

FOCUS	READING	WRITING
Sept. 14 - 20  Technical Definitions	D2L:  1. <a href="#">Assignment Sheet #3</a> 2. Gurak & Lannon Chapter 11, "Definitions." 3. Grammar Resources: <a href="#">Sentence Building Blocks</a>	1. <a href="#">Writing Workshop #2</a> : Respond to at least one peer's MSU email from last week <b>no later than midnight Wednesday, Sept. 16. Worth up to 5 points.</b>  2. <a href="#">Writing Workshop #3</a> : Submit your technical definition <b>by midnight Sunday, Sept. 20.</b>

So far, in Writing 221, you've

- **Read** about the requirements of writing effective technical documents, namely analyzing audience (via rhetorical thinking); understanding genres expectations; and refining language to achieve appropriate tone, length, format and style for these genres.
- **Written** discussion posts, memos, letters and emails—as well as feedback on peer work, which requires critical thinking and concrete writing.

That's a lot. Good job. Across genres, across disciplines, the *more* you write, the *stronger* you write. Practice = improvement = confidence & credibility. **You're on the right track.**

**Now, we are going to build on these skills.** This week—after you've read peer MSU emails and provided revision feedback in Writing Workshop #2—you will draft a technical definition. Definitions appear in technical documents all the time. Sometimes, as simple phrases; other times, as several pages of explanation. It depends on the writing situation and reader: how much do readers need to know and how much space do you, as the writer, have to explore an object or idea.

- **FIRST**, read Chapter 11 in Gurak and Lannon carefully. It's a short chapter, but to write an effective definition, you need to avoid common pitfalls (such as circular definitions, incorrect classifications, confusing detail, etc.) so please read actively (and probably twice).
- **SECOND**, read Assignment Sheet #3. Then return to Chapter 11 and read Figure 11.2 **aloud**; this is an effective example and will help you "hear" the flow of a well-written definition. Next, read the past student example Extended Definition of Honey Gardens Elderberry Syrup. The idea here is to emulate: When you write, you'll have that intonation in your mind to inspire your own clear language.
- **THIRD**, decide how much readers need to know—and what they do *not* need to know. There's an important strategic balance here.
- **FOURTH**, draft your definition. Print it out. Take a break. Read it aloud. Revise (word choice, sentence construction, transitions, content) and edit (punctuation, grammar). If your language isn't as clear or effective as you know it can be, schedule a free 40-minute tutoring session with the [MSU Writing Center](#), to meet either online or in person. Or, reach out to me with specific questions about strengthening your sentences and paragraphs. I'm here to help!
- **FINALLY**, post your draft to [Writing Workshop #3 by midnight Sunday \(9/20\)](#) with questions for peer reviewers. Examples of such questions include: *Did I help readers understand the device/idea/medicine clearly enough? If not, what specific details would have been helpful to add? Was my tone objective? In other words, did I use clear and accurate word choice to emphasis purpose and content rather than me, the writer.*

TECHNICAL WRITING TIP:  
POLISHING SENTENCE-LEVEL WRITING

To support both writing assignments this week, I want you to revisit some basic sentence-level writing concepts. Understanding subjects, verbs, clauses and phrases will help you better understand how to vary sentence construction for flow, as well as how to use punctuation properly (which we will cover in earnest in week 8). [OWL's discussion of writing clear, mature sentences will help justify this re-learning of basics.](#)

Please visit the [D2L page that defines these sentence building blocks](#). Some of you will be able to breeze through this; others may need to spend some time with the linked resources. If you find these concepts challenging, again, a free visit to the MSU Writing Center is in your best interest.

READING NOTES

Guark and Lannon, Chapter 11, "Definitions"

- There are three types of definitions discussed this chapter: parenthetical, sentence and expanded. It is important you understand the difference between the three and how/when to use one rather than the other.
- Most simple are parenthetical, as demonstrated in section 11.3.
- Sentence definitions contain the "term," "class" and "defining characteristics" or features.
- Notice the reasons discussed for why a technical writer would want to expand a definition into a paragraph--or even an entire report.

- Figure 11.1 demonstrates a variety of the ways writers can expanded definitions. This all depends on audience and context: what do readers need to know based on their reading expectations.
- Notice how all figures in this and other chapters contain a number (Figure 1), a title (Description of a Simple Laser) and labels. If a figure is taken from another source (i.e. you did not draw or photograph it), source information is also provided. You will be required to do this if you use visuals to expand your definition.