

DEFINITION REPORT ASSIGNMENT

Definitions	<p>Definitions Providing definitions— giving the precise meanings of terms— is an important strategy in presenting new concepts. Definitions help readers relate new material to ideas they already hold. They take readers from the familiar to the new.</p>
Definition Report Assignment	<p>Definition Report Assignment Identify a term or concept associated with your research report and write an extended definition. Use one of the following methods for extending your definition: analogy, comparison-contrast, or cause and effect. You may use a visual aid.</p>
Determining What to Define	<p>Determining What to Define It is important to determine <i>what</i> to define before determining <i>how</i> to define.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Familiar words for familiar things For the most part, you want to use familiar words of familiar things. Nothing is gained by using words just to impress or confuse. If a simpler word works, then use it. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> amelioration → improvement excoriate → denounce implement → carry out • Familiar words for unfamiliar things Do not confuse the everyday meaning of a term with its technical sense. For example, the word <i>apron</i> often brings to mind what is worn in the kitchen to protect clothes while cooking. <i>Apron</i> has different meanings in different situations as on a lathe, an apron is the vertical place in front of the carriage of a lathe. An apron is also used in aeronautics, navigation, furniture, textiles, carpentering, hydraulics, and plumbing, with different meanings in each field. • Unfamiliar words for familiar things At times, the reader may be familiar with a concept, but doesn't know what the technical term is. For example, the reader knows that plants can be grown outside soil in chemical solutions. But the term <i>hydroponics</i> is unfamiliar. • Unfamiliar words for unfamiliar things Frequently in technical communication, both the term and the

concept are unfamiliar to the reader, such as in most technical terms and jargon. It is necessary then to both define and explain the unfamiliar word and concept.

Creating Formal Definitions

Creating Formal Definitions

A *formal definition* is one sentence that contains three parts: the term that needs defining, the class to which the item belongs, and the differentiation of that item from all other members of its class.

- **Classify the Term**

To define a term, you must place it in a class, the large group to which the term belongs. The narrower the class, the more meaning conveyed, and the less that needs to be said in the differentiation. For the definition to be effective, readers must be able to relate it to something they know.

Example: A pen can be classified as a “thing” or as a “writing instrument.”

- **Differentiate the Term**

To *differentiate* the term, explain those characteristics that belong only to it and not to the other members of the class.

Example: Evaporation is the change of a substance from a liquid to a vapor, and not Evaporation is the process of water disappearing from a certain area.

Creating Informal Definitions

Creating Informal Definitions

For specialized or technical terms that your readers will not know, you can provide an *informal* definition.

- **Operational Definitions**

An operational definition gives the meaning of an abstract word for one particular time and place.

Example: If increasing sales by 10% is defined as successful, and the company increased sales by 11%, then they were successful.

- **Synonyms**

Use synonyms only when they are better known than the term being defined. When using synonyms, put the common word in parenthesis or set it off with dashes.

Example: There is only one *cardiac muscle*– the heart.

Developing
Extended
Definitions

Developing Extended Definitions

Extended definitions are expanded explanations of the term being defined. After reading a formal definition, a reader often needs more explanation to understand the term completely.

- **Explain the Derivation**

To explain the *derivation* of a term is to explain its origin.

Example: *Technology* derives from the Greek word *techne*, meaning “an art or skill,” and *logia*, meaning “a science or study.” Thus the literal meaning of *technology* is the study of an art or skill.

- **Explicate Terms**

To explicate means to define difficult words contained in the definition

Example: *Malnutrition* means “poor” nutrition.

- **Use an Example**

An example gives readers something concrete to help them understand a term.

Example: Chemical additives that affect the characteristics of foods are considered *food additives*... Without intentional food additives, bread would mold or dry out within a few days, salt would absorb moisture and clump in the shaker and marshmallows would quickly harden.

- **Use an Analogy**

An *analogy* points out a similarity between otherwise dissimilar things.

Example: Why does a moving railroad train stay on the tracks? They stay on the tracks because they are slightly tapered. If you roll a tapered cup across a surface, it makes a curved path. Like a tapered cup, the tapered rims of a railroad train cause the wheels to curve towards each other constantly keeping it on track. This is why passengers feel the train swaying as these corrective actions occur.

Developing
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- **Compare and Contrast**

A *comparison-contrast* definition shows both the similarities of and the differences between similar objects or processes

Example: Loosely speaking, we can use the words *speed* and *velocity* interchangeably. Strictly speaking, however, there is a distinction between the two. A race-car driver is concerned primarily with its *speed*—how fast he is moving; an airplane pilot is concerned with her *velocity*— how fast and in what direction she is moving. When we describe speed and the direction of motion, we are specifying *velocity*.

- **Explain Cause and Effect**

Some concepts are so elusive that they must be defined in terms of their causes and effects.

Example: The term *acceleration* applies to decreases as well as to increases in velocity. We say the brakes of a car, for example, produce large retarding accelerations; that is, there is a large decrease per second in the velocity of the car. We often call this *deceleration*. We experience deceleration when we tend to lurch toward the front of the car.

- **Analyze the Term**

To *analyze* is to divide a term into parts. Analysis helps readers understand by allowing them to grasp the definition bit by bit.

Example: *Elemental times*, a term used to analyze the work of a machine operator, is easier to understand when its main parts are discussed individually— overall time, average time, normal time, and standard time.

Planning
Definition

Planning Definition

The amount of detail that you provide depends on the reader's needs. To plan your definition, consider your audience's level of knowledge and the amount of detail they will need in this situation.

Checklist

Checklist

- Have you named the audience for the definition
- What do they know about the concepts on which this definition is based?
- What is your goal for the reader?
- Do you have a strong, developed introduction?
- Have you identified an effective method of extending the definition?
- Have you defined and clarified all unfamiliar terms or concepts?
- Is the new information based on material you can reasonable expect that the ready already knows?
- Is your writing clear?

Resource

Resource

- Riordan, Chapter 9, “Defining”