

Definition Writing – Essay Assignment Description

Using Chapter 17 on definition writing in *Models for Writers* as your guide for this assignment, write an essay of **at least 3 full pages / 5-8 paragraphs** defining a specific word-concept: the *general* topic for this assignment is (_____). Your task this time is to further narrow that general topic down into a specific aspect, characteristic, or type that you can then define from multiple angles.

What do you think of when you hear the word (_____)? What kinds of associations do we make with this word? What kinds of examples, experiences, research, anecdotes does it call to mind? Write an essay defining a certain aspect of this word.

- i. Choose your particular concept of (_____) 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 and antonym, class and characteristics, or extended definition [or all three – see below]
- iii. Develop your definition with lots of well-reasoned explanation, deep description and specific examples
- iv. Use the other “rhetorical strategies” or writing approaches you have already practiced – description, illustration, compare/contrast – to help you fill out your discussion

It is key in this assignment that you lay out your definition(s) thoroughly – do not leave your readers wondering what you think of the word-concept. 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.

To make this work easier, plan on defining your particular sense of the word-concept using the 3 most common methods of defining a new term or concept: through **synonyms** (similar words or ideas) and **antonyms** (opposing words and ideas), **formal definitions** placing the word-concept into a larger **class** and describing its **characteristics**, and **extended definitions** that include those defining strategies in addition to some of the other primary rhetorical modes, things like description, illustration, and comparative analysis. These methods are all covered at length in Chapter 17. Remember also to refer to the sample definition essays in the chapter to use as models for your own definition work, along with the samples you’ll find on our course website.

Please Note: You may choose to do a limited amount of outside research to help you with this essay, but you *may not* write about yourself or your own experiences. I want you to define an aspect of (_____) that is external to you, and then show us examples that illustrate, clarify, and expand on that definition. If you choose to include part of a dictionary definition, that’s fine – but use it only *briefly*, and do not rely on it to do the definition work for you. Please also remember that if you quote or paraphrase words or ideas from another source, you must attribute that material to its original source by naming the author and the title of the source in the body of your discussion.

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**. Lastly, make sure to not use 1st person (I, me) or 2nd person (you, your) speech in this essay – keep your attention focused on the definition, on the particular sense of *security* you are defining, rather than yourself. I want well focused, error free work from all of you.