Definition Essay

What is a Definition Essay?
A definition essay explains what a term, concept, or idea means. Often, definition essays give readers a new perspective on a common yet difficult-to-define word, such as love or happiness.

How do I define something?

- **Analyze it**
  - Break the subject down into its individual parts (Love could be broken down into romantic love and non-romantic love) and then define each part separately.

- **Classify it**
  - What group does the subject belong to? Why does it belong to this group instead of another?

- **Compare it**
  - What is the subject similar to? What is it different from?

- **Describe it**
  - What are the characteristics and connotations that describe the subject?

- **Give Examples**
  - What examples of the subject help us understand what it is?

- **Describe what it is NOT**
  - What characteristics do NOT describe the subject? Does that leave us with what it IS?

- **Explain its Origins**
  - Where did the subject come from? What is its background and history?

- **Discuss its Results, Effects, or Uses**
  - How is the subject used or understood? What are the results or effects of this use or understanding?

An effective definition essay will have

- **An Introduction that**
  - Tells the reader the subject that will be defined
  - Explains why this subject is difficult to define
  - Tells the reader why he or she should care about defining this subject
  - States a thesis that explains your definition
  - States the support for your definition

- **Body paragraphs that**
  - Begin with Topic Sentences that relate to your thesis and/or its specific support
  - Explain the specific supporting points for your definition
  - Use some (or all) of the above strategies for defining a subject

- **A Conclusion that**
  - Restates the thesis
  - Summarizes the support for the thesis