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12. Paragraphs of Definition

Paragraphs of Definition

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Introduction

To define the term ‘definition’ is quite hard because it requires the definitions of definition. The word ‘definition’ comes from the verb to ‘define’, which means “to state the meaning of a word or to describe the basic qualities of something”. According to Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary, definition simply means “an explanation of the meaning of a word or phrase, especially in a dictionary”. Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines it as “a statement expressing the essential nature of something” or “the meaning of a word or word group or a sign or symbol” (http://www.merriam-webster.com), while Word Reference defines it as “an exact description of the nature, scope, or meaning of something” (http://www.wordreference.com). Based on the above definitions, definition can be defined as an explanation of the meaning of a word or term. A good definition avoids confusion or misunderstanding, because it conveys the clear and precise meaning of a term, and thus helps you to understand what other people exactly mean.

A definition can be formal or informal. The definitions provided in dictionaries are examples of formal definition, which generally include three elements: (1) a term, i.e. the word being defined; (2) class, which refers to the (big) group to which the term belongs; and (3) differentiating features, or the word or phrase that makes it different with the others from the same class. For example, in “Scientific writing is a form of writing that is based on actual and relevant studies” the term is “scientific writing”, the class is “writing”, and the differentiating features is “that is based on actual and relevant studies”. To take another example, in “Science is the field of study which attempts to describe and understand the nature of the universe in whole or part” the term is “science”, the class is “field of study”, and the differentiating features is “which attempts to describe and understand the nature of the universe in whole or part”.

https://myreadwritebooster.wordpress.com/writing-3/2-paragraph-writing/12-paragraphs-of-definition/
Informal definitions express the meaning of a term partially or incompletely. They are frequently based on the writers’ experience so that they are not universal. The three common informal definitions are operational definitions, synonyms, and connotations. Operational Definitions give the meaning of an abstract word for one particular time and place. This is also called as an agreed-upon criterion. For instances, “An excellent score is when you get not less than 90 in the test.” This formulation is valid in the institution, but in other educational institutions, an excellent score might need just 86 or 95. In a certain culture, “Love is the feeling of someone when he or she likes and does nice things for you and with you”, whereas in other culture “Love means readiness to sacrifice everything for those being loved.”

Informal definitions could also be formed by using synonyms, or words that mean the same as another word. There are three ways to put the synonyms into a sentence in order to make a definition. First, by putting it into parenthesis, such as, “An individual’s intelligence (or mental capacity) is measured by using intelligent quotient (IQ) test”, “intelligence” is defined by providing its synonym, i.e., “mental capacity” in of. The synonyms could also be placed in a sentence by using dashes or an appositive, such as in “People’s main labors in life—learning, earning, and yearning—are also their major reasons for living” and “The altitude, or height above sea level, of Lhasa, the capital of Tibet, is over 12,000 feet.”

Last but not least, informal definitions could also be formed through denotation and connotation. Denotation is the literal or exact dictionary meaning of the word. Connotation, on the other hand, involves all the associations related to the word. By combining both, for instance, one may write a definition like this “That politician is a snake (He a cunning, treacherous, and insidious politician).

Writing a Definition Paragraph

The definitions discussed so far are formed in single sentences. They are just brief definitions. However, definitions can be extended into a paragraph called “definition paragraph”. A definition paragraph is essentially a definition sentence which has been expanded into a paragraph by adding special meanings, description, narration and/or other kinds of paragraph development in order to clarify the term being defined. Such paragraph usually begins with a definition sentence which is used as the topic sentence. Each category in the definition is expanded into major supporting sentences, and major supporting sentences could be supported by minor supporting sentences.

To write a definition paragraph, the following tips are recommended.

1. Write one topic sentence that mentions the element that you will define, and be sure to provide three key defining words or phrases.
2. In about one sentence, explain your first defining word/phrase by telling why this word/phrase defines your subject.
3. Provide one to two sentences that give a specific example of your first defining word/phrase.
4. Starting with a transitional phrase, explain your second defining word in about one sentence just like you did for your first defining word/phrase.
5. Write one to two sentences that give an illustrative example of your second defining word/phrase.
6. Explain your third defining key word/phrase the same way that you explained your first and second defining key word/phrase.
7. End your paragraph with one closing sentence.

(From: http://factoidz.com/how-to-write-one-fully-developed-and-wellorganized-definition-paragraph-esl-basic-skills/ (http://factoidz.com/how-to-write-one-fully-developed-and-wellorganized-definition-paragraph-esl-basic-skills/))
Common Terms used for Definition

- (The term) ... is defined as ...
- (The term) ... is understood to be ...
- (The term) ... signifies ...
- (The term) ... means that ...
- (The term) ... denotes ...
- (The term) ... suggests ...
- (The term) ... connotes ...
- (The term) ... is ...

Look how these tips are applied in the following definition paragraph samples

**Definition Paragraph Developed by Special Meanings**

In every society, social norms define a variety of relationships among people, and some of these relationships are socially recognized as family or kinship ties. A *family* is a socially defined set of relationships between at least two people who are related by birth, marriage, or adoption. We can think of a family as including several possible relationships, the most common being between husband and wife, between parents and children, and between people who are related to each other by birth (siblings, for example) or by marriage (a woman and her mother-in-law, perhaps). Family relationships are often defined by custom, such as the relationship between an infant and godparents, or by law, such as the adoption of a child.

(From: Scarry & Scarry, 2011: 476)

**Definition Paragraph Developed by Examples**

For me, the word love means trust, friendship, and unselfishness. First of all, love means trust because when you trust someone, you can talk to him/her about anything. For example, I trust my girlfriend 100%. It is because I trust her that I know I can tell her anything, and that is why I love her. Furthermore, I believe that love means friendship because the people who you spend time with are your friends, and if you do not love them, then why would you hang out with them? To illustrate, I love my two best friends because they are like brothers to me. We are always laughing and protecting each other. Finally, love means unselfishness because when you love someone and they love you back, there should always be sharing. For instance, my next-door neighbor's wife never shares anything with her husband, such as food, drinks, possessions, etc. I sure do not see a whole lot of love there. For me, love means the above three things.

(From: http://factoidz.com/how-to-write-one-fully-developed-and-wellorganized-definition-paragraph-esl-basic-skills/) (http://factoidz.com/how-to-write-one-fully-developed-and-wellorganized-definition-paragraph-esl-basic-skills/)

**Definition Paragraph Developed by Descriptions**
Anger is having a feeling of hatred toward someone or something. It is one of our basic emotions and can be most dangerous if it is not carefully controlled. A person can become angry when he cannot fulfill some basic need or desire that is important to him. For example, a child may become angry when he cannot play outside with his friends. An adult may become angry when he does not receive a raise in pay that he expected. Mentally, anger can interfere with our thoughts, making it difficult to think clearly. Physically, it may cause violent reactions in the muscles and in the nervous system. This causes an angry person to flush and tremble and to show other signs of disturbance. A person can be dangerous if he is in an angry mood because he can develop feelings of hostility and hatred toward another person, which can then often turn violent.

(From: http://www.sinclair.edu/centers/tlc/pub/handouts_worksheets/ (http://www.sinclair.edu/centers/tlc/pub/handouts_worksheets/))

9 thoughts on “12. Paragraphs of Definition”

**quotes on success**  |  **March 2, 2014 at 9:57 am**
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I rarely comment, but i did a few searching and wound up here 12. Paragraphs of Definition | Read & Write BALL at UKI. And I do have a couple of questions for you if it’s allright. Could it be only me or does it seem like a few of these remarks come across like they are left by brain dead visitors? 😞 And, if you are writing at additional online social sites, I'd like to follow anything fresh you have to post. Would you list of all of all your social sites like your linkedin profile, Facebook page or twitter feed?

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**Muhammad Adams**  |  **February 20, 2013 at 6:47 pm**
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i like it

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**Gea**  |  **January 1, 2012 at 10:19 pm**
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What is Marriage?

Marriage is defined as a legally accepted relationship between a woman and a man in which they live as husband and wife. It is an interpersonal relationship with governmental, social, or religious recognition, usually basing on a solemn contract. The most common form of marriage is a legally recognized union of a man and a woman by ceremony or common law as husband and wife. A marriage entails different meanings. True marriage in people’s mind is based on a loving relationship between a man and a woman in which they publicly promise to live together for better or worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health until death do them part. Marriage is not just resulted from love between two individuals. A successful marriage is like a good recipe whose main ingredients, besides love, are commitment, understanding, concern and loyalty. If you can include these aspects in your married life, you can find happiness in your marriage.
Gea | January 1, 2012 at 10:17 pm

What is Dependent Personality?

Dependent Personality Disorder is a condition characterized by an over-reliance on others that leads to submissive and clinging behavior and fears of separation. The dependent and submissive behaviors arise from feeling unable to cope without the help of others. This disorder is only diagnosed when behaviors become persistent and very disabling or distressing. This diagnosis should be used with great caution, if at all, in children and adolescents, for whom dependent behavior may be developmentally appropriate. A dependent person has some characteristics such as: is unable to make everyday decisions without an excessive amount of advice and reassurance from others, needs others to assume responsibility for most major areas of his/her life, has difficulty expressing disagreement with others because of fear of loss of support or approval, and has difficulty initiating projects or doing things himself / herself because of a lack of self-confidence in judgment or abilities, rather than a lack of motivation or energy.

juellarumiris | December 22, 2011 at 12:21 pm

Drama Queen

When I was in high school, I was introduced by this terminology, drama queen. It actually was referred to one of my classmates. At first, I was confused because she didn’t join drama class at school. And I knew she didn’t join any drama clubs outside school. But then I knew that her “over acting” attitude was my schoolmates was talking about. I was searching in dictionary, there’s specific definition about it. But then I concluded that, drama queen is a female who always gets attention from public by taking any actions to get mercy or praises. This lady really needs to look up to others that she is more than any other girls. In that way, she tried to attract people with what she has. The most effective was is through actions and words. It’s exactly like playing drama. She thinks carefully what she needs to say and do to attract people. She pays more attention to her looks and dress up. Even she could practice in front of mirror to shape her acting and words. During her “play”, she tends to exaggerate event so people feel mercy, or even admired her. From her performance, she expects to gain followers who can’t wait to know and listen what she has day by day. My classmate, whom I mentioned above, did really need attention from us that she talked imaginatively what my other friend did to her and at the end she screamed and asked for fight. The victim of course didn’t want tom but she was acting that she was the real victim. So, they fought. Well, life is already drama. We don’t need to add more invisible drama in our head to live happily and contently.

juellarumiris | December 22, 2011 at 12:20 pm

Marriage

I found two meanings of marriage. One is the legal relationship between a husband and wife. The other one is the ceremony in which two people become husband and wife. I think those two meanings are the ideal definition of marriage. People around the world live with regulations and cultures. If there were no regulations and cultures, people would live wildly and disorderly. So, for a man and a woman who agreed to live together as a husband and wife, they suppose to tie the knot under law. For the future, they are part of the law system of family. They have equal rights for children and welfare. Uniquely, in Indonesia, people mostly conduct marriage in two ways, legal and culture ceremony. Culture and religion are still strong components in Indonesian family household.
Both are bound each other and become one system in each ethnicity. It is not surprise that people legal their courtship much merrier in culture ceremony. In that way, marriage suppose to sacred and once in a life time.

vany | December 2, 2011 at 10:04 am
Dear Mr. Parlin
Below are my Paragraphs of Definition assignment:

Group A: Definition of a Controversial Term-Marriage
Marriage is a social bond or personal bond between the legal agreements that establish kinship relationships and that is an institution in the local culture which formalizes a personal relationship, usually intimate and sexual. There are many reasons for people to marry, such as love, matchmaking, social and economic demands, etc. Two people who love each other, when it felt the match would end his relationship with marriage. In certain tribes, arranged marriage is a reason that cannot be denied to marry. Likewise, the understanding in society, that marriage is a necessity, and to help the family economy. Whatever the reason marriage is a sacred and holy bond, so it should not end with divorce.

Group B: Personal definition of a Type of Person-A Good Teacher
A good teacher is a teacher who can provide inspiration for her students. This inspiration is shown by example and advice to build on young students so that they learn without fear of being wrong and unable to say. Teachers should be able to invite students who feel unable to learn anything to be able to. In this era, it needed professionalism in education. Not just teaching or knowledge transfer, as was done by our teachers in ancient times. But the technique of teaching and education should be developed in accordance with the development and advancement of the technology world today. And use of multimedia in education became one of the tricks to facilitate and support material that will be taught.

Regards,
Vany

Parlin Pardede | November 28, 2011 at 6:16 pm
Dear all attendees of Writing 2,
Write a paragraph on each of the following groups of topic. Feel free to choose the topic you like most in each group. Write each paragraph in 80-120 words.

Group A: Definition of a Controversial Term
1. Pornography
2. Freedom
3. Patriotism
4. Marriage
5. Masculinity

Group B: Personal Definition of a Type of Person
1. The Drama Queen
2. The Dependent Person
3. The Egotist
4. A Good Teacher
5. A Hero

Good luck!

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