

Critical vs Descriptive Writing

Leadership essay workshop for Level 4 students

LCBB4015 - Introduction to Leadership and Management

The real assignment asks you to explain three Goleman leadership styles, apply them to business situations, and discuss leadership skills needed today.

- Understand the difference between **describing** leadership and **critically discussing** leadership.
- Read two sample essays on a similar topic: one mainly descriptive, one more critical.
- Identify what makes writing stronger at Level 4: evidence, application, balance and judgement.
- Leave with a paragraph structure you can use without copying anyone else's work.

What the marker is looking for

Literature

Use credible academic sources and cite them correctly.

Knowledge

Show you understand leadership, styles, benefits and limitations.

Thinking

Go beyond 'what it is' and explain why, how and when it works.

Application

Use business situations to show how theory works in practice.

Communication

Write in clear paragraphs with a logical structure and formal tone.

Key message: higher marks come from explaining, applying and evaluating - not just listing facts.

P

Practice essay title

Democratic Leadership and Employee Participation in a Service Improvement Project

Practice question/task

Explain how democratic leadership could support employee involvement in a business improvement project. Discuss its benefits and limitations using a business example.

Important: this is deliberately close to your topic area, but it is not your assignment question and it does not cover three styles.

Descriptive writing	Critical writing
Explains what something is.	Explains why it matters in a specific situation.
Lists features, advantages or disadvantages.	Weighs up strengths, limitations and conditions.
Uses broad statements such as 'this improves teamwork'.	Makes precise claims such as 'this may improve commitment when staff have relevant knowledge'.
May include an example, but does not analyse it.	Applies the example to show how theory works in practice.
Often ends with 'this style is good'.	Ends with a reasoned judgement: when it works, when it does not, and why.

As you read, ask: is this explaining, applying and evaluating - or mostly telling me what democratic leadership is?

Democratic Leadership and Employee Participation in a Service Improvement Project

Democratic leadership is a leadership style where the leader allows employees to take part in decision-making. In this style, the leader asks team members for their opinions before making decisions. Goleman (2000) explains that democratic leadership is one of the six leadership styles and is useful when leaders want people to share ideas. It is different from commanding leadership because employees are not just told what to do. Instead, they can speak and contribute.

Democratic leadership is important because it can make employees feel valued. When people are allowed to share their ideas, they may become more motivated. This can improve teamwork because everyone feels involved. For example, in a retail business, a manager may ask employees how to improve customer service. The employees may give suggestions because they deal with customers every day. This can help the business because employees may know what customers complain about.

Another advantage of democratic leadership is that it can improve communication. When a leader listens to employees, workers may feel comfortable speaking about problems. This style can also increase commitment because people are more likely to support a decision if they helped to make it. This means democratic leadership can be good for business performance.

However, democratic leadership also has disadvantages. It can be slow because the leader has to ask people for their views. This may not be useful in a crisis when the business needs a quick decision. Also, not all employees may have enough experience to make good suggestions. Therefore, democratic leadership is useful in business, but it may not work in every situation. Leaders need communication skills and listening skills to use this style effectively.

Question for discussion: what would stop this essay from reaching the higher bands?

What is weak about Essay A?

- It explains the style, but it mostly stays at the level of **definition and general benefit**.
- The business example is relevant, but it is not developed enough to show a strong line of argument.
- The disadvantages are mentioned, but the discussion does not fully explain **when** the style is unsuitable.
- There is little judgement: the essay says the style is useful, but does not clearly evaluate the conditions that make it effective.
- It needs more precise links to business outcomes such as service quality, commitment, decision quality or organisational effectiveness.

Class task: rewrite one sentence so it moves from description to critical discussion.

As you read, look for: evidence, application, balance, judgement and links to business outcomes.

Democratic Leadership and Employee Participation in a Service Improvement Project

Democratic leadership can support employee involvement because it encourages staff to contribute ideas before decisions are made. In Goleman's (2000) framework, this style is useful when leaders need commitment, collaboration and fresh thinking rather than immediate compliance. This is important in a business improvement project because employees often understand operational problems that senior managers may not see directly.

For example, in a retail organisation trying to improve customer service, a store manager could use democratic leadership by asking frontline staff to identify common customer complaints and suggest practical changes. This may improve the quality of the decision because employees have direct knowledge of customer behaviour. It may also increase commitment because staff are more likely to support changes they helped to shape. In this sense, democratic leadership can contribute to organisational effectiveness by turning employee knowledge into better service processes.

However, the value of democratic leadership depends on the situation. If the business is facing an urgent crisis, such as a serious health and safety issue or a major system failure, consultation may delay action. A more directive approach may be needed in the short term. Democratic leadership can also become ineffective if the leader collects opinions but avoids making a final decision. Therefore, the style requires strong communication, judgement and decision-making skills.

Overall, democratic leadership is not simply 'good' because it involves people. Its strength is that it can improve engagement and decision quality when employees have relevant knowledge and when there is enough time to consult them. Its limitation is that participation must be managed carefully. A leader using this style should listen actively, compare different views, explain the final decision and remain accountable for the outcome.

Question for discussion: what makes this more analytical than Essay A?

What is stronger about Essay B?

Evidence of critical writing

- It makes a clear claim: democratic leadership helps when commitment, collaboration and fresh thinking are needed.
- It applies the style to a specific business situation rather than staying general.
- It explains the mechanism: employee knowledge can improve decision quality and service processes.

Why this matters for marks

- It gives balance: democratic leadership can be slow or unsuitable during urgent crises.
- It links leadership style to skills: communication, judgement and decision-making.
- It ends with a reasoned judgement, not a simple statement that the style is good.

Instead of...	Write more like...
Democratic leadership is good because employees can share ideas.	Democratic leadership may improve decision quality when employees have direct knowledge of the problem being solved.
Pacesetting leadership makes people work hard.	Pacesetting can improve short-term performance in skilled teams, but may increase burnout if targets are unrealistic.
Affiliative leadership improves teamwork.	Affiliative leadership may rebuild trust after conflict, although it can be weak if poor performance is not addressed.
Coaching leadership helps employees develop.	Coaching supports long-term capability, but it requires time and may be less suitable when urgent action is needed.

A simple paragraph formula

Point + Evidence + Application + Evaluation + Link

Point

State the leadership style or skill you are discussing.

Evidence

Use a credible source, e.g., Goleman or a leadership textbook/journal.

Application

Show how it works in a business situation.

Evaluation

Explain strengths, limitations and conditions.

Link

Connect back to organisational effectiveness, growth or development.

Useful phrase: 'This suggests that the effectiveness of the style depends on...'

Final checklist before writing

- ✓ I have chosen **three** Goleman leadership styles, not all six.
- ✓ I have explained the characteristics, advantages and disadvantages of each style.
- ✓ I have used realistic business situations, not vague examples.
- ✓ I have discussed essential leadership skills needed today.
- ✓ I have used at least five credible academic sources and cited them.
- ✓ I have written my own work and used AI only in the permitted ways.
- ✓ I have a clear introduction, main body and conclusion.

Critical writing is not about sounding complicated. It is about making a clear, balanced and evidence-based judgement.

Source note for students

This projector pack is for teaching discussion only. It is not a model answer for the assignment. The sample task deliberately uses one leadership style only, so students must still make their own choices, conduct their own reading and write their own essay.

Example sources to start from

Goleman, D. (2000) 'Leadership that gets results', Harvard Business Review, 78(2), pp. 78-90.

Goleman, D. (1995) Emotional Intelligence. New York: Bantam Books.

Northouse, P. G. (2021) Leadership: Theory and Practice. 9th edn. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Yukl, G. and Gardner, W. L. (2020) Leadership in Organizations. 9th edn. Harlow: Pearson.

Huczynski, A. and Buchanan, D. (2007) Organizational Behaviour. 6th edn. Harlow: Pearson Education.