**Assignment: The Definition Essay**

This type of paper requires an individual to write a personal yet academic definition of one specific word, idea, or concept. Choose a concept, idea, or word that will enable you to write an essay that will not just fulfill the basic requirements but will have depth. Choosing the “right” concept, idea, or word will make all the difference.

**Assignment:** Write a definition essay about a concept, idea, or word, using specific details, organization, rhetorical devices/strategies/appeals, and conventions. The purpose of this essay is to defend your interpretation/perspective/viewpoint of your chosen concept, idea, or word.

**What to consider before you start writing**: Incorporate or at least consider the following: analogy, connotation, denotation, enumeration, and negation. Don’t forget about your audience. Don’t assume that your reader knows everything, but don’t insult your reader’s intelligence. Choose a concept/idea/word that is open to debate or interpretation. Do your research! Find out the origins of your concept/idea/word, but don’t turn this paper into a history paper. This essay is about your definition of your chosen concept, idea, or word.

**Prewriting:** The following should be taken into account when you are planning your definition essay.

1. Analogy: compare your concept, idea, or word with a similar concept, idea, or word.
2. Connotation: implied meaning, commonly known culturally or emotionally
3. Denotation: Read the dictionary definition. Knowing the dictionary definition can help guide you and help you understand the acceptable and established definition.
4. Enumeration: a list of events, items, or parts of a story
5. Negation: what the concept, idea, or word is not; perhaps the concept/idea/word is misused or misunderstood often misused or misunderstood
6. While you will not be relying completely on the dictionary definition for your essay, familiarizing yourself with the official definition will allow you to compare your own understanding of the concept with the simplest, most academic explanation of it.
7. Provide traditional details about the concept, idea, or word. Explain any physical characteristics or traditional thoughts used to describe your concept, idea, or word.
8. Options to consider for your definition: you are writing a persuasive essay. A definition essay is somewhat subjective by nature since your definition requires you to analyze and define a concept, idea, or word from your own perspective. If the answer you come up with after analyzing a concept, idea, or word is the same answer anyone else would come up with, your essay will lack depth. Avoid being superficial. Go beyond generalities or make general statements.
9. Use examples, stories, and vivid images to illustrate the meaning of your concept, idea, or word. These methods will help clarify an abstract, intangible concept.
10. Look for the following: facts and numbers, such as statistics, and the opinions of experts.
11. You can use **only** **one personal** anecdote. Limit your use of the first-person pronoun. Avoid writing in second person.
12. You must do research and have **at least four different reliable sources**.

**Think about your audience.**

1. Consider your reader. What do they already know about your issue? What does your reader need to know to be able to understand the concept/idea/word as well as you do?
2. Think of how your readers might disagree with you. Then, choose reasons that would help them understand your point of view. Remember, everything is an argument.

**Definition Essay Structure:**

1. **Introduce the standard definition:** You need to clearly state what your word is along with its traditional or dictionary definition in your introductory paragraph. By opening with the dictionary definition of your concept/idea/word, you create context and a basic level of knowledge about the word. This will allow you to introduce and elaborate on your own definition. This is especially significant when the traditional definition of your concept/idea/word varies from your own definition in notable ways.

1. **Define the concept/idea/word in your own words in your thesis:** Your actual thesis statement should define the concept/idea/word in your own words. Keep the definition in your thesis brief and basic. You will elaborate more in the body of your paper. Avoid using passive voice and having too many simple sentences. **Do not repeat what others have written or said about your concept/idea/word.**

1. **Body paragraphs:** Divide your definition into parts. Think about the best way to explain your definition to someone if you were just talking. Once you’ve established your definition in your thesis, think about at least three different ways to prove your definition is strong. Some people are persuaded by facts, numbers, and/or statistics. Maybe they love a graph or a chart. Others need to have their heartstrings pulled; they need to have an emotional connection. Think of yourself as a lawyer defending your “client” before a jury. One strategy is not going to persuade or convince all of the members of the jury. You might not be able to change another person’s definition, but you want them to believe/think that your definition is plausible. Possible examples that will best illustrate your definition: a story (fictional or nonfictional), a painting, a photograph, a historical event, a person, or a group of people. Be specific. Paint a picture in your reader’s mind. **Only include a personal experience if this experience strengthens the defense of your thesis.**

1. **Conclude with a brief summary of the main points of your essay:** Rewrite/reword your thesis, topic sentences, and main points that you wish to “reinforce” in your reader’s mind. Avoid using the following words in your conclusion paragraph: “in conclusion, to conclude, to sum up, etc.” Avoid being redundant. **Suggestion**: Include how the concept/idea/word has affected you. If the concept/idea/word you are defining (defending) plays a part in your own life and experiences, your final remarks could explain the role the concept/idea/word has played in your own life. Relate your experience with the concept/idea/word to the definition you created for it in your thesis.

**Suggestions:** Keep the use of first person and second person limited. Avoid using the following words: it, seems, very, a lot, things, stuff. Don’t begin a sentence with the following: that, there, which, or any conjunctions. Cite your sources, even if you paraphrase someone else’s words.

**Requirements**:

* MLA format, at least five typed pages, double-spaced, one-inch margins, 12-size font, Times New Roman, plus a Works Cited page.
* You must use **at least four different, reliable sources** in your essay, and these sources must match the sources on your Works Cited page**.**
* All sources must be cited (in-text citations) at least once within your essay and included on your Works Cited page.

**Requirements of Works Cited page:**

1. Last page of your essay
2. Titled correctly
3. Citations are in alphabetical order based on the last name of the author. If no author, then use the title of the article.
4. Correct MLA format.
5. Make sure that the second and consecutive lines of each citation are indented.