

Definition Essay

A definition essay defines a word, term, or concept in depth by providing a personal commentary on what the specific subject means.

1. Most physical objects have a definition about which most people agree. 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.

2. 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.

Select a subject carefully.

1. Since such essays are personal in nature, select your subject based on your own need to clarify the term. For example, if you feel that the word *marriage* should be defined in a broader manner, that term would make a good subject for a definition essay. Perhaps as a parent, you want to define what the term *discipline* means from your point of view.

*Select a term or subject that you know well enough so that you can provide specific examples to illustrate your definition. For example, if you aren't familiar with the term *platonic love*, don't attempt to define it in an extended essay. Don't select a subject either too broad or too narrow to fit the parameters of your essay. (For example, the word *hat* may be too narrow for you to define in an extended essay. On the other hand, the term *love* may be too broad or general since pinning it down to a single definition is very difficult).

Once you have selected a subject, outline your paper carefully before ~~writing~~

1. Outlining will help you determine the specific points you want to cover ~~in the definition~~ and point out where you need examples.

2. Here are some suggestions for how to outline a definition paper:

- Attention getter

- You may want to include the traditional or dictionary definition here to provide a basis for your personal definition.

- You may want to open with a contradictory image to what would be your image to illustrate that definition.

- Thesis: State how you define the term. If you can write the definition using specific points, you will find the definition easier to follow when writing the paper.

II. Body

A. Background information:

1. Often unnecessary in this type of paper
2. However, you may need to provide some background about the term or your connection to the term.

B. Point one

1. The first part of your definition of the term.
2. Example to illustrate that point.
3. Analysis of how the example illustrates the point.

C. Point two

1. The second part of the definition of the term.
2. Example to illustrate that point.
3. Analysis of how the example illustrates the point.

D. Point three

1. The third part of the definition (if there is one)
2. Example to illustrate that point.
3. Analysis of how the example illustrates the point.

E. Point four, etc.

III. Conclusion

Review your definition's main points

1. Sometimes a reference back to the opening attention-getter is a good way of unifying the entire essay.
2. You may want to close with an explanation of how your definition has affected you.