

Definition

Definition clarifies the meaning of words, and identifies key information that distinguishes the word or concept from all others. A definition essay may require a combination of strategies to define a term. Use a dictionary to develop a simple definition. A simple definition identifies a term's class, characteristics, qualities, and lists synonyms with similar meaning. Sometimes, it is interesting to include the word's etymology.

Etymology, which is also found in the dictionary, provides information about the word's language of origin, its history and its roots, and may be useful in developing extended definition essays.

sol-i-tude (söl' ĭ-toōd' , -tyōōd') *n.* [ME< OFr.< Lat. *Solitude* < *solus*, alone.] 1. The quality or state of being alone or remote from others. 2. A lonely or secluded place.
* **syns:** SOLITUDE< ISOLATION *n. core meaning* : the quality or state of being alone <preferred *solitude* to crowded streets> (Webster's II 1051).

Extended Definition

Since language is constantly evolving, meanings change. These changes can create confusion about the word's meaning. Therefore, extended definitions clarify the distinctions of words through the different perspectives that are drawn from subjective information.

Subjective information draws on the writer's personal experience or base of knowledge to add a personal interpretation that enriches meaning. The writer's examples, explanations, and descriptive illustrations expand the essay, and more thoroughly define the term. For example, a four year old may define loneliness as the feeling he has when his friend plays with someone else. A ninety year old woman, on the other hand, living in a nursing home, may define loneliness through the quiet that sounds in the hallways at night, or through the crowded noisy dining hall of unfamiliar faces. A well developed definition essay might integrate both simple and extended definitions.

What a term "is not"

- One more strategy for developing a well written definition is to say what a term is not. Defining by negation establishes the parameters of meaning by ruling out characteristics that would not be included in a term's class. For instance, a business man who spends his days in a congested city would experience quiet as much needed solitude - not loneliness.

Circular definitions

- Circular definitions use the term itself in an attempt to define. These definitions are weak and should be avoided; they offer no explanation.

Term to be defined	
Topic Sentence	
Dictionary Definition Class Characteristics	
Synonyms	
Dictionary Etymology Language of origin Early definitions	
“What it is not”	
Personal Definition	