

2017 NAPLAN Topic (Years 3 & 5)

Topic

Which is better?

Write a persuasive text to convince a reader that one thing is better than another.

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 NAP writing test. She has documented the amount of time she spent planning, writing and editing, as well as flagging each aspect of the text structure as an aid to teachers. No edits have been made from the original.

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Planning (5 minutes)

Writing (33.5 minutes)

Editing (6.5 minute)
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Cats vs Dogs

Sizzling Start (5 minutes)

Dogs. They welcome you home with mad barking, and a breath that smells like meat left out in the sun for a week. They lick their muddy paws (and then some more unmentionable parts) and then they lick your face. Uggg! Oh please – give me a cat anytime, quiet and purring and so glad to see you!

Argument 1 (5.5 minutes)

Cats are always so calm. They are the Zen pet, the ones who make you slow down and reset and appreciate the day. They curl up on your lap, instead of jumping up and scratching your legs and yak yak yak 'look at me, I'm so needy' an endless barking regime. No, cats come to your space, 'oh, you're home, lovely to see you. Oh let me snuggle beside you.' They purr with pleasure and somehow quiet your soul. And who can't resist running their hands over the soft clean fur of a cat, soothing both cat and human together.

Argument 2 (6.5 minutes)

Cats are the low maintenance queens and kings of the pet kingdom. Want to go away for a week? Book your dog into a kennel (\$300). Alternatively ask your neighbour to feed your cat once a day. (\$30 for a gift). A cat is not only independent, but also smart. It will figure out very quickly the new feeding arrangement, maybe make friends with your neighbour and certainly not bark incessantly for a week while you are away. Or if you were a dog family and you get home tired after a long day at school. Drop

your back and head for the fridge, and there's your mum saying: 'Take the dog for a walk.' What again? 'Oh and don't forget the plastic bags to pick up the dog droppings.' Yuck, a walk with the dog in the howling wind with poo in a bag.

Argument 3 (7.5 minutes)

It's Saturday morning and I'm trying to sleep in. Trying is the key word here. Bark bark bark. The neighbours are out and their dog is a needy greedy annoyance. Ten minutes of its owners away and you would think the world is coming to an end. Did you know the biggest neighbourhood complaint is about barking dogs? It would be on our street too, except mum bought me earplugs. Meanwhile, ever seen my neighbour's back yard? Or rather their back lot pit? Big holes in the garden the dog has dug, dead patches of lawn all over from the wee and let's not forget the small piles of poo on the lawn, for any unsuspecting kid like me running to the pool. I walk very carefully when I visit there.

Ending with Impact (9 minutes)

It's cold, wet and raining. My family and I are curled up on the couches reading and chatting. Next door I hear the dog barking and complaining...again. More barking. Then I hear their front door slam and a voice shouting; 'OK, alright, we'll go walkies.' There's a rustle as my friend Simon tries to attach the lead to the jumping dog and another slam and the voice of his mum 'Don't forget the poo bag.' I just shake my head and curl up closer on the couch with my cat. She purrs and the sound makes us all happy. A cat melds with you, comforts you and sometimes, my favourite time, she kneads you with her paws. I run my hands over her soft fur and smile. Quiet, soft, comforting – cats always make you feel content.

Marked Results

2017 NAPLAN writing task (Years 3 & 5), Persuasive Genre

NAP Marker: Pip Walsh, Teaching and Learning Coordinator, Coomera Rivers SS

Criterion	Marks	Score Given	Comments
1. Audience	0–6	5	Writing is crafted to influence the reader through sustained use of persuasive techniques. Engaging opening that addresses the reader with descriptive language choices.
2. Text Structure	0–4	4	Coherent, controlled and complete argument in which all components are well developed. Introduction clearly states the writer's position. Body develops each argument and the conclusion reinforces the writer's position with an engaging final perspective.
3. Ideas	0–5	5	Ideas are generated, selected and crafted to be highly persuasive. Includes refutation of another position.
4. Persuasive Devices	0–4	4	Sustained and effective use of persuasive devices that are appropriate to the style of argument: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rhetorical questions – 'Did you know the biggest complaint is about barking dogs?' • Emotive language – Examples: needy, greedy, annoyance • Direct address of the reader – 'Oh you're home, lovely to see you.' • Figurative language (simile) – 'and a breath that smells like meat left out in the sun for a week.' • Humour – 'They lick their muddy paws (and then some unmentionable parts).'
5. Vocabulary	0–5	4	Sustained and consistent use of precise words and word groups that enhance the meaning. Example: 'endless barking regime.'
6. Cohesion	0–4	3	Meaning is clear and text flows well. Consistent use of cohesive devices such as word associations and connectives.
7. Paragraphing	0–3	3	Paragraphs are deliberately structured to pace and direct the reader's attention.
8. Sentence Structure	0–6	4	Most simple, compound and complex sentences are correct. Error in complex sentence: 'Or if you were a dog family and you get home tired after a long day at school.' (No independent clause.)
9. Punctuation	0–5	3	Most sentence level punctuation correct and correct use of quotation marks, apostrophes and commas. Errors: Missing commas, some 'splice' commas where full stops were needed, missing capital letters at the beginning of direct speech.
10. Spelling	0–6	6	Correct spelling of all words. More than 15 correct difficult words. Difficult words correct: unmentionable, calm, appreciate, regime, pleasure, maintenance, alternatively, neighbour, independent, arrangement, incessantly, annoyance, complaint, except, unsuspecting, complaining, favourite, comforting

Total Score: 41 out of 48 – Band 10

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Planning and Insights

NAP gets a lot right, but not this time with the writing prompt. Once again, the writing prompt was so wide open and the planning time so minuscule, that we are going to get the same topics written about over and over again.

Here's my prediction. Over 90% of students will write on the prompt suggestions. In fact, I know a lot of Seven Steps students will pick the Cats vs Dogs topic as this was (by co-incidence) one of the challenge topics in our School PD's and workshop for two years.

Then there will be a lot of other students who will trot out a topic they have practised in class, e.g. 'Ice-cream is better than chocolate'.

Only the bravest and the brightest will do something original. And that's a great shame, because we want our students to write from their original experience, not regurgitate something they have practised.

Too many possibilities mean students will flounder

The wide open topic will churn up a lot of time as students will need to decide what topic to 'pick'. A more specific topic is often easier, let me give you an example. When someone asks you 'how was your holiday?' most people find this generic question hard to answer. There are so many options.

A specific question would focus your mind:

- 'What was the best part of your holiday?'
- What was the craziest thing you did?
- What was the most embarrassing thing that happened?
- Did you try a sport you have never done before?
- What was your favourite food?
- What was a keeper family experience?

See how a more specific question allows the brain to focus quickly and answer with originality.

Concept development takes time

To give a specific author story, I was asked by two different editors to write a short chapter book.

The brief from the first editor was as follows: 'Jen, can you create a 500-word story on what would happen in a kid's house if all the water was cut off?'

It took me just 50 mins to come up with the concept for *There is no Water*, published by Rigby Heinemann. Easy! The kids thought it was fun to drink lemonade, not wash the dishes, but... it wasn't so great when the toilet didn't flush and they had to go to bed all muddy, sticky and sandy.

On the other hand, a publisher who was creating another series and had already taken two books from me, wanted to fill some gaps in the series. So, the brief was this: 'Jen can you come up with a fun book for boys.'

It took me five hours of scrambling though a myriad of ideas and blank pages before I finally came up with a concept. I heard my husband sneezing in the kitchen and my son negotiating a raise in his pocket money mid sneezing fit. It was (finally) a 'ah ha' moment. That's when I came up with the idea of Achool!, a father who was allergic to his own son.

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The safe idea vs the original idea

So, students have a couple of options when faced with a topic like this:

Option 1: Try...in the miniscule five minutes of planning time to come up with something original, and THEN spend the time to plan it structurally.

Option 2: Go with something familiar and try and make the writing lively enough to stand out from the crowd.

In 45 minutes, I would recommend that students go for the safe option (Option 2) and make their writing lively with a strong voice!

There is also another aspect to this. In previous NAP tests, I spent far too much time on planning which ate into my writing time. This time I went for the easy option by picking a topic I was familiar with – Cats vs Dogs – and stuck to the recommended 5 minutes of planning time.

Concept (2 mins)

Reading the question, deciding on a topic and whether to go safe or take a gamble. Conclusion 'go safe' as there is no time for originality of concept. Go for originality in writing.

Plan (3 mins)

Introduction: Jumping, licking and needy dogs

Body paragraph 1: Cats are independent, comforting, calm

Body paragraph 2: Cats are easy to care for, low maintenance. No walking in rain.

Body paragraph 3: Bag the dogs

Conclusion: Comparison between dog owner in rain and me curled up on the couch with a cat.

Editing – Hand Written vs Digital

Do you know where the phrase 'cut and paste' came from? In the days before digital, authors would have a paper manuscript and when they wanted to make any major adjustment, they would physically cut out paragraphs and then paste them (yes with glue) into another section.

Nowadays we are used to doing this digitally, and it is an important part of editing. Editing is not just fixing up a few spelling mistakes; it is vitally important to see the work as a whole and move sections of the work around to improve the flow.

As students are still writing paper submissions, it is much harder to edit in the true sense of the word, so in most cases they will just correct a few spelling mistakes and substituting a better word here and there. As I was writing 'online' I was able to cut and paste or delete at least seven sentences which would not have been possible with a handwritten submission. (Sorry, I cheated!)

I have a large admiration for students who can write strongly in a first and only draft. It is not the way most authors work. We do a creative 'down and dirty' draft and then edit substantially for expression and plotting improvement. When NAPLAN goes online, students will have the ability to edit their work properly.

Jen McVeity

Author, Churchill Fellow, Creator: [Seven Steps to Writing Success](#)

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