



2016 NAPLAN Topic – Years 7 & 9

The Sign Said

Write a narrative (story) about what happened to a character or characters after reading a sign.

You can use a sign on this page OR you can make up your own sign.

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.

Planning (6.5 minutes)

Writing (37.5 minutes)

Editing (1 minute)

The Sign Said

Sizzling Start

The sign said: No dogs, cars, bikes or horses – just in case I was thinking of smuggling one of those hidden in my rucksack.

It should have said no flies too, because they were everywhere – in our hair, eyes and face.

Marvel Park,' said Trent in his usual ultra bored voice. 'Guess we're expecting to meet Captain Marvel here, right?'

Wish the sign had banned know-everything brothers too. I would have traded a thousand more flies not to hear him for the day.

Backfill

I saw Mum sigh, and straighten up under her rucksack.

Here's the picture. A national Park in the middle of no-where. The happy family gathered to hike and bond. Missing one member – Dad. Last year Dad, Mum, Trent and I had gone to Bali for the holidays, we'd swum in pools, explored the towns, learn to bargain in the markets and laughed a lot. Then came The Divorce ... the smaller house, lots of mince meat for dinner and the visits to Dad only every second weekend. Not to mention the no expense spared family trip to Marvel Park for the holidays.

The main problem is introduced

'Come on,' said Mum and set off along the trail. 'You can navigate,' she called to Trent. He had his tablet out as always. He was checking Facebook and I wondered how long his reception or batteries would hold out under all the trees.

It was hot and I was glad to get under the shade of the gums. You could feel the calm as you walked. Trees are my thing. Something living, breathing, replacing human Co2 with oxygen and beautiful. The ones over us must have been over a hundred years old. How did they always manage to grow so gracefully?

'Where are we headed?' asked Trent.

'Wilson Falls,' said Mum. 'We are staying there the night. It's a cabin run by some friends of mine.' Mum did a lot of hiking and had this network of friends around the world. This holiday was her way of connecting with some of them.

Only trouble was, no-one had really consulted us.

Trent was plugging it into his tablet. Really? There was only one trail. Hard to get lost on the only path in town.

I should never, ever have thought that. You walk under the sanctuary of trees, smell the spice of leaves under foot, talk random stuff. 'Remember' was Mum's favourite word.

'Remember the school concert when ...'

'Remember when you fell off your bike and ...'

'Do you remember the Christmas when we ...?'

Good memories. Somehow it was easier to laugh under the trees. Even Trent was smiling.

'Which way now?' asked Trent. We had come to a clearing and two paths out. No sign. We picked the most trodden path.

'And now?' The next clearing was more overgrown, the paths narrower. I saw Mum bite her lip, look worried and glance at Trent's tablet. He shook his head.

'No connection,' he was looking slightly worried too. 'Nix.'

'Maybe we should go back?' I said.

Mum did the straightening of the shoulders thing again. 'No, it'll be fine,' she said. She had hiked the Grand Canyon, twice. But I suddenly remembered there were no trees in the Grand Canyon.

More complications and more problems

There were scratches on my arms, bushes all around us and sweat on my face and back. In front I could see the back of mum's shirt wet with sweat and her face when she turned around to check on us was hidden in tension. The lines above her eyes were getting deeper and her voice was too bright and cheery.

'Mum.' Trent's voice stopped us. 'We're lost.' His voice was flat. We had headed to the top of the mountain, an hour of scrambling and sweat in the hope we could get a view of where to go. But mountains are old in Australia, worn down, not tall – and the trees still grew there, taller than ever. High and graceful – and hemming us in. We could see nothing.

Mum shook her head. Somewhere there was determination, denial and fear in that one small movement. I stepped forward instinctively. Were those tears in hereyes? Mum, who was always so brave, knew all the answers. Now her hands were shaking.

'It's getting late,' was all she said. And suddenly I felt fear too. I looked at Trent. It was long in the afternoon, the air was getting cooler ... and that meant night was on the way. How long would it take to walk to someplace, anyplace that had shelter? I looked down at the ground, the leaves that had padded our walk, the trees that had shaded us, these were the only things that would be there in the night to keep us warm ... Not much warmth at all.

The tension scene

'Here!' Trent suddenly thrust his tablet into my hands and started scanning the trees around us. 'You're the tree person.' He kept scanning. Then he fastened on one tree, tall and high above the others. 'Climb up to top.' Was he carzy? It was huge.

'Why?' At least if I was going to risk my life I wanted to know why.

'Take photos,' he said. 'All around – 360 degrees. We can find some path or this place we're supposed to stay. You might even get internet access.'

I looked over at Mum. She just nodded slowly, the lines above her eyes were now deep and black. We were really in trouble if she was relying on a tree hugging daughter and a mainlining techo son permanently attached to his tablet to help out.

'It's getting dark,' was all she said. I took Trent's tablet, stuffed it into my shirt and started to climb.

Strange how many times I had climbed trees and loved them. Strange how in the sunlight trees were warm and safe and welcoming.

In the slowing dimming light of late afternoon, I felt fear of climbing huge hights, of the slipperiness of the branches ... yet somehow the security.

As the first of the twilight took hold, I reached the top of the tree and grazed out over the valley.

There was one bar of internet access. I hit Google Maps and Trent's incessant digital fingers and mind had stored the memory. Wilson Falls. I watched as the slow digital access unrolled the blue line of safety under my eyes.

Then just for double safety, I took photos of every mountain and every valley in every direction. Somewhere under all that we might find a way.

Exciting Ending

We did. Two hours can mean the difference between tears and fears – and triumph. In the very last of the daylight we made it to the camp of Mum's friend. We stumbled out of the bush, cold and scratched and frightened. It was dark, we were shivering and I know all of us had tears in our eyes.

Character resolution

Ahead of us there were bright lights, laughter and music. We should have run ahead to safety and warmth. Burst through the door. Yet strangely we stopped, and Mum was holding our hands.

'Remember this ...' said Mum. And she gathered us all close. I felt Trent nod. I did too. We would not forget.

Mum did her straightening stand tall thing and Trent was by her side. They were heading into the light.

By the door of the cabin was a small gum tree, a tiny seedling. I had just a few drops of water left in my water bottle and I unscrewed the lid and leant over and trickled it onto the tiny seedling.

'Thanks tree,' I said. Then I walked forward smiling into the bright lights.

Marked Results

2016 NAPLAN writing task – Years 7 & 9

Narrative Genre

NAPLAN Marker: Natalie Gleeson, English Learning Area Leader, St Bede’s College

Criterion	Marks	Score	Comments
Audience	0–6	6	The writer has skilfully orientated the reader with an entertaining introduction. A comedic narrative voice is sustained thus contributing to overall engagement. There is a sustained use of literary devices that also engage the audience.
Text Structure	0–4	4	All structural elements are controlled and well-developed. The narrative contains a cumulative plot with interesting points of tension that build to an exciting climax. The resolution has impact.
Ideas	0–5	5	Sophisticated ideas have been skilfully selected and crafted. Themes of family conflict and survival underpin the entire narrative. Ideas of family conflict have been elaborated on.
Character and Setting	0–4	4	Characters are well-developed. The identity of each character has been revealed through the use of purposeful dialogue. Character attitudes can be inferred via their actions. Setting has been well-developed and used to efficiently advance the plot.
Vocabulary	0–5	5	Language is well suited to the narrative. Language has been used with precision and in places, language achieves a comedic effect. Figurative language paints the picture of setting and characterisation – ‘sanctuary of trees’, ‘her face ... hidden with tension’, ‘eyes getting deeper’.
Cohesion	0–4	3	A range of cohesive devices have been used with accuracy. Lexical cohesion has been achieved via the repetition of words, synonyms and ellipses. Time and cause connectives contribute to the cohesiveness of structure, however, in places some addition connectives would have been more effective.
Paragraphing	0–2	2	Paragraphs suitably match the pace of the plot. As the tension increases, the paragraphs shorten for effect.
Sentence Structure	0–6	6	There are a range of controlled sentence types in the narrative. The three types of clause structure are present and have been controlled successfully.
Punctuation	0–5	5	There is a controlled use of correct and appropriate punctuation to aid reading of the text.
Spelling	0–6	6	There is accurate control of simple and common words, with minimal incorrect spelling of some difficult and challenging words.

Total Score:

46 out of 47 – Band 10

Planning and Insights

I love narrative – it is my favourite genre. However, I was very ambitious in this sample answer.

I started in the planning time to think about other signs in my world as I suspect most students would pick one of the pictures in the writing prompt. So I quickly brainstormed a few things:

- a ‘STOP’ sign spelt ‘SOTP’
- how I always get the Push/Pull signs on doors wrong
- the poster in my office: Risk
- dreaded computer signs: Memory loss
- billboards and road tolls
- a ‘For Sale’ sign.

This took me 3.5 minutes. However, in the end I kept returning to the Marvel Park sign. It harked back to a lot of hiking I’d done so I wanted to pull off a humour element with the kids’ attitudes, the challenge of the family getting lost and the bonding of the split family at the end.

Reviewers of my books always talk about ‘McVeity’s perennial theme of family’ and I do write about family in some way all through my books, even the humour ones. I guess for me family is one of the most important things in life.

As you can see from the headings that I have added after completing the task, the narrative sticks closely to the basic Story Graph:

- I start with a bit of a fight and some humour; not at the start of the day when nothing is happening or on the way to Marvel Park, but at the moment when they arrive at the park.
- The backfill comes next; a brief explanation of the Who, What and Why before getting straight back to the action.
- After a bit of build-up and some character development the main problem is introduced (they have no connection on their tablet) followed by complications and more problems (they are lost, tired and it is getting late).
- Then comes the tension scene; the heroine scales the massive tree despite the huge height and the slipperiness of the branches.
- Finally, the story ends with an action climax (the heroine makes it to the top, gets internet access and saves her family), character resolution (the family have bonded as a result of the ordeal) and theme resolution (when the girl shares the last of her water with a tiny tree – as a thank you).

Narrative is a far more complex genre than informative or persuasive, so this NAP task was always going to be a challenge. To create a plot that is more than just ‘I got lost for 5 minutes in the bush and was scared’ takes time. In addition, to delineate characters to give them richness and depth takes lots of subtle revelation through actions, thoughts and dialogue. I would have liked another 1,000 words to flesh out the characters and the situation, but that is not possible in 40 minutes!

I hope you enjoyed seeing how an author took on the NAPLAN challenge and how the basic story structure helped shape my writing. You are very welcome to share this with your students and fellow colleagues.

Jen McVeity

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