

Definition

1. When and why do we need definition?
2. As a writer, you may not always know the words you use are “clear” or “specific” enough. What do you think is the best way to find out whether the “term” is appropriately defined?
Too narrow? Or too broad?
3. What is a *formal definition*? Discuss the following examples and determine whether they are good definitions.

Aristotelian equation: *Definition of term = genus + differentia.*

<u>TERM</u>	<u>CLASS</u>	<u>DIFFERENTIATION</u>
Person	is a human being	considered as having a character of his or her own; or as being different from all others.
Character	is the combination	of qualities which make a particular person, thing, place, etc. different from others.
Quality	is something typical	of a person or thing.

—From *Longman's Dictionary Contemporary English*

4. When do writers define the term by naming **examples** of it?

Crucible is a pot of very refractory material used for melting and calcining a substance that requires a high degree of heat.

—From *Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary*

5. Are the following definitions (by the use of *synonym*) appropriate?

proud:
Arrogant:

Freedom:
Liberty:

6. The process to write to define a term:

- (1) **Triggering**: Whenever you or your audience might stop and ask “Just a minute—what exactly do I/we/you mean by this word?”
- (2) **Gathering**: To make your readers see what a key word means in practice, you will have to become a word watcher.
Who uses the words? In what situation? For what purpose? Are there several main uses? How are they related? Is there a common denominator—a common thread? What do you think is the prevailing or most useful meaning of the terms? What are you possible abuses or dishonest uses?
Applying the **discovery frame**:
 - (a) What popular associations (and misunderstandings) cluster around the term?
 - (b) What is the history of the movement/event related to the term—what famous names and events are associated with it?
 - (c) How do the media reflect changing definitions of the term?
 - (d) How and where, etc., do the issues of the term play a role or have played a role related to the interest of the paper/study?
 - (e) What related terms cluster around the term?
 - (f) What is the core meaning of the term?
- (3) **Shaping**: Focus on a common misunderstanding of the term and then correcting them and lead the reader to what you consider its true meaning. You then give several examples of situation where your definition fits especially well.

Focus on providing a historical perspective to its modern role.

7. Is the Aristotelian equation suitable for the definition of abstract terms like *Democracy*?

Democracy is . . .

8. What are the three most common ways to formally define **a class word**, **a specific composite word**, and **a nonconcrete word**?

To define a class word, state the *genus* (larger class to which the word belongs) + the *differentia* (characteristics that distinguish this word from others in the same class) + an *example* (the term that refers to a specific object in the subclass, a description of a specific object in the subclass, a picture of the specific object, or the specific object itself).

To define a *specific* composite word (e.g., Taiwan), give the *genus*+ *differentia*+ an *analysis* (description of parts or aspects).

To define a nonconcrete word, give the *genus* + *differentia* + a *specific situation* (a situation judged to express the idea in terms of specific persons, places, or objects).

9. What do you think the term *extended definition* may refer to? Do you suggest using *extended definition* in the following categories?

General words: freedom . . .

Newly coined terms: black power . . .

Words that imply an opinion: free society . . .

Language peculiar to a particular trade, profession, or group: binary fission . . .

Metaphorical phrases: bamboo curtain . . .

Can you provide more examples for each category? If you have to define words in these categories, what do you think you should do?

10. When will you suggest using *definition by negation*?

11. Analyze the following example and try to locate the various types of definition in this passage:

There is nothing more frightening to the amateur in the theater—at least to me—than to forget my lines. After weeks of rehearsal, with my lines seemingly embedded forever in my subconscious, I cannot conceive of forgetting them. However, all actors occasionally forget a line. Then what they do is to think up another one, called an *ad-lib*. An ad-lib is a made-up response to a cue when the actor has forgotten the playwright's words. It is not part of the script. Ad-libbing requires instant extemporizing-or improvising. The word comes from the Latin *ad libitum*, which means "as one pleases." An actor usually does not "please" to forget a line, but if one is clever the made-up lines will please the other members of the cast who may be waiting for their cues.

When I realize I have forgotten a line, my mind races frantically over the lines I *do* know. If I can't remember, I think of a replacement which fits the context of the scene. All of this activity is carried out in the space of about five seconds, although it may seem ten or twenty times longer to the actor. In the meantime, most of the audience may be totally oblivious to what is going on, especially if the actors are cool about the situation.

For the amateur, the situation is terrifying. I break out in a cold sweat, the silence is interminable, and the stage lights blinding. I feel dizzy. The other actors are in a panic, also. They try to concentrate on the forgotten line in the hope that they can transmit it by mental telepathy. When the actor finally ad-libs, everyone heaves a sigh of relief and the play continues smoothly until another actor drops a line.

The ad-lib requires a certain amount of creativity. Other actors may interject an ad-lib to cover for the one who has forgotten the line. It may also be used when someone has forgotten to enter. The actor who is on stage alone may say something mundane such as, "I wonder where John is?" or "John must be late," or "Perhaps John didn't receive my invitation."

The ad-lib is an important part of performance. Actors must be trained to make up lines in order to fill those gaps that inevitably will occur when a group of amateurs get on stage to play someone else's speeches.