Assignment Sheet: Definition Argument

On page 175 in your eBook, the editors provide suggestions for writing a definition essay. You can refer to those suggestions for this assignment. You will choose one of these three options for your definition essay:

1. In the student essay in Chapter 7, Laura Mullins defines the term gossip. Select one of the following words to define and prepare your own extended definition argument, using at least three of the strategies for defining described in this chapter. For each word in the list, you see a companion word in parentheses. Use that companion word as a word that you contrast with the word you are defining. (For example, how does gossip differ from conversation? The idea of an extended definition argument is to make fine distinctions among words similar in meaning.  Courtesy (manners)  Hero (star)  Wisdom (knowledge)  Community (subdivision)  Patriotism (chauvinism)  Freedom (liberty) 2. Select a word you believe is currently misused. It can be misused because it has taken on a negative (or positive) connotation that it did not originally have, or because it has changed meaning and lost something in the process. A few suggestions include awful, awesome, fabulous, exceptional (in education), propaganda. 3. Define a term that is currently used to label people with particular traits or values. Possibilities include nerd, yuppie, freak, jock, redneck, bimbo, wimp. Before selecting this topic, reflect on why you want to explain the meaning of the word you have chosen. One purpose might be to explain the word to someone from another culture. Another might be to defend people who are labeled negatively by a term; that is, you want to show why the term should not have a negative connotation.

You should choose a particular audience and develop your argument for its members. Ask yourself, to whom does this definitional issue—and your argument—matter? Craft your essay so that its pathetic, ethical, and logical appeals are appropriate to these readers.

You must use at least two secondary sources in your essay. Make sure that these sources are chosen and employed with your audience in mind. You must also cite these sources anytime they are used in your essay. Use sources that your audience will consider reliable. Source

material should contribute something to your paper that you cannot: specific facts, clarification or emphasis of a point, a voice with authority in a specific area, or illustration of the controversy or complexity of your issue.

Your essay should be four to six pages long, typed, double-spaced, and carefully proofread. You should format your essay according to MLA guidelines and include a Works Cited page.

Essays less than four full pages cannot earn more than 60% of the total points possible.

Preparing a Definition Argument: This information is taken directly from your eBook, beginning on page 181. I have added emphasis to important points and instructions by using bold type:

Planning:

1. Think: Why do you want to define your term? To add to our understanding of a complex term? To challenge the use of the word by others? If you do not have a good reason to write, find a different word to examine. 2. Think: How are you defining the word? What are the elements/parts/steps in your definition? Some brainstorming notes are probably helpful to keep your definition concrete and focused. 3. Think: What strategies will you use to develop and support your definition? Consider using several of these possible strategies for development:  Word origin or history of usage  Descriptive details  Comparison and/or contrast  Examples  Function or use  Metaphors

Drafting:

1. Begin with an opening paragraph or two that introduces your subject in an interesting way. Possibilities include the occasion that has led to your writing—explain, for instance, a misunderstanding about your term’s meaning that you want to correct. 2. Do not begin by quoting or paraphrasing a dictionary definition of the term. “According to Webster . . .” is a tired approach lacking reader interest. DO NOT USE THIS STRATEGY. If the dictionary definition were sufficient, you would have no reason to write an entire essay to define the term.

3. State your claim—your definition of the term—early in your essay, if you can do so in a sentence or two. If you do not state a brief claim, then establish your purpose in writing early in your essay. (You may find that there are too many parts to your definition to combine into one or two sentences.) 4. Use several specific strategies for developing your definition. Select strategies from the list above and organize your approach around these strategies. That is, you can develop one paragraph of descriptive details, another of examples, and another of contrast with words that are not exactly the same in meaning. 5. Consider specifically refuting the error in word use that led to your decision to writer your own definition. If you are motivated to write based on what you have read, then make a rebuttal part of your definition argument. 6. Consider discussion the implications of your definition. You can give weight and value to your argument by explaining the larger significance of your definition.

Grading Criteria:

I will evaluate your essay according to these criteria:

 Development of an arguable definitional claim

 Demonstrated understanding of definition arguments as they are presented in Chapter 7 of your eBook

 Thorough consideration of your audience and effective employment of strategies designed to persuade them

 Effective essay structure

 Effective use, citation, and documentation of source material

 Clear and precise sentence-level rhetoric (grammar and style)

 Adherence to MLA formatting guidelines