

Writing Challenge 9.0: Definition

engl 281 / sec. D / autumn quarter 2009-10 / chang

One of the basic academic, rhetorical, and persuasive arguments you can make is that of definition. Most people think of definitions as facts or truths or pithy statements out of a reference book. However, dictionary definitions are rarely helpful or useful when it comes to complex claims and controversial issues. Definitions are arguments. They persuade an audience to believe *something*, to agree upon *something*. Definitional arguments are usually used to set a common vocabulary, to clarify and elaborate a word, to identify the parameters of a term, to mark out what a word or term is and is not. For example, in the current debate about a national health care system, many argue such a system is *socialist* but many disagree what that term actually means, describes, and evokes. Your writing challenge for this week is to select a term to define and develop an extended, academic definition for a general audience unfamiliar with your term. Select a term that requires a definition, perhaps choosing one that is currently under debate or contention or one that is unknown to a general audience. Select a term that is specific, focused, and part of a larger conversation. Having a clear exigence and a clear argument is central to successful definitions: What are you defining? Why are you defining it? And for whom are you defining it? Your paper should demonstrate purpose, specificity, claim, and different tactics of definition. And you must have your term approved by your instructor before you can write this paper.

Guidelines and Due Dates

Format: 2-3 pages, typed, no title page, double-spaced, proper heading

Due: Tuesday, December 1, at the start of class

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