

# Definition Essay

A definition essay defines a word, term, or concept in depth by providing a personal commentary on what the specific subject means.

Most physical objects have a definition about which most people agree. Most people will agree on what trees, windows, computers, and pencils are in general. These objects all have specific physical properties that most people can agree on through the use of their physical senses.

However, abstract terms, such as *love*, *pain*, or *patriotism*, have different meanings for different individuals since such terms play on people's feelings more than their physical senses. Your assignment will be to choose an abstract term and define it following the format of an effective definition essay.

The definition essay provides a personal, extended definition of such terms by linking or comparing the term to a previous definition and by illustrating how that term should be applied.

## I. Introduction:

### A. Attention getter

1. You may want to include the traditional or dictionary definition here to provide a basis for your personal definition.
2. You may want to open with a contradictory image to what would be your image to illustrate that definition.

### B. Thesis:

1. State how you define the term. If you can write the definition using specific points, you will find the definition easier to follow when writing the paper. How you define the term will then be illustrated in the body with supportive details, examples, and/or facts/figures.

Example: Happiness is **having fun with friends, making memories with family, and finding some time in between for the enjoyment of personal hobbies.**

## II. Body Paragraphs (3)

A. Point one (*having fun with friends: don't just list examples of what you do, elaborate on why it makes you happy*)

1. The first part of your definition of the term (topic sentence).
2. Examples to illustrate that point.
3. Analysis of how the examples illustrates the point.

*B. Point two (making memories with family: don't just list memories, explain how the memories make you happy)*

1. The second part of the definition of the term (topic sentence).
2. Examples to illustrate that point.
3. Analysis of how the examples illustrates the point.

*C. Point three (finding some time in between for personal hobby enjoyment: don't just list examples, elaborate on why they make you happy)*

1. The third part of the definition (topic sentence).
2. Examples to illustrate that point.
3. Analysis of how the examples illustrates the point.

### **III. Conclusion**

A. Review your definition's main points

B. Closing attention getter

1. Sometimes a reference back to the opening attention-getter is a good way of unifying the entire essay.
2. You may want to close with an explanation of how your definition has affected or is significant to you

*Here is the outline for the sample definition paper on patriotism:*

I. Introduction

- A. Attention getter: Traditional definition of patriotism (as perceived in an image)
- B. Thesis: Patriotism is speaking out when a person feels the country is right or wrong, voting, campaigning, and respecting others.

II. Body

A. Speaking out when country is wrong

- 1. example
- 2. example

B. Speaking out when country is right

- 1. example
- 2. example

C. Voting

- 1. Making a choice based on one's needs
- 2. Being involved in the voting process

D. Campaigning

- 1. Finding a candidate who represents country's needs
- 2. example candidate

E. Respecting others

- 1. Respecting other races
- 2. Respecting others' points of view

### III. Conclusion

- A. Review of patriot as an involved decision maker, voter, and respectful citizen.
- B. Closing attention getter: return to introduction's image of patriot