

It is important to understand the difference between descriptive and critical analytical writing. Both are an essential part of academic assignments but “in general students lose more marks for lack of critical analysis than for any other single weakness in their work” (Cottrell, 2019, p. 268).

The main differences between the two types of writing are:

Descriptive writing	Critical/analytical writing
States what happened	Identifies the significance
States what something is like	Evaluates (judges the value of) 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
Says how to do something	Argues a case according to the evidence
Lists the main elements of a theory	Shows why the theory is relevant or suitable
Outlines how something works	Indicates why something will work (best)
Notes the method used	Draws out its strengths/weaknesses/appropriateness
Says when something occurred	Identifies why the timing is of importance
States the different components	Weighs up the importance of component parts
States options	Gives reason for the selection of each option
Lists details	Evaluates the relative significance of details
Lists in any order	Structures information in order (e.g. of importance)
States links between items	Shows the relevance of links between pieces of information
Gives information or reports findings	Evaluates information and draws conclusions

(Table adapted from Cottrell, 2019, p. 268)