

English 314 Unit #1: Definitions and Descriptions

(Worth 10% of your grade; due September 17)

Overview

One of the most common activities writers in technical environments are called upon to do is define or describe complex technical terms, concepts, and processes for non-technical audiences. Researchers must explain the basic concepts of their work to funding organizations; physicians must describe diseases and procedures to patients, their families, and insurance companies; even auto mechanics must often explain engines to car owners. In this assignment, you will (1) create a glossary of terms that might be useful to a new member of your field, and (2) describe a technical product or process used in your field to that same individual. Together, these two documents could serve as a valuable introduction to new students in your major, new volunteers in your community organization, or new employees at your place of business.

Assignment Details

Step 1: Select a topic and choose your audience

Think about the various roles you play in any given week—you may be a student, an employee, a volunteer, a club president, etc. As you move from one role to another, you alter your vocabulary, your level of formality, and your expectations about what others around you know. Select one of these roles, then focus on one or two particular aspects of that role. Choose something you find interesting and can explain to others with a little additional research (i.e., don't pick something completely foreign to you that you have to research from scratch; choose something about which you have at least a basic level of knowledge). Finally, imagine that you have been asked to train or orient a new member of your field. In addition to providing verbal instructions, you decide to create two documents that the person can refer to later.

Step 2. Create the documents

This assignment has two primary deliverables:

1. A **glossary of terms** that are unique to your field or that have special meaning in your field. Your glossary should contain at least 20 terms. Although you may draw upon dictionaries, glossaries, and Internet resources to define these terms, you should not simply copy and paste preexisting definitions into your glossary; rather, you should place each term and its definition within the context of your specific field. Some definitions may be as short as a single sentence; others may require a full paragraph. The glossary document should be structured and designed to enhance readability.
2. A **two-sided information sheet** (i.e., both sides of one sheet of paper) describing and explaining a technical product or process used regularly in your field. Include a minimum of one new or adapted illustration, designed for use by a specific semi-technical or non-technical audience. Include as much background, definition, explanation, visuals, etc. as necessary for your audience. At the very least, you will include an expanded technical definition and description of the product or process.

Step 3. Complete the assignment reflection

In addition to the primary deliverables, you will also write a short (1–1.5 page) analysis memo that explains the context and audience for your documents, and describes and justifies the choices you made with regard to content, organization, and design. Among other topics, you may want to answer the following questions: *Who is your audience? What is the purpose of your*

document? How effective do you think this document is in terms of your purpose and why? Why did you choose to organize the information the way you did as opposed to some other possible organization? Why did you choose to include the content you did? What was left out? Why is the design effective for the audience? Why are the visuals effective? Write this memo to me as your instructor, using specific details from your glossary and information sheet to explain your choices to help me better understand the context in which you see your document being used. Prepare your analysis memo in memo format, as described in Chapter 17 of our textbook.

Step 4. Submit all documents

When you are finished with the assignment, combine all three components (the two primary deliverable plus the analysis memo) into a single document and save it as “Full Name Unit 1.doc” (for instance, my file would be named “Quinn Warnick Unit 1.doc”). Then upload your file to the course website before class starts on Thursday, September 17. In addition, bring a printed copy of your completed assignment to class that day.

Evaluation Criteria

For this first assignment, we will develop the evaluation criteria as a class project. Once we have identified and agreed upon the criteria for evaluating this assignment, I will distribute a formal evaluation sheet that you can use as you create your deliverables.