2018 NAPLAN Topic – Years 7 & 9

New Technology

Write a persuasive text about a piece of technology that has been or will soon be invented that will make life so much better.

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.

Sizzling Start

'Hello, Jane's Hairdressing.'

'Hi, can I book an appointment please for Tuesday?'

'Sorry, we have no appointments left. How about Wednesday.

'Er … OK, what times have you got Wednesday?'

One of these voices is an AI (Artificial Intelligence) voice, coded to be flexible, understand different accents and inflexions and run a conversation. Which one? Voice #2. Yes the one that even sounds like a human and says 'Er …' It has been fed millions of voice transcripts and it has even learnt to code itself for human 'ummms' and 'errr …'

AI is not the future, it is here and now. These are exciting times.

Argument 1

Think of all the boring things you do every day. Grocery shop, drive cars, make appointments, balance the bank account. AI has the capacity to do all that. Out of milk, 'Siri, call up shoppig list.' Time to shop, 'Siri, send list to supermarket.' In the supermarket, robots can select and pack your order. A small robot or drone delivers. All possible now. What about driving – a tedius and sometimes dangerous and definitely time consuming task. No more. Thank you Elon Musk and Tesla and all the self driving cars. They are on the road testing now – with a dummy driver in the seat so we don't all freak out! Safer than human driven cars, and they can make the same moral decisions as humans. In peak hour traffic with cars all around you, do you serve to avoid a dog? Do you know the difference between a dog and a child. Yes, push in a million photos of dogs, everything from poodles to Great Danes. AI learns the parameters of a dog. And of a child. It is an easy decision from then. Call up the figures of your bank, AI will check them, balance them and BTW, let you know you have overspent on clothing the last month.

Argument 2

The worry in humans is that jobs will be lost. Yes, jobs are always lost in progress. Mostly the boring ones. I rarely walk to the post box, email takes care of communication. Sorry posties. Robots took over factory assembly lines. Computers took the place of secretaries. Now, robots with a sense of humour can wait on tables.

Argument 3

So what to do with all the free time so many more humans will have? 'Siri choose play list for melllow mood.' Settle down and read the amazing fiction chosen for your own taste. Learn new languages 'Siri, speak Japanese to me.' Explore the world 'Siri, book trip to Thailand.'

Yet even more than leisure time, we can achieve so much more in the world with the help of AI. There are diseases in the Third World that can be fought and won, cancer cures to be researched and tested fast and implemented. There are refugees that flee into countries and need food an dmedicine and safety.

Ending with Impact

How amazing it would be to one day be able to say 'Siri, tell me three ways I can personally help end world poverty.' And of the trillions of information and facts and learning within AI, it would give you an answer.

Marked Results

2018 NAPLAN Writing Task – Years 7 & 9 Persuasive Genre

Criterion	Marks	Score	Comments
Audience	0–6	5	Engaging script with a consistent voice that is maintained throughout. Creates a personal connection with the reader by addressing the audience directly. Persuades by appealing to reason, emotions and values. Most ideas are presented clearly.
Text Structure	0–4	4	A complete persuasive text. An engaging introduction 'hooks' the reader and sets up the position of the argument. The body of the text provides logical reasons that support the argument by beginning with benefits to the individual, and logically building to illustrate benefits at the community and global levels. The conclusion reinforces the writer's position and leaves readers contemplating further possibilities of the technology.
Ideas	0–5	5	Ideas are elaborated and contribute to the writer's position by addressing both personal and world issues. Ideas include an examination of cause and effect related to the technology discussed. The writer acknowledges one aspect of the 'other side' of the argument, and cleverly refutes this by showing how this concern can actually be seen as a positive outcome.
Persuasive Devices	0–4	4	Successfully persuades readers by logically introducing and explaining how the technology can positively impact our lives. The writer appeals to our logic (saves time, makes boring work redundant, etc.), values (makes the world a safer place, helps refugees, etc.) and emotions (cure cancer, end world poverty). Uses various persuasive devices: • Authoritative statements e.g. *These are exciting times*. • Creating a conditional mood e.g. *So what to do with all the free time …* • Directly addressing the reader e.g *… the boring things YOU do*. • Figurative language that creates images in the reader's mind, e.g. *peak hour traffic with cars all around you. … refugees that flee …* • Emphatic statements, e.g. *No more*.
Vocabulary	0–5	5	A range of precise and effective words and word groups are used to create a fluent script. The vocabulary choices suit the style of the argument. Modality: *yet, even more than … always, mostly, rarely, definitely* Precise words and word groups: *parameters, transcripts, tedious, fought and won, mellow mood, time-consuming task* Technical words: *code, artificial intelligence, robot, drone*
Cohesion	0–4	4	A highly cohesive text that flows well. Uses a range of connectives to link ideas across the script. Use of ellipses to omit words (consistent with the style of the writing), e.g. *Self-driven cars are has been ellipsed in Safer than human driven cars, and they …*
Paragraphing	0–3	2	All paragraphs are mostly correct. Third paragraph could be broken into two, with a new paragraph beginning with, *What about driving …*, so as to group all of these ideas in a separate paragraph.

Sentence Structure	0–6	5	Confidently and deliberately uses a range and variety of sentences that suit the style of the script. Awkward wording in first sentence of 6th paragraph.
Punctuation	0–5	3	Most but not <u>all</u> sentence level punctuation correct. Errors: Missing question marks and use of spliced commas. Correct use of a wide range of other punctuation.
Spelling	0–6	5	Correct spelling of all simple, most common and at least 10 difficult words. Errors: tedius/tedious, shoppig/shopping, melllow/mellow, serve/swerve. (More than 1 or 2 minor slips.)

Total Score:

42 out of 48. Band 10 – just!

Planning and Insights

The main problem – time

Once again the 40 minute time limit for the NAP writing task has proved untenable. It works against our stronger writers who know that original and meaningful ideas take time to develop, not the miniscule five minutes NAP suggests for planning.

I can't even drink a coffee in five minutes, let alone plan a powerful piece of writing.

Fifteen minutes should be the minimum planning time for any piece of sustained writing. Yes, I know some of our weaker writers will just sit there and wonder what to do. But surely that is our role as teachers of writing, to share the skills of brainstorming. How to plan. How to create ideas that are original and not just to grab the first idea that comes to mind.

Ideas (5 marks)

So, let's look at Ideas. Ideas and planning are the building blocks of every piece of writing.

There are lots of ideas in this piece. AI is something that fascinates me and I've just read the thought-provoking book *Unscaled* about the impact of technology and AI in the next ten years. OMG, it is extraordinary, do read it. I was certainly not short of ideas.

There are kids out there with English as a third language, who are dyslexic (10% of the population) or who come from a home that has three TVs, five smart phones and not one book. Yet they can all tap into the creative part of their brains and learn how to come up with ideas. Ideas are what every great inventor and changer of the world rely on. We can train that in young writers.

For those teachers who have done a Seven Steps workshop – remember the vast amount of activities in the day where people brainstorm in groups before they even attempt to write? (Such as the Senses activity in Tightening Tension and the Ten Ideas in just three minutes in the planning a narrative section.) These are simple and highly effective ways to show students how to tap into the creative side of their brain. Think first, write second is the way most authors work!

The secretarial side of writing – Spelling (6 marks) and Punctuation (5 marks)

I played fair and I didn't use spell check. However, I didn't get time to edit at the end and this is definitely where I lost marks. (Minus 1 mark for spelling and 2 marks for punctuation.)

The heavy weighting given to these secretarial parts of writing (11/48 marks or nearly 23%) seems unfair. There is a completely separate test in NAPLAN for spelling, grammar and punctuation called Language Conventions. It is unnecessary to double-test these components of writing and particularly to give them such weighting.

Most of the spelling mistakes were typos, but the NAPLAN marking structure doesn't actually differentiate. Plus, no matter how complex your punctuation, if you make too many mistakes, you lose marks.

Agonising over correct spelling at every sentence… well, that's what causes writer's block and bequeaths 'careful' writing that is about as interesting to read as the Terms and Conditions of Amazon.

Cohesion (4 marks)

I didn't do the standard 5 paragraph essay. Sometimes, a one-liner can have a lot of impact. Teachers well versed in the Seven Steps know that there is nothing against a basic four or five paragraph essay. What dumbs down students is the formula of 'I think technology is good because of reason 1, 2, 3'.

The conclusion is something I really like

On the test paper, NAP says this about conclusions: *A conclusion sums up your reasons so that a reader is convinced of your opinions.*

I think this is misleading. Obviously, a conclusion should not be a normal body paragraph idea. However, a conclusion should not be just a boring summary of what you have said in the body of the writing.

For instance, this is a typical summary ending – rather flat:

I think AI is making life so much better because it will save us time on boring tasks such as shopping and driving and give us more leisure time.

A real conclusion – one that persuades and makes change – is one that makes people think differently. It makes them want to take action. This is a persuasive piece, right? It should be judged on its persuasive effect.

How amazing it would be to one day be able to say 'Siri, tell me three ways I can personally help end world poverty.' And of the trillions of information and facts and learning within AI, it would give you an answer.

A more interesting conclusion also opens up opportunities to pick up marks in the areas of Audience (6 marks) and Persuasive Devices (4 marks).

Pacing – Can you create and write at 13 words per minute?

This is a 500-word piece and if students wrote about that much, after planning they would only have 35 minutes to write. The average adult can hand copy text at 13 words per minute and up to 20wpm (so says Wikipedia). But that's just copying.

Add to that being creative, following your planned structure, cutting the boring bits and of course ensuring perfect spelling and grammar … 13wpm seems quite insurmountable for most students. That's 35 minutes of continuous writing simply to produce 455 words without edits.

You can see how my paragraphs got shorter and shorter towards the end. I did put more time into the second paragraph as I thought it was important to immerse the reader into what AI can really do. But after that, time was a demon and I had to take short cuts.

So we are back to the same of problem of time again. Just 40 minutes to brainstorm ideas, plan, draft and edit. This is an extremely difficult task for me, an experienced author, to accomplish. How do the kids do it? Are we setting them up to fail?

Jen McVeity

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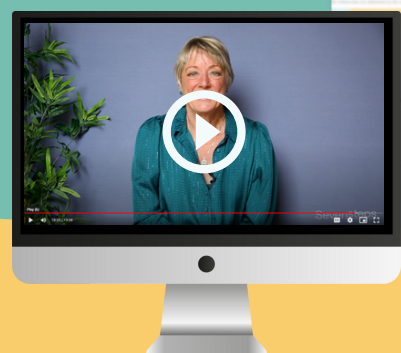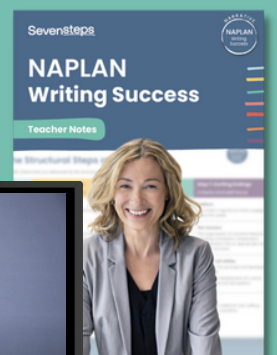
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