



Tikrit University

College of Education for Women

English Department

Subject : Introduction to Academic Writing

2<sup>nd</sup> year

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## Definition Paragraphs

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### Organization

People who are interested in your culture may ask you to explain a word that they have heard but do not understand, such as Spanish machismo or German Gemutlichkeit, or an interesting custom or practice such as casual Friday or Saint Patrick's Day in the United States, O-bon festivals in Japan, holi festivals in India, or quinceafiera parties in Spanish-influenced cultures. Tests of general writing ability sometimes ask you to define abstract terms such as love, friendship, courage, or happiness. Tests in college classes may contain questions such as these:

What are Miranda rights?

What are organic soil amendments, and how do they improve soil?

What was the Underground Railroad?

What is the Rh factor, and why is it important to pregnant women and their babies?

These kinds of questions ask you to define or explain something; for our purposes, we will simply call them definition paragraphs.

One way to write the topic sentence of a definition paragraph is to give three pieces of information:

1. The word or thing you will define or explain (the topic)
2. The large category or group to which the word or thing belongs
3. The distinguishing characteristics that make it different from other members of the category.

### Term /Person/Concept

The Underground Railroad was.....

Courage is ...

Casual Friday refers to ...

### Category or Group

a secret system . . .

the quality ...

the custom ...

### Distinguishing Characteristics

that helped slaves escape from the South to freedom in the North during the mid-1800s.

of being brave when you are facing something that is dangerous or that you fear.

of office workers wearing casual clothes to work on Fridays.

In the supporting sentences, add details that explain the topic more completely. The supporting sentences may give additional facts telling who, what, where, when, how, or why, an explanation of a process, examples, or a description.

In the concluding sentence, you may tell why the topic is important, interesting, or unique.

## **Appositives**

**Appositives** are nouns or noun phrases that rename a preceding noun or noun phrase.

1 . They set up a special table on which they display seven foods with names beginning with the letter s in Farsi, the language of Iran.

2. There people celebrated the end of the farming season by lighting bonfires, large outdoor fires, to keep away bad spirits who might appear in the night.

In sentence 1, Farsi and the language of Iran are the same thing.

In sentence 2, bonfires and large outdoor fires are the same thing.

The language of Iran and large outdoor fires are appositives.

Appositives are very useful in writing definitions because they give the reader more information about your topic concisely (without a lot of extra words).

**Fudge, a delicious chocolate candy, was invented as a result of a cooking mistake.**

It can be necessary information or extra information.' Consider this sentence:

**My friend Tim got married last week.**

In this sentence, Tim is an appositive because Tim and my friend are the same person . Tim is a necessary appositive because it is necessary to identify which friend got married. If we omit the word Tim, we don't know which friend got married.

Now consider this sentence:

**Tim, my friend, got married last week.** In this sentence, the appositive is my friend. It is extra information because the name Tim already identifies the person who got married. If we omit my friend, we still know who got married. The fact that he is the writer's friend is not necessary to identify him. It is merely extra information. If there is only one of an item, it is unnecessary to identify it further, so appositives of one-of-a-kind items are always extra information. For example,

**Earth has only one moon,** so any appositive of the Moon. in a sentence would be extra information. Similarly, adjectives such as **tallest, strongest, oldest,** and most interesting automatically make the following noun one of a kind.

**The Moon, Earth's only natural satellite, orbits Earth about once a month.**

The highest mountain in North America, Mount McKinley, is in Alaska. The appositive Mount McKinley is extra information because it follows the highest, and there can be only one "highest." I have three sons.