To understand the differences between descriptive and critical writing

To learn how to structure critical paragraphs using the 'TEEEL' acronym

To explore different methods of relating theory to practice

By the end of this lesson, you will be able to:

Produce well-structured critical paragraphs, integrating scholarly theories to build compelling practice-based arguments.

Descriptive and Critical Writing

Definitions

Task

1 Description

A To assess the validity, coherence, or usefulness of theories, concepts, and models in practice. To draw conclusions, proposing evidence-based recommendations or solutions.

2 Analysis

B To outline theories, concepts, models, or practices.

3 Evaluation

C To examine theories, concepts, models, and practices in detail – identifying significant factors and alternative methods.

QA Definitions

Answer

1 Description

B To outline theories, concepts, models, or practices.

2 Analysis

C To examine theories, concepts, models, and practices in detail – identifying significant factors and alternative methods.

3 Evaluation

A To assess the validity, coherence, or usefulness of theories, concepts, and models in practice. To draw conclusions, proposing evidence-based recommendations or solutions.

QA **Being Critical**

The ACE Team

What does it mean to be 'critical'?

- To **analyse** and **evaluate** information, making a logical decision about the extent to which you believe it to be true or false.

- To move beyond description, **assessing** the **validity**, **coherence**, or **usefulness** of a source.

- To consider the **strengths** and **limitations** of theories, models, or concepts in practice.

- To draw **conclusions**, propose **recommendations** or **solutions** based on this evidence.

QA Descriptive or Critical Writing?

A. Descriptive Writing	B. Critical Writing

Provides information, facts, or figures on a particular topic

A. Descriptive Writing

Provides information, facts, or figures on a particular topic

QA **Descriptive or Critical Writing?**

| A. Descriptive Writing | B. Critical Writing |

Explains what a theory says or summarises an experience in the workplace

QA **Descriptive or Critical Writing?**

A. Descriptive Writing

Explains what a theory says or summarises an experience in the workplace

QA Descriptive or Critical Writing?

| A. Descriptive Writing | B. Critical Writing |

Evaluates the strengths and limitations of a theory in practice

QA **Descriptive or Critical Writing?**

B. Critical Writing

Evaluates the strengths and limitations of a theory in practice

A. Descriptive Writing | **B. Critical Writing**

Demonstrates the significance of links between pieces of information

B. Critical Writing

Demonstrates the significance of links between pieces of information

QA Descriptive or Critical Writing?

| A. Descriptive Writing | B. Critical Writing |

Lists details or describes the order in which things happened

A. Descriptive Writing

Lists details or describes the order in which things happened

QA **Descriptive or Critical Writing?**

A. Descriptive Writing

Notes the methods used and how the research was undertaken

QA Descriptive or Critical Writing?

| A. Descriptive Writing | B. Critical Writing |

Explores alternative approaches, indicating which is appropriate or suitable

B. Critical Writing

Explores alternative approaches, indicating which is appropriate or suitable

B. Critical Writing

Argues a case according to evidence, acknowledging gaps in the existing research

QA **Descriptive or Critical Writing?**

A. Descriptive Writing	B. Critical Writing

Presents opinions

QA Descriptive or Critical Writing?

A. Descriptive Writing

Presents opinions

QA **Descriptive or Critical Writing?**

| A. Descriptive Writing | B. Critical Writing |

Draws conclusions, proposes recommendations or solutions

B. Critical Writing

Draws conclusions, proposes recommendations or solutions

QA Descriptive and Critical Writing

A. Descriptive Writing	B. Critical Writing
Provides information, facts, or figures on a particular topic	Evaluates the strengths and limitations of a theory in practice
Explains what a theory says or summarises an experience in the workplace	Demonstrates the significance of links between pieces of information
Lists details or describes the order in which things happened	Explores alternative approaches, indicating which is appropriate or suitable
Notes the methods used and how the research was undertaken	Argues a case according to evidence, acknowledging gaps in the existing research
Presents opinions	Draws conclusions, proposes recommendations or solutions

(Adapted from Cottrell, 2003)

Building a Critical Argument

You can use the acronym 'TEEEL' to organise your paragraphs, building an effective critical argument.

Topic – Clearly and succinctly tell the reader what the paragraph will be about.

Expand – Make sure your reader understands the main idea by defining industry terms and / or relating it back to your experiences in the workplace.

Evidence – Incorporate some evidence to back up your main idea. This evidence should be a paraphrase supported by a reference to a scholarly resource. You should also consider the strengths and limitations of the evidence, demonstrating its value, coherence, or relevance.

Explanation – How does the evidence develop your argument? You should also discuss the extent to which its findings apply to your organisation.

Link – Conclude your paragraph by either linking back to your main idea or linking forward to the next paragraph. You may also propose a recommendation.

(Adapted from University of West London, 2020)

QA TEEEL – Topic

Consider the following topic sentences. Which is an example of descriptive writing? Which is an example of critical writing? Why?

a) There is a large amount of research that examines digital intercultural communication.

b) Digital communication has enhanced the capacity of people to connect across cultures but replicating the human connection felt in physical interactions remains an industry-wide challenge (Smith, 2016).

(Adapted from University of Technology Sydney, 2022)

A

There is a large amount of research that examines digital intercultural communication.

Descriptive Writing

The topic sentence lacks precision, describing the 'large' amount of research that has been conducted.

It is not clear whether the research tends to support a certain perspective on digital intercultural communication or who it has been conducted by.

Whilst the broad topic of digital intercultural communication is introduced, its relevance to the learner's industry is not.

B

Digital communication has enhanced the capacity of people to connect across cultures but replicating the human connection felt in physical interactions remains an industry-wide challenge (Smith, 2016).

Critical Writing

The topic is succinctly introduced through a paraphrase and its accompanying citation to a scholarly resource.

Through this research, an 'industry-wide challenge' is identified.

As a result, the learner's argument is clearly established. They will go on to explore this challenge in detail, demonstrating their understanding of relevant theories and technologies – proposing a recommendation for future practice.

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QA TEEEL – Evidence

Consider the learner's use of scholarly evidence. Which is an example of critical writing? Why?

a) Harrison (2017, p. 9) argues that while technology has increased the capacity for people to communicate across cultures, it fails to 'foster in-depth relationships'.

b) Although Harrison (2017) argues that such forms of communication often fail to produce meaningful relationships, he neglects to consider the possibility of organisation-driven interventions like the Connection Index utilising big data and artificial intelligence (AI) to connect people with similar interests from around the world.

(Adapted from University of Technology Sydney, 2022)

Example B engages critically with Harrison's argument, identifying a potential limitation... but how could it be further improved?

b) Although Harrison (2017) argues that such forms of communication often fail to produce meaningful relationships, he neglects to consider the possibility of organisation-driven interventions like the Connection Index utilising big data and artificial intelligence (AI) to connect people with similar interests from around the world.

(Adapted from University of Technology Sydney, 2022)

QA TEEEL – Link

Consider the following linking sentence. What does it neglect to consider? How could it be improved?

Further research is perhaps required to examine how new digital technologies can be utilised to encourage meaningful intercultural communication.

(Adapted from University of Technology Sydney, 2022)

QA TEEEL – Link

Answer

Further research is perhaps required to examine how new digital technologies can be utilised to encourage meaningful intercultural communication. The methods by which the Connection Index exploits big data and AI for connectivity are therefore explored in more detail below, as are additional ways this tool might be employed to foster meaningful connections across cultures online.

(Adapted from University of Technology Sydney, 2022)

QA Writing Critically

Top Tips:

✓ Consider a range of different perspectives and counter-arguments.

✓ Consider what worked, and the degree to which it worked. What were the challenges and limitations? To what extent can the model / theory be applied to your organisation?

✓ Use a range of academic sources and work-based evidence to support findings / claims / arguments.

✓ Synthesise different sources, theories, and positions to develop your own arguments, solutions, and conclusions.

✓ Provide insight and recommendations into how practice / theory could be improved and further areas for development.

ACE Critical Thinking Checklist

Tip

You can use the **ACE Critical Thinking Checklist** to assess the criticality of your work!

Have I presented an argument?	
Have I justified my argument?	
Have I explained its significance?	
Is my argument convincing?	
Have I connected my ideas with appropriate signalling language?	
Are my ideas supported with evidence?	
Have I engaged critically with scholarly resources, evaluating the validity, coherence, and usefulness of their arguments?	
Have I considered the strengths and limitations of their positions?	
Have I engaged in comparative analysis, exploring relevant disparities, contradictions, or alternatives proposed by the wider academic community?	
Have I effectively refuted their findings and / or explained why they should be regarded as less important or contextually relevant?	

Relating Theory to Practice

Supporting Practice with Theory

At the most basic level, **theory** should be used to **support choices** made in your **professional practice**. You can see this in the example below:

Company x's project teams were established on an opt-in basis following the idealistic model (Smith, 2021), where members were encouraged by the clear goals and knowledge of the skill sets needed.

Professional practice is shown to **align with** recent **research** in the field.

Theory is reinforced by a **specific example** of practice according with it in an exact and detailed way.

(Adapted from RMIT University, 2021)

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QA Analysis and Evaluation

After introducing relevant, well-chosen concepts to justify workplace decisions it is crucial to then **analyse** and **evaluate** the **success** of both **theory** and **practice**, as seen in italics below.

Company x's project teams were established on an opt-in basis following the idealistic model (Smith, 2021), where members were encouraged by the clear goals and knowledge of the skill sets needed. *This idealistic team model validated the diverse skills that individuals brought to the team, celebrating both personal satisfaction as well as the team's project achievements.*

Task

How could this analysis / evaluation be improved and made more 'critical'?

QA

This idealistic team model validated the diverse skills that individuals brought to the team, celebrating both personal satisfaction as well as the team's project achievements.

Has not considered alternative perspectives / theories / experiences

Does not discuss limitations, challenges, "to what extent" the model can be applied

No sources or evidence used to back up claim / argument

Does not provide insight into how things could be improved

QA Analysis and Evaluation

Considering alternative perspectives / theories / experiences

Singh (2023), however, explores the potential drawbacks of this model, including...

Discussing limitations, challenges, "to what extent" the model can be applied in the workplace context

While Smith (2021)'s approach yielded several benefits, the author neglects to consider the specific organisational culture of Company x, which...

Using additional sources or evidence to back up the claim

Furthermore, as Rodriguez (2022) demonstrates...

Providing insight into how things could be improved

Following Hoffmann et al. (2019), Organisation x could also...

QA Methods of Relating Theory to Practice

Top Tips:
✓ Always think "what purpose does this theory serve in my paragraph?"
✓ Think about how different theories link to one another and can be used to build your argument, engaging in comparative analysis.
✓ Reinforce or challenge theory by using specific, detailed and meaningful examples from your own practice.
✓ Always be <u>critical</u> about the theory **and** your practice!

QA **Challenging Theory in Relation to Practice**

Specific tasks were shared out amongst my team but these were not seen as equally difficult by all team members. Consequently, the perception of unfairness impacted on our interactions. Social interdependence theory recognises a type of group interaction called "positive interdependence" (Johnson and Johnson, 2008, cited in Maughan and Webb, 2010) and many studies demonstrate that learning can be improved through cooperation (Maughan and Webb, 2010). We did not experience this with the initial task allocation. Nonetheless we achieved a successful outcome through further negotiation, finding that "cooperative learning experiences encourage higher achievement" (Maughan and Webb, 2010). To improve the process in future, perhaps we could elect a chairperson to help encourage cooperation when tasks are being allocated.

(Adapted from University of Portsmouth, 2021)

The ACE Team

Challenging Theory in Relation to Practice

Task

In your breakout rooms, please read the paragraph and discuss the following questions:

1. How does the author challenge theory with reference to practice?

2. How could the author take a more critical approach to theory?

The ACE Team

Challenging Theory in Relation to Practice

Answer

Specific tasks were shared out amongst my team but these were not seen as equally difficult by all team members. Consequently, the perception of unfairness impacted on our interactions. Social interdependence theory recognises a type of group interaction called "positive interdependence" (Johnson and Johnson, 2008, cited in Maughan and Webb, 2010) and many studies demonstrate that learning can be improved through cooperation (Maughan and Webb, 2010). We did not experience this with the initial task allocation. Nonetheless we achieved a successful outcome through further negotiation, finding that "cooperative learning experiences encourage higher achievement" (Maughan & Webb, 2010). To improve the process in future, perhaps we could elect a chairperson to help encourage cooperation when tasks are being allocated.

(Adapted from University of Portsmouth, 2021)

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Challenging Theory in Relation to Practice

'Perhaps we could elect a chairperson to help encourage cooperation when tasks are being allocated.'

Answer

'Although Author X (Date) stresses the importance of egalitarianism, perhaps we could elect a chairperson to help encourage cooperation when tasks are being allocated.'

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QA   Relating Theory to Practice

Top Tips:
✓ Demonstrate clear links between your experiences and the theories, models and concepts studied on the course.
✓ Indicate how your practical experiences assist you in understanding the theories, models and concepts.
✓ Explore whether your observations are consistent with what those theories and models suggest. Does your experience challenge or negate these concepts?
✓ If your experience is quite different, analyse this discrepancy to identify why your practice contradicts established theory and what this therefore means in a practical setting.

Review

1. Explaining what a theory says is an example of critical writing

2. You should only discuss <u>one</u> theory per paragraph

QA

2. You should only discuss <u>one</u> theory per paragraph

❌

The ACE Team

3. It is important to consider the strengths and limitations of a theory when using it in practice

3. It is important to consider the strengths and limitations of a theory when using it in practice

You might also like...

ACE Resources:

- The Critical Thinking Checklist
- Critical Thinking Quick Guide
- Critical Writing – Building an Argument Quick Guide
- Evaluating Sources & Reading Critically Quick Guide

External resources:

- Cardiff University's *Critical Reading and Thinking Skills*: https://xerte.cardiff.ac.uk/play_12097#page1
- The University of West London's *Writing Critical Paragraphs*: https://www.uwl.ac.uk/current-students/support-current-students/academic-support/writing-critical-paragraphs

Thank you for attending today's ACE workshop. We would be grateful if you could take 2 minutes to complete our **feedback form**.

[ACE Feedback Form](#)

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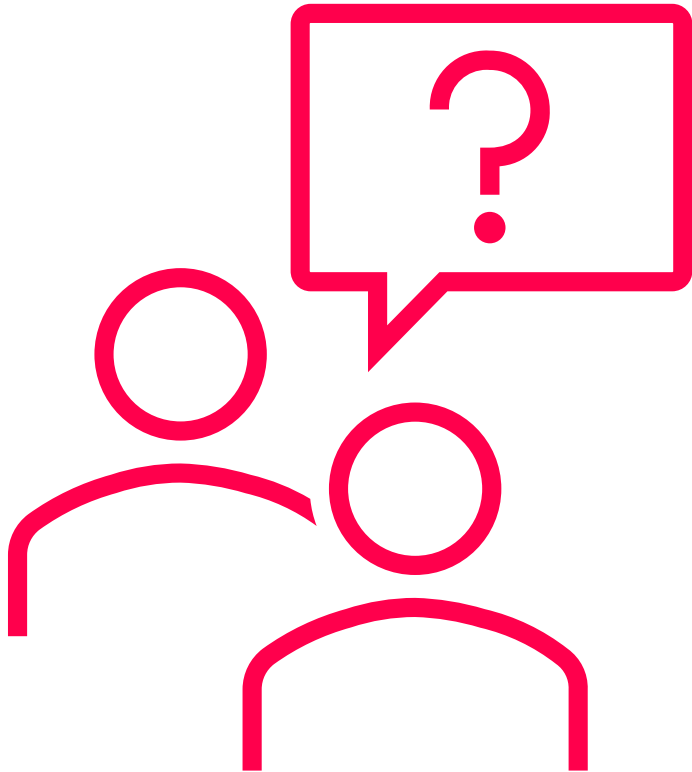
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Any Questions?

Thank You!