

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. Ideally, the chosen term should refer to something that can mean different things to different people.

When you write a definition essay, your main purpose is to explain to readers your understanding of a key term or concept, while your secondary purpose is to persuade them that your definition is a legitimate one. Keep in mind that a definition essay does not simply repeat a word's dictionary meaning. Instead, it conveys what a particular term means to you. For example, the term "courage" is often associated with a lack of fear, but many will argue that "courage" is more accurately described as acting in spite of fear.

Another example is if you were to write about the term patriotism, you might begin by presenting your definition of the word. You might say patriotism means turning out for Fourth of July parades, displaying the flag, or supporting the government. Or perhaps you think patriotism is about becoming politically active and questioning government policy.

Three Steps to Effective Definition

1. Tell readers what term is being defined.
2. Present clear and basic information.
3. Use facts, examples, or anecdotes that readers will understand. Whatever definition you choose, be sure to provide specific instances so that readers can fully understand your meaning of the term. For example, in writing an essay on patriotism, you might describe three people whom you see as truly patriotic. Writing about each person will help ensure that readers see and understand the term as you do.

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."

Considering Purpose and Audience

As with other essay forms, keep your audience in mind. If, for instance, you were proposing a new definition of patriotism, an audience of war veterans might require different examples than would an audience of college students.

Sample Outline

Student Maturity

Being a mature student does not mean being an old-timer; maturity is not measured by the number of years a person has lived. Experienced students, in fact, can have a great advantage over others if they fully utilize their potential. No doubt, the yardstick of maturity is marked by the qualities of self-denial, determination, and dependability.

Self-denial is an important quality in the mature student.

Determination is another characteristic of a mature student.

Although self-denial and determination are both vital, probably the most important measure of maturity is dependability.

In conclusion, ...

Sample Introductions:

Most people might think that a feminist is just a man hater with short spiky hair that goes through the streets protesting every insignificant instance of possible sexism or misconduct. However, a more accepted version of feminism is simply any person, man or woman, who believes that women have the right to be equal with men. To be a feminist means to _____, _____, and _____.

The word intelligence brings visions of Albert Einstein or other smart men or women of science. However, I would more readily argue that intelligence should be measured in different areas and ways. It is not only important to be the smartest kid in class. Therefore, I would say that schools and universities should not only be developing their students' minds intellectually, but they should be building our youth's common sense, street smarts, and social skills.

Topics

Cheapskate	Soul
Loser	Family
Good neighbor	Responsibility
Busybody	Insecurity
Whiner	Assertiveness
Optimist	Jealousy
Pessimist	Practicality
Hypocrite	Nostalgia
Procrastinator	Gentleness
Loner	Depression
Persistence	Obsession
Rebellion	Islam
Sense of humor	Fear
Escape	Arrogance
Laziness	Conscience
Danger	Class
Curiosity	Innocence
Common sense	Freedom
Violence	Idealism
Shyness	Spirituality

Example Essays:

Beauty <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1swHxIceYXDoQm9WcksKKpBbjGrjMxKVR9XCn5mNmVrU/edit>

Success

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Lbf20-4G1hirEx0ZY8rdxRIbhVVhDYn2WJCOKagN2Sg/edit>

Heros

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/16dr4ifJIV2xjKQFMNQsntS1W3LHYlh3rChQVgMUVJnc/edit>

Silliness

http://www.custom-essays.org/examples/Silliness_definition_essay_.html

Wisdom (clear one)

http://www.custom-essays.org/examples/Wisdom_definition_essay.html