

# Extended Definition

## INTRODUCTION

Attention grabber

Dictionary definition

### The Meaning of Work

When I was young, people would sometimes ask whether my mother worked. I was never quite sure how to reply. If I said “no,” I didn’t feel I was being truthful. If I said “yes,” the likely follow-up question would be “Where does she work?” When I answered that my mother worked at home, people would smile politely and say, “Oh, then she’s a housewife.” “No,” I would explain, “she’s an artist.”

Because what seemed like a simple question turned out to be complicated, I grew up giving the issue of work a lot of thought. What is work? Is it defined by what you do? By how you do it? By where you do it? By how much money you make? In one definition, Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, Tenth Edition, describes work as “the labor, task, or duty that is one’s accustomed means of livelihood.” Unfortunately, not all work situations fit into this definition. If they did, I would have to conclude that because my mother never sold enough of her art to earn a living—that is, because her art was not a means of “livelihood”—she didn’t work. By the same reasoning, I would have to say that when Dad washed the dishes after dinner, when Mom took the dog for a walk, or when I wrote a paper for my English class, none of us were actually working—unless, of course, someone was paying us for our labor, and I don’t remember that ever happening. Why is it, then, that performing those tasks felt like work, even if the dictionary would not define them that way?

## Extended Definition *continued*

Thesis

Perhaps what we need is a more complex definition of the word work. I agree that work is a labor, task, or duty. Rather than focus on whether work contributes to one's livelihood, though, it makes more sense to define work as a labor, task, or duty that entails a sense of obligation, and one that is performed with the goal of making a contribution.

BODY

Most people believe they know what work is not. Work is not play. Does that mean that work is never fun? Of course not. Some people love their work. They see their jobs as rewarding experiences, brisk mental or physical workouts that end in the glow of success. Some people even select their careers based on what they have fun doing. A ski instructor, for example, might choose that career because he or she loves to ski. What separates work from play is not how much fun we have doing it, but whether we feel an obligation to perform the task.

Examples

If the ski instructor decides to hit the slopes on her day off, she is "playing." If, though, a sense of obligation enters into the picture—"I have to practice skiing today so that I can become a better teacher"—then play becomes work. I might enjoy reading books on the weekend. If I have to read a book over the weekend for school, though, I'm likely to call this work rather than play, no matter how much or how little I enjoy it. One way to define "work," then, is by what it is not: work is not play, an activity that a person is under no obligation to perform.

Work is also not play because play does not necessarily have a specific goal. Often, the goal of work is to perform labor or tasks that

## Extended Definition *continued*

Example

make some kind of contribution. This contribution can take many forms. When we work, we might be contributing to ourselves—our sense of confidence or well-being, our need to be challenged, and yes, even our bank accounts. We might be contributing to the company that employs us by helping to create better products or a better reputation for our employer, which could lead to greater profits. We might be contributing to society by improving the world around us. Some people's work contributes on all these levels. A reporter who writes a brilliant and heart-warming story about the plight of homeless people may feel that he is enriching his own knowledge of the homeless, helping to sell more newspapers, and making the world a better place by encouraging people to help others. None of these contributions is necessarily tied to the reporter's livelihood, although it might be.

Example

Work is the oil that lubricates the machine of our society. Work is what keeps the buses running, the computers humming, the grocery store shelves stocked. In many cases, this work is done partially or primarily to earn the worker a livelihood. For people like my mother, however, work also meant laboring to create art that brought pleasure and intellectual stimulation to people's lives. Work was what made her feel like she was contributing to society. She felt a sense of obligation to share her work, her art, with those around her in order to create the kind of world she wanted to see, despite the fact that she earned no significant amount of money as a result.

## Extended Definition *continued*

### CONCLUSION

Summary of definition

Statement of definition's importance

According to the definition in the dictionary, my mother was not working. If we broaden the definition of "work," however, so that it includes both an obligation and a contribution, we can take steps toward a much more inclusive and realistic meaning of the word. By taking into consideration the many different ways people can contribute their labor, we can begin to see that what looks like play is sometimes really work; that work is not always about how much money a person earns while performing a task; and that our labor, if it makes a contribution to ourselves, our employers, our society, or our world, is always important work.

# Extended Definition

## Definition

Some words, like *freedom* and *hope*, have so many meanings and associations that they require an **extended definition** to explain them. An extended definition expands and refines a standard dictionary definition and sometimes explores the personal meaning a word has for the writer.

Many extended definitions use the structure illustrated in the framework below. Print this framework and use it as a guide when you write your own extended definition.

### Framework

### Directions and Explanations

**Introduction**

- Use an attention grabber.
- Supply necessary background information, including your subject's larger category.
- Provide a clear thesis.

**Get your readers' attention** Use an arresting example or a striking contrast.

**Build background** Provide background information and mention the common dictionary definition of the term.

**Get to the point** State your thesis, showing how your definition extends the common one and indicating how your essay will progress.



**Body**

- Discuss the first example, illustration, anecdote, or analogy.
- Discuss the second example, and so on.

**Offer some support** Provide examples that bolster your thesis.

**Organize your ideas** Arrange those examples in an order that makes sense, such as chronological order or order of importance.



**Conclusion**

- Summarize the definition.
- Briefly explain the importance or relevance of the extended definition.

**Sum it up** Quickly remind your readers of your extended definition, and highlight the ways in which your definition is different from the common definition.

**Provide your opinion** Leave readers with a clear statement of your ideas about the definition's importance.