

Writing analytically and persuasively

Description, analysis and persuasion

What different assessment tasks have in common

Different types of tasks (e.g. essay, report) require different types of answers. Although tasks can be very different, they do, however, have some things in common. One of these things is that students are generally required to show evidence of critical/evaluative thinking (see [How to demonstrate critical judgement Quick Guide](#)), analysis and persuasive writing in your answer. This guide focuses on how to be *descriptive*, *analytical* or *persuasive*.

Description, analysis and persuasion

Descriptive refers to a piece of writing that describes something or tells us what something is like. While descriptions often form a part of larger assessments, a whole assessment will seldom be just descriptive.

Analytical refers to a piece of writing that pulls a topic apart, or deconstructs it, and shows how the different parts or aspects relate to each other. Almost all university assessments require analysis.

A piece of writing is **persuasive** if it presents evidence that has been evaluated critically to convince the reader either that something is true or that some action should be taken. Most university assessments include some form of persuasion.

Usually the assessments which achieve the highest marks are the ones which have been both analytical and persuasive. That is, they have carefully *analysed* a topic, *organised* the information and supporting evidence and presented a *persuasive* case.

Have a look at the following three short examples. You will see that they treat similar information differently. The broad topic is *team and individual sports*. One example is descriptive, one is analytical and one is persuasive.

Example A

Team sports have more than one player. Players compete as part of a team and co-operate with each other. In individual sports players compete on their own. Some team sports are Rugby League, cricket, netball and hockey. Some individual sports are weightlifting, boxing, golf and swimming (except for relays). In most individual sports, other than fighting sports, players don't usually have physical contact with other players. Team sports also usually cost each player less because equipment is shared among all the players.

Example B

One way of thinking about sports is to divide them into team sports and individual sports. Team sports can be defined as those which require more than one player on each side, for example Rugby League, netball and hockey. Individual sports require only one or two individuals to play, for example golf and boxing.

Team sports require players to play together co-operatively or the team will lose no matter how good the individual players are. In individual sports it is just one individual against another.

Team sports generally cost less per player to play than individual sports because at least some of the cost is shared. For example, a football match is played with one ball regardless of how many players there are on each team. On the other hand, in equestrian sports you have one rider per horse.

It might appear that the risk of injury is greater in team sports because players are more likely to come into physical contact with each other, like in Rugby League, but some individual sports are dangerous too, boxing and horse-riding for example.

Example C

Of the two kinds of sports, team sports and individual sports, team sports are better for society for two main reasons, co-operative behaviour and cost. Negative factors like risk of injury are similar for both team and individual sports.

Team sports teach people how to act co-operatively with each other, which is essential for a society to function in a healthy and productive way. On the other hand, individual sports foster an individualistic and personal approach. While these are valuable traits, they can be developed at the expense of others and encourage people to be selfish and antisocial.

All sports can be expensive, but individual sports tend to be more costly for each individual player, making them inaccessible to lower income families. For example, how many families can afford a horse? In team sports cost tends to be spread around, making them more accessible. For example, one football can be shared among up to 36 players at any one time in an Australian Football match.

All sports have some risk of injury. Risk of injury depends more on how dangerous the sport is rather than on whether it is a team or an individual sport. While the various codes of football have high rates of injury this is not restricted to team sports. For example, equestrian sports are mainly individual and there is a high risk of serious injury. Similarly, a sport like mixed martial arts fighting carries a high risk of serious injury...

(Examples adapted from Rolls, N. & Wignell, P. (2009). *Communicating at University: Skills for Success*. Darwin: Charles Darwin University Press, pp. 18–19.)

Comments on the examples

Example A

Example A is basically **descriptive**. It is a collection of sentences on different aspects of team and individual sports but the information is not organised in any coherent way. It does not show any analysis.

Example B

Example B shows **analysis**. It has taken similar information about team and individual sports, defined each and organised the information into categories: co-operation, cost and risk. The example shows analysis but does not attempt to convince the reader that one kind of sport is better than another.

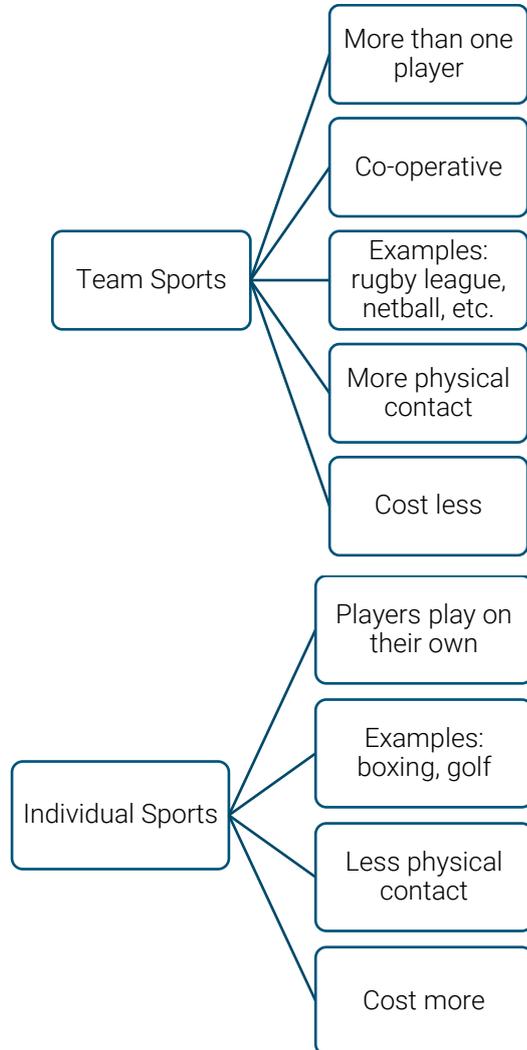
Example C

Example C attempts to persuade the reader that one kind of sport is better than another. In order to do this, it has added what is called a *thesis* statement: *team sports are better for society*. It has then added a layer of organisation. The text is organised around **reasons** why team sports are better for society. It has used much the same information as Example B but the information is now organised to support a proposition (team sports are better for society) and to counter arguments that might be put against the proposition (risk of injury).

Organising information into a diagram or chart

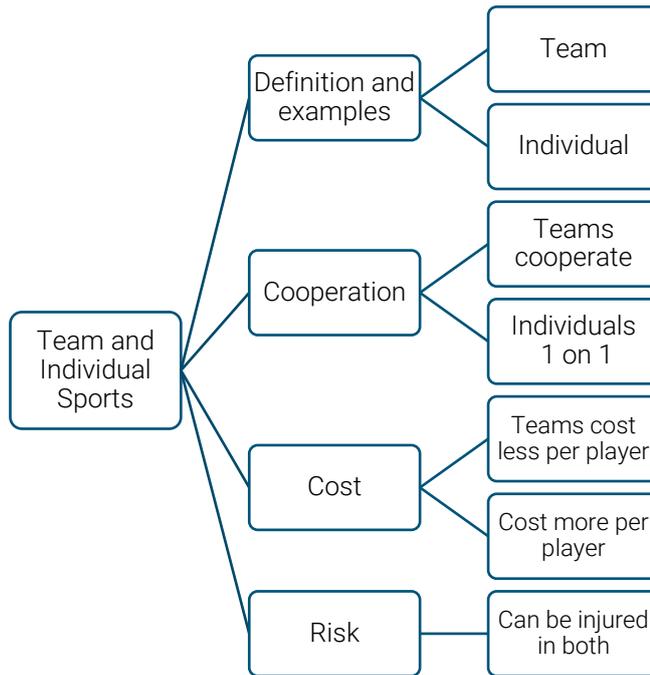
One way of showing the difference between the examples is to put the information into a diagram or chart. This will show how the information has been analysed and will help you in putting an assessment together.

Example A



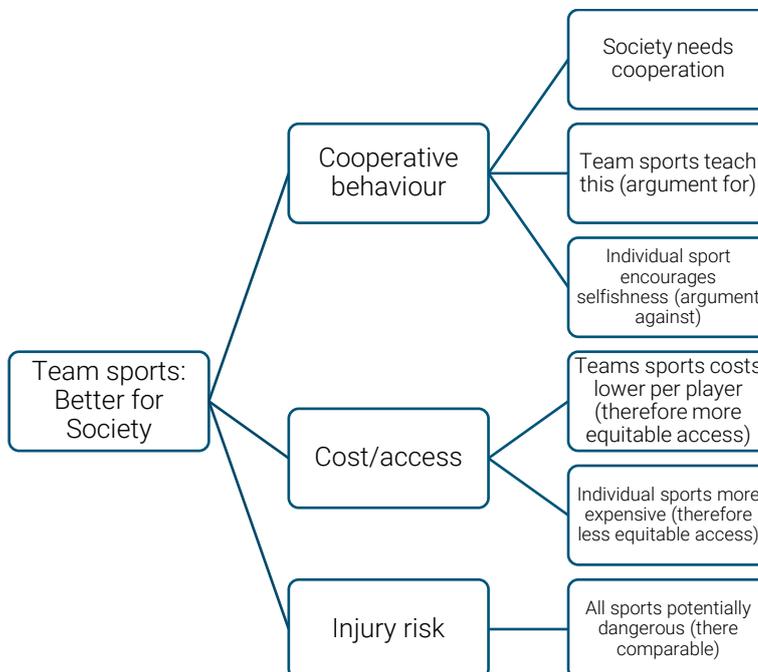
Example A has only organised the information into two broad groups with no apparent connections between them. There is only one level of analysis.

Example B



Example B has gone two steps further by combining team and individual sports and adding a layer of analysis. The information has been organised into 4 categories (*definition and examples, co-operation, cost and risk*) and these categories contrast aspects of team and individual sports.

Example C



Example C has categorised the information in a similar way to Example B. The main difference is that the characteristics of team and individual sports are now used as evidence to support an argument, that team sports are better for society, rather than just presenting information about team and individual sports. The arguments are based on a premise that a co-operative and equitable society is a good society and that activities which support co-operative behaviour and equity are therefore preferable to those which don't.

Summary

There are, of course, many ways that information can be analysed and organised. What is important is that your analysis and organisation matches what the assessment task is asking you to do. Also, unless you are specifically asked to simply describe something, you will have to be able to **analyse** and demonstrate **analysis** of information. It is also highly likely that you will often need to be **persuasive**.

See the *SCU Learning Zone* for more related Quick Guides.

Reference

Rolls, N. & Wignell, P. (2009). *Communicating at University: Skills for Success*. Darwin: Charles Darwin University Press.