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Academic Writing



Trawsnewid Addysg; Trawsnewid Bywydau
Transforming Education; Transforming Lives



www.uwtsd.ac.uk

would that more of the youthful populace were so moved as to indulge in the daily pursuit of informative literary input such as might raise the accuracy of their perceptions regarding their health.

Studies by World Youth (2019) reveal that young people benefit from reading about their health.

So basically, you need to go read more man!



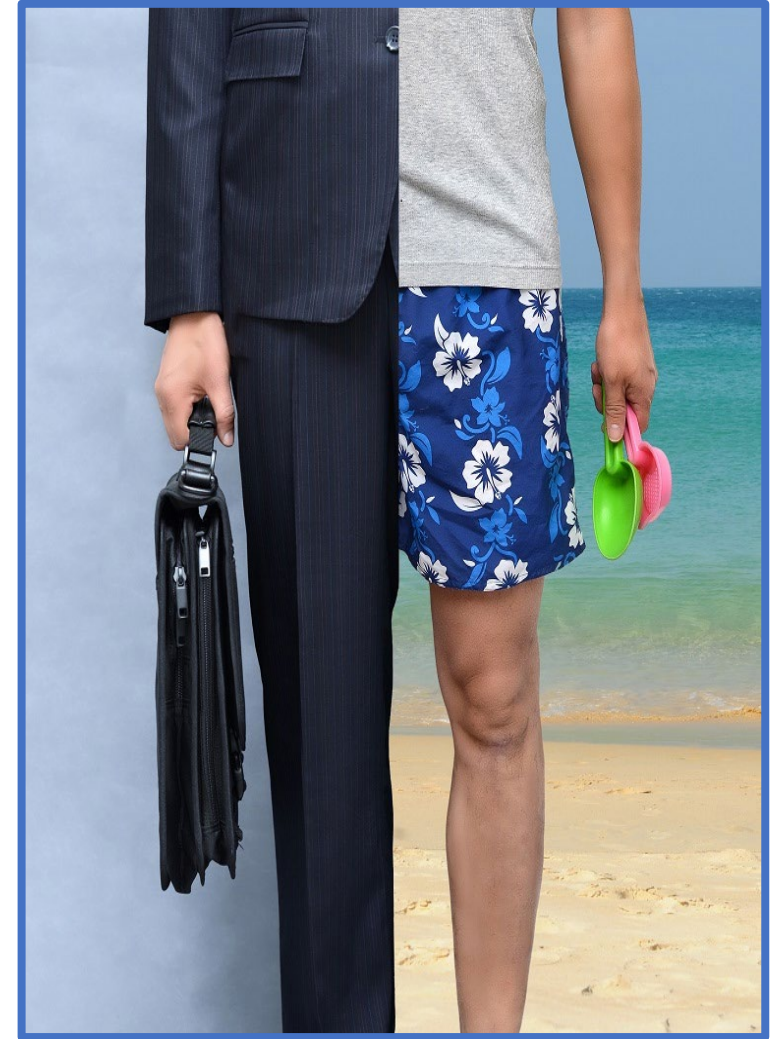
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Use formal English

- Academic language is more formal than the language used in everyday conversations, emails, social media or magazines
- It shouldn't sound 'chatty'
- It also avoids slang and colloquialisms e.g 'the argument was a bit over the top.'
- Copy the style of academic papers to adapt to this language



Aim for clarity

- Write so that your reader can easily follow what you are trying to say; take your reader by the hand and guide him/her
- Do not use long words and technical jargon simply in order to sound impressive
- Check whether your sentences are so long and complicated that they are hard to follow
- Avoid antiquated language, convoluted sentences or mannerisms – they can use up your word limit and obscure your argument



Learn how to use specialist terminology

- If you are not familiar with specialist terms, look for explanations of these in introductory textbooks or glossaries
- Pay attention to how such terms are introduced in books and articles – note the different forms used, such as noun and verb forms, and past tenses
- Do not litter your writing with terms that you yourself do not understand – it is better to write them in your own words than to sound as though you do not understand what you are saying



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Avoid abbreviations and contractions

For assignments, write words out in full:

- 'dept.' as 'department'
- 'e.g.' as 'for example'
- 'didn't' as 'did not'
- 'they're' as 'they are'
- 'isn't' as 'is not'



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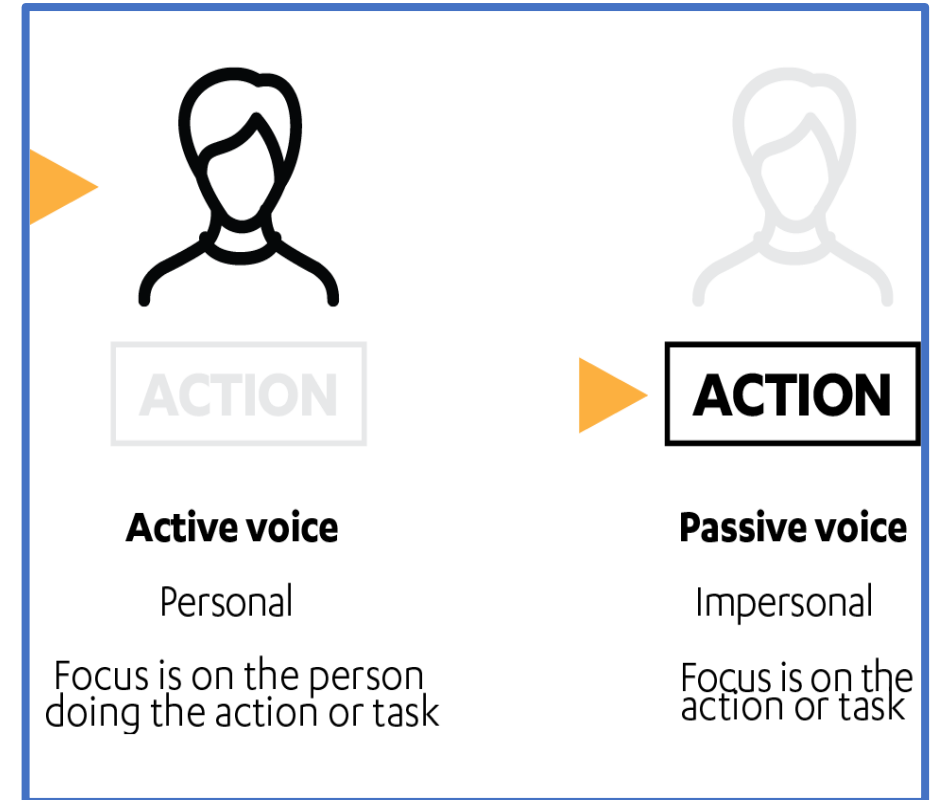
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Keep your language impersonal and passive

Most courses prefer you to avoid personal pronouns such as 'I/we' and 'you'. Instead sentences begin in impersonal ways such as:

- It can be seen that...
- There are a number of...
- It has been found that...
- It can be argued that...

This is also an example of hedging – not committing to a single position



Be impersonal

- It is important that your personal involvement with the topic does not overshadow what you are saying
- The use of the passive voice helps to maintain an element of objectivity
- ‘We distributed worksheets to the pupils.’ (active)
- ‘Worksheets were distributed to the pupils’ (passive)

Objectivity

Undistorted by emotion or personal bias; based on observable phenomena.

Objectivity



Subjectivity



Be tentative



Academic writing generally sounds cautious. Writers indicate that they are aware that nothing is completely certain as further research could challenge what is currently understood. They use words that appear to express this lack of certainty, such as:

- Appears to; seems to; tends to; may; might; seemingly.

They use phrases such as:

- In some cases, this...
- The evidence suggests that...

Be objective



- Academic writing avoids subjective judgements so also avoids words such as 'nice', 'wonderful', 'worthwhile', 'usual', 'normal' or 'natural' if used in a potentially subjective or culturally specific way – the reader's understanding of these words may be different to your own
- Accept that there is no truth
- Avoid sweeping generalisations
- Keep questioning yourself whether your work could be interpreted as biased



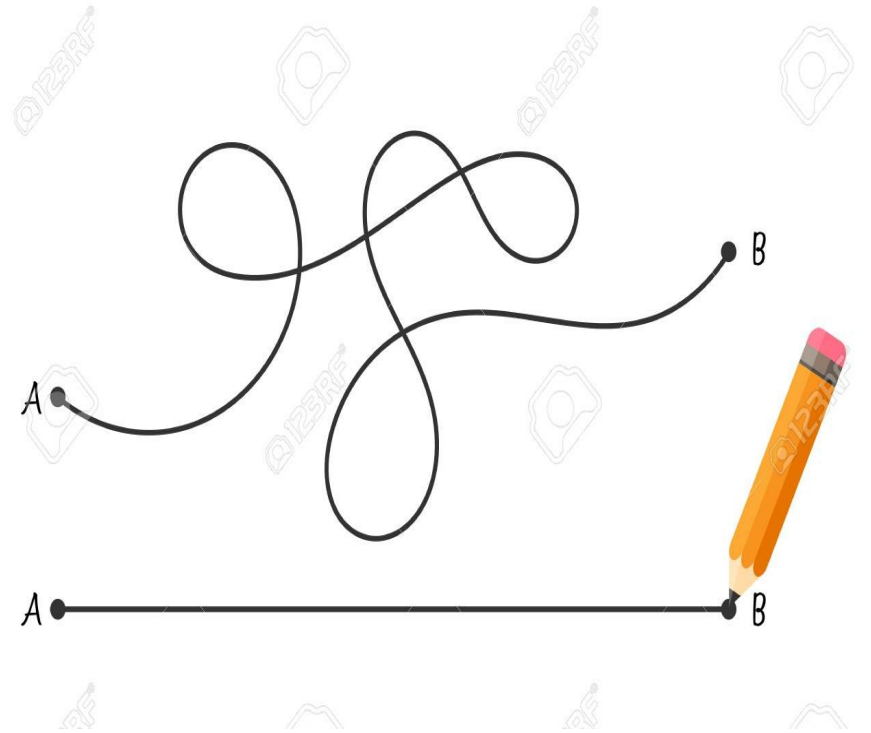
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Be concise

- Edit out unnecessary words and phrases
- Go straight to the point i.e. what do you want to say?
- Make your point clearly



Be precise

Example of a vague sentence:

Some people did not like the idea at the time and made the politicians stop it but then he attacked him publicly.



Why is it vague?

- 'some people' – who exactly?
- 'the idea' – which idea?
- 'at the time' – when? date?
- 'the politicians' – all politicians? or a certain group? or a political party?
- 'made the politicians' – how did they 'make' them
- 'stop it' – stop what? how was it stopped?
- 'people did not like the idea' – why not?
- 'he' and 'him' – who exactly?

Be confident

This assignment tries to analyse/ hopes to demonstrate/ attempts to argue...

When you are doing this you are implying that you may not be able to do what you have set out to do

You are inviting the reader to pass judgement on the success or otherwise of your attempt

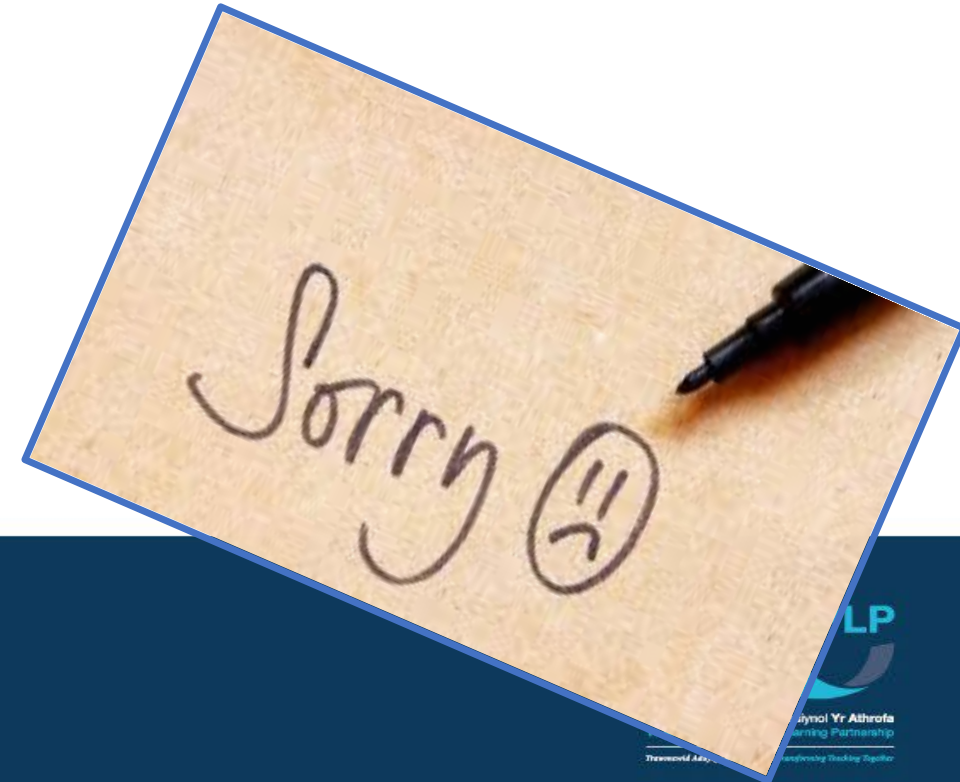
It is better to state confidently that 'This assignment will critically analyse competing perspective on...'



Avoid apologies

Don't apologise to the reasons for any weaknesses you think there might be in your work, such as you found the subject difficult or had not time to write a conclusion.

Write with confidence, even if you don't feel it.



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Addressing the reader

Avoid asking readers questions and telling them what to think or do. Don't use rhetorical questions.



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Quotations

- Avoid over reliance on quotations
- Do not copy large chunks of text; either use them as appropriate in quotation form or paraphrase
- Don't overuse quotations – they should be used in support of your argument not instead of your writing



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Avoid misplaced conjunctions

Except in creative writing, the following words are not used at the start of sentences:

- or
- and
- but
- yet



Numbers

- Numbers below a hundred are usually written in full in non-scientific writing:
- Thirty one percent
- Nineteen numbers
- However, figures are retained in statistical and scientific work:
- 31 per cent
- 7.3 newtons
- 0.54 mg

1 2 3 4 5
6 7 8 9 0



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Structured

- Academic writing should be in a logical order
- The introduction should preview the work, the conclusion summarise it
- Paragraphs should be used to organise ideas/paragraphs
- Time is needed to plan the writing so that you can work out the structure in advance of writing



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Structured

Introduction (10%)

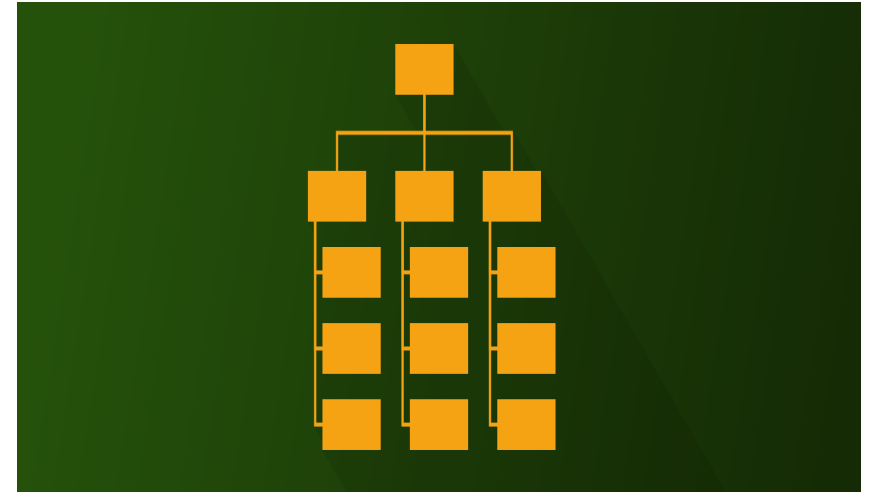
- engage the reader by introducing your topic
- identify the issues you are about to explore
- preview how you plan to answer the question

Main text (80%)

- divided into paragraph: one paragraph = one argument
- Structure set out by introduction and the approach to the question
- must cover everything you said you would cover in the introduction

Conclusion (10%)

- summarise your argument and the main themes
- Do not present new arguments



Paragraphs

Paragraphs give your writing structure:

- They cover one main idea
- They are several sentences long
- They are formatted consistently
- They have an internal structure



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Supporting
statements

The Topic sentence

States the main idea – a general statement

Explanation or Definition (optional)

Clarifies any difficult or unclear terms in
the Topic sentence
Alternatively: introduces the evidence

Evidence

Supports or develops the main idea with
facts, examples, experiments, studies,
arguments, quotes etc.

Comment

- Explains what the evidence means, & how it relates to your point.
- Supports or develops the evidence with analysis or further info e.g. opposing or contrasting points to broaden or develop the discussion
- If appropriate, mention other evidence (examples/studies/experiments/interpretations) to widen the discussion

Concluding sentence

- States the implications or consequences of the paragraph
- Shows the development of the argument
- Links back to the Topic sentence (may use same or similar key words from the Topic sentence)
- Links forwards to the main idea of the next paragraph

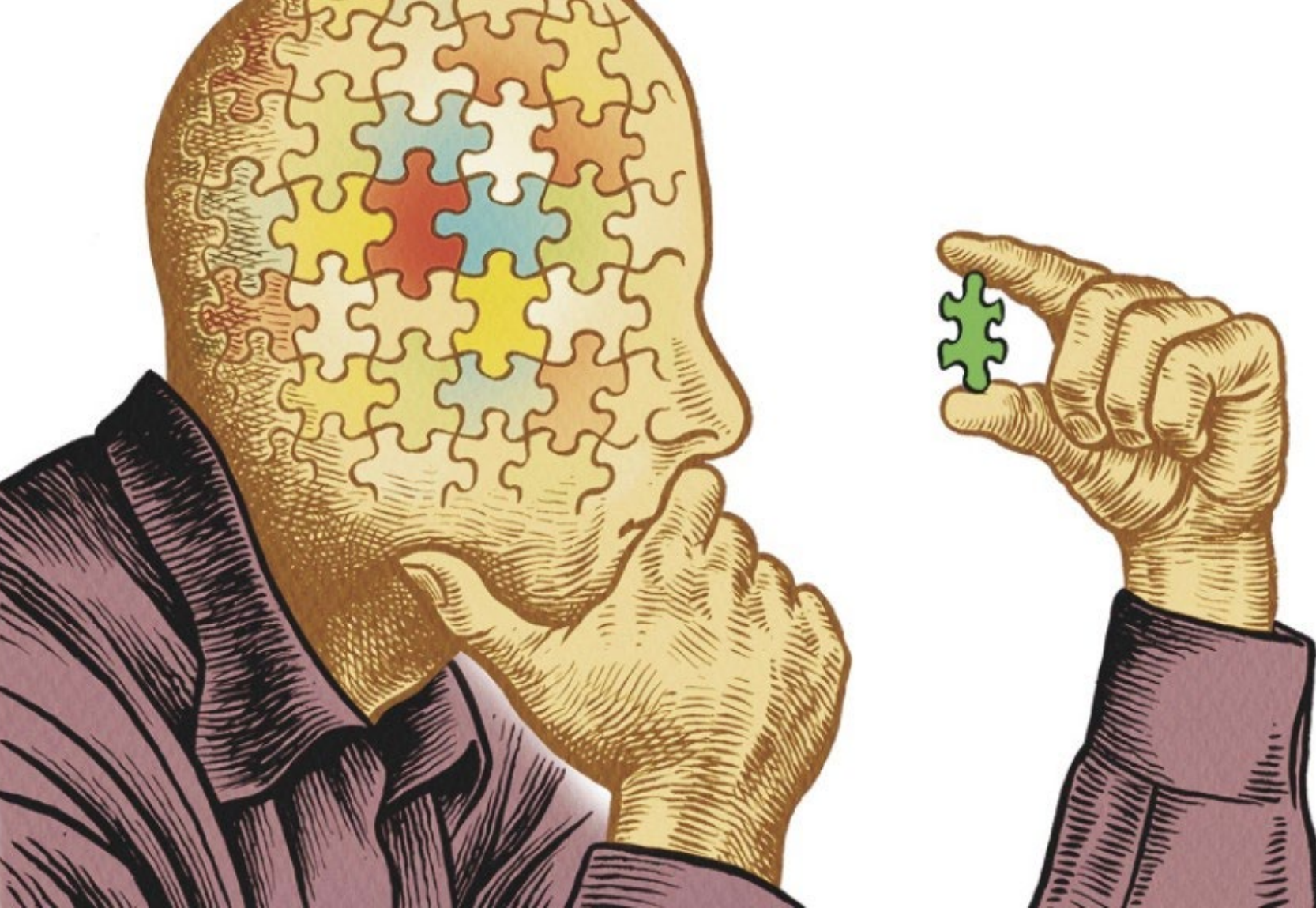


Signposted

- Differences between your arguments and examples given
- Links between sentences to do with the same point
- Links between paragraphs in the same section of the essay
- How sections lead to a conclusion or answer



Be critical



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Critical versus descriptive writing



Descriptions: they report information about something, but they don't perform any kind of reasoning - and nor do they pass judgement on or analyse the information they contain.

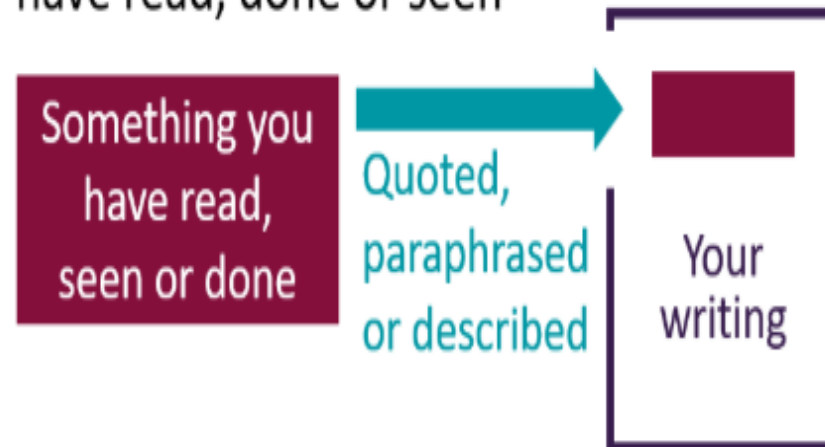
Tom Chatfield, *Critical Thinking*

Many students are told that their writing is too descriptive and not critical enough. But what does this actually mean? The next few slides describe 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

This 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.

Descriptive writing = informing of what you have read, done or seen



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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.

Critical writing = using something you have read, done or seen to **persuade** the reader of your position



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Table comparing functions of descriptive and critical writing

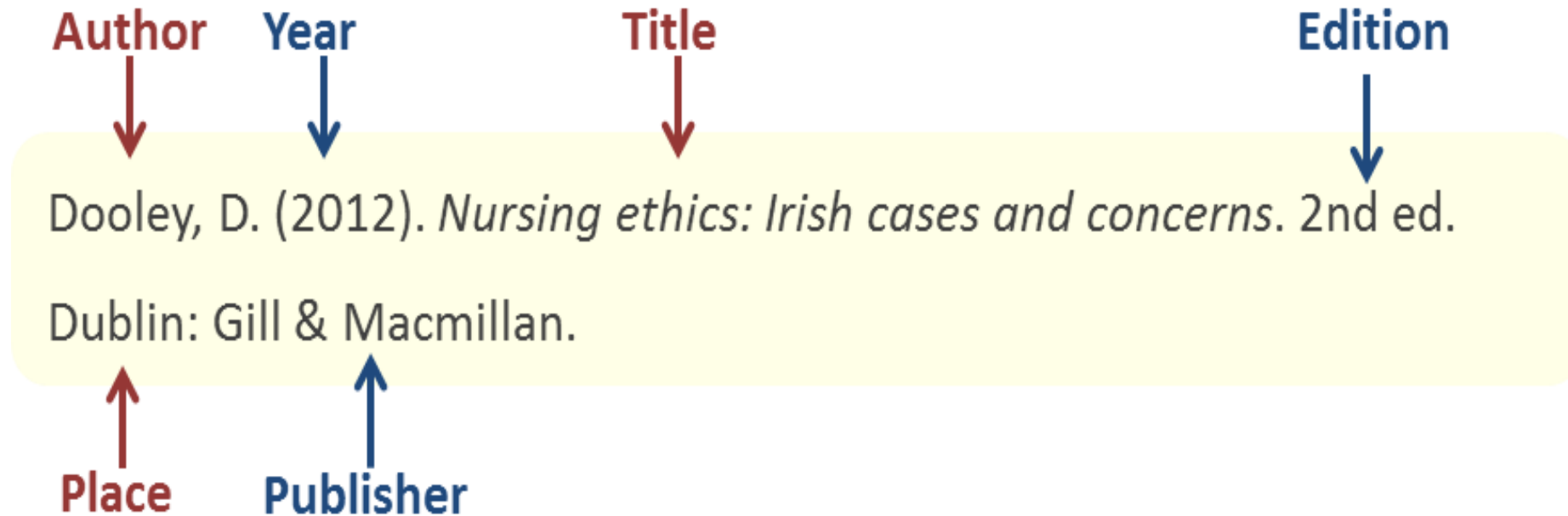
The table below gives more examples of the difference between descriptive and critical writing

Adapted from Cottrell 2008:286

Descriptive writing	Critical writing
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	Analyses how the story so far impacts on the current state
Says how to do something	Analyses 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	Weights 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 judgement on provided information
Gives information	Draws conclusions



Referencing



Editing

- Leave some time in between writing and editing
- Put yourself in the position of the reader:
 - Has everything been defined?
 - Can the reader follow your thinking?
 - Can you summarise the key point of each paragraph and why it is relevant to your essay title?
- Read your essay aloud and let it be read by your peers



Proof reading

What are you looking for?

- Spelling
- Grammar
- Missing words
- Spacing
- Punctuation
- Words used inappropriately or out of context

Print your assignment off to proofread it.
Let others read over it.



