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**LECTURE 5: Answering Essay Questions with ‘Define’, ‘ Explain’ or ‘Clarify’**

Define, explain and clarify are instruction words having the same objective which is to ask the writer to define or inform about a topic, a situation or a concept and clarify any confusing information. Below are definitions which provide guidance on the specificity of each question word.

**Define**

* When answering questions with ‘define’, one must outline the precise meaning of the subject of the question, providing how other scholars **define** the subject, and specifying one meaning used instead of another (if this is the case). It is important to provide more than one meaning if there are several of them as it shows the writer’s familiarity with the literature.
* To sum up the writer should give in precise terms the meaning of something. Bring to attention any problems posed with the definition and different interpretations that may exist.
* There are several ways to define a term. Here are a few options.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Define by function | Explain what something does or how something works. |
| Define by a structure | Tell how something is organized or put together. |
| Define by analysis | Compare the term to other members of its class and then illustrate the differences. These differences are special characteristics that make the term stand out. For example, compare a Siberian husky to other dogs, such as lap dogs, mutts, or sporting dogs. |
| Define by what the term does not mean | This distinction can sometimes clarify the definition. It helps readers to understand the term better. |

**Explain**

* ‘Explain’ questions expect you to basically clarify a topic. When answering such questions, the writer should **give definitions** for any jargon or key terms used as if he/she is writing for someone who knows nothing about the topic. Therefore, in explanatory answers, any ‘what’, ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions will help to structure a clear and logically coherent answer.

**Clarify**

* Clarify a topic by giving a detailed account as to how and why it occurs, or what is meant by the use of this term in a particular context. This means to provide insight into a subject. To provide clarification, it is advisable to break down a complex topic into simple elements or parts. For example, this could be done by making a topic clearer by explaining it in simpler terms.

**TUTORIAL (TD) 5**

**Task one**

Topic: **Wisdom is one of the greatest qualities that a human being possesses: Write an essay in which you define wisdom.**

Use the following outline to develop your essay.

I. Introduction

A. Attention getter: A contradictory image about wisdom/ Traditional definition of wisdom (as perceived in an image)

B. Thesis statement: Wisdom is a compilation of a life experience marked by humility, kairos, and unselfishness.

II. Body

* 1. life experience
  2. Topic sentence: Wisdom + life experience
     1. Supporting sentences: Examples/details to illustrate how life experience results in wise people.
     2. Concluding sentence: analysis of how life experience defines what wisdom is.
  3. humility
     1. Topic sentence: Wisdom + humility
     2. Supporting sentences: Examples/details to illustrate how humility results in wise people.
     3. Concluding sentence: analysis of how humility defines what wisdom is.
  4. Kairos
     1. Topic sentence: Wisdom + kairos
     2. Supporting sentences: Examples/details to illustrate how kairos make people wise.
     3. Concluding sentence: analysis of how kairos define what wisdom is.
  5. Unselfishness
     1. Topic sentence: Wisdom + unselfishness
     2. Supporting sentences: Examples/details to illustrate how unselfishness causes people to be wise.
     3. Concluding sentence: analysis of how unselfishness defines what wisdom is.

III. Conclusion

A. Review the specific points of the definition of wisdom, i.e., life experience, humility, kairos and unselfishness.

B. Closing attention getter: refer to image of wisdom in the introduction.

**Sample definition essay on wisdom**

Wisdom is a personality possession that one gains over a lifetime of experience. It is a possession that is bestowed upon a person, rather than one that the person recognizes on his or her own. Wisdom incorporates many other traits, but the requirement that it is recognized by people other than the ones possessing it set wisdom apart from other personality traits. Wisdom is a compilation of a life's experience marked by humility, kairos, and unselfishness.

Wisdom is an idea that is often confused with or improperly attributed to old age. Not all old people are wise, though many are. Conversely, not all wise people are old. One often hears the phrase "wise beyond years" in reference to a young person who displays the traits of wisdom. However, true wisdom is a result of strong life experiences. Naturally, older folks have had more experiences from which to draw wisdom, so it is easy to limit wisdom to old people. But, the key to wisdom is the strength of the experience. A young person may have an extraordinary experience which teaches him or her a powerful lesson. Lessons of this type often transform into wisdom.

Experience is just one of the major ingredients of wisdom; humility is also a requirement. Because wisdom is bestowed upon a person by virtue of others’ recognition, humility must be a possession of the wise person. To claim wisdom for oneself is foolishness. Humility is characterized by a person’s unwillingness to be the center of attention or by a person’s quickness to share credit or place others in a superior position. One who is wise recognizes that the standing of others should take precedence to his or her own standing. Therefore, the wise person takes in account what is best for others when offering advice or information.

In addition to experience and humility, wisdom also incorporates the Greek term kairos. Kairos means proper timing and measure in all things. A wise person does not offer more than is required, nor does he or she omit relevant information. The mark of true wisdom is also a sense of timing that is most beneficial to the inquirer. As with humility, a wise person does not take in account what will be most timely for his or herself, but what is best for the other person. The wise person knows when to step into a situation and when to let things run their courses. The wise person has the ability to understand not only a situation, but the people within that situation. The last mark of wisdom is unselfishness.

Unselfishness differs from humility in the respect that humility requires someone to be praised or recognized in order to deflect that praise or recognition onto others. Unselfishness requires nothing more than the constant thought of others' interests and wellbeing over ones' own. This mark of wisdom sets true wisdom apart from mere intelligence or learning. Anyone can have the right answer at the right time, but only those who possess true wisdom are ready to sacrifice themselves and their own interests to provide sound advice or information to others. This is the essential part of unselfishness as it marks wisdom.

True wisdom requires all three qualities: humility, kairos, and unselfishness. The experienced person, who has one or two of the three qualities, but not all three, cannot be truly wise. The experienced person who possesses all three traits must also have these qualities recognized by others, rather than recognize and claim the traits for him or herself. Only the possession of experience, humility, kairos, unselfishness, and the recognition of others makes for a truly wise person.

**Reference**

Wisdom definition essay <https://www.coursehero.com/file/22252852/Wisdom-Definition-Essay/>

**Task two**

Topic: **Clarify what is meant by the term ‘student’**

Use the following outline to develop your essay

I. Introduction

A. Attention getter: The term “student” is common not only in English

B. Thesis statement: This essay will focus on providing English definitions, etymology and concepts aligned with the term ‘student’

II. Body paragraphs

1. English definitions
2. Etymology of the word
3. concepts aligned with it

(Paraphrase and develop the following ideas in distinct paragraphs):

* 1. **We are continuously students**. As Ralph Waldo Emerson said, “Do you know the secret of the true scholar? In every man there is something wherein I may learn of him; and in that I am his pupil.”
  2. Student implies **humility** “The know-it-alls of this world are often not seen as students”
  3. Teachers are also permanent students
  4. Student implies also **curiosity**, “Take the attitude of a student, never be too big to ask questions, never know too much to learn something new” (Og Mandino).

III. Conclusion

A. Review the specific points of the definition of the word ‘students’, i.e., definitions, etymology and concepts

B. Closing attention getter: refer to the introduction's image of student.

**Sample essay clarifying the term student**

The word “student” is common not only in English, but also in Afrikaans, Czech, Danish, Dutch, Latin, Lower Sorbian, Norwegian Bokmål, Norwegian Nynorsk, Polish, Romanian, Serbo-Croatian, Swedish, and Tatar. As you can see, this word has a rich history all over the world. For the purpose of this essay, however, we will focus on its English definitions, etymology and concepts aligned with it. Let us say that we will become a student of the word “student.”

*Oxford Dictionary* is usually the go-to resource for definitions. Therefore, let us look at what this esteemed dictionary says about “student.” As a noun, it means, “A person who is studying at a university or other place of higher education,” with some variations such as “A school pupil” and “A person who takes an interest in a particular subject” (*Oxford Dictionaries*). As a modifier, the word is “Denoting someone who is studying in order to enter a particular profession” (*Oxford Dictionaries*). As you might have noticed, the term is broad, and becoming a student is a rather easy thing to do. All we need to do is say that we are studying a certain subject.

Now, we will start digging into how the word was formed. It all began with the Latin word studens, which was a present participle of the word studere (to study). This term eventually moved onto Old French in the form of estudiant, which literally means “student” in the way we know it now. So, basically, it began as a present participle, and became a noun all of its own (*Wiktionary*).

The term “student” has been notoriously hard to define even though it is such a commonly used word. This is because no one can actually master a subject, so we are continuously students**.** We cannot reach the limit of any subject, as knowledge is not only expanding, but it is also seemingly infinite—even computers cannot process all the information available at any present time. This means we can never claim to be outside of “studenthood,” despite our accolades, degrees, and status within a certain discipline. This makes even the most highly recognized person within a particular field a student. They are on equal terms with people learning within educational institutions. However, it may be said they have achieved a certain level of knowledge—though mastery cannot be accurately claimed. As Ralph Waldo Emerson said, “Do you know the secret of the true scholar? In every man there is something wherein I may learn of him; and in that I am his pupil.”

Also, being a student implies certain humility. If you have a large ego, it would be difficult for you to be considered a student. In order to study and to learn, you have to be able to accept, absorb, and integrate new information in your brain. The know-it-alls of this world are often not seen as students, even if they are enrolled in a university.

Even teachers can be considered students. Teachers often say they learn from their students in the subject they know best. In addition, teachers are known to continually study and innovate within their discipline. This means they are in a sense students too.

The act of curiosity is sometimes cited as a way of being a student. As American author Og Mandino said, “Take the attitude of a student, never be too big to ask questions, never know too much to learn something new.” Many issues arise in this world because of narrow mindedness, and being a student is seen as being beneficial for one’s character and society as a whole. What is a student if not someone who is curious about life and how it works?

The term “student” is usually defined as someone who studies in any shape or form. The word can be employed as a noun or a modifier, but began as a present participle in Latin, where it moved onto Old French as a noun. However, “student” can also be used as a philosophical term denoting curiosity, humbleness, and the acceptance of the vastness of knowledge.

By Nicholas Klacsanzky <https://academichelp.net/samples/academics/essays/definition/student.html>

**References**

“Student | Definition of Student in English by Oxford Dictionaries.” *Oxford Dictionaries* | English, Oxford Dictionaries, en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/student.

“Student.” Servent – *Wiktionary*, en.wiktionary.org/wiki/student.