HACK YOUR IELTS · EPISODE 6

20

Phrases to Explain Causes & Reasons

The complete guide with usage notes, grammar patterns and example sentences for every phrase.

5
groups of phrases

20
example sentences

1
model paragraph

Essay type: causes, reasons & “why is this happening?”

START HERE

How to use this guide

Two minutes of reading that will make the next eight pages work harder for you.

Where you will need these phrases

1. **Direct cause questions.** "Why is this happening?" or "What are the causes of this trend?"
2. **Causes and solutions.** "What are the causes of this problem and what can be done about it?"
3. **Causes and effects.** "What are the causes of this development and what are its effects?"

The 3-step cause sentence

1

State the trend

Say what is happening: "Online learning has grown rapidly."

2

Add a cause phrase

Pick one phrase from this guide: "This can largely be attributed to technological advancement."

3

Explain it

Add one supporting sentence: "Fast internet and cheap devices now put courses in everyone's pocket."

What comes after each phrase?

AFTER THE PHRASE	PHRASES FROM THIS GUIDE
A noun phrase or an -ing form	attributed to · due to · result of · stems from · rooted in · lies in · exacerbated by · driven by · fuelled by · account for · given rise to · force behind · role in · cause of · owing to
A full clause (subject + verb)	the primary reason for this is that · explained by the fact that · given that · one of the underlying factors is that

Three golden rules

- ✓ **Do not use all 20 in one essay.** Choose three or four and spread them across your body paragraphs. Variety shows range, overuse looks forced.
- ✓ **Hedge your claims.** Words like *largely, partially, primarily* make your argument sound reasoned instead of exaggerated.
- ✓ **Always explain the cause.** A great phrase followed by a vague idea does not help. Lexical Resource and Grammatical Range & Accuracy are two of the four Writing criteria, 25% each.

A

GROUP A · PHRASES 1–4

The Main Cause

Use these when one reason clearly leads the way.

1 FROM THE REEL

can largely be attributed to

Pattern: subject + can largely be attributed to + noun / -ing

USE IT WHEN

Naming the main reason while still sounding careful, not absolute.

EXAMPLE

> The rise in online learning **can largely be attributed to** technological advancement.

Pro tip: "Largely" admits there may be other causes, which makes your tone measured and academic. Swap it for *mainly* or *partly* to change the strength.

2

is primarily due to

Pattern: subject + is primarily due to + noun phrase

USE IT WHEN

Stating the first and strongest cause in a plain, direct way.

EXAMPLE

> The decline in print newspapers **is primarily due to** the convenience of free online news.

Pro tip: "Due to" needs a noun phrase after it, never a full clause. Need a clause? Use *because* instead.

3

is chiefly the result of

Pattern: subject + is chiefly the result of + noun phrase

USE IT WHEN

Showing that a problem is the end product of one clear cause.

EXAMPLE

> Rising obesity rates **are chiefly the result of** sedentary lifestyles and easy access to processed food.

Pro tip: Match your verb to your subject: *rates are, the rate is*. Works especially well for social problems.

4

stems from

Pattern: subject + stems from + noun / -ing

USE IT WHEN

Tracing a problem back to where it begins.

EXAMPLE

> Much of the stress felt by employees **stems from** unrealistic deadlines.

Pro tip: Short, natural and perfect when you want to avoid repeating "because". Never write "stems from because".

B

GROUP B · PHRASES 5–8

Deeper Causes

Go beneath the obvious reason and show real depth.

5 FROM THE REEL

one of the underlying factors is

Pattern: One of the underlying factors (behind + noun) is + noun phrase

USE IT WHEN

Pointing to a deeper, background cause behind the obvious one.

EXAMPLE

> Many young adults delay moving out, and **one of the underlying factors is** the increased cost of living.

Pro tip: Say "factors" (plural) but "is" (singular), because the subject is *one*. Add "behind" to link it: *one of the underlying factors behind this trend is…*

6

is rooted in

Pattern: subject + is rooted in + noun phrase

USE IT WHEN

A cause with long-term, cultural or historical roots.

EXAMPLE

> The reluctance to learn foreign languages in some countries **is rooted in** the belief that English alone is enough.

Pro tip: Best for attitudes, traditions and beliefs. It sounds odd with simple physical causes like weather or price.

7

The root cause of … lies in …

Pattern: The root cause of + noun + lies in + noun phrase

USE IT WHEN

Highlighting the single most important reason beneath a problem.

EXAMPLE

> **The root cause of** youth unemployment **lies in** the gap between what schools teach and what employers need.

Pro tip: This is a strong claim, so use it once per essay and save it for your most important point.

8

is exacerbated by

Pattern: subject + is exacerbated by + noun phrase

USE IT WHEN

A factor that makes an existing problem worse instead of starting it.

EXAMPLE

> Air pollution in big cities **is exacerbated by** heavy traffic and poor public transport.

Pro tip: Shows nuance: one cause starts the problem, another makes it worse. Great for problem-solution essays.

C

GROUP C · PHRASES 9–12

More Than One Cause

For when the answer is never just one thing.

9 FROM THE REEL

this trend is partially driven by

Pattern: This trend / This shift + is partially driven by + noun, noun and noun

USE IT WHEN

More than one factor is involved and none explains everything alone.

EXAMPLE

> International cuisine has become hugely popular. This trend is partially driven by changing consumer preferences and growing cultural diversity.

Pro tip: Starting with "This trend" points back to your previous sentence, which boosts cohesion. List 2 or 3 causes, no more.

10

is fuelled by

Pattern: subject + is fuelled by + noun phrase

USE IT WHEN

Something growing fast because of a specific factor.

EXAMPLE

> The boom in online shopping is fuelled by fast delivery and constant social media advertising.

Pro tip: Pairs naturally with growth words: *boom, surge, rise, demand*. Both "fuelled" (UK) and "fueled" (US) are fine. Stay consistent.

11

a combination of … has contributed to …

Pattern: A combination of + noun and noun + has contributed to + noun phrase

USE IT WHEN

The cause is a blend of several things working together.

EXAMPLE

> A combination of longer working hours and rising rents has contributed to falling birth rates in many cities.

Pro tip: "Contributed to" is softer than "caused", which is exactly right when you cannot prove a single cause.

12

a number of factors account for

Pattern: A number of factors account for + noun phrase

USE IT WHEN

Opening a paragraph by promising several causes, then explaining them.

EXAMPLE

> A number of factors account for the shortage of teachers, including low salaries, heavy workloads and limited career progression.

Pro tip: A ready-made topic sentence. Follow it with one factor per sentence and a short example each.

D

GROUP D · PHRASES 13–16

Cause as the Subject

Start with the cause and finish with the effect.

13

has given rise to

Pattern: cause (subject) + has given rise to + effect

USE IT WHEN

A cause that leads to a brand-new situation or problem.

EXAMPLE

> Rapid urbanisation **has given rise to** a shortage of affordable housing.

Pro tip: Formal and compact. Works for good and bad outcomes. The fixed phrase is "give rise to".

14

is a major driving force behind

Pattern: subject + is a major driving force behind + noun phrase

USE IT WHEN

A cause that keeps pushing a change forward.

EXAMPLE

> Competition for well-paid jobs **is a major driving force behind** the popularity of postgraduate study.

Pro tip: Ideal for trends (growth, change, popularity). Pair it with a clear noun phrase, not a verb.

15

has played a pivotal role in

Pattern: subject + has played a pivotal role in + noun / -ing

USE IT WHEN

A decisive cause that is not necessarily the only one.

EXAMPLE

> Social media **has played a pivotal role in** shaping teenagers' attitudes to body image.

Pro tip: Safer than "caused", because it admits other influences. After "in", use a noun or an -ing form.

16

is a leading cause of

Pattern: subject + is a leading cause of + noun phrase

USE IT WHEN

A cause that ranks among the top reasons for a problem.

EXAMPLE

> Lack of physical activity **is a leading cause of** heart disease in developed countries.

Pro tip: Write "a leading cause" or "one of the leading causes". "The leading cause" is a risky claim unless you are certain.

E

GROUP E · PHRASES 17–20

Reason Clauses

Full sentences that explain exactly why.

17

The primary reason for this is that …

Pattern: The primary reason for this is that + subject + verb

USE IT WHEN

Introducing the reason in a new sentence after you state a fact.

EXAMPLE

> Many graduates struggle to find work. **The primary reason for this is that** employers want experience that students rarely gain at university.

Pro tip: Say "reason **for**" (not "of") and "is **that**" (not "is because").

18

This can be explained by the fact that …

Pattern: This can be explained by the fact that + clause

USE IT WHEN

Explaining a surprising or puzzling trend.

EXAMPLE

> Fewer people read print books today. **This can be explained by the fact that** e-books and audiobooks are cheaper and easier to carry.

Pro tip: Always follow "the fact that" with a complete clause (subject + verb), never a bare noun.

19

Owing to …, …

Pattern: Owing to + noun phrase, + main clause

USE IT WHEN

Opening a sentence with the cause for a formal, academic tone.

EXAMPLE

> **Owing to** the growing availability of cheap flights, international tourism has expanded rapidly.

Pro tip: "Owing to", "due to" and "because of" all take a noun phrase. Do not forget the comma after the cause.

20

Given that …, …

Pattern: Given that + clause, + main clause

USE IT WHEN

A cause your reader will already accept as a known fact.

EXAMPLE

> **Given that** healthy food is often more expensive, many low-income families rely on cheaper processed meals.

Pro tip: Means roughly "since", but sounds more academic. It signals clear logic: fact first, consequence second.

AVOID THE TRAPS

Common mistakes & quick upgrades

Small grammar slips can hide great vocabulary. Fix these first.

6 mistakes to stop making

✗ The reason is because prices rose.

✓ **The reason is that prices rose.**

"Reason" and "because" say the same thing, so use one or the other: *The reason is that…* or *This is because…*

✗ The main reason of this problem is…

✓ **The main reason for this problem is…**

Reason takes "for". Cause takes "of": *the cause of*.

✗ This can be attributed with poor planning.

✓ **This can be attributed to poor planning.**

Attribute something *to* something.

✗ Due to prices rose, people stopped buying.

✓ **Due to the rise in prices, people stopped buying.**

Due to / owing to / because of need a noun phrase. Before a clause, use *because* or *since*.

✗ One of the underlying factor are cost.

✓ **One of the underlying factors is cost.**

Plural noun after "one of the", but a singular verb, since the subject is "one".

✗ Technology is the only reason for this.

✓ **Technology is largely responsible for this.**

Absolute claims are hard to defend. Hedging shows balanced, academic thinking.

Upgrade a basic sentence

BEFORE

Many people feel lonely because they use phones too much.

→

AFTER

Growing loneliness can largely be attributed to excessive smartphone use.

BEFORE

Crime goes up because there are no jobs.

→

AFTER

The rise in crime is partially driven by high unemployment.

BEFORE

Teenagers get bad grades because they stay up late.

→

AFTER

Poor results among teenagers often stem from late nights and irregular sleep.

BEFORE

Pollution is bad because there are too many cars.

→

AFTER

Urban air pollution is primarily due to the sheer volume of vehicles on the road.

SEE IT IN ACTION

Model paragraph & practice

One body paragraph that uses four phrases naturally, then your turn.

Question: Why are more adults choosing to study online?

The rise in online learning can largely be attributed to [1] rapid technological advancement. High-speed internet and affordable devices have made quality courses accessible from almost anywhere. However, one of the underlying factors is [5] the increased cost of living, which has pushed many students to look for cheaper alternatives to campus-based degrees. This trend is partially driven by [9] changing attitudes to work, since employers increasingly value practical skills over traditional qualifications. Given that [20] flexible study allows people to earn while they learn, it is hardly surprising that online courses have become so popular.

Small numbers show which phrase from the guide is used. Notice that each phrase is followed by a specific idea, not a vague one.

Your turn: rewrite these sentences

1. Use **"stems from"**: *Many employees feel stressed because they work long hours.*
2. Use **"is fuelled by"**: *More people shop online because social media ads are everywhere.*
3. Use **"has given rise to"**: *Cities grew very fast, so there are not enough homes.*
4. Use **"Owing to"**: *Fuel prices rose, so many commuters switched to public transport.*
5. Use **"is exacerbated by"**: *Air pollution is bad in cities and heavy traffic makes it worse.*

Suggested answers

1. Widespread stress among employees stems from excessive working hours. **2.** The boom in online shopping is fuelled by the constant presence of social media advertising. **3.** Rapid urbanisation has given rise to a shortage of housing. **4.** Owing to rising fuel prices, many commuters have switched to public transport. **5.** Air pollution in cities is exacerbated by heavy traffic.

Your wording may differ and that is fine, as long as the grammar pattern is correct.

KEEP THIS PAGE

All 20 phrases at a glance

Screenshot it, print it, stick it above your desk.

#	PHRASE	WHAT FOLLOWS
GROUP A · THE MAIN CAUSE		
1	can largely be attributed to REEL	noun / -ing
2	is primarily due to	noun phrase
3	is chiefly the result of	noun phrase
4	stems from	noun / -ing
GROUP B · DEEPER CAUSES		
5	one of the underlying factors is REEL	noun phrase (or that-clause)
6	is rooted in	noun phrase
7	The root cause of … lies in …	noun phrase (after "lies in")
8	is exacerbated by	noun phrase
GROUP C · MORE THAN ONE CAUSE		
9	this trend is partially driven by REEL	noun, noun and noun
10	is fuelled by	noun phrase
11	a combination of … has contributed to …	noun and noun + has contributed to + noun phrase
12	a number of factors account for	noun phrase
GROUP D · CAUSE AS THE SUBJECT		
13	has given rise to	effect (noun phrase)
14	is a major driving force behind	noun phrase
15	has played a pivotal role in	noun / -ing
16	is a leading cause of	noun phrase
GROUP E · REASON CLAUSES		
17	The primary reason for this is that …	subject + verb
18	This can be explained by the fact that …	subject + verb
19	Owing to …, …	noun phrase, + main clause
20	Given that …, …	subject + verb, + main clause