**Definition**

Definition clarifies for the reader exactly what the writer means when he/she uses a particular term or phrase. Definition may comprise an entire essay, or it may be an element that helps develop a longer essay. Definition is helpful when we are writing about abstract concepts or talking about subjective terms.

**Example**

An abstract concept might be defining what is meant by the phrase “modern art.” A subjective term might be defining the word “beauty.” Although most of us can generally agree what is meant by the word “pencil,” a word like “beauty” becomes a problem when we think of that old saying, “Beauty is in the eye of the beholder.” In other words, we have different ideas about what is beautiful.

**Strategies to consider:**

1. Look the word or phrase up in the dictionary. Note the history of the word, its roots, and its original meaning. Compare its original meaning to its present meanings. Consider slang definitions. Use it in examples.
2. Be objective about a term. Really try to explain it, in a series of peeling away layers, to someone who has no idea what this term means.

For example, when looking at the word “addiction,” we can start with examples. We immediately think of alcoholics or drug addicts as obvious examples. What do alcoholics and drug addicts have in common? They have in common that usually they are habitual about taking or using their addictive substance.

But one can be habitual about drinking orange juice in the morning or working out at a gym. So the next element to consider when we speak of addiction in terms of alcoholism or drug dependency is that we usually mean there is something harmful about the habitual behavior. When we say “addicted” or “addicts,” the slang interpretation is also associated with harmful behavior and a loss of control.

Looking in the dictionary, we again find reference to habitual, compulsive, and harmful behavior. Further, the original meaning and historical use has not changed much over the years. So, looking at these factors, we can come up with a sentence that begins to define addiction: “Addiction is habitual, compulsive, and ultimately harmful reliance on a substance, behavior, or person.”

**Assignment**

1. Revise one of your essays, adding a definition as an element that helps develop that essay.
2. Define any of the following terms:

Beauty Patriotism Art Love
Alienation Fanaticism Hate Virtue
Joy Marriage Luck Ethics