

Rhetorical Form: Writing an Extended Definition

What is an extended definition?

An extended definition is a definition that goes beyond a dictionary.com or a Merriam Webster definition. Anyone can look up a one-sentence definition online or in a dictionary. In contrast, extended definitions are lengthier and more detailed definitions.

When should an extended definition be used?

An extended definition is used in any of the cases below:

- specialized terms (such as unique words used in professions such as medicine, technology, engineering, etc.)
- loaded words (this includes words that have strong emotional colorings or "connotations")
- stipulative definition (this means words that have double or triple meanings, etc.)

How do I use an extended definition?

An extended definition can be formed by following these steps (not necessarily in this order):

- provide an example (an example is specific and concrete)
- use a synonym (a synonym is a word that is a different but has the same meaning)
- state what the thing is not (or invoke an antonym or contrasting idea)
- refer to etymology (etymology is the historical usage of the term)

Example: Extended Definition of Toy Breed (Dogs)

This paragraph is an example of an extended definition about toy breeds of dogs.

A "toy breed" is a type of dog that has been bred for human companionship. For example, a Shih Tzu is a toy breed that was bred by Tibetan monks over 1,000 years ago. It is a small, shaggy dog that enjoys sitting in laps or near the feet of its human companion. This explains why toy breeds are also called "lap dogs." The name Shih Tzu is the romanization of the Chinese characters for "lion dog," or shīzīgǒu, which is a bit misleading since Shih Tzus are a toy breed, typically weighing no more than 8-12 lbs. As indicated by the name "toy," this breed does not labor for humans by hunting, tracking, or herding the way that an Alaskan Malamut might pull a sled or a Bloodhound might track a duck for sport. Instead, they are a breed that enjoys brief bursts of play and warm nuzzles as characterized by their small size and friendly personalities./

This handout explains when and how to write extended definitions. For further insight into the topic, please consult Winifred Bryan Horner's book *Rhetoric in the Classical Tradition*.