



2016 NAPLAN Topic – Years 3 & 5

Imagine

Imagine if a character found an object that made something amazing happen.

Write a narrative (story) about the adventure.

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 (7 minutes)

Writing (37 minutes)

Editing (1 minute)

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Imagine

Sizzling Start

Woof, woof. Woof.

Come on human mother Emma, please let me out! I need to go tinkle.

Woof woof. She was stirring something on the hot thing in the kitchen.

WOOF.

'Quiet Rufus!' she ordered. But I'd been locked inside all day.

WOOF. WOOF. Human mother Emma, you don't want a wet floor do you?

Meow. Sneer. Cyril the cat stalked past, tailed raised. With a sleek movement he disappeared out the cat door. Way too small for me – and he knew it. He strolled out into the garden. I hate that cat.

WOOF! Please, please mother Emma. It's alright for you humans, you can cross your legs. Ever seen a dog cross their legs???

With a sigh, the Emma got up and crossed over to the door and flung it open. I raced out and just made it to the nearest tree. Tinkle, tinkle, tinkle. Ah relief.

'Nearly didn't make it, did you?' Cyril was watching me and sneering again. 'Nearly wet the floor. Ha ha.' And he disappeared inside again. Flip flap went the cat door. I had to wait outside.

Backfill/Set Up

Should I bark at the possums? No that gets me into trouble. Should I chase around the yard? No, wait, I can play with the old blue box thing I dug up today.

'Rufus! Come in now.' Oh, great, inside already. Yay! I grab my box toy and head inside.

The human boy Jack was home from the school. I drop the box in front of him.

'What's that?' he asked and opened it up.

It's a strange thing about humans, they don't see much and don't hear as much as us dogs. A bright blue light shot out of the box right into him. The other end of the light came to me, right into my brain. I shook, my head, it felt weird.

'Good dog,' said Jack. I wagged my tail delightedly. When he spoke like that it often meant a tummy rub. I dropped onto my back.

Tummy rub, tummy rub, I thought to him. Oh joy, he stretched out his hand and obliged.

More, more ... I was in heaven. And he kept on rubbing. This was the longest tummy rub in the history of my life. I rolled over.

Ear scratch, ear scratch ... He did! Wow, the BEST day!

'Jack, stop playing with the dog and get ready for dinner,' said Mother.

No, no, don't stop ... I thought to him. Amazing – he didn't listen to the mother and kept on patting me.

'Jack!' Oh oh, I knew that tone. So did Jack. We both backed away.

'What's this?' Mother Emma had found the box I bought in. 'Ah, I remember this. It used to belong to our old dog. Collie loved this box.' Her eyes grew soft. 'He was the greatest dog, we used to go on long walks, play fetch for hours, even go to the beach.

I wagged my tail. I LOVE the beach. I can do fetch! I adore long walks. I want that too!

She opened the box. The weird blue light immediately shone out. It went to her, and right back to me. I saw her shake her head, just like I was doing. What was that light?

'Give it back to me,' I thought.

'Here,' she placed it in front of me. 'Take it back.'

That was nice of her.

How about some dinner, I begged. It was early yet, but worth a try.

'How about I feed you?' she asked and headed to the dog food cupboard. She poured a huge bowl of dry biscuits. I really wish I had some raw meat too...the thought came into my mind and it seemed like hers at exactly the same time. 'I'll get you some raw meat too,' she said.

Wow, could this day get any better!

Crescendo #1

'Getting your own way – just for a change,' sneered Cyril. He was sitting on his usual position on the couch glaring down at me. Cyril was allowed on the couch, not me. 'Must feel nice to have the humans do what you want,' he sniggered. 'Of course they always treat ME wonderfully.' He settled down closer and purred in smug satisfaction.

Cats are never nice creatures, but Cyril was one of the nastiest.

'Make the most of it,' he whispered, 'it won't last.'

But I was starting to wonder. Cat's think they are so smart, but I was figuring something out. The box, the blue light, the humans being so nice for a change, doing exactly what I asked for.

I settled down on the floor and waited for the human father Josh to come home. I had a plan to test.

Crescendo #2

Woof, woof! Josh was home. I let him put down his briefcase, give mother and boy Jack a hug, and then I bounded over to him with the box. 'Not now,' he said. I went into the wag the tail, happy dog, please, please play with me routine. At last, he picked up the box.

'Hey, wasn't this Collie's box?' he asked Emma mother. 'Collie was such a great dog, we always had such fun with him. All those walks and trips and remember how he always curled up on the bed with us? He was such a happy dog.' Then Josh opened the box. YES! Out shone the blue light, it went from him to me and I didn't waste any time.

Pat me, pat me ... I thought. Absently he reached out a hand and rubbed my back. 'Ear scratch, ear scratch...' and immediately his hand went to my ears. Tummy rub ... I rolled over. 'Hey Rufus,' he rubbed hard, 'looks like you're really pleased to see me hey?'

Ah, it was going to be a good night.

Crescendo #3

It was a good night. A great week. A fabulous month. My humans were amazing. They took me for long walks. Rubbed my tummy every night for hours while they watched TV. Shared their meals with me and every weekend we got in the car and drove to the park or beach and we all played cricket or romped on the sand and swam. I had never seen my humans so happy.

It is always the simple things that made the difference in life.

'Ah Rufus, you're such a great dog.' Jack hugged me and snuggled up to me all the time. We both loved it.

'Here Rufus, try a bit of this.' Mother Emma would sneak a bit of lamb chop to me under the table at dinner and smile.

'Hey boy, come for a walk!' Josh was getting fitter and healthier every day from all the walks we were taking.

'He's just like old Collie' I heard Josh say one night. 'Collie was always so playful and lovable. And so is Rufus. He makes us happy.'

It was good to teach my humans how to play.

In fact the only small glitch in my life was sneering Cyril. True, he was getting ignored a bit – as he should have been. I managed to persuade Emma that I should be on the couch too. The bed now, that was a bit more difficult. Cyril always got there first and he had sharp claws and could lash out at a wet nose quicker than I could back away. The bed was still Cyril's.

Exciting Ending

Until, one day I wondered if the blue light from the box would work on a cat too...

It took a while, I had to lever the box half open, and then leave it around. When Cyril discovered it, he sneered of course.

'Kind of a dumb toy, isn't it?' he sniffed. He batted the box with his paw. I played dog dumb and waited.

Bang! The box tipped and the lid fell open. Out flared the blue light. To Cyril and back to me. I saw Cyril blink and then look sick. 'What was that?' he asked.

He never really knew.

Poor Cyril changed after that. The next day, he seemed to think that being outside and not on the couch was a wonderful way to spend the day. That slinking past me and not saying a word was a very good idea. Plus somehow, an odd thought or two of mine convinced Cyril that sleeping outside in the dark was far better than spending every night on the warm bed of the humans.

Character resolution

'Come on Rufus, come on!' Josh the father was patting the bed. 'Come on up!' I landed right in the middle of the bed and licked Josh and Emma's faces delightedly.

'Oh stop it,' laughed Emma, but she came back for more. 'You're such a great dog.' She buried her face in my fur. 'We love you.'

I curled up at the foot of the bed and tried not to hog all the space. There was a contented sigh from Emma. 'I'm happy,' she said.

Josh was scratching my ears. 'Thanks pal,' was all he said, but I knew what he meant.

It was good to help my humans be so happy.

Tomorrow, I thought as I closed my eyes for sleep, we might go to the beach.

Marked Results

2016 NAPLAN writing task – Years 3 & 5 Narrative Genre

NAPLAN Marker: Anna Gojkovic, Master Teacher, Wellers Hill SS

Criterion	Marks	Score Given	Comments
Audience	0–6	6	Successfully orients, engages and affects the reader through the deliberate and sustained use of language and narrative devices: humour, narrator stance. These language choices and narrative devices are used to evoke an emotional response.
Text Structure	0–4	4	Coherent, controlled and complete narrative employing effective plot devices.
Ideas	0–5	5	Ideas are generated, selected and crafted to create humour, suspense and tension.
Character and setting	0–4	4	Effective characterisation developed through dialogue, introspection and reaction to other characters: 'Way too small for me – and he knew it ... I hate that cat'; 'Cats are never nice creatures, but Cyril was one of the nastiest'. Details are used to create a sense of place and atmosphere: 'with a sleek movement he disappeared out of the cat door'.
Vocabulary	0–5	5	A range of precise and effective words and phrases used in a natural and articulate manner that enhance the mood of the story: 'he had sharp claws and could lash out at a wet nose quicker than I could back away'; 'She buried her face in my fur'. Uses humour for effect: 'Ever seen a dog cross their legs?'
Cohesion	0–4	4	Meaning is clear and text flows well in a sustained piece of writing.
Paragraphing	0–2	2	Paragraphs are deliberately structured to pace and direct the reader and move the story forward.
Sentence Structure	0–6	5	Sentences are correct. Meaning is clear and sentences demonstrate variety.
Punctuation	0–5	5	All sentence punctuation correct (no stray capitals). Provides accurate markers to enable smooth and efficient reading. Accurate use of quotation marks for direct speech and a new line for new speaker One error: Cat's (Cats).
Spelling	0–6	5	Correct use of most words. Used 15 or more difficult or challenging words correctly: immediately, thought, discovered, whispered, convinced, tomorrow, buried, exactly, healthier, satisfaction, wonderfully, persuade, difficult, amazing, obliged, stretched, absently, position. 5 errors: tailed (tail), selltled, hmans, scrath, fabulous

Total Score:

45 out of 47 – Band 10

Planning and Insights

Many thanks to Anna Gojkovic (Wellers Hill SS and NAPLAN marker) for taking on the challenge of marking this piece! I've learnt a lot from Anna.

I thought this topic had a lot of potential for many students. The pictures were good too – they stimulated the imagination, rather than fixating students on one story idea.

As always I started by brainstorming various ideas on the topic. (3 mins)

This included:

- Blueberries – scientists have found they make you smarter, though they don't know why.
- Flying – a suit found, but the kid crashes a lot.
- Diary – secret that changed a family.
- Dog that can persuade humans to obey.

I chose the dog topic as I thought it would have great potential for humour and I love writing humour.

Also it was probably inspired by an experience last month when I was staying with a friend in New Orleans where her large dog would jangle bells on a chain at the door to get let in and out. I thought how annoying for the dog not to be in control of getting outside. I sort of took on the personality of that dog for this story.

The story started out as a very simple plot, a dog finding it can get humans to do anything it wanted. The sneering cat Cyril came in as a way for the dog to finally get revenge. However, I found a deeper and more meaningful theme crept in as well – that of dogs and their simple happiness. This happens to me all the time, I can't just write humour; my stories have to have a meaning as well.

As it turns out though, that extra theme didn't actually benefit me in any way during NAPLAN. The more you write the less time you have for editing and therefore you will lose marks for things like spelling (note the typos in this piece). In the test situation of NAPLAN, once you get full marks for ideas (5) and engaging the audience (6) you will not gain any more marks for a deeper and more meaningful story. With that in mind, I would probably suggest to students to keep their narratives a lot shorter and less complex.

There were a lot of words in this story, and I had to write fast, but it was quite easy once I had the characters delineated. The plot really was quite simple and as you can see from the headings that I have added after completing the task, it sticks closely to the basic Story Graph:

- I start with some dynamic dialogue and a bit of humour when the dog desperately needs to go for a tinkle; not with a boring description of the dog and the characters.
- The backfill/set up comes next; all of the main characters and the box with the weird blue are introduced.
- The 'pebble, rock, boulder' structure doesn't apply to this particular narrative, but the rule of three does; in this case the tension builds with crescendo 1, 2 and 3 as we learn more and more about what the light from the box can do.
- Finally, the story ends with an action climax (the blue light transforms the evil cat) and character resolution (the family are happier now that they are obeying the dog).

What was difficult – as always – was the planning time. Five minutes is NOT enough. We cannot expect original and meaningful writing from our students if we do not allow them time to think.

Most authors spend at least 20–30% of their time planning. If the planning time for NAPLAN becomes longer, I think examiners will find a much deeper level of writing and certainly stronger writers will have more time to excel. As it is, the minuscule planning time is flattening out our excellent writers.

Do share this NAPLAN attempt with any of your students and colleagues. Enjoy!

Jen McVeity

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