



English III

Expository Writing: Definition

Learning Targets

- Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly through the selection, organization, and analysis of content.
- Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
- Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience.
- Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.
- Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.
- Use knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.

LEARNING STRATEGIES

Brainstorming,
Sharing and Responding,
Marking the Text,

Writing an Expository Essay

The purpose of an expository essay is for the writer to communicate ideas and information about a topic to specific audiences for specific purposes. Expository essays are often written to define or describe a subject, to provide directions for how to do something, or to compare subjects by exploring how they are similar and different.

ACTIVITY 1

Discovering the Elements of a Definition Essay

Before Reading

1. Definition essays are characterized as essays in which a writer attempts to explain in a personal yet academic way the nature of a word, a thing, an idea, a concept, or a phrase. List some possible topics that you could use as the focus of a definition essay.

During Reading

2. In the following passage, Nancy Mairs, who has multiple sclerosis, calls herself a “cripple.” Read the essay in order to identify the writer’s **purpose** or main idea and make inferences about the writer’s intended **audience**.
3. As you read, identify the writer’s use of **evidence** to develop the topic. Evidence includes relevant facts, definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples. Underline or highlight the most relevant or effective examples.

My Notes

Sample Text

On Being a Cripple

by Nancy Mairs

I am a cripple. I choose this word to name me. I choose from among several possibilities, the most common of which are “handicapped” and “disabled.” I made the choice a number of years ago, without thinking, unaware of my motives for doing so. Even now, I’m not sure what those motives are, but I recognize that they are complex and not entirely flattering. People—crippled or not—wince at the word “cripple,” as they do not at “handicapped” or “disabled.” Perhaps I want them to wince. I want them to see me as a tough customer, one to whom the fates/gods/viruses have not been kind, but who can face the brutal truth of her existence squarely. As a cripple, I swagger.

But, to be fair to myself, a certain amount of honesty underlies my choice. “Cripple” seems to me a clean word, straightforward and precise. It has an honorable history, having made its first appearance in the Lindisfarne Gospel in the tenth century. As a lover of words, I like the accuracy with which it describes my condition: I have lost the full use of my limbs. “Disabled,” by contrast, suggests any incapacity, physical or mental. And I certainly don’t like “handicapped,” which implies that I have deliberately been put at a disadvantage, by whom I can’t imagine (my God is not a Handicapper General), in order to equalize chances in the great race of life. These words seem to me to be moving away from my condition, to be widening the gap between word and reality. Most remote is the recently coined euphemism “differently abled.” Which partakes of the same semantic hopefulness that transformed countries from “undeveloped” to “underdeveloped,” then to “less developed,” and finally to “developing” nations. People have continued to starve in those countries during the shift. Some realities do not obey the dictates of language.

Mine is one of them. Whatever you call me, I remain crippled. But I don’t care what you call me, so long as it isn’t “differently abled,” which strikes me as pure verbal garbage designed, by its ability to describe anyone, to describe no one. I subscribe to George Orwell’s thesis that “the slovenliness of our language makes it easier for us to have foolish thoughts.” And I refuse to participate in the degeneration of the language to the extent that I deny that I have lost anything in the course of this calamitous disease; I refuse to pretend that the only differences between you and me are the various ordinary ones that distinguish any one person from another. But call me “disabled” or “handicapped” if you like. I have long since grown accustomed to them; and if they are vague, at least they hint at the truth. Moreover, I use them myself. Society is no readier to accept crippledness than to accept death, war, sex, sweat, or wrinkles. I would never refer to another person as a cripple. It is the word I use to name only myself.

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After Reading

4. When you have finished reading, respond to the questions below in the space provided.
 - a. **Purpose:** What is the writer’s purpose for writing this essay? (Refer to the first paragraph in which the writer introduces the topic.)

 - b. **Audience:** Who is the writer’s target audience for this essay? What textual evidence tells you who the audience is?

 - c. **Organization:** What is the purpose or main idea of each paragraph?

 - d. **Evidence:** What facts, quotations, examples, and details does the writer use to support and develop the topic? What evidence is most relevant?

 - e. **Transitions:** What words does the writer use to connect and clarify relationships between ideas and create and move the reader from one part of the essay to the next?

 - f. **Language and Style:** What are examples of precise and vivid diction that the writer uses to explain and describe the topic?

Check Your Understanding

What is the purpose of a definition essay? Why is it helpful to define an abstract concept, phrase, or idea subjectively?