

DEFINITION

ASSIGNMENT

100 POINTS

Planning Ahead

Consider what you might like to write about in your causal analysis and proposal.

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Getting Started

Review your reading from *The Weather Makers*, or revisit the web sites you have analyzed.

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Contested Definitions

See some examples of contested definitions within the organic food vs GMO debate.

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More on Writing

Definition Arguments

Formal Definitions:

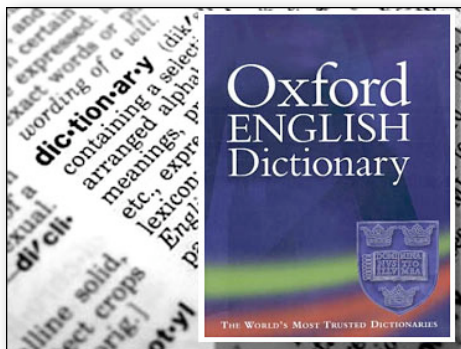
Term = Class + Difference

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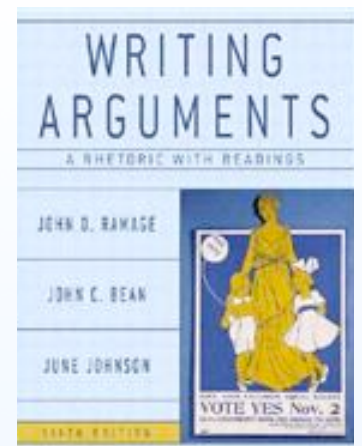
ASSIGNMENT OVERVIEW

Someone once said (and some attribute it to Plato, himself), “He who wins the definitions wins the argument.” We certainly can not have useful arguments without clarifying definitions and understanding our opponents’ definitions. In this third assignment, I ask you to define a term and argue for its accuracy and fitness in the broader context of the climate change debate.

In brief, I would like you to make a definitional claim and then argue that a particular item falls under that definition by matching the criteria you have established. As your book, *Writing Arguments*, makes clear, the dictionary will be



of little value to you in this process of defining because the *denotative* definition of a term is usually not being contested. Instead, I want to know how a word or concept is specifically defined, its context and connotation, its implications, its history, its ability to conjure emotion or to remove emotion. I want a rich, thick, interpretive definition and a claim that relies on that definition.



Six Types of Claims

1. *Categorical Arguments*
 2. *Definitional Arguments*
 3. *Cause/Consequence Arguments*
 4. *Resemblance Arguments*
 5. *Evaluation Arguments*
 6. *Proposal Arguments*
- See Chapters 10-11 in *Writing Arguments* for more information about each claim type and about definition claims specifically.

INVENTING AND COMPOSING

Planning Ahead

With this essay, I strongly encourage you to consider what you might like to write about in your causal analysis and in your action proposal so that you can use this essay to begin research on the other papers.

- *Public Transportation:* For example, if you are considering public transportation as a significant method for reducing carbon emissions and our community's carbon footprint, then you can start now to explore the vocabulary and contested terms within the public transportation debate. If you were to read a news report on the relationship between public transportation and climate change, (<http://www.sacbee.com/110/story/716721.html>), you could identify key terms like transit-oriented development and smart growth. You could then define the term and use it to argue about whether recent developments or future developments in Anchorage can be defined as smart growth or transit-oriented development.

- *Local Food Economy:* On the other hand, if you are considering local food consumption and the increased use of local food in the restaurant business as significant methods for reducing petroleum fertilizers and transportation costs for food, then you can start now to explore the vocabulary and contested terms within the local food debate. If you were to read a news report on the relationship between food and climate change, (<http://www.blocalnews.com/lifestyles/15709757.html>), you could identify terms like food miles (or food kilometers), food security, and sustainable agriculture. You could then define one of those terms and use it to argue about whether local food production within 100

miles of the Anchorage Bowl could be defined as a form of sustainable agriculture or whether local food production offers significant food security. The following article looks at the relationship between food miles and global warming: <http://uk.reuters.com/article/environmentNews/idUKN0521281920071017>.

- *Sample article covering contested definitions:* http://www.scitizen.com/screens/blogPage/viewBlog/sw_viewBlog.php?idTheme=13&idContribution=533&PHPSSESSIONID=9153117c0475666b1b3cd684656868fc
- *Possible contested terms associated with climate change:* sustainability, development, scientific certainty, sound science, precautionary principle, theory, fact, climate change, global warming, weather, climate, mitigation, resilience, adaptation, natural changes, anthropogenic causes, energy independence, etc. However, you will do best to select a term that is connected to the broader issue you may want to write about in a later paper.

Getting Started

1. Review your reading from *The Weather Makers*, or revisit the web sites you have analyzed. Or, if you think ahead to broader contexts, you can read a few articles on the issue that interests you. Or you could google "your interest area + climate change." In that reading or on those web sites, locate controversial key terms used in arguments that are somehow related to climate change.
2. Examine the context in which the word is used.

3. Summarize and analyze the ways in which a writer defines the contested term(s).
4. Ask yourself if you share or do not share a particular writer's definition(s).
5. Examine the benefits or the value of this definition.
6. Consider the costs, limitations, or consequences of the definition.
7. Consider its connotations or possible associations.
8. Review the word's history or etymology, both within and beyond the current context.
9. Determine the word's ability to conjure emotion or to minimize emotion.
10. Finally, put the word to use in making a definitional argument of your own, one that argues about whether or not $X = Y$, Y being the contested definition. Look to your local community for the X .

Organic Food Debate— Sample Contested Definitions

Positive: Organic food is food produced naturally, without toxic chemicals, drugs or factory-farm techniques.

Negative: Organic food is food that is not grown with conventional pesticides, petroleum- or sewage-based fertilizers, genetic engineering, or radiation.

The use of genetically engineered organisms is an unproven technology that the organic system does not need in order to grow high quality and nutritious food.

Biotechnology is a genetic process that helps farmers produce higher yields on existing lands and also reduces runoff and pollution.

Food security is a form of sovereignty.

MORE ON DEFINITION

Analytical

Analyze

Critique

Judge

Compare/contrast

Creative

Create

Invent

Discover

Imagine if ...

Practical

Apply

Use

Put into practice

Implement

Formal Definitions

A formal definition, as explained in your textbook on p. 183, is sometimes called an Aristotelian definition. In this formula, a term is defined by placing it in a class or category and then showing the attributes or characteristics that set it apart from other members of the group. Below is the formula:

Term = Class + Difference

Capital Punishment, a penalty regarding the justice and expediency of which many worthy persons -- including all the assassins -- entertain grave misgivings.

Term = Capital Punishment

Class = a penalty

Difference = toward which many worthy persons entertain grave misgivings regarding its justice and expediency— including all the assassins.

For more definitions from Bierce's *The Devil's Dictionary*, see the box below.

Criteria-Match Structure

The “criteria” part of the structure defines the Y term by setting forth the criteria that must be met for something to be considered a Y. The “match” part examines whether the X term meets these criteria.

Reportive Approach

When you take a reportive approach, you research how others have used a term, searching for authoritative definitions acceptable to your audience yet favorable to your case.

Stipulative Approach

Using the stipulative approach, you create your own definition of the contested term. An effective strategy is to establish initial criteria for your contested term by thinking of hypothetical cases that obviously fit the category you are trying to define and then thinking of hypothetical cases that obviously don't fit the category.

Rebutting Definition Claims

- *Question the Criteria:* consider the fitness of criteria; the consequences of the argument; the representativeness of your examples; and the potential bias in your position.
- *Question the Match:* consider the currency and accuracy of your examples. Are they extreme? Are there better alternatives?

Arbitrary Sign System

Language, for all its wonderful powers, is an arbitrary sign system that required agreement among its users before it can work. Defining something can be devilishly complex.

Organizing the Paper

For more ideas on how to organize your paper, please see pages 188-189 in your textbook.

Reality

The dream of a mad philosopher.

Reporter

A writer who guesses his way to the truth and dispels it with a tempest of words.

Future

The period of time in which our affairs prosper, our friends are true, and our happiness is assured.

History

An account mostly false, of events mostly unimportant which are brought about by rulers mostly knaves, and soldiers mostly fools.