

### 6 Rules of Definition

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Good definitions are the basis of rational debate. After all, if we can't agree on what something is, how can we discuss it? The following *6 Rules of Definition* are taken from David Kelley's The Art of Reasoning with Symbolic Logic (1990).

i. A definition should include a *genus* and a *differentia* .

Good: A dog is an *animal* with *four legs that barks* .

Bad: A dog is when...

A dog is like...

ii. A definition should not be too broad or too narrow.

Broad: A dog is an animal with four legs.

Narrow: A dog is a furry animal with four legs that barks and is named Rex.

iii. A definition should state the concept's essential attributes.

Non-essential: A dog is an animal that is a companion.

iv. A definition should not be circular.

A dog is a canine.

Folly is an act that is foolish.

v. A definition should not use negative terms unnecessarily.

A dog is not a cat.

vi. A definition should not use vague, obscure, or metaphorical language.

Maturity is the state of psychological development in which a person becomes well-adjusted.

Death is the cessation of one's participation in finitude.

Life is a cabaret.

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