

Definitions

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WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will learn about when to use definitions in your speech. Specifically, this lesson will cover:

1. Introduction
2. Providing Definitions
3. Examples

1. Introduction

During the introduction to your speech or presentation, you've given your audience a promise. You've told them that in exchange for their attention, you are going to deliver some information that answers the question which spawned the presentation in the first place.

Now you are giving the main part of your speech, and your audience expects you to deliver as promised. There's just one problem. Even though you've already decided what to include in the answer, you realize that there are times when the listeners may lose focus because they aren't following you.

One way to make sure that your answer is focused is to tell your audience what you are talking about. In other words, define your key terms. In doing this, you do two things: First, you show that you know what you are speaking about. Second, you avoid misunderstandings by settling on a single understanding of the key terms.

➦ **EXAMPLE** It might be that your audience understands power in a Marxist way, and you want to approach the presentation from a feminist point of view. By providing a brief definition, there will be no misunderstanding. Your audience may not agree with you, but that is not necessary to get your point across.

A definition makes sure you and your audience are talking about the same things.

➦ **EXAMPLE** You can define fruit salad as consisting of bananas, pineapples, and yellow apples (ideally you would have a reason for this, too). Having done so, your audience will not object when you later state that fruit salad lacks the vital bits of red. Your definition of a fruit salad has supported this idea.

2. Providing Definitions

In order to define the key terms, you first have to bluntly state what they are. Always include the key words included in the question. These have been identified as central **concepts** for you, and by excluding them, you'll be very likely answering a different question from the one set.

There are often other key terms you want to include, and it's usually worth spending some time thinking about which ones are the key concept. The number of definitions you include will depend on the length of your speech.

Sometimes it takes a bit of time to think which terms are the central ones. This is time worth spending, because you can later use the concepts without giving any further qualifications or comments. For this reason, you should also define the terms carefully.

IN CONTEXT

Having defined "power" in a particular way, every time you use the term in the presentation, it will have the meaning you desire. Providing the definition of the key terms also works as a signal to your audience that you know what you're talking about.

By defining "power" in a certain way, you demonstrate that you're aware of other interpretations. In fact, it will usually not be necessary to state what the other interpretations are, unless the distinction is a key aspect of the argument.

It is easy to support your ideas once you've created credibility.



TERM TO KNOW

Concept

An understanding retained in the mind, from experience, reasoning and/or imagination; a generalization (generic, basic form), or abstraction (mental impression), of a particular set of instances or occurrences (specific, though different, recorded manifestations of the concept).

3. Examples

Very often, you'll use the work of somebody else to help you define the key terms. The following two paragraphs define the concepts "social disadvantage" and "siblings."

The definitions are taken from a range of sources, and referenced accordingly. In the context of another speech or presentation, these definitions may be too long or too short.

Social disadvantage, to start with, refers to a range of difficulties a person can be exposed to. According to McLanahan and Sandefur, social disadvantages include a lower expectancy in educational attainment, lower prospects at work, or lower status in society. Steinberg demonstrated that social and economic disadvantages in society often come together, leading some sociologists talking about underclasses. Social disadvantage, however, does not necessarily have to be as extreme as that: it describes a relative difficulty in reaching a similar position in society than people

not disadvantaged.

Siblings, finally, in the context of this presentation, refer to brothers and sisters of the same birth family. This means that siblings are biologically related, as well as living in the same family.



SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned that **providing the definition** of the key terms also works as a signal to your audience that you know what you're talking about. You then looked at some **examples** of how key terms may be defined in a given speech.

Source: Boundless. "Definitions." Boundless Communications Boundless, 3 Mar. 2017. Retrieved 19 May. 2017 from <https://www.boundless.com/communications/textbooks/boundless-communications-textbook/supporting-your-ideas-9/using-other-supporting-materials-49/definitions-198-6623/>



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