MLA Definition Essay Template

Document Setup Instructions:

1. Open Microsoft Word

2. Set font to **Times New Roman 12pt**

3. Set margins to **1 inch** on all sides

4. Set line spacing to **Double**

5. Enable **Header** for page numbers

6. Save as: LastName_FirstName_DefinitionEssay.docx

MLA FORMATTED TEMPLATE

[Click here and type your last name] [Insert] → [Page Number] → [Top of Page] → [Plain Number 3]

[Press Tab 6 times to align page number with right margin]

[Click below header to begin document]

[Your Full Name]

[Professor's Last Name]

[Course Number]

[Date in Day Month Year format (e.g., 27 January 2025)]

[Center cursor and type your title here - Do not bold, underline, or use quotation marks]

[Capitalize all major words in title]

[Press Tab to indent first line of paragraph] [Begin your introduction here. Start with an engaging hook that introduces the concept you will define. Provide some context about why this term needs defining or why people commonly misunderstand it. Your introduction should be 4-6 sentences and end with your thesis statement. Your thesis should clearly state the term and your specific, nuanced definition of it. For

example: "While commonly understood as _____, true [Term] is actually _____ that requires _____, _____, and _____."]

[Press Tab to indent] [Begin your first body paragraph here. Start with a topic sentence that introduces the first aspect of your definition. This paragraph typically explores the dictionary definition, etymology, or historical usage of the term. Include a properly formatted MLA in-text citation if using a source. For example: The Oxford English Dictionary defines [Term] as "_____" ("[Term]" 245). Explain why this basic definition is insufficient or how it has evolved. Analyze what this historical context reveals. End the paragraph with a concluding sentence that transitions to your next point.]

[Press Tab to indent] [Begin your second body paragraph here. This paragraph should explore the first major characteristic of your refined definition. Start with a clear topic sentence. Provide specific examples, anecdotes, or references that illustrate this characteristic. Analyze how these examples demonstrate your point. Use transitions like "for instance," "consider," or "as demonstrated by" to introduce evidence. If using sources, integrate them smoothly with proper citations. Conclude the paragraph by reinforcing how this characteristic is essential to understanding the term.]

[Press Tab to indent] [Begin your third body paragraph here. This paragraph should explore the second major characteristic of your definition or address common misconceptions. Start with an appropriate topic sentence. Provide contrasting examples or counterarguments if addressing misconceptions. Use comparative language: "Unlike _____, true _____ involves _____." Or "Many mistakenly believe _____, but in reality _____." Analyze why these distinctions matter. Conclude by summarizing this aspect's importance to the overall definition.]

[Press Tab to indent] [Begin your fourth body paragraph here. This paragraph can explore a third characteristic, discuss the term's significance, or examine its application in specific contexts. Start with a topic sentence that clearly indicates this paragraph's focus. Use the most compelling examples or analysis here. Consider discussing what happens when the term is misunderstood or misapplied. Analyze

the consequences or benefits of your refined definition. This should be a substantial paragraph that adds depth to your argument.]

[Press Tab to indent] [Begin your conclusion here. Start by restating your thesis in fresh language. Briefly summarize the key characteristics or aspects you've discussed, but do not simply repeat them. Instead, synthesize them into a coherent whole. Discuss the broader implications of your definition. Why does this nuanced understanding matter? How should it change how people think or act? End with a final, memorable thought that leaves the reader considering your definition's significance. Avoid introducing new information or examples in the conclusion.]

[If you have no sources, delete this page. If using sources, create a new page for Works Cited]

[Insert] → [Page Break] to create new page

[Center cursor and type:] Works Cited

[Press Enter and return to left alignment]

[Format each entry with hanging indent (0.5 inches). Alphabetize by author's last name or title if no author.]

[Sample entries - replace with your actual sources:]

Author's Last Name, First Name. *Title of Book*. Publisher, Year.

Author's Last Name, First Name. "Title of Article." *Title of Journal*, vol. number, no. number, Year, pp. page range.

"Title of Webpage." *Title of Website*, Publisher or Sponsor, Date of Publication, URL. Accessed Day Month Year.

"Term." *Title of Dictionary*, Edition, Publisher, Year.

MLA FORMATTING SHORTCUTS & TIPS

Word-Specific Instructions:

To set margins:

Layout → Margins → Normal (1" all sides)

To set double spacing:

Home → Paragraph → Line and Paragraph Spacing → 2.0

To create hanging indent for Works Cited:

1. Highlight entries

2. Right-click → Paragraph

3. Under "Indentation," Special → Hanging → 0.5"

To insert page numbers with last name:

1. Insert → Page Number → Top of Page → Plain Number 3

2. Type your last name before the number

3. Select both → Home → Font → Times New Roman 12pt

To ensure proper paragraph indentation:

Do NOT use spaces. Press Tab once at start of each paragraph.

Common MLA Rules for Definition Essays:

1. **Titles:** Capitalize all principal words in your title

2. **Italics:** Use for key terms on first mention and for published works

3. **Quotations:** Use for definitions taken directly from sources

4. **Citations:** Place at end of sentence before period: (Author Page)

5. **Numbers:** Spell out numbers that can be written in one or two words

6. **Contractions:** Avoid in formal academic writing

Content Guidelines for Each Section:

Introduction Should:

- Engage reader's interest

- Explain why term needs defining

- Provide necessary context

- Present clear, arguable thesis

Body Paragraphs Should Each:

- Focus on one aspect of definition

- Begin with clear topic sentence

- Provide specific evidence/examples

- Include analysis connecting evidence to definition

- Use transitions between ideas

Conclusion Should:

- Restate thesis (rephrased)

- Synthesize main points

- Explain significance of your definition

- End with memorable final thought

Sample Thesis Statements:

Replace bracketed information:

"Although [common understanding], [Term] is actually [your definition], which involves [characteristic 1], [characteristic 2], and [characteristic 3], ultimately serving as [broader function]."

"Beyond [simplistic definition], true [Term] represents [complex definition] that requires [component 1] and [component 2], transforming it from [what it's not] to [what it truly is]."

Transition Words for Definition Essays:

To introduce aspects: *Primarily, Fundamentally, Essentially*

To add characteristics: *Furthermore, Additionally, Equally important*

To contrast: *However, Conversely, In contrast*

To illustrate: *For example, Specifically, To illustrate*

To conclude points: *Therefore, Consequently, Thus*

CHECKLIST BEFORE SUBMISSION

Formatting:

- 1-inch margins on all sides

- Times New Roman 12pt font throughout

- Double spacing throughout

- Last name and page number in header (right-aligned)

- Heading block (left-aligned) with name, professor, course, date

- Centered, properly capitalized title

- 0.5" paragraph indents (using Tab, not spaces)

- Works Cited page if sources used (with hanging indents)

Content:

- Engaging hook in introduction

- Clear, arguable thesis statement

- 3-5 body paragraphs with topic sentences

- Specific examples and evidence

- Analysis connecting examples to definition

- Conclusion that synthesizes without repeating

- Proper MLA citations if sources used

- Academic tone maintained

- No contractions or colloquial language

Proofreading:

- Spell check completed

- Grammar check completed

- Read aloud for flow and clarity

- Verified all requirements met

- File named correctly

TROUBLESHOOTING COMMON ISSUES

Problem: Header disappears on second page

Solution: Double-click top of page, check "Different First Page" is UNchecked

Problem: Can't get proper hanging indent

Solution: Highlight text → Right-click → Paragraph → Special → Hanging → 0.5"

Problem: Extra space between paragraphs

Solution: Home → Paragraph → Spacing → After: 0pt → Set as Default

Problem: Title not centered properly

Solution: Select title → Home → Center align (or Ctrl+E)

Problem: Page numbers not appearing

Solution: Insert → Page Number → Top of Page → Plain Number 3 → Type last name before number

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Save this template for future use. To reuse, simply "Save As" a new document and replace the bracketed information with your content.

Remember: This template follows MLA 9th edition guidelines. Always confirm with your instructor if they have specific requirements that differ from standard MLA format.