

# Narrative Writing

## What Is Narrative Writing?

A narrative is 'a story of events or experiences, real or imagined' (ACARA, 2010 to present). Much of what we cover in this manual can therefore be applied to imaginary stories and recounts – fiction and non-fiction – across all forms of media, including movies, animations, books, poems and songs.

We tend to think of narrative writing as something we do at school, but how often do we need this skill in later life? The truth is that being able to relate 'a real or imagined sequence of events' is still relevant beyond the classroom. A travel blog, an email to a friend, a social media post or a conversation at a dinner party all benefit from the ability to tell an engaging story.

What's more, elements of narrative (such as short anecdotes) can and should be used where appropriate in informative and persuasive writing. For example, an advertisement, can tell a story that seeks to persuade; infotainment can engage and entertain the reader while also conveying facts; historical fiction weaves true events into a story about fictional characters.

According to the Australian Curriculum:

“ Texts can be classified as belonging to one of three types: imaginative, informative or persuasive, although it is acknowledged that these distinctions are neither static nor watertight and particular texts can belong to more than one category.

(ACARA, 2010 to present)

Refer to our *Persuasive Writing Manual (Second Edition)* and *Informative Writing Manual* to find out how the Seven Steps can be applied to these two text types.

### *Narrative writing ...*

- seeks to entertain and emotionally move an audience, but may also inform and persuade
- relates a series of connected events or experiences that may be real or imagined (plot)
- may include real or imaginary people (characters)
- may be set in a real or imaginary place (setting)
- includes an orientation, a complication and a resolution (structure)
- often centres around a problem that creates tension and interest (conflict)
- includes an underlying idea about the world and/or humanity that guides the narrative, linking all the elements (theme)
- can be written in prose or poetry
- is usually written in first or third person
- is not confined to specific forms (print, online) and can be multimodal (such as a music video, advertisement, film or web page).

## Types of Narrative Writing

Narrative texts come in many forms: they might be told in prose or in poetry; they can be written, spoken, acted, sung or expressed on film or in digital form. What makes them narratives is their purpose – to entertain and emotionally move an audience.

Below is a list of some common types of narratives, many of which are covered in this manual.

### Imaginative texts (fiction)

#### **Texts that relate a series of imaginary events or experiences**

- novels, chapter books or series set in real or imagined worlds (e.g. the *Treehouse* series by Andy Griffiths, *Catch a Falling Star* by Meg McKinlay, the *Nevermoor* series by Jessica Townsend)
- short stories, flash fiction or microfiction in any media (e.g. 'Rain Stones' by Jackie French, Twitter stories in 280 characters, the *Minuscule* series, the *SparkShorts* series)
- poems that tell a story (e.g. 'Alligator Pie' by Dennis Lee, 'Sick' by Shel Silverstein)
- picture books and wordless picture books (e.g. *Welcome to Country* by Aunty Joy Murphy and Lisa Kennedy, *Journey* by Aaron Becker)
- plays, scripts, musicals (e.g. *Romeo and Juliet*, theatre and film adaptations or radio plays)
- movies and TV series (e.g. *The Incredibles*, *Kiki's Delivery Service*, *Little J and Big Cuz*)
- song lyrics that tell a story (e.g. 'Ghost Riders in the Sky' by Johnny Cash, 'Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star')
- jokes and anecdotes (e.g. 'A funny thing happened ...')
- comic strips and cartoons in print and animation (e.g. *Snake Tales*, *The Adventures of Tintin*, *Peppa Pig*)
- graphic novels (e.g. *Ubbly's Underdogs* by Brenton E McKenna, *The Nameless City* by Faith Erin Hicks)
- genre fiction (e.g. speculative fiction, detective stories, thrillers, fantasy, mockumentaries)
- diaries, also called epistolary stories (e.g. *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* by Jeff Kinney, *Diary of a Wombat* by Jackie French and Bruce Whatley)
- advertisements that tell a story (e.g. 'Mog's Christmas Calamity' by Sainsbury's UK)
- legends and traditional tales (e.g. *How the Kangaroos Got Their Tails* by George Lirrmiyarri Mung Mung and Pamela Lofts, the Japanese folk tale *Urashima Taro*, European fairy tales)

### Narrative recounts

#### **Texts that give an account of an event or experience that is real, or only partly imaginary**

- anecdotes (e.g. a funny thing I saw or did)
- recounts (e.g. what I did on the holidays/the weekend/an excursion)
- 'faction' or factual fiction (e.g. historical fiction such as *Pennies for Hitler* by Jackie French)
- diaries (e.g. *The Diary of a Young Girl* by Anne Frank)
- biographies, autobiographies, memoirs (e.g. *On a Beam of Light* by Jennifer Berne, *The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind* by William Kamkwamba and Bryan Mealer, *I Am Malala* by Malala Yousafzai and Christina Lamb).

For more examples, check out the lists of texts and videos at the end of each Step chapter. Sign up for a *Teacher Hub* Starter account to access more extensive lists of exemplars.

# Seven Steps and Narrative Writing

All kinds of narratives rely on the Seven Steps techniques. Here are some examples:

EXAMPLE	STEP
Novels require careful planning to ensure that all the threads flow throughout the story and are wrapped up at the end.	<b>Step 1</b> Plan for Success
Travel blogs need to hook the reader and make them want to find out more.	<b>Step 2</b> Sizzling Starts
Action movies build tension by putting the characters in grave danger and then upping the stakes.	<b>Step 3</b> Tightening Tension
Comic strips use dialogue to tell a story and develop the characters.	<b>Step 4</b> Dynamic Dialogue
Poetry often uses word pictures to create a vivid image in the reader's mind.	<b>Step 5</b> Show, Don't Tell
Short stories and picture books are ruthlessly edited to create maximum impact in a short format.	<b>Step 6</b> Ban the Boring
Fairy tales and fables often end with a dramatic action climax followed by an emotional resolution that conveys the moral of the story.	<b>Step 7</b> Exciting Endings

## Five Key Elements of a Narrative

Every story has five key elements: character, setting, plot, conflict and theme. These elements are woven throughout the manual. Here is a quick guide to where you can find them:

NARRATIVE ELEMENTS	RELATED STEPS
<p><b>Character</b></p> <p>Believable characters are essential to any great story. Get students to brainstorm lots of characters and pick the best ones (Step 1). To develop those ideas and create characters with depth, ensure that each character has at least one weakness (Step 3), get them to interact with other characters (Step 4), and show their personality traits and motivations through their actions (Step 5).</p>	<p>Step 1: Plan for Success</p> <p>Step 3: Tightening Tension</p> <p>Step 4: Dynamic Dialogue</p> <p>Step 5: Show, Don't Tell</p>
<p><b>Setting</b></p> <p>Settings are also important in a narrative. Again, brainstorm lots of settings and pick the best ones (Step 1). Settings orient the reader by establishing when and where the story takes place (Step 2). A great setting can also set the mood and tone for the story (Step 5).</p>	<p>Step 1: Plan for Success</p> <p>Step 2: Sizzling Starts</p> <p>Step 5: Show, Don't Tell</p>
<p><b>Plot</b></p> <p>The plot of the story follows the story arc (Step 1) and includes a Sizzling Start (Step 2), build-up of tension (Step 3), an action climax and an emotional resolution (Step 7).</p>	<p>Step 1: Plan for Success</p> <p>Step 2: Sizzling Starts</p> <p>Step 3: Tightening Tension</p> <p>Step 7: Exciting Endings</p>
<p><b>Conflict</b></p> <p>The conflict or problem in a narrative is what drives the plot and dictates the theme. This conflict should be established in the planning stages (Step 1) and developed throughout the story as the tension escalates (Step 3). It's important that the ending to the story wraps up this conflict in a satisfying way for the reader (Step 7).</p>	<p>Step 1: Plan for Success</p> <p>Step 3: Tightening Tension</p> <p>Step 7: Exciting Endings</p>
<p><b>Theme</b></p> <p>The theme or moral of the story needs to be established in the planning stages and woven through the narrative (Step 1). The theme is conveyed through the conflict (Step 3) and resolution (Step 7) within the story. This underlying meaning is what stays with us long after we have finished reading a great story.</p>	<p>Step 1: Plan for Success</p> <p>Step 3: Tightening Tension</p> <p>Step 7: Exciting Endings</p>

## Curriculum Matrix

The Curriculum Matrix lists the Australian Curriculum content descriptions covered by each Step and directs you to the relevant pages in the manual. The activities in this manual are designed for Year 3–6 students but they can easily be adapted for younger or older students.

### Year 3

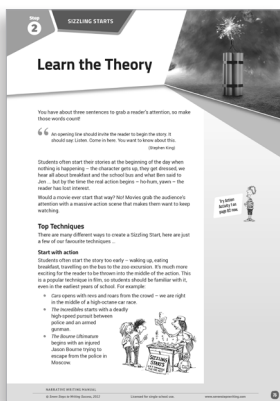
LANGUAGE	STEP 1	STEP 2	STEP 3	STEP 4	STEP 5	STEP 6	STEP 7
<b>Language for interaction</b>							
Understand that successful cooperation with others depends on shared use of social conventions, including turn-taking patterns, and forms of address that vary according to the degree of formality in social situations ( <a href="#">ACELA1476</a> )	AA1, p 54 AA2, p 54 AA3, p 55 AA5, p 56 AA6, p 56 AA7, p 57 AA8, p 57	AA1, p 82 AA2, p 82 AA5, p 84	All Action Activities	AA1, p 119 AA2, p 119 AA3, p 120 AA5, p 121 AA6, p 121	All Action Activities	AA1, p 155 AA2, p 155 AA3, p 156 AA5, p 157	All Action Activities
<b>Text structure and organisation</b>							
Understand how different types of texts vary in use of language choices, depending on their purpose and context (for example, tense and types of sentences) ( <a href="#">ACELA1478</a> )	AA8, p 57	All Action Activities	All Action Activities	AA1, p 119 AA3, p 120 AA4, p 120 AA5, p 121 AA6, p 121	All Action Activities	All Action Activities	All Action Activities
Understand that paragraphs are a key organisational feature of written texts ( <a href="#">ACELA1479</a> )	AA6, p 56 AA7, p 57 AA8, p 57	All Action Activities	AA1, p 102 AA2, p 102 AA3, p 103 AA5, p 104 AA6, p 104			AA3, p 156 AA4, p 156 AA5, p 157 AA6, p 157	AA2, p 173 AA3, p 174 AA4, p 174 AA5, p 175 AA6, p 175
Identify the features of online texts that enhance navigation ( <a href="#">ACELA1790</a> )		AA6, p 84		AA1, p 119 AA4, p 120	AA4, p 138		
<b>Expressing and developing ideas</b>							
Identify the effect on audiences of techniques, for example shot size, vertical camera angle and layout in picture books, advertisements and film segments ( <a href="#">ACELA1483</a> )			AA1, p 102 AA4, p 103	AA6, p 121	AA5, p 139		AA1, p 173 AA5, p 175
Learn extended and technical vocabulary and ways of expressing opinion including modal verbs and adverbs ( <a href="#">ACELA1484</a> )		AA1, p 82 AA3, p 83 AA4, p 83 AA5, p 84 AA6, p 84	AA1, p 102 AA3, p 103 AA4, p 103 AA5, p 104 AA6, p 104	AA1, p 119 AA2, p 119 AA3, p 120 AA5, p 121	AA1, p 137 AA2, p 137 AA4, p 138 AA5, p 139 AA6, p 139	AA1, p 155 AA6, p 157	AA1, p 173 AA6, p 175

# Implementation

## How This Manual Works

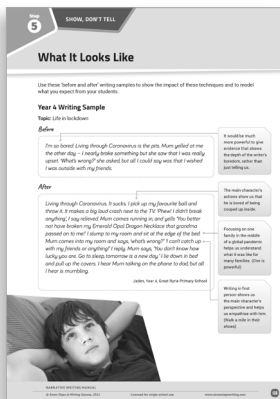
This manual assumes you will introduce one Step at a time, but you don't have to start with Step 1! Often students are engaged and gain confidence by starting with Step 2: Sizzling Starts. (Check out the implementation advice on pages 31–2 for more on this.)

Each of the core chapters in the manual (one per Step) is laid out in the same way for ease of use.



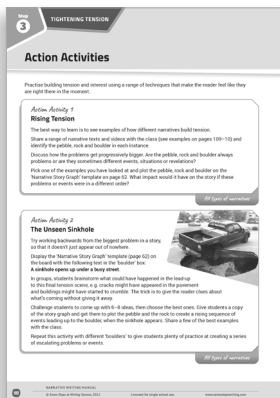
### Learn the Theory

The key techniques that underpin each Step are covered at the start of each chapter. There are also ideas on how to take it further with more advanced writers, or students who are already familiar with the Seven Steps.



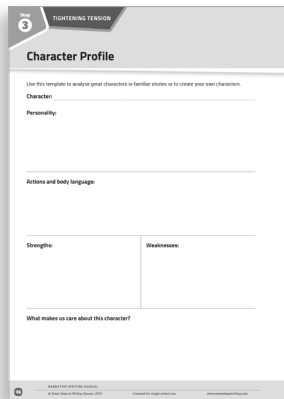
### What It Looks Like

Use these 'before and after' writing samples to show the impact of the Seven Steps techniques and to model what you expect from students. These samples have been directly transcribed and left unedited.



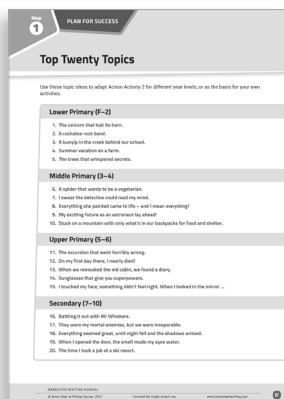
### Action Activities

These short, fun activities are designed to help students consolidate their understanding of each Step by practising the techniques. The activities progress from modelling and discussing the techniques (I do), to putting the techniques into practice in small groups (We do) and then alone (I do). For each Action Activity, we have recommended relevant types of narrative texts (see page 7).



### Templates

The templates are used to scaffold students' learning and can be found towards the back of each chapter. Templates are referenced in the relevant Action Activities.



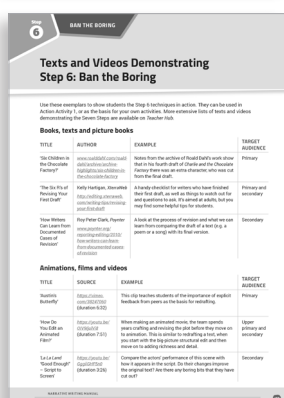
### Top Twenty Topics

Use these topic ideas to adapt activities for different year levels, to change the focus of topic-based activities when you repeat or extend them, or as the basis for creating your own activities.



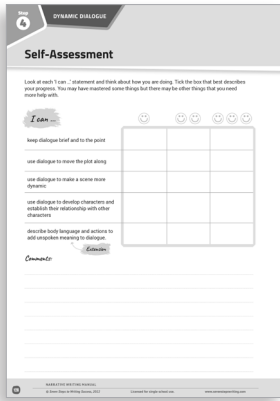
### Writing Prompts

Use these visual writing prompts to give students additional practice with a particular Step and get their creative juices flowing!



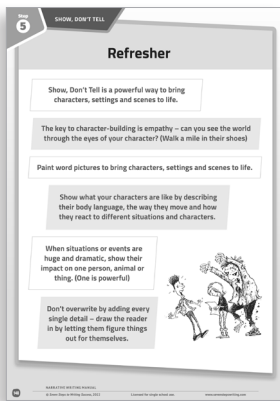
### Text and Video Lists

Use these lists of exemplars to show students the different Seven Steps techniques in action. You can also use them to create your own activities.



### Self-Assessment

Students can use these self-assessment rubrics to evaluate their own progress, and teachers can use them as the basis for conferencing with students. Some include extensions to stretch more advanced students.



### Refresher

The key points for each Step are set out on a poster to refresh students' memories.

## Putting it all together

Now for writing a whole narrative, i.e. playing the tennis match! When students are ready – or at least familiar with Steps 1, 2, 3 and 7 – review the 'Putting It All Together' chapter on pages 185–217.

Working collaboratively leads to better learning outcomes, so it's best to create full texts as a group first. Students scaffold each other by writing a small part of a complete text, and they learn from the ideas and creativity of everyone in the group.

This chapter includes templates to guide students through the complex process of writing a complete text. Once students have mastered the process collaboratively with the use of templates, gradually reduce the scaffolds until they can write independently with creativity and confidence.

There is also a marking rubric (pages 207–8) and graded writing samples (pages 211–17) that you can use to assess your students' progress and assist with reporting.





## Eight-Week Starter Plan

How do you start applying the Seven Steps techniques to narrative writing? Here is a sample plan for the first eight weeks to help you implement the core structural Steps (Steps 1, 2, 3 and 7).

Feel free to change this plan to suit the needs of your students. For beginner writers, you may want to spend more time on each Step. For advanced writers, you might consider covering one or two Steps a week.

TIMELINE	TOPIC	KEY POINT	WHAT TO REVIEW	ACTIVITIES
Week	Introduction	Chunk large tasks – the tennis analogy	Introduction, pp 1–32 The Five Secrets, p 3	
	Step 2: Sizzling Starts	A great start grabs the reader's attention immediately	Learn the Theory, pp 75–9 What It Looks Like, pp 80–1	Do Action Activities 1–2, p 82
Week 2	Step 2: Sizzling Starts	Use a range of techniques to start with a bang	Texts and Videos Demonstrating Step 2: Sizzling Starts, pp 89–90	Do Action Activities 3–6, pp 83–4 Students complete the self-assessment, p 91
Week 3	Step 3: Tightening Tension	The pebble, rock, boulder technique	Learn the Theory, pp 93–5 Texts and Videos Demonstrating Step 3: Tightening Tension, pp 109–10	Do Action Activities 1–2, p 102
Week 4	Step 3: Tightening Tension	Tension scenes are long and strong	Learn the Theory, pp 95–9 What It Looks Like, pp 100–1	Do Action Activities 3–6, pp 103–4 Students complete the self-assessment, p 111
Week 5	Step 7: Exciting Endings	Great endings have two parts	Learn the Theory, pp 167–8 What It Looks Like, pp 171–2	Do Action Activities 1–2, p 173
Week 6	Step 7: Exciting Endings	Plan your ending before you start	Texts and Videos Demonstrating Step 7: Exciting Endings, pp 181–2	Do Action Activities 3–6, pp 174–5 Students complete the self-assessment, p 183
Week 7	Step 1: Plan for Success	Brainstorm 10 ideas to get one great idea	Learn the Theory, Part 1: Brainstorming and Selecting Ideas, pp 33–7 What It Looks Like – Story, Part 1: Brainstorming and Selecting Ideas, p 47	Do Action Activities 1–3, pp 54–5 Students complete the self-assessment for Part 1, p 71
Week 8	Step 1: Plan for Success	Developing and ordering ideas on the Narrative Story Graph	Learn the Theory, Part 2: Developing and Ordering Ideas, pp 37–46 What It Looks Like, Part 2: Developing and Ordering Ideas, pp 48–53	Do Action Activities 4–8, pp 55–7 Students complete the self-assessment for Part 2, p 72

Additional narrative writing resources are available on *Teacher Hub*. Log in to your account at <https://teacherhub.sevenstepswriting.com> or visit our website to learn more.