

How to write... critically

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Critical/analytical writing vs. descriptive writing

Have you ever had feedback from lecturers on your assignments such as “more analysis needed”, “too descriptive”, “less description, more critique”? If so, your feedback and marks can be improved by balancing descriptive writing with a more critical/analytical approach.

Use the chart below to help develop your descriptive writing into a more critical style

Descriptive writing...

Critical/analytical writing...

states what happened	identifies the significance
states what something is like	evaluates strengths and weaknesses
gives the story so far	weighs one piece of information against another
outlines the order in which things happened	makes reasoned judgements
instructs how to do something	argues a case according to the evidence
lists the main elements of a theory	shows why something is relevant or suitable
outlines how something works	indicates why something works (best)
notes the methods used	identifies appropriate or suitable methods
states when something occurred	identifies why the timing is important
states the different components	weighs up the importance of component parts
states options	gives reasons for selecting each option
lists details	evaluates the relative significance of each detail
lists in any order	structures information in list of importance
states links between items	shows the relevance of various links
gives information or reports findings	evaluates information and draws conclusions

Adapted from:

Cottrell, S. (2013) *The study skills handbook*, 4th ed. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan