How to Teach Cause and Effect Using Graphic Organisers

A practical instructional sequence for teachers and education support staff

1 Explain the Purpose

Introduce the organiser and explain that it helps students understand why events happen.

Use a familiar example, such as heavy rainfall causing a river to flood, before introducing more complex texts.

2 Read and Model

Read a short passage about the Western Roman Empire. Think aloud as you identify important information.

“The text tells us that political instability made governing difficult. That contributed to the empire’s weakening, so I’ll record it as one of our causes.”

Point to the relevant section of the organiser while recording the information.

3 Practise Together

Continue reading and help students identify additional causes.

Ask: “What other problems affected the empire?” “How did these problems make the empire weaker?” “What happened as a result?”

Use discussion to help students distinguish contributing causes from the main effect.

4 Explain Orally

Ask students to use their completed organiser to explain why the empire weakened.

Model a complete explanation, pointing to the causes and effect as you speak.

Encourage students to connect ideas using because, so and as a result. Provide sentence starters when needed.

5 Write an Explanation

Students use the same information to write one or two connected sentences.

Encourage them to explain how the causes led to the outcome, rather than simply copying information from the boxes.

6 Apply to New Texts

Gradually introduce new passages and reduce the amount of teacher support.

Begin with straightforward cause-and-effect relationships before progressing to texts involving several contributing factors and longer-term consequences.

Supporting Students Towards Independence

Some students will initially need considerable support to identify and explain cause-and-effect relationships.

Teachers can reduce the number of causes, provide key information or complete part of the organiser as a worked example.

As students become more confident, these supports can gradually be removed.

The aim is not simply to complete a diagram. It is to use the organiser as a visual scaffold that helps students identify important information, understand relationships between events and explain their thinking with increasing independence.