

THE DEFINITION ESSAY

A definition essay defines a word, term, or concept in depth by providing a personal commentary on what the specific subject means. Most physical objects have a definition about which most people agree. For example, most people will agree on what trees, windows, computers, and pencils are in general. These objects all have specific physical properties that most people can agree on through the use of their physical senses. However, abstract terms, such as love, pain, or patriotism, have different meanings for different individuals since such terms play on people's feelings more than their physical senses. The definition essay provides a personal, extended definition of such terms by linking or comparing the term to a previous definition and by illustrating how that term should be applied.

Setting Up the Definition Essay

- Select a subject carefully.
- Select a term or subject that you know well enough, so you can provide specific examples to illustrate your definition.
- Don't select a subject either too broad or too narrow to fit the parameters of your essay.
- Once you have selected a subject, outline your paper carefully before writing.

Writing the Definition Essay

Introduction: Open with an attention getter. You may want to include a traditional definition here to provide a basis for your personal definition. You may also want to consider opening with a contradictory image to what would be your image to illustrate that definition. Make sure that you have a good, specific thesis, that tells readers how you will define the term. If you can write the definition using specific points, you will find the definition easier to follow when writing the paper.

Body: Background information is often unnecessary in this type of paper. However, you may need to provide some background about the term or your connection to the term. The bulk of your body will consist of the specific points and their support. For each point, provide an example to illustrate that point and an analysis of how the example illustrates the point. Follow your outline to remind yourself when you need examples and analysis of those examples. Use good, specific examples to illustrate each point. Examples allow readers to visualize.

Conclusion: Review the key points. Echo images and ideas from the introduction.