

Rule 8: A Lexical Definition Should Indicate the Context to Which the Definiens Pertains

This rule applies to any definition in which the context of the definiens is important to the meaning of the definiendum. For example, the definition “‘Deuce’ means a tie in points toward a game or in games toward a set” is practically meaningless without any reference to tennis. Whenever the definiendum is a word that means different things in different contexts, a reference to the context is important. Examples:

“Strike” means (in baseball) a pitch at which a batter swings and misses.

“Strike” means (in bowling) the act of knocking down all the pins with the first ball of a frame.

“Strike” means (in fishing) a pull on a line made by a fish in taking the bait.

It is not always necessary to make *explicit* reference to the context, but at least the phraseology of the definiens should indicate the context.

Exercise 2.5

Criticize the following definitions in light of the eight rules for lexical definitions:

- ★1. A sculpture is a three-dimensional image made of marble.
2. “Elusory” means elusive.
3. “Birdie” means sinking the ball in one stroke under par.
- ★4. A cynic is a person who knows the price of everything and the value of nothing.
(Oscar Wilde)
5. “Semantics” is when somebody studies words.
6. “iPod” means a handheld electronic device having a single click-wheel on one side.
- ★7. A theist is anyone who is not an atheist or an agnostic.
8. “Intelligence” means whatever is measured by an IQ test.
9. A symphony is a musical piece written for full orchestra.
- ★10. Feminism is a militant movement originated by a group of deviant women for the purpose of undermining the natural distinction between the sexes.
11. “Wood” means fibrous, lignified cellulose.
12. Logic is the study of arguments including definitions.
- ★13. “Truculent” is if you’re cruel or fierce.

14. A house is a structure made of wood or stone intended for human habitation.
15. Satire is a kind of glass, wherein beholders do generally discover everybody's face but their own.

(Jonathan Swift)

- ★16. A carpenter's square is a square used by a carpenter.
17. "Safety" means a play in which a player grounds the ball behind his own goal line when the ball was caused to cross the goal line by his own team.
18. Puberty: the time in life in which the two sexes begin first to be acquainted.

(Johnson's Dictionary)

- ★19. "Normal" means an attribute possessed by people who are able to get on in the world.
20. An organic substance is any substance that is not inorganic.
21. Faith is the bird that sings when the dawn is still dark.

(Rabindranath Tagore)

- ★22. "Schooner" means sort of like a sailboat.
23. "Faith" means reason succumbing to insecurity.
24. "Gammon" means, in backgammon, a victory in which one player defeats another before he can remove any of his men from the board.
- ★25. A cello is a stringed musical instrument played with a bow.
26. Tobacco is a plant grown in the southeastern United States that, when enjoyed in the form of cigars and cigarettes, produces a most delightful and satisfying taste and aroma.
27. History is the unfolding of miscalculations.

(Barbara Tuchman)

- ★28. "Clock" means a manufactured device featuring two pointers that rotate past a set of numerals ranging from 1 to 12.
29. "Soap" means saponified glyceride.
30. Mackerel: a sea-fish.

(Johnson's Dictionary)

- ★31. "Anchorperson" means an electronic media guru who has great looks but less- than-average intelligence and who brings canned news to people incapable of reading a newspaper.
32. "Diet" means like when you cut back on your calories.
33. Animal: a living creature corporeal, distinct, on the one side, from pure spirit, on the other, from pure matter.

(Johnson's Dictionary)

- ★34. "Pen" means an instrument used for writing on paper.
35. Wine is an alcoholic beverage made from grapes.