**Descriptive vs. critical writing**

**Descriptive writing**

A good way to remember descriptive writing is that provides information on: **what, who, where, when**. Descriptive writing demonstrates to your marker the knowledge you have of a subject (of what something is) and your knowledge of what other people say about that subject.

**Critical writing**

Critical writing requires you to apply analysis and evaluation to the descriptions you have provided. Writers who can produce persuasive critical writing use evidence to support their ideas. Critical writing allows you to:

* **Apply**an idea or theory to a different situations. Does the idea work/not work in practice? Is there a factor that makes this work/not work? (relating theory to practice). For example: 'Smith's (2008) theory on teamwork is effective in the workplace because it allows a diverse group of people with different skills to work effectively'.
* **Justify** why a process or policy exists. For example: 'It was necessary for the nurse to check the patient's handover notes because...'
* **Suggest**an **alternative approach** to view and act on situations. For example: 'By adopting a Freirian approach, we could view the student as a collaborator in our teaching and learning'. Or: 'if we had followed the NMC guidelines we could have made the patient feel calm and relaxed during the consultation'.
* Discuss the **strengths** and **weaknesses** of an idea/theory/policy. Why does this idea/theory/policy work? Or, why does this idea not work? For example: 'Although Smith's (2008) theory on teamwork is useful for large teams, there are challenges in applying this theory to teams who work remotely'.
* How the **idea links to other ideas** in the field (**synthesis**). For example: 'the user experience of parks can be greatly enhanced by examining Donnelly's (2009) customer service model used in retail.
* How the idea **compares and contrasts** with other ideas/theories (comparison/classification of the type of theory). For example: The approach advocated by the NMC differs in comparison because of factor A and factor C.
* The “up-to-dateness” and relevance of an idea/theory/policy (**currency**). For example: 'although this approach was successful in supporting the local community, Smith's model does not accommodate the needs of a modern global economy'.
* **Evaluates** an idea/theory/policy by providing an evidence-informed judgment. For example: 'Therefore, May's delivery model should be discontinued as it has created significant issues for both customers and staff (Ransom, 2018)'.
* **Creates**new perspectives or arguments based on knowledge. For example: 'to create strong and efficient buildings, we will look to the designs provided by nature. The designs of the Sydney Opera house are based on the segments of an orange (Cook, 2019)'.

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| **Descriptive writing** | **Critical writing** |
| **Reports** what happened | **Evaluates** the significance of what happened |
| **Hypothesises** why something happened |
| **Outlines** what something is like | **Evaluates** the strengths and weaknesses of something |
| **States** evidence | **Argues**, using evidence |
| **Explains** what a theory says | **Determines** why a theory is relevant |
| **Explains** an experimental method | **Justifies** the use of a particular method over another |
| **Quotes**, **summarises** or **paraphrases** information from different writers | **Compares** and **contrasts** the views of different writers |
| **Considers** the relevance or validity of information from different writers |
| **Gives examples** of different items | **Differentiates** between items, possibly using examples |
| **States** the findings of an experiment | **Distinguishes** between important and less important findings of an experiment |
| **Lists** details | **Evaluates** the relative significance of details |
| **Lists** information | **Organises** information in order of importance |
| **Lists** options | **Critiques** the options in order to **select** the best one |

**Descriptive statement + Critical statement + Judgment statement**

According to…                 However…            Overall…

Smith argues that…         Alternatively…           Therefore

**Finding your academic voice**

“healthy skepticism … but not cynicism;

confidence … but not arrogance;

judgement which is critical … but not dismissive;

opinions … without being opinionated;

careful evaluation of published work … not serial shooting at random targets;

being ‘fair’: assessing fairly the strengths and weaknesses of other people’s ideas and writing … without prejudice; and

making judgements on the basis of considerable thought and all the available evidence … as opposed to assertions without reason.”