

## Avoid Cause-and-Effect Issues

This writing principle threw me at first because cause-and-effect issues are not technically or grammatically wrong. The novelist, Dwight Vreeland Swain, named this writing principle the Motivation-Reaction Units (MRUs). In my notes, I refer to MRUs as cause-and-effect issues.

Cause-and-effect issues or if you like MRUs will slow the pacing of the story, cause wordiness, and distance the reader into a plot-stopper/speed bump moment. And sometimes cause confusion. The reader will stop to think, reread, or lose the rhythm of the story.

### **A cause-and-effect issue is when:**

- The actions in a scene are out of sequence
- Thoughts or action happens in reverse (wrong) order
- Implied action and reaction are happening at the same time.

Yes, in the real world, action and reaction sometimes happens at the same time, but most of the time it does not. The goal of Deep POV is to avoid cause-and-effect issues. Write linearly, in the proper sequence, as things happen from the character's point of view.

Write the action before the reaction, inner thought before an action. Another way of saying this is that in a scene, the action must come before the reaction.

**A few cause-and-effect phrase examples:**

- after eating she went home
- after reading the book he left
- as she walked down the street
- as the sun came up
- before eating she washed up
- while eating lunch he gazed

**Clue words that may lead to cause-and-effect issues:**

- |       |        |       |
|-------|--------|-------|
| after | at     | when  |
| as    | before | while |

**Note:**

Verbs or pronouns followed these common cause-and-effect clue words.

**More common cause-and-effect phrases:**

- |         |            |             |            |
|---------|------------|-------------|------------|
| as a    | after a    | before a    | while a    |
| as he   | after he   | before he   | while he   |
| as I    | after I    | before I    | while I    |
| as she  | after she  | before she  | while she  |
| as the  | after the  | before the  | while the  |
| as they | after they | before they | while they |
| as we   |            |             |            |

at  
at the

**Issue: (As the)**

*As the* sheriff approached the door, he reached for his gun.

The words “as the” imply the action and reaction are happening at the same time.

**Fix:**

The sheriff drew his gun and approached the door.

Or.

The sheriff approached the door and drew his gun.

This has a proper sequence and reads more to the point.

**Issue: (when she)**

The waitress blushed *when she* tripped and dropped the tray.

The phrase “when she” implies the action and reaction are happening at the same time. The order is wrong as well. The waitress needs to drop the tray first before she blushes.

**Fix:**

The waitress tripped and dropped the tray. A rush of blood shot up into her cheeks.

This sequence is correct. The waitress dropped the tray first and then she blushed.

**Note:**

Sometimes, two things happen at the same time. You need to understand when it is all right to use these words and when it is not.

**Example: (As the)**

As the bank robber bolted toward the sheriff, swinging a knife, the sheriff crouched, lifted the gun, and fired.

This works because it takes time for the bad guy to reach the sheriff. The sheriff has time to act while the bad guy is heading for him.

**In Summary:**

Even if two things happen at the same time, avoid using any of the cause-and-effect phrases to connect the events. In Deep POV, these cause-and-effect phrases are speed bumps. Real life and storytelling are different. Write linearly. One experience at a time in the order that happens in the story. Write the action that ends first and connect the next action with a different conjunction.

**Reference search:**

Cause and Effect: Understanding Story Flow

Cause and Effect: Telling Your Story in the Right Order

Motivation-reaction Units (MRUs According to Swain)