

EXAMPLE 2 OF DESCRIPTIVE AND CRITICAL WRITING

The excerpts from the essay below illustrate how descriptive and critical writing fit together in academic writing. The essay task is: *In the last 20 years, rates of divorce have risen significantly in Western countries. Critically analyse some of the different explanations given for this phenomenon.*

Essay	Feature
<p>A major change that has occurred in Western countries is an increased incidence of divorce. Whereas in the past divorce was a relatively rare occurrence, in recent times it has become quite commonplace. An important issue for sociologists, and indeed for all society, is why these changes in marital patterns have occurred. Two possible explanations for the divorce phenomenon are changes to divorce laws and broader socio-economic change. This essay will critically analyse these explanations and the impact each has had on the divorce rate in Europe, the United States and Australia. While legal changes have contributed to increased divorce rates, the major contributing factors are most likely changes to social and economic behaviour within society.</p>	<p>Defines the problem</p> <p>Identifies the key arguments</p> <p>Identifies the task</p> <p>Identifies and refines the thesis</p>
<p>One type of explanation for rising divorce has focused on changes in laws relating to marriage. For example, Bilton, Bonnett and Jones (2007) argue that increased rates of divorce do not necessarily indicate that families are now more unstable. It is possible, they claim, that there has always been a degree of marital instability. They suggest that changes in the law have been significant because they have provided unhappily married couples with “access to a legal solution to pre-existent marital problems” (p. 301). Like Bilton et al. (2007), Madden (2013) also</p>	<p>Uses description to outline the argument from Bilton, Bonnett and Jones</p> <p>Analyses the argument</p>

<p>believes that changes in divorce rates can be best explained in terms of changes in the legal system. Whilst these studies indicate that changes in the law have increased divorce rates in that divorce has become more accessible, these explanations do not address the reasons for couples seeking divorce. Thus, the problem with these explanations is that they do not consider why these laws have changed in the first place. It could be argued that reforms to family law, as well as the increased rate of divorce that has accompanied them, are the product of more fundamental changes in society.</p>	<p>Synthesises ideas and evidence from a variety of sources</p> <p>Evaluates the ideas and arguments of others</p> <p>Makes evidence-based judgements</p>
<p>Another type of explanation is one that focuses precisely on these broad societal changes. For example, Hart (2013) argues that increases in divorce rates and marital breakdown are the result of economic changes that have affected the family. One example of these changes is the raised material aspirations of families, which Hart (2013) suggests has put pressure on both spouses to become wage earners. Women as a result have been forced to become both homemakers and economic providers. According to Hart (2013), the contradiction of these two roles has led to conflict and this is the main cause of marital breakdown. However, Hart's (2013) explanation cannot account for all cases of divorce. For example, as Apostol and Lee's (2010) study illustrated, marital breakdown also commonly occurs in families where only the husband is working. Nevertheless, the argument that changes in family relations are related to broader social forces seems to be more promising than one that looks only at legislative change.</p>	<p>Uses description to outline the argument from Hart</p> <p>Constructs consistent and well-supported arguments</p> <p>Analyses the argument</p> <p>Discusses the issue in a balanced way</p> <p>Makes judgements and included 'my' voice</p>
<p>It is difficult to offer a comprehensive explanation for the growing trend of marital breakdown within the parameters of this paper. However, it is worth pointing out that, whilst it appears to be a time of increased family instability, research suggests that historically, instability may have been the norm rather than the exception. In any case, as has been highlighted in this essay, changes in the rate of divorce in Western countries cannot be adequately explained by changes to divorce laws alone. More comprehensive reasons are to be found within a broader socio-economic perspective that considers how changes in financial and social expectations impact families resulting in an increase of those seeking a solution in divorce.</p>	<p>Discusses the issue in a balanced way</p> <p>Synthesises ideas and evidence from a variety of sources</p> <p>Evaluates the ideas and arguments of others</p>

Essay adapted from: <http://www.monash.edu.au/lls/llonline/writing/general/essay/sample/index.xml>