

Paper One: Definition Essay **Liz Homan, English 125**

Description:

For this assignment, you will write an essay (re)defining a word or phrase of interest to you. The goal of your paper is to move beyond a standard dictionary definition to a more complex understanding of your subject. Basically, this is actually a process of *redefinition*, which requires you to reconsider the word based on the perspective and experiences you bring to your analysis. In order to do this successfully, you should be sure to consider your personal experiences, values, and beliefs. It is this combination of the personal and the analytical that will give the essay significance, since you will bring your experiences (and, if you are able, the experiences of others) to bear on your redefinition of your word or phrase. However, it's not all about the personal – keep in mind that this essay is also about drawing conclusions and making connections. Thus, it's not “all about you;” you will also need to show the reader how this subject matters in a broader context.

Getting Started:

Coming up with your topic might be difficult. There's no way around it – you might need to think for a while to choose a word or phrase to successfully analyze. But that is half the battle of writing. Here are some questions to ask yourself as you begin brainstorming, investigating, and writing:

1. What do people normally think of when they hear the term? That is, what are the connotations and denotations of the word? (use what you found out from friends and from your interviews)
2. Why is it important that the topic or word be (re)defined correctly?
3. Why might reasonable people argue about the definition of the word, or perhaps the way in which it is used?
4. What specific behaviors, attitudes, values, policies, or qualities does the term involve?
5. How does redefining the word give readers a *new way of seeing*?

Requirements:

All-told, your paper should meet the following requirements:

1. 4-5 pages, double-spaced, Times New Roman 12-pt font, 1-inch margins (according to MLA guidelines)
2. Present an argument of some kind that is risky, complex, and arguable for your reader.
3. Focus on a single word or short phrase
4. Incorporate references to outside sources (it is not a requirement that you do outside research, but if you ask your friend Jim about the connotation/denotation of a word, be sure to note that you asked your friend Jim. Similarly, if you take a definition out of a dictionary, reference the dictionary).
5. Turn in your final draft along with *all previous drafts and peer reviews!*

Evaluation Guidelines:

Your paper will be assessed based on how well you present your argument to your reader and how well you support it. With essays like this, as you saw in the student essay we all read as an example, *risk counts*. The paper should build on itself and be organized in such a way that your connections are clear and easy-to-follow. Your sense of voice and personal style will also be assessed – be sure *you* are “in” this paper in some way, and feel free to experiment with word choices and sentence structures as you write.