

Worksheet for Revising Technical Definitions

The purpose of this worksheet is to help you revise sentence definitions and extended definitions. The first few questions will address sentence definitions. The remainder of the questions will address extended definitions.

Sentence Definitions

What term or concept is being defined in this technical definition?

Has the term been placed into a “category” of similar items? Should the category be broadened or narrowed to better fit the term?

Have “distinguishing characteristics” been used appropriately to distinguish the term from other terms in its category? In other words, do the distinguishing characteristics show how the term is unique among the similar items in its category?

Extended Definitions

Early in the extended definition, is a sentence definition used to define the term? If not, should the author include one?

Would the extended definition be improved if the author used some of the following techniques:

Word origin and word history—Does the definition explain where the term originated and how it has been used?

Examples—Does the definition offer examples of the word’s usage or situations in which the word might be used?

Negation—Does the definition tell you what the term does not mean?

Division into parts—Does the definition divide the subject of the definition into parts, allowing further definitions of these parts?

Analogy—Does the definition use familiar concepts to explain difficult concepts?

Graphics—Would a diagram, picture, or other kind of graphic help define the term visually?

Does the technical definition have a clear beginning, middle, and end?

Has the author chosen plain words that the readers of the technical definition will understand?

Are any sentences too long? Should some be shortened to make them more readable?

Are there any places where readers might need a word defined in the definition? In other words, is the author properly defining any terms that are being used to define the term?

Could the author use the senses better (sight, hearing, texture, taste, or smell) to add details to the technical definition?

How might design be used to enhance the readability and attractiveness of the technical definition?

Should the author add in headings to divide the technical definition into parts?

Could italics or bolding be used to highlight any special words or concepts?

Finally, are there any typos, spelling errors, or grammatical problems that the author should fix?