



2021 NAPLAN Topic – Years 3 & 5

Following Tracks

Write a narrative (story) about footprints, tracks or a trail.

The tracks in your story may be left by a person, an animal, a vehicle or something odd.

Perhaps the tracks are clues or lead your characters to something exciting or difficult.

Note: This exemplar was written by Jen McVeity, creator of the Seven Steps to Writing Success and the author of over 20 books. She wrote this in the exact time that all children receive to draft and submit their NAPLAN writing test. We have not checked or changed Jen's spelling, grammar or punctuation – this example is exactly as she wrote it in the time allowed.

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Planning (6 minutes)

Writing (34 minutes)

Editing (0 minutes)

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Sizzling Start

Usually when the wind howls and the rain sleet down, I lie in my bed and feel warm and cosy. Tonight my bed was warm, and my room heated – and I was shivering and freezing. Fear did that to you.

Backfill

Tomorrow morning we would be hiking the Great Ocean Road for three days – and three days of rain were forecast. Tonight was the last time I would be dry and warm for 100 hours.

'Amanda?' I called across the dividing wall in the hiking lodge. Amanda was my sort of sister. We were thrown together when my dad and her mum got married to each other – and we had nothing in common. She was 17, sup fit and loved the outdoors. I was 4 years yournger, into AI, environmental change and could count the muscles in my body on one hand.

'Huh?' There was a grunt from next door. Then nothing. I was on my own.

Start of the plot

The alarm went off at 6.00am. I had seen the time on the clock often – and never used it. The rain was still pouring down. I could hear Amanda in the shower we shared and I swear she was singing. Though as she was tone deaf, it was hard to tell.

Breakfast came and went in a blur. Hiking gear so carefully packed by my parents were thrown on. Shirts, vest, parka, you name it, I put everything on. Then we headed out in the pouring rain with the guides and 8 other lunatic people who thought walking on the top of cliffs in the howling wind and rain was a good idea. It wasn't.

Step, step step. There wasn't anything to see except following the track and boring bushes. And looking at the pack and back of the person in front. Step, step, slosh. The rain was getting stronger. I could feel water running off my nose. The front of my hiking pants getting soaked. The tissue I had in my pants was useless, it too was soaking wet. At least my top was dry.

The guides stopped occasionally to tell us stuff. Like the names of plants, the history of the area, the limestone rocks. I couldn't wait for lunch stop and rest my shaking legs. And I was starving, I had barely stuffed down anything at breakfast.

Step, slog, slog. And this was supposed to be the easy day on the track. It was slush and slog and exhausting.

We made it back to the lodge at last. Endurance and stubbornness had won the day. Amanda was peeling off her gear and grinning.

'Did you see the middens?' she asked. 'Of the ancient indigenous people? All those shells?'

Nup. No. And who cares?

More backfill

At dinner that night, in front of everyone, it came out why Amanda and I were there. Birthday presents. My parents were great believers in 'experiences' not 'stuff' so for our birthdays we each had to choose an experience. Amanda had chosen this Twelve Apostles hike. I hated it. For my birthday I was going to drag her to a Minecraft conference for three days for sure.

Transition – character growth of narrator and also connection to sister

Day 2: Did I mention the rain? The 6.00am start? And this was a 14km walk day. Fun times. Not.

At least I knew enough to eat a big breakfast. And put the stuff I wanted to keep dry in my parka pockets. And I took the walking poles they offered. No time to think they looked dumb, 'they help by 5%' the guide said, and I grabbed them.

Step, poles, power downhill, stagger and slow uphill. More rain. I was kinda of getting used to it. At least this time we got to see some interesting views.

"The shipwreck Coast' it's called, said Amanda. 'Over 200 ships were wrecked on the reefs here.' I looked across the pounding surf and raging winds and shivered. It was real easy to see why. And to see the sailors so far out to sea, struggling against these same rains and winds – and dying.

'Chirrip,' I looked around. The rain had stopped for a change and a wren, tiny and cheeky had flitted onto a bush near us.

'You can eat this,' said our guide, handing around small pieces of a plant growing by the track. It tasked OK, you could feel the salt from the ocean in it's leaves.

That night, we sat outside in the late afternoon air and put band aids on our starting blisters and looked across at each other.

'Going OK?' Amanda asked.

I had made it through 14 kms of rain and tracks and still survived. And tomorrow was the last day.

I nodded.

'Yeah. Happy birthday,' I said to her.

Character of narrator now is more outward looking – personal growth & action climax, end of the walk

Day 3: The end of the road. And there was this thing called sunshine peeking through the clouds and the rain had stopped.

Once more on the track we walked and sometimes I even managed to get the breath to talk.

'I hiked the Three Capes in Tassie last month,' said one of the group. You would love it.

'You into AI?' said one guy. Amanda must have been talking. 'Me too. We do a lot in my company. Give me a call.'

'See the top of that sand dune?' said Amanda. 'Race you to it!. She gave me a big head start.

And as we walked, slowly you could see in the distance the rocks that were standing sentinniel in the ocean. The Apolstles.

Huge, towering limestones rocks standing in the sea, battered by wnd and waves. And somehow beautiful.

They loked so far away. Days away. But distances can be deceiving. As we followed along the track, they slowly got closer and closer. One hour. Two. Then they were there. Powerful and awesome. And we were on the beach with them looming up proud in front of us.

Character resolution

It was one of those times where you didn't really know what to say. How to feel. I was confused.

I walked along the sand and sat in a small cove, hidden from everyone.

Something was different now and I didn't know what it was.

'Hey.' Amanda was there and she was quiet. 'You OK.'

'How did you find me?' I asked. She looked at my clear tracks in the sand and pointed. I laughed.

'It was a good walk,' she said. And I smiled. That was it. Rain, wind, slog ... it had still, strangley been good.

'I've heard about the Three Capes in Tassie,' I said. Hear, that's a nice hike.

And suddenly she laughed, put out her hand and hauled me to my feet and gave me a hug.

'Let's do it!' she said. 'For your birthday?'

'Yeah,' I nodded. 'For my birthday.

Marked Results

2021 NAPLAN writing task (Years 3 & 5) – Narrative Genre

NAP Marker: Shelley Sharpe

Criterion	Marks	Score	Comments
Audience	0–6	5	Text engages reader throughout its duration, with deliberate choice of language to evoke emotional responses from the reader about relationships and physical resilience. Shows development of underlying theme and narrative stance but doesn't quite show the sophistication and sustained choice of precise language or engagement required for a 6.
Text Structure	0–4	4	Rhythm of text is fabulous. Dividing the story into a three-day diary gives the developing story great pace and reveals layers of conflict; reluctance to hike, battling the weather and blisters, struggling with family relationships, etc. Not only does the main character overcome the problems of an epic journey but the resolution reveals positive personal growth in a hard family relationship.
Ideas	0–5	5	This text is a believable narrative, which hints at an underlying theme of 'overcoming the odds' when the character realises that hardship can have its rewards. The diary entries show development of character together with correctly paced action to sustain the reader's interest.
Character and Setting	0–4	4	Character develops over time, showing convincing dialogue, personal reflection and believable reactions to other characters. Settings are described well, with particular emphasis on the bad weather to highlight the difficulty of the hike conditions for the main character.
Vocabulary	0–5	4	A range of vocabulary used. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technical: <i>rain sleets down</i> • Colloquial: <i>Amanda was my sort of sister</i> • Precise words/phrases: <i>lunatic</i> and <i>huge, towering limestone rocks</i> • Repetition: <i>step, step, step</i> • Imagery: <i>Amanda was peeling off her gear and grinning</i> • Personification: <i>sunshine peeking through the clouds, looming up proud in front of us.</i> There is the occasional inappropriate word choice, e.g. <i>it came out why Amanda and I were there</i> – this word choice makes the sentence confusing. The word 'revealed' would be better: <i>it was revealed that night ... or the reason why we were here was revealed when ...</i>
Cohesion	0–4	3	Diary markers assist the reader to move with the text clearly. The narrative tense is controlled nicely, except in paragraph 1. Some clumsiness with referring words stop the flow and overall ease in reading: <i>Hiking gear, so carefully packed by my parents were thrown on, 8 other lunatic people and I had seen the time on the clock often – and never used it.</i> Writing shows continuity of ideas and sections that are tightly linked but not enough for category 4.

Criterion	Marks	Score	Comments
Paragraphing	0–2	2	Paragraphs are focused on one idea or used for speech. Use of paragraphs contributes to the text flowing nicely.
Sentence Structure	0–6	5	<p>Text shows control over a range of different structures, and sentences show variety. Using shorter sentences is effective in this story to show the effort and struggles of the main character. Most simple, compound and complex sentences are correct.</p> <p>Whilst effective, there is an overuse in fragments, e.g. <i>Days away. Powerful and awesome. How to feel.</i></p> <p>Errors: <i>I was kinda of getting used to it</i> (most likely a typo); <i>limestones rocks.</i></p> <p>Occasional errors so the text does not meet requirements for category 6.</p>
Punctuation	0–5	3	<p>Most sentence punctuation correct.</p> <p>Errors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • missing comma in a list, e.g. <i>Step, step step.</i> – most likely a typo • missing quotation marks, e.g. <i>'I've heard about the Three Capes in Tassie,' I said. Hear, that's a nice hike.</i> • missing question mark: <i>'You OK.'</i> • missing capital letter: <i>The shipwreck Coast</i> • incorrect apostrophe: <i>in it's leaves.</i>
Spelling	0–6	5	<p>Correct spelling of simple words – <i>wnd</i> (wind) is a typo.</p> <p>Correct spelling of most common words. Errors: <i>super, younger, alarm, tasted, looked, strangely.</i></p> <p>Challenging words correct: <i>occasionally, lunatic, environmental, indigenous.</i> Errors: <i>sentinel, Apostles, suddenly.</i></p> <p>Correct spelling of at least 10 difficult words: <i>exhausting, endurance, stubbornness, middens, ancient, experiences, believers, conference, interesting, survived, distance, deceiving, awesome, different, powerful.</i></p>

Total marks:

40 out of 48

Jen's Thoughts

It's interesting to view my marks for the 2021 NAPLAN narrative writing test.

The authorial elements of the piece are my strongest suit. A Sizzling Start gave me good marks for engaging the audience, and Dynamic Dialogue helped with the 4/4 score for Character and Setting.

An emphasis on planning earned me 3/4 marks in Cohesion (I follow the story graph) and full marks in the Ideas section.

Tightening Tension and an Exciting Ending also contributed to full marks in Text Structure.

It was the 'voice', that hard-to-define but necessary part of writing, that worked against me. I was writing in a teenage boy's voice with casual and colloquial vocabulary, and that lost me 4 marks overall in Audience, Vocabulary, Sentence Structure and Cohesion. Check out the comments to see why.

I took a hit in the Spelling and Punctuation sections, as I concentrated too much on creating the story, and not at all on editing. This meant I had a few typos and punctuation mistakes.

NAPLAN is a first-draft-only test. I hope the [proposed changes](#) to remove the secretarial criteria (spelling, grammar and punctuation) from the NAPLAN writing task actually happen! These elements are tested in the NAPLAN language conventions test and shouldn't be taking marks away from the creative writing task.

Do have a go at sitting NAPLAN yourself. It's a great learning experience and will help you put yourself in your students' shoes!

Jen McVeity

Author, Churchill Fellow, Creator: Seven Steps to Writing Success

NAPLAN 2021 – Jen’s Insights

This year, I sat the NAPLAN writing test again ... for the sixth time! It’s always a challenge, but I enjoy doing it to get an idea of what students are going through, and also to help teachers prepare for next year. I recommend you give it a try!

Every time I attempt NAPLAN, I reflect on how different (and difficult) it can be to write under test conditions. Most writing that kids do for school doesn’t have such strict rules or time restrictions – just 5 minutes to plan, 30 minutes to write and 5 minutes to edit. Other writing still comes with a deadline, but students aren’t as rushed and they get time to really think about their work.

If I find test writing hard, as an author and adult, students must find it even harder! But we know, for better or worse, that both types of writing are part of school life.

So I’ve pulled together some tips and insights from my 2021 NAPLAN experience, and shared these thoughts below. I hope you find some inspiration and ideas to take back to the classroom. Remember, Seven Steps is here to support you, and give you the power to turn your students into confident writers – not just on test day, but every day!

Jen McVeity

Author, Churchill Fellow, Creator: Seven Steps to Writing Success

Planning: How to master it

Test day

For this prompt, ‘Following tracks’, I wanted to do a hiking story, because I’d just finished a hiking trip – in the rain. I was fortunate to be able to reflect on recent experience, which helped with my planning.

However, I did try to brainstorm other concepts. Here are the other ideas I didn’t proceed with:

- hiking tracks
- ants laying down food tracks
- ski tracks in powder snow. Challenge. Maybe avalanche?
- mystery disappearance in desert – tracker on rocks and sands
- fit bit – tracking – heart attack.

TIP: Five minutes isn’t really adequate, but it’s all students have. Get students used to doing short, fun planning and brainstorming activities to prepare for this.

Check out this Seven Steps blog post on [6 tips to reduce NAPLAN nerves](#).

In the classroom

If you know the Seven Steps, you know that brainstorming and ideation are crucial to great writing! Practising how to approach a topic can help students create more original narratives. Follow these simple tips:

1. Set students a topic and then ask them, in groups, to come up with 10 ways to approach it.
2. Gradually reduce the number of students in the group, until they can do this confidently and go solo.

This is great practice, not only for tests but to encourage students to be critical and creative thinkers.

TIP: Planning is an important skill you can practise in the classroom. It will lead to much richer, complete texts.

Teacher Hub is packed with resources and activities to teach planning!

Ambition: A double-edged sword

Test day

I was too ambitious in my NAPLAN response this year. I always try to write a story with depth and strong character arcs. But this does make other elements of the test difficult in just 40 minutes!

Some of your more competent students may also struggle with this – they won't perform as well in NAPLAN if they're being too ambitious. They are less likely to stick to a simple premise like 'I got lost in the woods and found a footprint in the mud and tracked the prints to get home.'

Also, your movie-watchers may find it challenging if they're trying to write a feature-length movie. These ideas are often rushed in a test, or left unfinished.

TIP: Show students how to choose small 'slice of life' ideas.

In the classroom

Ambition is not a flaw in classroom writing, or when writing to inspire and entertain others.

For students to write a more complex and accomplished narrative, they need to include a strong plot, develop characters and settings, and take their protagonists on a journey of self-discovery.

That's a lot to include in one cohesive piece, which is why the Seven Steps is so helpful. As students master each Step, they'll learn the building blocks of creative and unique writing.

TIP: Use the Seven Steps to help your students avoid weak starts or endings, or writing that fizzles out in the middle.

Teacher Hub has hundreds of resources to help you!

Spelling and punctuation: last but not least

Test day

Unfortunately, in NAPLAN (and any test), having time to correct the secretarial side of writing isn't always possible.

From 47 marks for the entire narrative piece, NAPLAN gives 6 marks for spelling and 5 for punctuation. That's 11/47 marks, or 23%.

I know I'll lose marks for typos this year (because I do actually know how to spell 'looked', 'wind' and 'suddenly!'). And maybe I'll lose 1–2 marks for punctuation typos too. But I ran out of time to fix these because I chose to focus more of my time on my characters' journeys.

TIP: Get students into the habit of re-reading any piece of writing they're going to submit, to check their spelling, punctuation and grammar. In NAPLAN, using these 5 minutes of editing time can give students an 'easy' 2–3 extra marks in their spelling and punctuation scores.

In the classroom

The authorial elements of writing are the essence of a creative and cohesive piece.

The Seven Steps shows students how to assess their own work and that of their peers. They learn to Ban the Boring as they write and in the revising/redrafting process.

These are valuable skills to strengthen their communication, classroom writing and test performance!

TIP: In test situations, students only get time for a quick spelling, punctuation and grammar check, but real editing is so much more than this. Teach students to Ban the Boring and they will be able to edit for structure and expression.

Classroom Activities

Challenge: Spot the Seven Steps!

Read Jen's NAPLAN submission for 'Following tracks' on pages 1–3. Can you spot all Seven Steps in her writing? Highlight or colour in each Step when you find it.

- Step 1: Plan for Success
- Step 2: Sizzling Starts
- Step 3: Tightening Tension
- Step 4: Dynamic Dialogue
- Step 5: Show, Don't Tell
- Step 6: Ban the Boring
- Step 7: Exciting Endings.

Hint: the Steps may not be in order!

Comprehension and inference

1. How do you know Amanda, the 'sort of' sister, actually cares for the narrator?
2. How does the narrator feel about Amanda? Does this feeling change?
3. The kids' parents are only mentioned in one paragraph. How do you feel about the parents? What do you think they're like?
4. Let's dig deeper. How do you know all of this? What can you *infer* from the writing?
5. What themes has Jen woven into her story? Can you give examples for each?

Alternate ending

Can you write a different ending to Jen's story? Maybe the hike doesn't go to plan. Do they make it to the Twelve Apostles? Do the kids get along?

Plotting on the Story Graph

This is a great activity for advanced students – plot Jen's text on the Narrative Story Graph. Here are the elements to look for:

- Sizzling Start
- Backfill
- Pebble
- Rock
- Boulder
- Exciting Ending
- Character Wrap-up.

Members can access an
editable template of the
Narrative Story Graph on
Teacher Hub!