

## Definition Writing

Using Chapter 6 on definition writing in *Models for Writers* as a guide, create a **3 page** (minimum) essay discussion that responds to one of our unit readings from *50 Essays*. You have two choices here: either reinforce and deepen a definition that's already offered of a key word or concept in one of those essays, or create your own new alternative definition of a key word or concept from one of those essay readings. Use your notes from our class discussions of those readings to help you isolate which word or concept you'll be focusing on in your own essay. You should be quoting and page citing specific short passages as needed from your *50 Essays* reference essay in your own discussion since you'll be responding to what you read in that essay as you write your own.

This is how Chapter 6 of *Models for Writers* frames your essay task this time:

*"Some of the most pressing issues in American life today are further complicated by imprecise definitions of critical terms. Various medical cases, for example, have brought worldwide attention to the legal and medical definitions of the word death. Debates continue about the meanings of other controversial words. Write an essay in which you discuss not only its definition but also the problems associated with defining it."* (116)

So you'll be defining your word by focusing on specific aspects, characteristics, and misconceptions about it that you can then discuss in detail.

In your **thesis argument**, take a clear position on how you would define this word, and why. What do you think of when you see your chosen term? What kinds of associations do you make with this word? What examples, memories or experiences does it call to mind? What makes it difficult to define the word? What misconceptions are you aware of regarding this word? How do others define the word, and are those definitions right, or do they leave something out? Follow this outline as you begin drafting your essay:

- i. Choose your word definitions carefully: begin this process by doing some brainstorming or listing of possible ideas that you could explore in a discussion that seeks to more fully define what the word actually means to you
- ii. Decide how you plan to define your term – by **synonym**, **negation**, or **category**, or all three
- iii. Develop your definition with detailed explanation and specific examples that concretely illustrate your ideas
- iv. Use the other "rhetorical strategies" or writing approaches we've already reviewed this term – description, illustration, compare/contrast – to help you complete your discussion

It is absolutely key in this assignment that you lay out your definition(s) thoroughly – do not leave your readers wondering what you think of the word. Use well-organized examples in your body paragraphs to support your working definition, and put that working definition right up front so that your reader will know *exactly* what you wish to communicate with the examples and explanations you provide – the goal here is to provide your reader with a "mental hook" on which to hang the definitions and explanations in the rest of your essay. Your own full working definition of your word, stated clearly in the opening paragraph, will function as a thesis statement would in other kinds of essay writing. It will be the fundamental "idea statement" that you repeatedly return to and reinforce throughout your definition discussion.

To make this work easier, use the methods of defining a new term or concept we've studied from *Models for Writers*: synonyms (similar words or ideas), negatives (opposing words and ideas), and categories (groups of words or concepts that are related or connected to your own sense of the word). These methods are explained in Chapter 6 and we've discussed them at length in class. Return to your notes or the chapter explanations and models to review them before you use those same approaches in your own definition work.

You may choose to do a limited amount of outside research (beyond your use and citation of the *50 Essays* essay you're choosing to respond to) to help you with this essay, and you may also reference your own experiences if they help you define your chosen term more completely or illustrate it more fully. This is not a personal narrative essay like you wrote earlier in the term, however: though you should talk about your own experiences in order to illuminate certain parts of your definition if you wish, the main focus of your discussion should be to use *all* of the definition strategies we've learned and practiced this unit.

Be sure to provide lots of concrete examples that illustrate, clarify, and expand on your working definition. If you choose to include part of a dictionary definition, that's fine also – but use it only *briefly*, don't include it in your opening paragraph or in your working definition thesis statement, and do not rely on it to do the definition work for you. Use dictionary references to reinforce your own definition work, not replace it.

Finally, remember that if you choose to quote or paraphrase words or ideas from another source, you must cite that material by author and title in the body of your discussion as we have previously discussed in class. If you have questions about how to do this, please use the citation resources I've placed on our course page at **Gregtech.net** or ask me – I want you to feel confident in your ability to cite outside sources so that it's done correctly.

Lastly, **proofread** your work very, very thoroughly, and use academic language throughout the essay. This means making sure all of your **verbs** are in the **same tense**, it means **eliminating contractions** and **slang speech**, and it means ensuring that **every sentence** is **complete** and **correctly joined to or separated from** other sentences nearby. I want error free work this time from all of you.