

# Definitions

PHIL2100

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## 1 Definitions and Their Purposes (Ch. 2.3 excerpt)

- The basic function of a definition is to assign a meaning to a word
- we examine only lexical definition; There are many other kinds (see Ch. 2.3);
- All definitions consist of two main components: the **definiendum**, the word that is supposed to be defined, and the **definiens** is the group of words used to define the word.

*Dfn* 1.1. a **Lexical Definition** is a definition used to report the meaning that a word has in an existing language

## 2 Criteria for Lexical Definitions (Ch. 2.5)

A Lexical Definition should ...

1. conform to the standards of proper grammar
2. convey the essential meaning of the word being defined
3. be neither too broad nor too narrow
4. avoid circularity
5. not be negative when it can be affirmative
6. avoid figurative, obscure, vague or ambiguous language
7. avoid affective terminology

Some 'definitions' that fail one or more rules.

- 'human' means a featherless biped \*\*\* (contra 2)
- 'rules' means a king \*\*\* (contra 3)
- 'hunter' means one who hunts (contra 4)
- 'communism' means the radical leftist political view (contra 7)
- 'Florida' is the southern state that isn't Texas, South Carolina, ... (contra 5)

### Definition Exercises – Focus on Rule 3

Attempt 1: 'car' means a vehicle with four wheels

Definition is too broad (includes too much): a golf cart is a vehicle with four wheels but it is **not** a car

Definition is too narrow (includes not enough): a car whose wheel has fallen off is not a vehicle with four wheels but it **is** still a car

Attempt 2: ...

Attempt 1: 'bachelor' means an unmarried, male

Too broad: boy toddlers are male and unmarried, but they are not bachelors. ...

Attempt 2: 'bachelor' means an adult, unmarried, male

Too broad: a Catholic priest — adult, unmarried, male but not a bachelor...

Attempt 3: ...

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