

APSU Writing Center

Definition Essay

Definition Essay

- A definition essay explains a term, either by clarifying its meaning or specifying which meaning is intended when a word has multiple interpretations.
- This type of essay helps students practice supporting their assertions with textual evidence and develop organizational skills.
- Think of a definition essay like a tree: the roots are the basic meaning, the branches are the different strategies, and the leaves are the examples that bring it to life.

Choosing a Term

- Before writing, choose a term you understand and can explain in depth.
- Narrow your focus by choosing a definition that is interesting to you.
- Restate the definition in your own words.

Ways to Define a Term

- You can use several strategies in your essay. Strong essays often combine more than one.
- **Description:** Go in depth by giving descriptive details of the word.
 - **Example:** Defining a cat might include its size, fur texture, eye color, and behavior.
- **Comparison & Contrast:** Discuss how the word is similar or different from another definition.
 - **Example:** Defining a team player by comparing them to someone who only works alone.
- **Function:** Explain what the term does or how it works.
 - **Example:** A compass is a tool that helps travelers find direction.
- **Structure:** Describe how the term is organized or put together.
 - **Example:** A family can be described as parents, children, and extended relatives, each playing different roles.
- **Analysis:** Explain how the term stands out from similar terms.
 - **Example:** A Siberian husky is a dog known for its thick coat, cold-weather endurance, keen strength, and stamina.
- **Distinction:** Clarify the term's meaning by explaining what it is not.
 - **Example:** A kind person does not laugh at someone's misfortune.
- **Using Examples:** Strong definition essays include specific examples that support the definition.
 - Ask yourself which examples will best help readers understand the term.
 - Consider whether a short story or anecdote could illustrate it.
 - Think about which examples will connect most with your audience.

Possible Essay Topics

- Kindness
 - Sportsmanship
 - Respect
 - Fear
 - Sense of Humor
 - Optimism
 - Friendship
 - Knowledge
 - Charisma
 - Beauty
 - Jealousy
 - Success
- Whatever essay topic you choose, make sure you are interested in it and familiar with it. Your essay will be even stronger if you can connect it to your own experiences.

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Definition Essay Outline

Title:

Due Date:

Course:

Instructor:

Introduction: (Introduce the topic, explain why the word is important, and state your main definition in the thesis.)

Paragraph 1: (First strategy: Description, Comparison, Function, Structure, Analysis, or Distinction.)

Paragraph 2: (Second strategy: choose a different one. Include explanation and examples.)

Paragraph 3: (Third strategy: choose another one. Include explanation and examples. Repeat as needed.)

Conclusion: (Summarize your main points, restate the thesis in a new way, and explain why this definition matters or how it helps readers understand the concept more deeply.)



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References

Dallas Baptist University. (n.d.). *The Definition Essay*. University Writing Center.

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