

# Types of Academic Writing

Academic assignment writing may include descriptive, analytical, evaluative, critical, and reflective writing. For reflective writing, refer to the [Reflective Writing Study Guide](#).

	Descriptive Writing	Analytical Writing	Evaluative Writing	Critical Writing
<b>Purpose</b>	Tells what happened Gives facts and background	Explains how things work and how ideas connect	Judges how good or effective something is	Questions assumptions and considers different viewpoints
<b>Scope</b>	Based on what exists or what occurred	Based on evidence and relationships	Based on criteria for judging value or quality	Based on exploring perspectives and deeper issues
<b>Example Questions</b>	What is it? What happened? Who, where, when?	Why did this happen? How do the parts fit together?	How well does this work? What is the overall assessment given the strengths and weaknesses?	What assumptions have been made? Whose views are included or missing?
<b>Example sentence starters</b>	“This shows that...” “According to...”	“A reason for this is...” “This is an important aspect because...”	“This is effective because...” “A better approach would be...”	“From another perspective...” “This challenges the idea that...”
<b>When to use</b>	Background Summaries Reporting results	Explaining patterns Linking ideas Interpreting results	Assessing methods Judging findings Drawing conclusions	Comparing viewpoints Exploring implications Questioning assumptions
<b>One word description</b>	<b>Reports</b>	<b>Explains</b>	<b>Judges</b>	<b>Interrogates</b>

## Examples

### Descriptive Writing Example

Online learning refers to educational instruction delivered through digital platforms such as learning management systems, video conferencing tools, and online discussion forums (Miles, 2020). It has become widely adopted (Hudson & Beckett, 2023). Typical online courses include recorded lectures, weekly readings, quizzes, and interactive activities. Students access these materials at scheduled times or asynchronously, depending on the course design (Miles, 2020).

### Analytical Writing Example

Online learning changes the relationship between students, teachers, and course content by shifting much of the learning process to self-directed engagement (Miles, 2020). As students can access materials at any time, online learning increases flexibility, but it also requires stronger time-management skills. Also, the reduced immediacy of teacher feedback may negatively influence motivation (Howard, 2025). These components interact to shape the overall learning experience, suggesting that the effectiveness of online learning depends on how well these elements are integrated.

### Evaluative Writing Example

Online learning can be highly effective when courses are designed with clear structure, interactive elements, and timely feedback, but its success varies depending on the learner and context. Research shows that students who are self-motivated and technologically confident tend to perform well, whereas those who rely on in-person support may struggle (Maxwell & Jones, 2025; Norris, 2019; Poldark & Beckett, 2020). Compared with traditional classroom teaching, online learning offers greater accessibility but may be less effective for developing practical or collaborative skills (Polan & Becket, 2020). Overall, its value lies in its flexibility, though improvements in engagement strategies could strengthen outcomes.

### Critical Writing Example

While online learning is often promoted as a universally accessible alternative to traditional education (Heke & Lucas 2021), this viewpoint overlooks significant disparities in digital access, learning environments, and cultural expectations around teaching. For example, emphasis on individual responsibility may disadvantage students who rely on communal or interactive learning (Matthews et al., 2024). Also, the focus on efficiency can obscure broader questions about what meaningful education entails (Matthews et al., 2024). When viewed within wider debates about equity and the purpose of higher education, online learning challenges and reinforces existing structures, suggesting that its impact cannot be fully understood without considering these broader social and institutional contexts.

NB. This example is fictitious and has been written for the purpose of education on types of writing in higher education using an adaptation of text generated by Copilot: Microsoft. (2024). *Copilot* (version 4.0) [large Language Model]. <https://copilot.microsoft.com/>

## Types of Writing for Postgraduate Research Reports

<b>Abstract</b>	<b>Descriptive:</b> summarising the purpose, background, methods, findings, conclusions, and significance of the research
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>Descriptive:</b> reporting background information, context, definitions
<b>Literature Review</b>	<p><b>Descriptive:</b> summarising what other researchers have said</p> <p><b>Analytical:</b> explaining themes, trends, or gaps</p> <p><b>Evaluative:</b> assessing strengths and weaknesses of existing studies</p>
<b>Methodology</b>	<p><b>Descriptive:</b> reporting the participants, instruments, data collection and data analysis procedures</p> <p><b>Evaluative:</b> making judgements about the suitability of chosen methods</p>
<b>Results</b>	<p><b>Descriptive:</b> reporting findings, statistics, figures, tables</p> <p><b>Analytical:</b> explaining patterns in the data</p>
<b>Discussion</b>	<p><b>Analytical:</b> interpreting what the results mean; linking findings to theories or previous research</p> <p><b>Evaluative:</b> determining how strong or limited the findings are</p> <p><b>Critical:</b> explaining differences in interpretations and perspectives considering alternative explanations, situating your findings within wider debates, showing how evidence reshapes current understanding of the topic</p>
<b>Conclusion</b>	<p><b>Evaluative:</b> assessing the overall contribution, limitations, and weaknesses of the study</p> <p><b>Critical:</b> reflecting on the implications and future research directions</p>