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Definition Essay

What is a Definition Essay?

A definition essay is writing that explains what a term means. Some terms have definite, concrete meanings, such as *glass*, *book*, or *tree*. Terms such as *honesty*, *honor*, or *love* are abstract and depend more on a person's point of view.

Three Steps to Effective Definition:

1. Tell readers what term is being defined.
2. Present a clear and basic definition.
3. Use facts, examples, or anecdotes that readers will understand.

Choosing a Definition:

Choosing a definition is a key step in writing a definition essay. You need to understand the term before you can define it for others. Read the dictionary, but don't just copy the definition. Explain the term briefly in your own words. Also, it's important to limit your term before you start defining it. For example, you could write forever on the term "love." To limit it, you would write about either "romantic love," "platonic love," or "first love."

Thesis Statement of a Definition Essay:

The thesis statement usually identifies the term being defined and provides a brief, basic definition.

(term) (basic definition)
Ex: Assertiveness is standing up for your rights.

How To Write an Effective Definition:

1. **Create a definition.** There are several ways to define a term. Here are a few options.
 - **Define by function.** Explain what something does or how something works.
 - **Define by structure.** Tell how something is organized or put together.
 - **Define by analysis.** Compare the term to other members of its class and then illustrate the differences. These differences are special characteristics that make the term stand out. For example, compare a Siberian husky to other dogs, such as lap dogs, mutts, or sporting dogs.

(term) (precise definition)
Ex: A Siberian husky is a dog reputed for its ability to tolerate cold, its distinctive features, and its keen strength and stamina.

- **Define by what the term does not mean.** This distinction can sometimes clarify a definition and help a reader better understand it.
2. **Use understandable facts, examples, or anecdotes.** Select facts, examples, or anecdotes to fully explain your definition. Ask yourself, "Which examples will best help readers understand the term? What examples would most appeal to my readers? Will a brief story reveal the term's meaning?" Do not use any examples that will not support the definition.

Remember: A definition essay is writing that explains what a term means. When writing a definition essay, remember to tell readers what term is being defined, to present a clear and basic definition, and to use facts, examples, or anecdotes that readers will understand.