

## WRITING TO DEFINE

A dollar bill is always worth one hundred cents. But words are a different kind of currency. The same word may mean different things to different people. Many quarrels start when two people use the same word but mean different things by it. Many misunderstandings result when a word is meant one way but taken another.

One of the most basic questions we ask is "What do you mean?" What do you mean-- "rehabilitation?" What do you mean-- "indecent?" Often our major purpose as writers is to explain what we mean by an important term. When we *define* a term, we mark off the territory the word covers. We relate the word to the thing--to the reality it stands for in our lives. To make an important term real for the reader, we may

- show what the term means in *practice*;
- recognize several *different* important meanings of the word;
- mark it off from *other* related words.

Study the following short passages. Choose one of the three key terms for an extended definition. Write a paper filling in the full meaning of a term that is sometimes "just a word." Use detailed examples from your own observation or experience.

1. Like many words associated with our system of law and justice, the term *rehabilitation* has no definite meaning. "Rehabilitation" implies the reestablishment of a former state, but for most prisoners there is no former period in their lives that would be considered acceptable.
2. A *prejudice*, unlike an ordinary misconception, actively resists all evidence that would or could change it. We tend to grow emotional when a prejudice is threatened with contradiction.
3. *Love* is a very powerful word that has many different meanings. For instance, love is a deep feeling of fondness for another person. It is also a physical act of embrace. It also stands for the feeling of brotherhood of all human beings.

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From: Guth, Hans P. New English Workbook. Wadsworth, 1985