

Clarifying meanings in Academic English

Explain one of the things below as well as you can, using the phrases on the next page to help you if you like. Your partner will ask you for more and more clarification (even if they have really understood what you mean)

- a causal relationship
- a cycle
- a definition of your field area of interest
- a foreign term that is used in academic English, e.g. something from Latin or Greek
- a formula/ an equation
- a fundamental concept of your field
- a hypothesis
- a method of statistical analysis
- a process
- a school of thought
- a trend
- a word which has different meanings in everyday and academic English
- an academic achievement and why it is significant
- an ideology
- changes in ideas on one topic
- contrasting two ideas or two people's ideas
- differences between two similar terms
- different approaches to a common theme of research
- different definitions of one word or phrase
- exceptions to a rule
- how something is administered
- instructions for writing appendices
- rules of citation (e.g. of one publication)
- some specialist terminology
- the consensus view on something
- the content of one book or paper
- the differences between two areas of research
- the ideas of one person
- the scope of some research
- unifying two theories
- your thesis



Useful phrases

- Anticipating your questions,...
- By... I mean.../ ..., by which I mean...
- I can illustrate this with an analogy./ This is not a precise analogy but...
- I would define.... as.../ I am using... to mean...
- ... is usually defined as...
- In other words,.../ i.e./ To put it another way,.../ That is to say...
- It can help to picture it as / symbolise it as/ visualise it as...
- More simply,.../ In layperson's terms,... /A more straightforward explanation is.../ A simpler if less precise definition explanation is...
- Practically, this means that.../ Practically speaking,...
- The meaning is somewhat ambiguous but.../ There's no precise definition but...
- There are two related meanings./ Other people define it as.../ An alternative explanation is...
- To be (more) specific/ precise,.../ Specifically,...
- To clarify,...
- To illustrate what I mean,...
- You could also take it to mean...
- You might be more familiar with...

Suggested questions

- Is that the same thing as...?/ Is that similar to...?
- What's the difference between that and...?
- Can you define...?
- What does... mean?
- I can't get my head round...
- Is there a simpler way to explain...?

Clarifying phrases presentation/ practice

From your memory or knowledge, put one word into each of the gaps below.

..., _____ which I mean...

I can illustrate this with _____ analogy./ This is not _____ precise analogy but...

I would define.... _____....

_____ other words,.../ i.e./ _____ put it another way,.../ That is _____ say...

It may help to picture it / symbolise it/ visualise it _____...

_____ simply,.../ _____ layperson's terms,... / _____ more straightforward explanation is.../ A simpler _____ less precise definition explanation is...

Practically, this _____ that.../ Practically speaking,...

_____ meaning is somewhat ambiguous but.../ There's _____ precise definition but...

There _____ two (related) meanings./ Other _____ define it as.../ _____ alternative explanation is...

To _____ (more) specific/ precise,.../ Specifically,...

To illustrate _____ I mean,...

You could also _____ it to mean...

Compare your answers with the previous page. Other answers might be possible.

What other phrases could you use with that function?