

Definition Essay

A definition essay goes beyond just a dictionary definition of a word. Usually a word or concept can be defined in just one sentence. A definition essay, however, needs to be several paragraphs. Therefore, the definition must be extended to include examples, details, personal experience, description, causes, effects, analysis, etc.

Above all, a definition essay must demonstrate a detailed account of your own opinion about the word or concept. For example, if you are writing an essay about "love," the thesis and the details must be based upon your personal ideas of what "love" is.

Topics for definition essays are always general. In other words, you can write about "Love" or "Truth" or "Justice," but not "My love for my wife" or "The truth about violence on T.V." Definition essays are also subjective: you need to assert and support your own opinions about the concept.

Definition essays have two basic parts:

1. The denotation, or direct explanation of the meaning, and
2. The connotation, or the ideas that the word implies or includes.

For example, you may say that "love" means "an affection for a person or thing" (denotation). However, what does the word "love" imply? Does it imply loyalty, dedication, gift-giving, sexual passion (connotation)? Do any of these not mean "love" for you? You can check in a thesaurus for words of similar meanings that may show connotations.

Topics for a definition essay

Your instructor should set a certain topic or topic area.

I. Abstract concepts

Define one of the following (or another abstract concept):

| | | |
|------------------------|----------------------|-------------------|
| Truth | Love | Hatred |
| Justice | Honor | Loyalty |
| Fidelity | Courage | Cowardice |
| Liberty | Prejudice | Tolerance |
| Greed | Ambition | Generosity |
| Self-confidence | Pride | Modesty |
| Sensitivity | Insensitivity | Boredom |
| Adventure | Good taste | Poor taste |

These could also be defined as adjectives, e.g. "A proud person" or "An ambitious person."

Additionally, you could define a concept from your own culture or language for which we don't have an equivalent in English. When writing a word from your own language, always use italics. Here are some examples of words from other languages for which we have no exact equivalent in English:

| | | |
|-----------------------|--------------|--|
| <i>ataoso</i> | Spanish | one who sees problems with everything |
| <i>giomlaireachd</i> | Scots Gaelic | the habit of visiting others at meal times |
| <i>termangu-mangu</i> | Indonesian | sad and not sure what to do |
| <i>ichigo-ichie</i> | Japanese | the practice of trying to make each moment perfect |
| <i>lagom</i> | Swedish | not too much and not too little; the right amount |

II. Good or Bad

Define a "good" or "bad" one of the following (e.g. "a good friend" or "a bad vacation.")

| | | |
|----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Friend | Marriage | Teacher |
| Job | Husband | Wife |
| Child | Class | Vacation |
| Meeting | Date | Home |

Begin your brainstorming by asking yourself "What are the qualities of a good class?" or "What is prejudice?" Then think of examples, facts, anecdotes, personal experiences, opposites, etc. that can help to define your topic.

III. A Place

Define a specific place in terms of its special qualities and what it means to you. These could be both positive and negative qualities. The place could be as large as a country or as small as a room.

| | |
|----------------------|---|
| Country | (e.g. Armenia) |
| State | (e.g. Utah) |
| City | (e.g. Los Angeles) |
| Small Town | (e.g. Hood River) |
| Neighborhood | (e.g. Greenwich Village) |
| Shopping area | (e.g. a local mall) |
| Park | (e.g. Hyde Park, London) |
| Street | (e.g. 5th Avenue, New York) |
| House | (e.g. your grandmother's house) |
| Room | (e.g. your kitchen) |

Choose a place which is familiar to you and about which you have many ideas and impressions.

Organizational pattern for definition essay:

1st paragraph:

Introduction: "hook" -
anecdote, interesting facts,
humorous story, personal experience

Thesis statement: topic + your definition

Body paragraphs:

Begin each paragraph with a topic sentence.

Develop body paragraphs in some of these ways:

- a) analyze: divide into parts and define each part;
- b) compare: show similarities and/or differences with other ideas;
- c) exemplify: use examples to illustrate each body paragraph;
- d) negate: define what the topic is not so you can clarify what it is;
- e) illustrate: describe the subject in detail, giving specific information;
- f) give background: relate the history of the word or idea;

Conclusion:

Summary, prediction, anecdote, comparison, etc.

Definition Essay: Example #1

Ishindenshin

Ishindenshin is a common Japanese word. It describes a Japanese concept used to refer to communication without words or a “reading of the heart.” We Japanese do not always say exactly what we think or feel. People can guess and receive what is in a sender’s heart. People can understand each other without words. This is not a familiar concept in western cultures, where people are generally encouraged to state exactly what they mean. The phenomenon of *ishindenshin* works well when Japanese are communicating in Japan, but it can present certain challenges when Japanese are communicating outside of their country.

Ishindenshin was born as a Buddhist word. The story goes that when Buddha preached to a lot of disciples about Buddhism, it was too hard to express the depth of the religion in words, so he showed them a lotus flower to communicate a point. Although most of his disciples could not understand what he meant, there was one who could understand. After that, Buddha preached his teachings only to the enlightened disciple instead of to many disciples.

There are many ways that Japanese demonstrate *ishindenshin* in their daily lives. For example, when people ride on a bus, they stand up and give their seats to someone who is old or has a physical disability. *Ishindenshin* works especially well in situations like this where people do not know one another. It is like telepathy because people do not say anything. In Japanese culture, we seldom say negative words to other people because we are observant about hurting someone, but non-verbal communication will often get a negative point across. For example, my mother often has a sore shoulder. When she does, she shakes her head and takes a few deep breaths. At this point, all of us in the family know what she wants us to do, so she gets a massage.

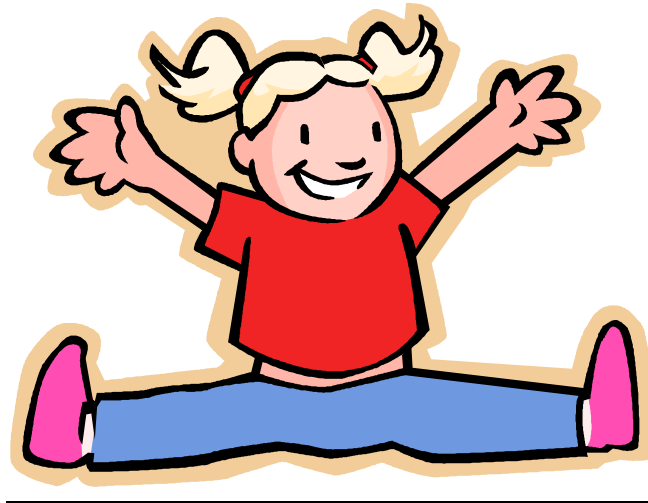
Ishindenshin is a very useful concept. Understanding each other without explaining feelings is a convenient tool in communication. However, at the same time, it does sometimes cause misunderstandings. When I came to the United States the first time when I was 13, an American family welcomed me into their home as a family member. When I felt hungry and wanted to get something to eat, I expressed my feelings with the words, “I am beginning to get hungry,” but my host mother did not give me anything to eat. I felt so strange. Even though my English was not good, I knew that I had said the words clearly. I thought that she was so mean and did not want to give me any food, especially when my host sister got snacks for her and not for me. Then I thought about whether there was something wrong with my communication and decided to ask her directly for something to eat. I learned that there was no *ishindenshin* in American culture, so I had to say exactly what I wanted. I realized that outside of my own country, I had to adjust my communication style.

A Japanese overseas study coordinator that I know said that Japanese students may not be as good at English as many other international students because they are accustomed to the concept of *ishindenshin*. He also said that it is very hard for Japanese

students to express every idea that they wish to communicate. There are many differences between the cultures of the U.S. and Japan; however, to know new things about other cultures is very interesting, so Japanese living in other countries need to get accustomed to talking in different ways.

Ishindenshin has mostly good effects but can also have a few bad ones for Japanese living outside of their country. Using this telepathy too much can have unfortunate consequences, but I believe it is important to use a moderate amount. We sometimes have to use our emotional intelligence and interpret feelings without words because there are situations in all people's lives when there are no words to express exactly how we feel.

Chisako Hayakawa



Definition Essay: Example #2

A Good Husband

"I love you so much!" my elementary school friend said to my husband, and she kissed my husband's lips. After we came out of her house, I urged my husband to answer my questions. "What was that? Why did she do that? What relationship is between two of you?" My husband answered that there was nothing, and that my friend was lonely because she had just become alone. I shouted toward my husband, "Are you protecting her, now?" My husband raised his voice to me, "Why are you shouting at me? I told you there was nothing between your friend and me!" I got angry so much that I took my stuff and rushed out of my house. I shouted, "I can't live with you any more!" But he didn't even try to stop me and let me go. I couldn't believe what was happening to me. I was going crazy, I yelled "Ah a a a k!!"

With a scream I woke up and saw that my husband was sleeping beside me with his usual snore. I thanked God that it was just a terrible dream. He may not be perfect but at least he does not have an affair with my friend. What makes a good husband? I think a good husband should be a best friend who should be respected by his wife and be sincere to his married life.

A good husband should be a best friend to his wife. When a man and a woman meet and fall in love, they feel that they can do everything with their burning love. However, after marriage they can find themselves in reality and realize that their burning love is not eternal. They might find each other's weak points and become disappointed. They also might try to fit their spouse into their own personality under the name of love. However even when married, if you have a mindset of being best friends, that could give more serenity of mind to each other than lovers because they respect each other's privacy. A good husband, like a good friend, acknowledges his wife's weak points and accepts those as her personality. Also a good husband will respect his wife's sense of value, emotion, thoughts and desires like a friend.

A good husband should have his wife's respect. For the wife, respecting her husband is sometimes more important than loving her husband because a woman can't keep on loving her husband without first respecting him. It doesn't mean a good husband has to be very successful in his life. Most men think making a lot of money is the only way to make their wives happy. Making a lot of money is important, but it is not everything. A woman can be satisfied with just a rose from her husband. Like that, a wife's emotional satisfaction is just as important. If a husband makes less money than other men, but his wife respects and is proud of her husband's honesty or sincerity that may be enough for her happiness.

A good husband is sincere to his married life. He must keep his marriage vows. Whether he is happy or going through a hard time, he should always share his feelings with his wife. When trouble comes to him and his wife, he should be patient about solving the problems with his wife, and he never should have an affair with any other woman, of course. Until one of them is dead, he should always love and be faithful to his wife,

A good husband's characteristics are not only suitable for a good husband but also for a good wife. There is no perfect husband and wife. It is impossible. In my case, if I give a grade to my husband, he will get a "C+". If that is true, then what would my grade be? In my country when a couple marry, they swear in such a way, "Until the black hair turns to white...." I think that even though no one is perfect, if you try you will be a good husband. A good husband has an open mind like a friend, should be respected by his wife and sincere to his married life.

Jieun Yoo