was not killing the English language but actually enriching it and keeping it alive.

Conclusion

According to *Newsweek*, people around the world will send approximately 2.3 trillion text messages this year (Huang). The exceptional popularity of texting and its fast growth over the last ten years explain why it is attracting so much attention. It is not, however, the threat that some believe it to be. It is neither destroying the language nor deadening people's thoughts and feelings. It is a lively and creative way for people to play with words and stay connected.

Concluding statement

#### Works Cited

- Huang, Lily. "The Death of English (LOL)." *Newsweek*. Newsweek, 2 Aug. 2008. Web. 23 Aug 2008.

"OMG! Text Tee  
Post [Leeds  
Newspaper

#### GRAMMA IS BECAU

When you w  
the process,  
the reason is  
that"; there  
actually me  
grammatica

INCORR

CORRE

#### EXERCISE

The followi  
O. Rendell,  
answer the  
necessary.

The Phi



At the clo  
this week  
founders

"OMG! Text Teens Are GR8 at Language After All." Yorkshire Post [Leeds, England] 15 May 2008: n. pag. InfoTrac Custom Newspapers. Web. 25 Aug. 2008.

### GRAMMAR IN CONTEXT: AVOIDING "THE REASON IS BECAUSE"

When you write a **causal argument**, you connect causes to effects. In the process, you might be tempted to use the ungrammatical phrase *the reason is because*. However, the word *because* means "for the reason that"; therefore, it is redundant to say "the reason is because" (which actually means "the reason is for the reason that"). Instead, use the grammatical phrase "the reason is *that*."

**INCORRECT** Another reason texting is so valuable is because it encourages creative use of language.

**CORRECT** Another reason texting is so valuable is that it encourages creative use of language.

### EXERCISE 13.6

The following essay, "U.S. Needs an Educated Citizenry" by Marjorie O. Rendell, is a causal argument. Read the essay carefully, and then answer the questions that follow it, consulting the outline on page 362 if necessary.

The *Philadelphia Inquirer* published this piece on September 15, 2008.



## U.S. NEEDS AN EDUCATED CITIZENRY

MARJORIE O. RENDELL

At the close of the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia, 221 years ago this week, a crowd approached Benjamin Franklin. They asked whether the founders had created a monarchy or a republic.