



# Descriptive vs. Critical Writing

---

## Critical Writing: Descriptive vs. Critical

Many of students are told that their writing is too descriptive and not critical enough. But what does this actually mean? This page describes both sorts of writing so that you can see the difference and gives examples of how to make your writing less descriptive and more critical.

### Descriptive Writing

Descriptive writing is an essential element of academic writing, but it is used to **set the background** and to **provide evidence** rather than to develop argument. When writing descriptively you are **informing** your reader of things that they need to know to understand and follow your argument but you are **not transforming** that information in any way. This is usually writing about things you have read, done (often as part of reflective writing) or observed.

### Critical writing

When writing critically, you are **developing a reasoned argument** and participating in academic debate. Essentially you are **persuading** your reader of your position on the topic at hand. This is about taking the information you have described and **using it** in some way. This could be writing things like:

- why it is relevant to your argument
- how it relates to other literature
- how it relates to the focus of your assignment
- how a theory can be put into practice
- why it is significant
- why you are not persuaded by it
- how it leads you to reach your conclusion.

### Table comparing functions of descriptive and critical writing

The table below gives more examples of the difference between descriptive and critical writing



# Descriptive vs. Critical Writing

<b>Descriptive Writing</b>	<b>Critical Writing</b>
States what happened	Identifies the significance of what happened
States what something is like	Evaluates the strengths and weakness of something
Gives the story so far	Analyzes how the story so far impacts on the current state
Says how to do something	Analyzes why things are done a certain way
Explains what a theory says	Shows why a theory is relevant Identifies the strengths and weaknesses of a theory in practice
Explains how something works	Indicates why something will work (best)
Notes the method used	Identifies whether a method was suitable or appropriate
Says when something occurred	Identifies why the timing is of importance
Identifies the different components of something	Weighs up the importance of component parts
States options	Gives reasons for selecting each option
Lists details	Evaluates the relative significance of details
Lists in any order	Structures information in order of importance
States links between items	Shows the relevance of links between pieces of information
Gives evidence	Argues a case according to the evidence
Provides information for comparison	Makes a reasoned judgment on provided information
Gives information	Draws conclusions