

Definition



Definition Essay Pattern

In these cases it best to pick large topics and *not* limited subjects.

The results are to establish a form of analysis to show

- **the components of a subject —or—**
- **the history behind the formation of a subject.**

For example:

An author would define how the printing press industry became a driving force behind the Renaissance arts movement, rather than specifically writing on the a specific product of the time period, such as the Guttenberg Bible itself.

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As with the other patterns, definitions can be used as a portion of a larger piece of research, to clarify the terms used in your paper, *or* the entire essay can define one major subject.

Keep in mind, although in simplest terms you are taking out your dictionaries and seeing the development of a word or phrase, do *not* rely on the cliché act of quoting the definition out of the Random House Dictionary.

Think beyond the typical answer here.

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There are seven techniques for this pattern:

1. Analysis: Divide the subject into parts and define each part separately.

(Explain the formation and/or structure behind the formation of hurricanes.)

2. Comparison/analogies: Taking an unfamiliar subject and clarifying it with comparisons and contrasts to a similar subject.

(Explain Australian-rules football by comparing it with Latin American football.)

3. Details/enumeration: Describe physical characteristics, elements, traditional thoughts, and other attributes that make up the subject?

(Explain the components of an essay: introduction, thesis, body, conclusion.)

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4. Negation: Defining a subject by what it is *not*.

(Explain American baseball by contrasting it with British cricket.)

5. Origins and Development: Where did the subject come from? What is the background information? What is the history of the subject?

(Explain the origin & history of the Japanese poetry form called haiku?)

6. Results, Effects, and Uses: Discuss the primary use of the subject.

(Explain the results of using steroids for teen-age athletes?)

7. Another common technique is called **synonyms**: defining your word with words of similar meanings

(Explain similar wordings of snow: sleet, icy rain, snowflakes, blizzard, flurries.)

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Dictionaries give what are called **formal definitions**.

Essays using definition pattern are **extended definitions**; they extend meanings of selected words; they can go they go more in-depth than the academic dictionary meanings, or even deal with an author's personal reactions to a specific word itself. These include additional interpretations to the standard meaning behind a word or phrase.

Current examples of such essays will seek clarification of terms such as

“right to life,” “same sex marriage,” “civil rights,” and “affirmative action.”

Such essays utilize personal narratives and discuss personal definitions and experiences for a supplied subject.

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Organization of the essay can follow numerous methods:

exemplification:

listing of various examples: different views of how feminism works in the 21st century

description:

explaining the nature of something by describing it in detail

For example, an advocate of feminism would show a new definition of the word in modern times by describing in detail the advantages of being labelled feminist—going beyond expected stereotypical reactions.

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process:

an extended definition can follow a process formula as well.

For example the term *metamorphosis* describes a natural process showing the transformation of frog eggs to tadpole to an adult frog.

By tracing the entire process at various points of change, you can define each stage of development for your readers so they gain a better understanding of the environmental process.

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Slang terms offer strong essays as well.

The logic here, slang or “clique” languages often describe the thought process of a particular generation: the postwar generation, the beat generation, the lost generation, generation x— all of these various groups created their own unique style and coded phrases to differentiate themselves from their parents and the previous art culture.

Writers take terms and spin the definitions into a manner of defining themselves and/or their own generation.

Examples:

• my bad • cat’s pajamas • google • i-pod • awesome • gag me with a spoon