

ACE Quick Guide to Critical Writing: Building an Argument

An effective scholarly argument will...



Set out a position, with **evidence**, in a logical sequence.



Demonstrate an understanding of **relevant facts, models, theories and positions**.



Move beyond description to evaluate the strengths and limitations of these facts, models, theories, and positions.



Engage in comparative analysis, **exploring relevant disparities, contradictions, or alternatives** proposed by the wider academic community.



Propose **reasonable conclusions** and / or recommendations.

This begins with good paragraph structure. You can use the acronym 'TEEEL' to organise your critical paragraphs:

Topic, Expand, Evidence, Explanation, Link (TEEEL)

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 consider the strengths and limitations of the evidence, demonstrating its value, coherence, or relevance.

Explanation – How does the evidence support or 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)



An example TEEEL paragraph:

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). The stated aim of Organisation x's 'Connection Index' is therefore to "grow social connectivity by improving the quality of online interactions" (Organisation x, 2023). 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. In the past 18 months 85% of users participating in the Connection Index trial reported a more fulfilling digital experience with an increased number of "strong connections" (Appendix A), which appears to challenge Markson's (2018) contention that online communication tends not to facilitate profound interpersonal experiences. The methods by which the Connection Index exploits big data and AI for connectivity are explored in more detail below, as are additional ways this new tool might be utilised to encourage more meaningful connections across cultures online.

(Adapted from University of Technology Sydney, 2022)

Descriptive and Critical Writing

You may have been given the feedback that your writing is too descriptive and not critical enough. The following table summarises the differences:

Descriptive Writing	Critical Writing
States what happened	Identifies the significance
Explains what a theory says or how something works	Evaluates its strengths and limitations in practice
Notes the methods used and how the research was undertaken	Demonstrates the relevance of links between pieces of information
Lists details or describes the order in which things happened	Provides reasons for selecting each option, exploring alternative approaches
Presents opinions	Argues a case according to evidence, recognising the potential limitations of existing research
Provides information, facts, or figures on a particular topic	Draws conclusions, proposes recommendations or solutions

(Adapted from Cottrell, 2003)



Descriptive writing is an essential component of scholarly assignments, used to provide background, context, and information. Critical writing, however, involves **building an argument** – considering the strengths and limitations of evidence in practice and contributing to academic debate. You may therefore explore:

- The authority and reliability of a source
- Its relevance to your argument
- Why it is / is not significant
- How it relates to existing literature you have read
- The extent to which you are persuaded by its findings
- The extent to which theory can / cannot be put into practice
- How it leads you to reach your conclusions and / or recommendations

(Adapted from University of Hull, 2003)

You should begin a new paragraph when...

1. You introduce a new idea or argument.

If your paragraph is beginning to deviate from your central argument, it is time to split it into more than one. If you are working with an extended idea that spans multiple paragraphs, each sub-point should become its own paragraph.

2. To contrast information or examine alternatives proposed by the wider academic community.

You can use separate paragraphs to distinguish between conflicting theoretical positions, exploring their strengths and limitations in light of your experiences in the workplace.

3. It becomes too lengthy.

The breaks between your paragraphs function as a short respite for your reader or marker – increasing the readability of your writing.

4. You are ending your introduction or starting a conclusion.

Your introductory and concluding arguments should be presented in a new paragraph. They may, however, span multiple paragraphs, depending on the topic, length, and genre of your assignment.

(Adapted from Purdue University, 2023)



Reference List

Cottrell, S. (2003) *The Study Skills Handbook*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Purdue University (2023) *On Paragraphs*. Available at: https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general_writing/academic_writing/paragraphs_and_paragraphing/index.html (Accessed: 29 November 2023).

The University of Hull (2023) *Descriptive vs Critical Writing*. Available at: <https://libguides.hull.ac.uk/criticalwriting/descriptive-critical> (Accessed: 29 November 2023).

University of Technology Sydney (2022) *How to Write Critically*. Available at: <https://www.uts.edu.au/current-students/support/helps/self-help-resources/academic-skills/how-write-critically> (Accessed 3 October 2023).

University of West London (2020) *Writing Critical Paragraphs*. Available at: <https://www.uwl.ac.uk/current-students/support-current-students/academic-support/writing-critical-paragraphs> (Accessed: 18 October 2023).

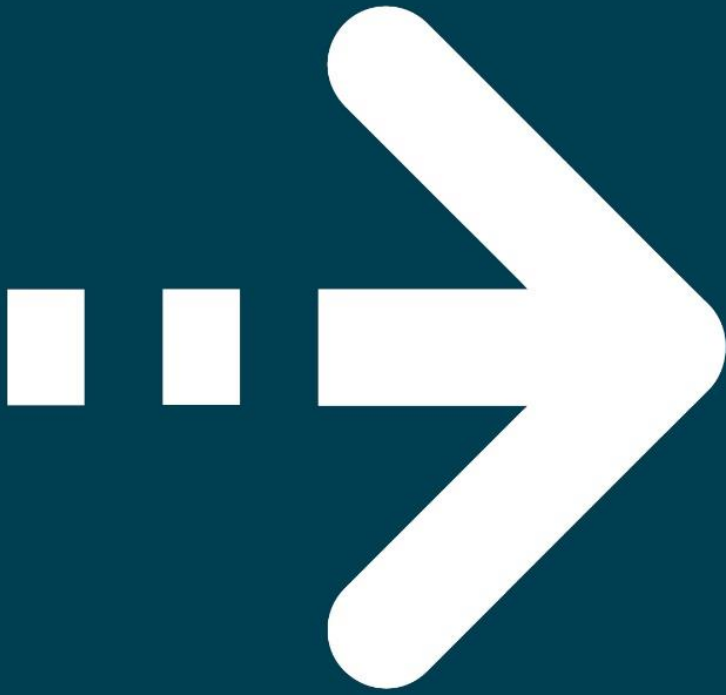
Additional Resources

The University of Manchester's [Academic Phrasebank](#) provides examples of conventional academic phrases used to structure and clarify critical arguments.

The ACE Critical Thinking Quick Guide includes additional guidance on demonstrating criticality in your degree apprenticeship – including the difference between criticising and being critical.

The ACE Critical Thinking Checklist can be used to assess the criticality of your paragraphs.

The ACE Introductions and Conclusions Quick Guide offers advice on what to include in your introduction and conclusion respectively.



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