

al, sentence, and extended.

Choosing the Appropriate Type of Definition

... TRY THIS TYPE OF DEFINITION

Parenthetical. A *parenthetical definition* is a brief clarification within an existing sentence. Sometimes, a parenthetical definition is simply a word or phrase enclosed in parentheses or commas or introduced by a colon or a dash: "The computers were infected by a *Trojan horse* (a destructive program that appears to be benign)."

Sentence. A *sentence definition* usually follows a standard pattern in which the item to be defined is placed in a category of similar items and then distinguished from them: "Crippleware is shareware in which some features of the program are disabled until the user buys a license to use the program." Here, "shareware" is the category and the words that follow "shareware" are the distinguishing information.

Writers often use sentence definitions to present a working definition for a particular document: "In this report, *electron microscope* refers to any microscope that uses electrons rather than visible light to produce magnified images." Such a definition is called a *stipulative definition*. See the Guidelines box for more about writing sentence definitions.

Extended. An *extended definition* is a detailed explanation—usually one or more paragraphs—of an object, process, or idea. Often an extended definition begins with a sentence definition, which is then elaborated. For instance, the sentence definition "An electrophorus is a laboratory instrument used to generate static electricity" tells you the basic function of the device, but it doesn't explain how it works, what it is used for, and its strengths and limitations. An extended definition would address these and other topics. See pages 386–90 for more about extended definitions.

WRITING SENTENCE DEFINITIONS

The following Guidelines box presents more advice on sentence definitions.

GUIDELINES Writing Effective Sentence Definitions

The following five suggestions can help you write effective sentence definitions.

- ▶ **Be specific in stating the category and the distinguishing characteristics.** If you write, "A Bunsen burner is a burner that consists of a vertical metal tube connected to a gas source," the imprecise category—"a burner"—ruins the definition: many types of large-scale burners use vertical metal tubes connected to gas sources.
- ▶ **Don't describe a specific item if you are defining a general class of items.** If you wish to define *catamaran*, don't describe a particular catamaran. The one you see on the beach in front of you might be made by Hobie and have a white hull and blue sails, but those characteristics are not essential to all catamarans.
- ▶ **Avoid writing circular definitions—that is, definitions that merely repeat the key words or the distinguishing characteristics of the item being defined in the category.** The definition "A required course is a course that is required" is useless: required of whom, by whom? However, in defining *electron microscope*, you can repeat *microscope* because *microscope* is not the difficult part of the term. The purpose of defining *electron microscope* is to clarify *electron* as it applies to a particular type of microscope.
- ▶ **Be sure the category contains a noun or a noun phrase rather than a phrase beginning with *when*, *what*, or *where*.**
 - INCORRECT A brazier is what is used to . . .
 - CORRECT A brazier is a metal pan used to . . .
 - INCORRECT Hypnoanalysis is when hypnosis is used to . . .
 - CORRECT Hypnoanalysis is a psychoanalytical technique in which . . .
- ▶ **Consider including a graphic.** A definition of an electron microscope would probably include a photograph, diagram, or drawing, for example.