

# Rutgers Learning Centers

At Camden Campus

## CRITICAL THINKING: CAUSE AND EFFECT

In solving problems and thinking, you can use cause-and-effect skills in at least three important ways:

**1. You can predict outcomes from a given action.**

You can think or plan ahead. You can figure out what might happen if you do something or do nothing. For instance, if you join a sports team, you can predict that you'll meet new people and get some exercise. If you do not join, you will have more time for other things.

**2. You can identify possible causes for a given event.**

You can make a good guess as to why something did or did not happen.

**3. You can figure out what to do to cause a future event to happen.**

You can decide what result you want and then figure out how to cause it.

Sometimes it is easy to get confused about cause and effect; this confusion can lead you into the following mistakes:

**1. Thinking that two things must be related --**

Two things happening at about the same time are not necessarily related. For instance, imagine that you sleep with your book under your pillow and then pass a test. That does not mean that the two are related. Sleeping with the book under your pillow did not cause you to pass the test. The book's presence was coincidental.

**2. Reversing cause-and-effect relationships --**

Sometimes we get mixed up and try to fix the wrong part of the relationship. For example, we might say, "That factory has lazy workers and screaming supervisors. So, let's get rid of the screaming supervisors and there will be no more lazy workers." This conclusion may confuse the actual cause (the lazy workers) with the effect (why the supervisors scream.)

- from *Thinking Tools*, Miles and Rauton, H & H Publishing Co., Inc., Clearwater, FL. 1990

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