

A spiral-bound notebook with a textured, light brown cover. The spiral binding is on the left side. The text is centered on the cover.

Define and Explain

And the definition is...

Define and explain what?

- 📄 You probably find yourself looking up good ol' Webster for definitions from time to time or perhaps you've had to explain a concept to a friend
- 📄 The fact is- you must be able to articulate definitions in order to create meaning for your audience
- 📄 After all- you probably learn more from a teacher who explains the meaning of why your learning something rather than a teacher who tells you to learn something because they said so

What can I define that's important?

Concrete Subjects:

A concrete subject is any tangible object or actual process: a machine, a physical activity, your homework, your family, etc

Abstract Subjects:

An abstract subject is more difficult to explain because it does not have a physical existence. Meaning...you cannot point to it, pick it up or take it apart to show how it works. Examples: love, courage, existentialism etc

How can I define something without Webster?

📄 Define by example

Abstract ideas, concepts and subjects are difficult to explain if your audience does not understand your terms in the same way you do. For instance, your audience's perception of love might be based on platonic adoration whereas your perception of love might be based on romance. Therefore, you must use examples so they get a visual idea of your definition.

📄 “Love sits up at night and holds your hair while you get sick;”

📄 This example visually uses an example of an act of love with the use of personification.

📄 Define by elimination

Much like defining abstract subjects by examples, defining by elimination welcomes creativity and vivid language full of imagery. Defining by elimination is when you define a subject by what it is not, by what it is opposite of and by showing a contrast

📄 “A man is not a person who can put on lipstick and ask for directions while driving at the same time.”

📄 This example explains the abstract concept of who a man is even though the physical aspect of man is a concrete subject

So what do I do with all these definitions?

- ☞ Surely these definitions mean something
- ☞ Whether you are copying vocabulary words for English, memorizing definitions in French class, learning concepts in economics or tackling historical movements in social science- you must understand how these definitions are meaningful in a context
- ☞ In essence- your audience will understand your arguments and explanations if you help them understand your definitions and perceptions

Pre-writing ideas?

- ☞ The best pre-writing strategies are probably the topoi and the pentad which are both explained in the pre-writing section of this website
- ☞ The structure of this type of essay is basic- your thesis is your definition and your supporting paragraphs back up your definition
- ☞ For example:

Topic: The idea of “Home”

Thesis: Home is not about a place, a city, or a small town; it is not about a structure, the bricks or the nails in the wood; it is about the people, the love and the experiences shared together.

1st Body Paragraph: About creating new homes while moving from place to place

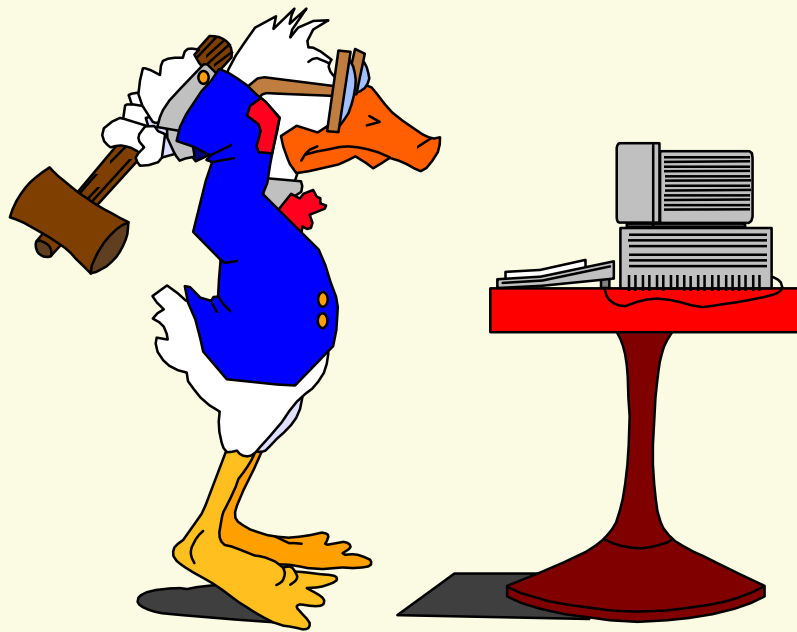
2nd Body: About making a home in a small dorm or a large house

3rd Body: About making a home in a foreign land away from friends and family

4th Body: About making a home alone

Conclusion Paragraph: About making home with anyone and anything- “Home” is all about the attitude and the spirit inside who resides there

What does a define and explain essay look like?



Here is a sample define and explain essay for an English essay, but remember, even writing a chapter review can be important in order to understand meanings

Any other bright ideas?

- 📄 Rubrics for define and explain writing assignments can be found in the “Rubric” section of this website
- 📄 Remember that your audience might not agree or perceive the same definitions as you do, so be creative and be specific so they can understand your meaning