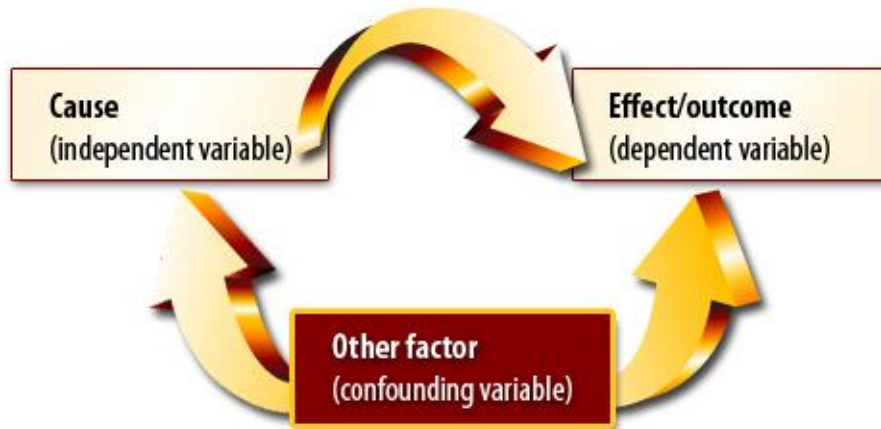


What is historical causation?



"Everything that becomes or changes," Plato said, "must do so owing to some cause; for nothing can come to be without a cause." Historical causation is the attempt to trace current and historical events to their root causes. Historical causation tries to find explanations for changes, radical or subtle." Ocean Malandra, http://www.ehow.com/info_8790651_historical-causation.html

A few causation fundamentals from Prof. Slatta:

1. "More simplistic thinking looks for immediate proximity to explain cause-and-effect relationships. A great deal more thinking is involved in finding relationships that are not obvious by simple patterns of close proximity. In college students are expected to go beyond basic or surface reasons when finding a cause or explaining an effect. The pattern of cause and effect=, particularly when not obvious, is used to promote deeper exploration of ideas and events that require more critical thinking than sorting information into categories." [Terry Doyle & Todd Zakrajsek, *The New Science of Learning*, 2013, pp. 64-65]
2. Mind the chronology! A cause must precede an effect. Thus an event or action in 2012 cannot be the cause of something else that happened a decade earlier. However, you may examine effects (outcomes) and then back up in time, trying to establish why the event happened. For example, reading the reforms in the Mexican Constitution of 1917 might provide insights into the perceived problems that caused the uprisings against the dictatorship of Porfirio Diaz in 1910.
3. A description of an event does not explain its cause. So, if asked about the cause of a revolution or political violence, merely describing what happened does not answer the question.
4. Outcomes/effects are distinct from causes. Again if asked about causes of an event, do not list what happened after the event--it's not relevant. You must take up what happened beforehand to uncover causes.
5. Don't confuse causation with correlation. In asserting causation, you argue that A makes B happen. Correlation is when two or more things or events tend to occur at about the same time and might be associated with each other, but aren't necessarily connected causally. Think of correlation as coincidence. Just because 2 things happen in sequence or nearly at the same time does not mean one necessarily caused the other.
6. Don't confuse confounding variables (extraneous factors) with causes.