

Assessing Writing in the National Assessment Program

The writing task

The writing task for this test is a narrative. It is the same task for all students in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9.

The administration of the writing tasks employs closely scripted scaffolding. The teacher reads the directions on the writing prompt aloud to all students. The prompt includes images which can support students in crafting their response. Students have 5 minutes to plan, 30 minutes to write and 5 minutes to edit.

Definition

The following definition of the social purposes of the narrative has shaped the development of the criteria. It has also shaped the delineation of the essential structural components required for the task.

A narrative is a time-ordered text that is used to narrate events and to create, entertain and emotionally move an audience. Other social purposes of narrative writing may be to inform, to persuade and to socialise. The main structural components of a narrative are the orientation, the complication and the resolution.

Criteria

The ten criteria assessed in the writing task are

- Audience
- Text structure
- Ideas
- Character and setting
- Vocabulary
- Cohesion
- Paragraphing
- Sentence structure
- Punctuation
- Spelling

The following table shows criteria and the range of score points for the writing task.

Audience	Text Structure	Ideas	Character and Setting	Vocab	Cohesion	Paragraphing	Sentence Structure	Punctuation	Spelling
0–6	0–4	0–5	0–4	0–5	0–4	0–2	0–6	0–5	0–6

The top of each page shows the **criterion name and number**. The **skill focus** defines the underlying skill being assessed.

The **category descriptor** is a broad statement describing the particular skill level. This is an overall statement which should be used to make the judgement.

Additional information is included to help shape the judgement. However, this information should not be read as an exhaustive list.

Notes at the bottom of the page provide clarifying detail where necessary.

1

Audience

Skill focus: The writer's capacity to orient, engage and affect the reader.

	Category descriptor	Additional information
0	– symbols or drawings which have the intention of conveying meaning	
1	– contains some simple written content	
2	– shows awareness of basic audience expectations through the use of simple narrative markers	<p>Simple narrative markers may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – simple titles – formulaic story opening: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Long, long ago ...</i> <i>Once a boy was walking when ...</i> – description of people or places
3	– an internally consistent story that attempts to support the reader by developing a shared understanding of context	– contains sufficient information for the reader to follow the story fairly easily
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – supports reader understanding – attempts to engage the reader 	<p>Narrative devices may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – fantasy, humour, suspense – sub-genre styles (e.g. satire, boys' own, chick lit) – intertextual references
5	– supports and engages the reader through deliberate choice of language and use of narrative devices	<p>Language choices may:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – control writer/reader relationship – reveal values and attitudes – establish narrator stance – subvert expectations – evoke an emotional response
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – caters to the anticipated values and expectations of the reader – influences or affects the reader through precise and sustained choice of language and use of narrative devices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – encourage reflection – display irony

Text structure

Skill focus: The organisation of narrative features including orientation, complication and resolution into an appropriate and effective text structure.

	Category descriptor	Additional information
0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – no evidence of any structural components of a time-sequenced text 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – symbols or drawings – inappropriate genre, e.g. a recipe
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – minimal evidence of narrative structure, e.g. a story beginning only or a ‘middle’ with no orientation – a recount of events with no complication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Complication presents a problem to be solved, introduces tension and requires a response – it is more than just a sense of disappointment in the narrator. E.g. <i>not being allowed to go to the shop</i> is a disappointment. <i>Sneaking out of the window without mum seeing, falling and breaking a leg</i> is a complication. – Complications should always be read in context. <i>I hit the ball over the fence and lost it</i> is a disappointment. However, if it has already been established that <i>the ball belonged to Joe and he would kill me if he knew I had taken it out of the trophy case</i>, then losing it is a complication.
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – contains a beginning and a complication – where a resolution is present it is weak, contrived or ‘tacked on’ (e.g. <i>I woke up, I died, They lived happily ever after</i>) 	
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – contains orientation, complication and resolution (detailed longer text may resolve one complication and lead into a new complication or layer a new complication onto an existing one rather than conclude) 	<p>Sophisticated structures, sequences and plot devices include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – circular – parallel – foreshadowing/flashback – side or back story – story within a story – stream of consciousness
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – coherent, controlled and complete narrative, employing effective plot devices in an appropriate structure, and including an adequate ending 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – red herring – epiphany – cliff-hanger – coda – twist – evaluation – reflection – moral

3

Ideas

Skill focus: The creation, selection and crafting of ideas for a narrative.

	Category descriptor	Additional information
0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – no evidence or insufficient evidence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – symbols or drawings
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – ideas are very few and very simple – ideas appear unrelated 	
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – ideas are few, not elaborated or very predictable 	
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – ideas show some development or elaboration – all ideas relate coherently to a central storyline 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – some ideas may contain unnecessary elaboration (waffle)
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – ideas are substantial and elaborated – ideas effectively contribute to a central storyline – the story contains a suggestion of an underlying theme 	
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – ideas are generated, selected and crafted to explore a recognisable theme – ideas are skilfully used in the service of the storyline 	<p>Ideas may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – psychological subjects – unexpected topics – mature viewpoints – elements of popular culture – satirical perspectives – extended metaphor – traditional sub-genre subjects: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>heroic quest</i> <i>whodunit</i> <i>good vs evil</i> <i>overcoming the odds</i>

Character and setting

Skill focus: Character: The portrayal and development of character.

Setting: The development of a sense of place, time and atmosphere.

	Category descriptor	Additional information
0	– no evidence or insufficient evidence	– symbols or drawings
1	– only names characters or gives their roles (e.g. <i>father, the teacher, my friend, dinosaur, we, Jim</i>) AND/OR – only names the setting: (e.g. <i>school, the place we were at</i>) Setting is vague or confused.	
2	– suggestion of characterisation through brief descriptions or speech or feelings, but lacks substance or continuity AND/OR – suggestion of setting through very brief and superficial descriptions of place and/or time	– basic dialogue or a few adjectives to describe a character or a place
3	– characterisation emerges through descriptions, actions, speech or the attribution of thoughts and feelings to a character AND/OR – setting emerges through description of place, time and atmosphere	
4	– effective characterisation. Details are selected to create distinct characters. AND/OR – maintains a sense of setting throughout. Details are selected to create a sense of place and atmosphere.	– convincing dialogue, introspection and reactions to other characters

NOTES

Characterisation and setting are essential components of effective narrative writing. The inclusion of the AND/OR category is necessary as different types of stories may focus on only one aspect.

Some stories may be character-driven (e.g. *Pippi Longstocking* by Astrid Lindgren) and the setting may be very sketchy or undeveloped. Other stories, which attempt to build atmosphere and suspense, may focus on setting the scene (e.g. the wild west genre) with little character detail. Many stories will have a balance of these two components.

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Vocabulary

Skill focus: The range and precision of language choices.

	Category descriptor	Additional information
0	– symbols or drawings	
1	– very short script	few content words
2	– mostly simple verbs, adverbs, adjectives or nouns AND/OR – two or three precise words	– single words: <i>quick, big, run, look, red, cold, water, great, man, soft, need, really, very, beautiful, scream, grab, huge, think</i> – simple groups: <i>My big warm bed; It looked like a bright green lizard; A five headed, six armed monster</i> – simple figurative language: <i>as big as a house</i>
3	– precise words or word groups (may be verbs, adverbs, adjectives or nouns)	– single precise words: <i>hissed, yanked, clutched, absolutely, disgusted, exhilarating, rewarded, eventually</i> – effective simile: <i>... into a porthole-like trap; Burning coal shot out like tiny bullets</i> – metaphor: <i>... lungs screamed for air</i> – attitudinal: <i>simpered</i> – evaluative: <i>devout, aggressive, hard-done by</i> – technical: <i>resuscitated</i> – formal: <i>To what do I owe this honour?</i> – colloquial language for characters' speech: <i>Watcha doin'?</i> – alliteration: <i>... completely captivating cat called Clarence</i> – effective personification <i>... the wind clutched at her hair</i>
4	– sustained and consistent use of precise words and phrases that enhance the meaning or mood	
5	– a range of precise and effective words and phrases used in a natural and articulate manner Language choice is well matched to genre.	

NOTES

Words are generally categorised into two classes:

Content words (or lexical items) describe objects and concepts. This class of words consists of nouns, verbs, adverbs, adjectives, noun groups, phrasal verbs and verb groups.

Grammatical word classes (or structural words) consist of prepositions, articles, conjunctions, pronouns and interjections.

Cohesion

Skill focus: The control of multiple threads and relationships over the whole text, achieved through the use of referring words, substitutions, word associations and text connectives.

	Category descriptor	Additional information
0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – symbols or drawings 	
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – links are missing or incorrect – short script <p>Often confusing for the reader.</p>	
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – some correct links between sentences (do not penalise for poor punctuation) – most referring words are accurate <p>Reader may occasionally need to re-read and provide their own links to clarify meaning.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – small selection of simple connectives and conjunctions used: <i>then, soon, and, but, or, then, suddenly, so, and then, when</i>, ordinal numbers, only temporal connectives – often marked by cumbersome repetition of nouns or unreferenced pronouns
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – cohesive devices are used correctly to support reader understanding – accurate use of referring words <p>Meaning is clear and text flows well in a sustained piece of writing.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – other connectives used: <i>later, meanwhile, instead, in the middle of, earlier, just as, usually, although, even though, such as, because, finally</i> – word association to avoid repetition, e.g. synonyms, antonyms, word sets
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – a range of cohesive devices is used correctly and deliberately to enhance reading <p>An extended, highly cohesive piece of writing showing continuity of ideas and tightly linked sections of text.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – consistent use of word associations and substitutions that enhance reading

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Paragraphing

Skill focus: The segmenting of text into paragraphs that assists the reader to negotiate the narrative.

	Category descriptor	Additional information
0	no use of paragraphing or only a beginning sense of paragraphing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– script is a block of text– random breaks– new line for every sentence– new line for new speaker with no other paragraphing evident
1	writing is organised into paragraphs that are mainly focused on a single idea or set of like ideas that assist the reader to digest chunks of text	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– indicates broad changes in time and scene– formulaic structures
2	all paragraphs are focused on one idea or set of like ideas and enhance the narrative	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– deliberately structured to pace and direct the reader's attention– single sentence may be used as a dramatic or final comment or for emphasis

NOTES

For the purposes of the task, paragraphing can be indicated by any of the following conventions:

- indentation of a new line
- space between blocks of text
- student annotations, e.g. P for paragraph, tram lines, square brackets, asterisk
- available space on previous line left unused, followed by new line for paragraph beginning.

Sentence structure

Skill focus: The production of grammatically correct, structurally sound and meaningful sentences.

	Category descriptor	Additional information
0	– no evidence of sentences	– drawings, symbols, a list of words, text fragments
1	– some correct formation of sentences Some meaning can be construed.	– in general, control is very limited
2	– most simple sentences are correct Meaning is predominantly clear.	– correct sentences are predominantly simple
3	– most simple and compound sentences correct – some complex sentences are correct Meaning is predominantly clear.	– experiments with complexity but with limited success
4	– simple and compound sentences are correct – most complex sentences are correct OR All sentences correct but do not demonstrate variety Meaning is clear.	– greater control of complex sentences but lacks variety
5	– sentences correct (allow for occasional typo, e.g. a missing word) – demonstrates variety in length, structure and beginnings Meaning is clear and sentences enhance meaning.	VARIETY – clause types and patterns (verbless, adjectival, adverbial, multiple dependencies, non-finite) – dependent clause position – length and rhythm – lexical density: increased with elaborating and extending phrases, or reduced to the essential
6	– all sentences are correct Writing contains controlled and well-developed sentences that express precise meaning and are consistently effective.	– stylistically appropriate choices

NOTES

- Some students do not accurately identify their sentence boundaries with punctuation. In these cases it will be necessary to read the *intended* sentence. Run-on sentences should not be regarded as successful (overly repeated 'and', 'so' etc).
- Verb control and preposition errors should be considered as sentence errors.

9

Punctuation

Skill focus: The use of correct and appropriate punctuation to aid reading of the text.

NOTE: ‘Splice’ commas used to join two sentences are INCORRECT. (E.g. *The dog ate my homework, it was hungry.*) Do not score these as correct sentence punctuation or comma use.

	Category descriptor	Additional information
0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – no evidence of correct punctuation 	<p>Sentence punctuation includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – capital letters to begin sentences – full stops to end sentences – question marks to end sentences – exclamation marks to end sentences <p>Noun capitalisation includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – first names and surnames – titles: Mr, Mrs, Miss, Ms etc. – place names: Paris, Italy – institution names: Valley High – days of week, months of year – street names: Ord St – book and film titles – holidays: Easter, Ramadan – historic events: World War II <p>Other punctuation includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – apostrophes to mark contractions – commas in lists – commas to mark clauses/phrases – apostrophes to mark possession – correct hyphenation of compound words – quotation marks for direct speech – capital letters and commas used within quotation marks – new line for each speaker – quotation marks for text extracts and highlighted words – brackets and dashes – brackets to signal humorous asides – colons and semicolons – points of ellipsis – commas or semicolons to balance or create rhythm between clauses
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – some correct use of capital letters to start sentences OR full stops to end sentences <p>Punctuation is minimal and of little assistance to the reader.</p>	
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – some accurately punctuated sentences (beginning and end) – some noun capitalisation where applicable <p>Provides some markers to assist reading.</p>	
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – some correct punctuation across categories (sentences mostly correct with some others correct) <p>OR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – accurate sentence punctuation, nothing else used <p>Provides adequate markers to assist reading.</p>	
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – all sentence punctuation correct – mostly correct use of other punctuation <p>Provides accurate markers to enable smooth and efficient reading.</p>	
5	<p>writing contains accurate use of all applicable punctuation</p> <p>Provides precise markers to pace and control reading of the text.</p>	

NOTES

In first draft writing, allowances can be made for the very occasional omission of sentence punctuation at scores 4 and 5. ‘Mostly’ is approximately 80% but it is not intended that every use of punctuation is calculated rigorously.

Spelling

Skill focus: The accuracy of spelling and the difficulty of the words used.

	Category descriptor	Additional information
0	no conventional spelling	<p>Simple words</p> <p>Short vowel single-syllable words (<i>bad, fit, not</i>) with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – consonant digraphs (<i>shop, thin, much, chips</i>) – consonant blends (<i>drop, clap, grass, bring</i>) – double final consonants (<i>will, less</i>) <p>High frequency long vowel single-syllable words (<i>name, park, good, school, feet, food</i>)</p> <p>Common words</p> <p>Single-syllable words with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – two and three consonant blends (<i>square, stretch, light, catch, crack, strung</i>) – common long vowels (<i>face, sail, eight, mean, nice, fly, coke, use, close, again</i>) <p>Multi-syllabic words with even stress patterns (<i>middle, litter, plastic, between, hospital</i>)</p> <p>Compound words (<i>downstairs</i>)</p> <p>Common homophones (<i>there/their, write/right, hear/here, brake/break</i>)</p> <p>Suffixes that don't change the base word (<i>jumped, sadly, adults, happening</i>)</p> <p>Common words with silent letters (<i>know, wrong, comb</i>)</p> <p>Single-syllable words ending in <i>ould, ey, ough</i></p> <p>Most rule-driven words: drop e, double letter, change y to i (<i>having, spitting, heavier</i>)</p> <p>Difficult words</p> <p>Uneven stress patterns in multi-syllabic words (<i>chocolate, mineral</i>)</p> <p>Uncommon vowel patterns (<i>drought, hygiene</i>)</p> <p>Difficult subject-specific content words (<i>obese</i>)</p> <p>Difficult homophones (<i>practice/practise</i>)</p> <p>Suffixes where base word changes (<i>generate/generation</i>)</p> <p>Consonant alteration patterns (<i>confident/confidence</i>)</p> <p>Many three and four syllable words (<i>invisible, organise, community</i>)</p> <p>Multi-syllabic words ending in <i>tion, sion, ture, ible/able, ent/ant, ful</i></p> <p>Challenging words</p> <p>Unusual consonant patterns (<i>guarantee</i>)</p> <p>Longer words with unstressed syllables (<i>responsibility</i>)</p> <p>Vowel alteration patterns (<i>brief to brevity, propose to proposition</i>)</p> <p>Foreign words</p> <p>Suffixes to words ending in e, c or l (<i>physically, changeable, completely</i>)</p>
1	few examples of conventional spelling	
2	correct spelling of – most simple words – some common words (errors evident in common words)	
3	correct spelling of – most simple words – most common words (errors do not outnumber correct spellings)	
4	correct spelling of – simple words – most common words – some difficult words (errors do not outnumber correct spellings)	
5	correct spelling of – simple words – most common words – at least 10 difficult words (errors do not outnumber correct spellings)	
6	correct spelling of – all words – at least 10 difficult words – some challenging words NOTE: As the work is first draft writing, allowances can be made for very occasional (1 or 2) minor errors, which should be disregarded when assigning this category.	