

TOP SCORING

NAPLAN

NARRATIVE EXEMPLARS

REAL BAND 6 STORIES

+

EXPERT BREAKDOWN

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Introduction

The NAPLAN (National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy) writing assessment evaluates students' ability to compose a written text in response to a stimulus or prompt. For the narrative writing component, students are required to craft an engaging story that demonstrates their command of language, creative thinking, and storytelling abilities.

This ebook presents a collection of exemplary Band 6 narrative responses—those that have achieved the highest possible scores in the NAPLAN assessment. Each exemplar is accompanied by an expert breakdown that identifies the specific elements contributing to its excellence, providing valuable insights for students, parents, and educators.

Narrative writing is both an art and a craft. While creativity and imagination are essential, there are also specific techniques and structures that can elevate a story from good to exceptional. The exemplars in this collection demonstrate how successful student writers balance creativity with technical skill to produce narratives that excel across all assessment criteria.

By studying these exemplars and understanding the expert breakdowns, students can identify concrete strategies to improve their own writing, develop a deeper appreciation for effective storytelling techniques, and approach the NAPLAN writing assessment with greater confidence and competence.

Understanding Band 6 Criteria

NAPLAN narrative writing is assessed according to ten distinct criteria, each evaluating a different aspect of writing skill. A Band 6 score represents the highest achievement level, indicating that the student has demonstrated exceptional proficiency across all aspects of narrative composition. Here's a breakdown of what assessors look for in each criterion:

1. Audience (0-6 points)

The writer's capacity to orient, engage, and affect the reader through the crafting of a complete and compelling narrative that creates a strong sense of context, atmosphere, and/or emotion.

2. Text Structure (0-4 points)

The organisation of narrative features including orientation, complication, and resolution into an appropriate and effective text structure that enhances the storytelling.

3. Ideas (0-5 points)

The creation, selection, and crafting of ideas for a narrative, including the development of

4. Character and Setting (0-4 points)

The portrayal and development of character and setting through description, action, dialogue, and

characterisation, setting, and plot that work together as a coherent and engaging story.

reflection that adds depth and authenticity to the narrative.

5. Vocabulary (0-5 points)

The range and precision of contextually appropriate language choices, including the use of vivid verbs, precise nouns, effective adjectives, and adverbs that enhance the narrative.

6. Cohesion (0-4 points)

The control of multiple threads and relationships across the text, including the use of referring words, conjunctions, connectives, and adverbials that link and support meaning.

7. Paragraphing (0-2 points)

The segmenting of text into paragraphs that assist the reader to follow the narrative, support the narrative structure, and enhance the narrative's pacing.

8. Sentence Structure (0-6 points)

The production of grammatically correct, structurally sound, and meaningful sentences with variety in length, structure, and beginnings that enhance the narrative flow.

9. Punctuation (0-5 points)

The use of correct and appropriate punctuation to control and support the narrative, including the use of complex punctuation for dialogue, emphasis, and pacing.

10. Spelling (0-6 points)

The accuracy of spelling and the difficulty of the words used, including the correct spelling of common words, difficult words, challenging words, and sophisticated vocabulary.

To achieve a Band 6 score, a narrative must excel in all these areas, demonstrating sophisticated control of language, structure, and ideas that significantly exceed year-level expectations. The exemplars in this collection represent outstanding achievement across these criteria, providing concrete examples of what excellence in narrative writing looks like at different year levels.

Exemplar 1: The Unexpected Discovery

Year 3-4

Original Prompt:

Write a narrative (story) that includes an unexpected discovery. What was discovered? How was it found? What happened because of this discovery?

Student Response:

The Treasure Box

Emma's grandmother had passed away last month, and Emma missed her terribly. Today, she was helping her father clean out Grandma's small cottage by the sea. The cottage smelled like cinnamon biscuits and lavender, just like Grandma always did.

"Emma, could you please sort through these boxes in the attic?" her father called from downstairs. "Just decide what we should keep or donate."

"Okay, Dad," Emma replied, climbing the creaky wooden stairs that led to the dusty attic. The attic was dark and filled with cobwebs. Sunlight streamed through a small round window, illuminating dancing dust particles in the air. Emma sneezed as she made her way towards the pile of cardboard boxes in the corner.

As she sorted through old photo albums and knitting patterns, Emma noticed something unusual. Behind a stack of hatboxes was a small wooden chest with intricate carvings of flowers around its edges. It looked very old and had a tiny golden lock on the front. Emma had never seen it before.

"I wonder what's inside," she whispered to herself, gently wiping away the dust with her sleeve. She tried to open it, but the lock held firm. "Dad!" she called. "I've found something!"

Her father climbed up to the attic and examined the chest. "That's strange," he said, scratching his head. "I don't remember Grandma ever mentioning this."

They brought the chest downstairs and tried various keys from Grandma's key bowl, until finally, a small silver key turned in the lock with a satisfying click.

Inside the chest was a collection of treasures: old letters tied with faded ribbon, a delicate pocket watch, some foreign coins, a small watercolour painting of a lighthouse, and a journal with a soft leather cover.

Emma carefully opened the journal and gasped. "Dad, look at this! These are Grandma's adventures when she was young!"

The journal was filled with stories of Grandma's travels around the world before she got married. There were pressed flowers, ticket stubs, and beautiful descriptions of places Emma had never known her grandmother had visited.

"I had no idea Mum travelled so much," Emma's father said, amazement in his voice as he flipped through the pages. "She never told me about any of this."

Emma read entry after entry, discovering a side of her grandmother she'd never known – a young woman who had climbed mountains, sailed across oceans, and made friends in distant

countries.

That night, Emma couldn't sleep. She kept thinking about her quiet, knitting grandmother who had once been an adventurer. In the morning, she made a decision.

"Dad," she said over breakfast, "I want to visit the lighthouse in Grandma's painting. And then I want to see all the other places she wrote about."

Her father smiled, a tear in his eye. "I think Grandma would have loved that, Emma."

And so, because of their unexpected discovery, Emma and her father began planning their own adventures, following in Grandma's footsteps. Emma started her own journal, too, just like her grandmother had done. On the first page, she wrote: "The greatest treasure isn't gold or jewels, but the stories we collect along the way."

Expert Breakdown:

Audience 6/6

This narrative masterfully orients and engages the reader from the opening paragraph. It creates an immediate emotional connection by establishing Emma's relationship with her recently deceased grandmother. The discovery of the chest creates genuine intrigue, and the emotional journey of discovering an unknown side to a loved one resonates universally. The narrative concludes with a satisfying resolution that reflects character growth and a meaningful message about the value of stories and experiences.

Text Structure 4/4

The narrative follows a clear and effective structure with a well-developed orientation that establishes setting (grandmother's cottage), characters (Emma and her father), and context (cleaning out after grandmother's passing). The complication (discovery of the mysterious chest) is introduced at an appropriate point and developed with increasing curiosity. The resolution is meaningful and extends beyond the immediate discovery to show its lasting impact on the characters' lives.

Ideas 5/5

The central idea—discovering an unknown facet of a loved one after their death—is highly original and emotionally resonant. The narrative explores themes of grief, family connections, hidden identities, and the passing down of adventurous spirit across generations. The use of the journal and mementos as windows to the past is thoughtfully executed and provides depth to the story's premise.

Character and Setting 4/4

The setting is vividly established through sensory details ("smelled like cinnamon biscuits and lavender," "creaky wooden stairs," "dark and filled with cobwebs"). Emma is portrayed with authentic emotions and reactions, while the grandmother becomes a complex character despite being physically absent from the story. The relationship between Emma and her father adds another layer of characterisation as they share in the discovery.

Vocabulary 5/5

The vocabulary is precise and evocative throughout. Notable examples include "illuminating dancing dust particles," "satisfying click," "intricate carvings," and "delicate pocket watch." There is effective use of varying and precise verbs ("passed," "streamed," "gasped," "scratching") and thoughtfully selected adjectives that enhance the narrative without becoming excessive.

Cohesion 4/4

The narrative maintains excellent cohesion through consistent use of referring words, logical sequencing of events, and effective transitions between ideas. The opening connects seamlessly to the discovery, which then links naturally to the exploration of the contents and finally to Emma's decision. Temporal references ("last month," "today," "that night," "in the morning") effectively guide the reader through the timeline.

Paragraphing 2/2

Paragraphing is used expertly to control pacing and emphasis. New paragraphs mark changes in focus, setting, speaker, and the introduction of new ideas. Short paragraphs of dialogue are effectively interspersed with longer descriptive passages. The deliberate paragraph structure enhances the dramatic reveal of the chest's contents and Emma's emotional reactions.

Sentence Structure 6/6

The narrative demonstrates sophisticated control of sentence structures with effective variation in length and type. Simple sentences ("Emma couldn't sleep") create emphasis and control pacing, while complex sentences develop ideas and convey relationships between events. Dialogue is correctly structured and integrated naturally into the narrative flow. Sentence beginnings are varied and thoughtfully crafted for effect.

Punctuation 5/5

Punctuation is consistently accurate and used for stylistic effect. Quotation marks for dialogue, commas for phrasing, and apostrophes for contractions and possession are all used correctly. The colon in the final sentence is appropriately used to introduce the concluding thought. Punctuation enhances meaning and supports the narrative's pacing and emotional resonance.

Spelling **6/6**

The narrative demonstrates perfect spelling throughout, including challenging words such as "intricate," "illuminating," and "satisfying." The consistent accuracy with difficult vocabulary indicates exceptional spelling ability for this year level.

Lessons Learned:

- Create an immediate emotional connection with readers by establishing relatable situations and authentic feelings.
- Use specific sensory details to bring settings to life, making them vivid and memorable.
- Develop a logical narrative structure where each event naturally leads to the next, building curiosity and momentum.
- Include dialogue that sounds natural and serves multiple purposes: revealing character, advancing the plot, and breaking up descriptive passages.
- End with a meaningful resolution that goes beyond simply concluding the action to show character growth or a broader significance.

Exemplar 2: The Time Machine

Year 3-4

Original Prompt:

Imagine you could travel back in time. Write a narrative about your adventure to the past. Where did you go? What did you see? What happened?

Student Response:

The Dinosaur Dilemma

My heart was pounding like a drum as I stared at the strange machine in our garden shed. It definitely hadn't been there yesterday when I was looking for my cricket bat. The machine was round and silver with a glowing blue button in the middle and a small screen with numbers on it. It looked like something from one of my science fiction books.

I reached out and touched the cool metal surface. There was a small plaque that read: "Chronos 3000 – Time Travel Device. WARNING: Use with extreme caution."

A time machine? In our garden shed? I couldn't believe it! I had always been fascinated by dinosaurs. I'd read every book in the library about them and watched every documentary.

Without thinking too much about it, I typed "65,000,000 BC" into the keypad – the time of the dinosaurs.

"Just a quick look," I whispered to myself. "I'll be back before tea time."

I pressed the blue button. Suddenly, everything around me started spinning. Colours swirled like paint being mixed together. My stomach lurched as if I was on the world's fastest roller coaster. Then, with a thud, everything stopped.

When I opened my eyes, I couldn't believe what I was seeing. I was standing in a vast jungle with enormous ferns and strange-looking trees towering above me. The air was hot and humid, and it smelled different – earthier and more primal. In the distance, I could hear unusual animal calls that sent shivers down my spine.

"I've actually done it," I gasped. "I've travelled back to the time of dinosaurs!"

I took a few cautious steps forward, my trainers sinking slightly into the spongy ground.

Everything looked so alien yet so familiar from my books. Dragonflies the size of birds zoomed past my head. A small, lizard-like creature scurried across my path, stopping briefly to stare at me with curious eyes before disappearing into the undergrowth.

The ground beneath my feet began to tremble. At first, I thought it might be an earthquake, but then I heard it – a deep, rhythmic booming. Something big was coming my way.

I ducked behind a massive fern just as an enormous Brachiosaurus lumbered into view. It was magnificent! Its long neck stretched up into the canopy of leaves, its tail swishing gently behind it. I had to clamp my hand over my mouth to stop myself from shouting with excitement.

As I watched in awe, I didn't notice that the time machine – which had shrunk to the size of a wristwatch on my arm – was blinking red. When I finally looked down, I saw a warning message: "BATTERY LOW – 5 MINUTES TO RETURN."

"Oh no!" I whispered. I needed to get back quickly!

Just as I was about to press the return button, I heard a terrifying roar that made my blood freeze. Standing between me and my way back to a clearing was a Tyrannosaurus Rex. Its yellow eyes fixed on me, and its massive jaws opened to reveal rows of dagger-like teeth.

My legs wouldn't move. I was petrified with fear. The T-Rex took a thunderous step towards me, then another. I could smell its breath – like rotting meat. In desperation, I remembered

something I'd read about T-Rex vision – it was movement-based. If I stayed perfectly still, maybe it wouldn't see me.

I held my breath and didn't move a muscle as the massive predator sniffed the air. My heart was beating so loudly I was sure the dinosaur would hear it. The T-Rex roared again, looking confused. Then, miraculously, it turned away, distracted by something moving in the distance. The second it moved away, I jabbed at the return button on my wrist. The world started spinning again, colours blurring around me.

With another thud, I was back in our garden shed, shaking and sweaty but completely thrilled. According to my watch, I'd only been gone for five minutes, but I had memories that would last a lifetime.

I never found the time machine in our shed again after that day. Sometimes I wonder if I dreamed the whole thing. But then I look at the strange scale I found in my pocket – iridescent and unlike anything on Earth today – and I know it was real.

Now when my teacher says I know too much about dinosaurs, I just smile. If only she knew where I'd got my information!

Expert Breakdown:

Audience 6/6

This narrative immediately engages the reader with the exciting discovery of a time machine and maintains high interest through the vivid dinosaur encounter. The first-person perspective draws readers directly into the experience, creating suspense and excitement. The narrative balances wonder, fear, and humour effectively, with a satisfying resolution that includes both a safe return and a tantalising suggestion that the adventure was real (the scale as evidence).

Text Structure 4/4

The narrative follows a clear chronological structure with an engaging orientation (discovering the time machine), a well-developed complication (the dinosaur encounter and the low battery situation), and a satisfying resolution (the escape and return with evidence). The pacing is excellent, with the central adventure appropriately expanded while the beginning and end are more concise but still complete.

Ideas 5/5

The narrative presents a fresh take on the time travel concept by incorporating scientific knowledge about dinosaurs (T-Rex's movement-based vision) and creating genuine moments of wonder and danger. The ideas are creative yet plausible within the story's framework, with

thoughtful details such as the machine shrinking to a watch size and the protagonist bringing back physical evidence.

Character and Setting 4/4

The prehistoric setting is beautifully rendered through multi-sensory details ("hot and humid," "earthier and more primal," "spongy ground"). The protagonist is well-developed through their internal thoughts, passion for dinosaurs, and realistic reactions to both wonder and danger. The dinosaurs themselves are portrayed with scientific accuracy and become characters in their own right, particularly the threatening T-Rex.

Vocabulary 5/5

The vocabulary is precise and sophisticated, with effective use of scientific terminology ("Brachiosaurus," "Tyrannosaurus Rex," "iridescent") and vivid descriptive language ("heart was pounding like a drum," "colours swirled like paint," "dagger-like teeth"). There is excellent variety in word choice, particularly verbs ("lurched," "lumbered," "scurried," "swishing") that create dynamic imagery.

Cohesion 4/4

The narrative maintains strong cohesion through logical sequencing, effective transitions between scenes, and consistent point of view. Connectives and referring words link ideas smoothly across paragraphs. The narrative uses time-related words and phrases ("suddenly," "when," "then," "as") to maintain temporal clarity throughout the adventure.

Paragraphing 2/2

Paragraphing is used strategically to enhance the narrative's impact. New paragraphs mark shifts in setting, the introduction of new dinosaurs, moments of increased tension, and changes in the protagonist's situation. Short paragraphs effectively heighten tension during the T-Rex encounter, while longer paragraphs develop the rich sensory details of the prehistoric world.

Sentence Structure 6/6

The narrative demonstrates sophisticated control of sentence structures to achieve specific effects. Short, simple sentences ("I held my breath and didn't move a muscle") create tension, while complex sentences develop sensory imagery and reflective moments. There is excellent

variety in sentence beginnings and structures throughout. Dialogue is correctly integrated and punctuated.

Punctuation **5/5**

Punctuation is used accurately and effectively throughout. The writer demonstrates sophisticated control of dialogue punctuation, exclamation marks for emphasis, dashes to insert additional information, and commas to control pacing and create readable complex sentences. Quotation marks, apostrophes, and hyphens are all used correctly.

Spelling **6/6**

The narrative demonstrates perfect spelling throughout, including challenging scientific terms ("Brachiosaurus," "Tyrannosaurus Rex"), sophisticated vocabulary ("iridescent," "primal," "undergrowth"), and hyphenated terms. The consistent accuracy with specialised vocabulary is particularly impressive for this year level.

Lessons Learned:

- Incorporate knowledge and research (dinosaur facts) to add authenticity and depth to imaginative scenarios.
- Use all five senses to create immersive settings that readers can visualise, hear, smell, and almost feel.
- Create tension through life-threatening complications and obstacles that the protagonist must overcome.
- Vary sentence length deliberately—short sentences for tension and impact, longer sentences for description and reflection.
- Include a tangible "souvenir" or evidence from the adventure to strengthen the ending and leave readers with something to ponder.

Original Prompt:

Write a narrative about a place that is abandoned or forgotten. What happened there? Who discovers it? What secrets does it hold?

Student Response:

The Lighthouse Keeper's Last Secret

The lighthouse stood like a lonely sentinel on the jagged cliff edge, its once-brilliant white paint now peeling and greyed by decades of salt and storms. No one had climbed its spiral staircase for nearly fifty years, not since the mysterious disappearance of the last lighthouse keeper, Oliver Blackwood, in the great storm of 1973. Modern navigation systems had made the old structure obsolete, and the small coastal village of Marston Cove had gradually forgotten about it.

Maya pedalled her bicycle along the cliff path, the wind whipping her dark curls across her face. She'd only been living in Marston Cove for three weeks, having moved there with her mother after her parents' divorce. The summer holidays stretched endlessly before her, empty of friends or adventures. That's why, when she spotted the abandoned lighthouse in the distance, it immediately captured her imagination.

"Mum, I'm just going exploring!" she called through the cottage door before setting off that morning. Her mother, buried in work at her laptop, had merely nodded distractedly.

As Maya approached the lighthouse, she noticed how the structure seemed to defy the laws of time. While the exterior was weathered and crumbling, it remained standing proud against the relentless coastal elements. A rusty iron fence surrounded the building, bearing a faded sign: "DANGER – KEEP OUT – PROPERTY OF TRINITY LIGHTHOUSE AUTHORITY."

Maya scoffed. No one had maintained this fence in years; there was a gap wide enough for her to slip through without difficulty. She approached the heavy wooden door, expecting it to be locked, but when she pushed, it creaked open with surprising ease.

"Hello?" she called, her voice echoing up the hollow tower. Only silence answered.

The interior was dim, with dust motes dancing in the few beams of light that penetrated through cracks in the walls. Maya pulled out her phone and switched on the torch. The ground floor contained what must have been the keeper's living quarters: a small iron bed frame, a weathered desk, and shelves lined with logbooks and technical manuals, all covered in a thick layer of dust. Something about the desk caught Maya's attention. Unlike the rest of the room, which was coated in undisturbed dust, there were marks on the desk as if someone had recently moved something. She shone her torch more deliberately and noticed a slight difference in the colour of the wooden floorboards beneath the desk.

Crouching down, Maya discovered a loose floorboard. Her heart quickened as she pried it up with her fingertips, revealing a small cavity underneath. Inside was a tin box, the kind once used

for tobacco or biscuits. With trembling fingers, she lifted it out and brushed away the dust. The lid was decorated with faded sailors' knots.

Inside the box were three items: a leather-bound journal, a brass key, and a black and white photograph of a young man in a lighthouse keeper's uniform standing beside a young woman on the cliff edge, both smiling broadly. Maya turned over the photograph. Written in faded ink was: "Oliver and Elizabeth, 1972."

Maya opened the journal, the spine cracking from decades of being untouched. The handwriting was neat but hurried, as if the writer had been in a state of agitation:

April 15, 1973 – The lights appeared again last night, hovering over the western reef. This marks the fifth consecutive night. I've reported it to the Authority, but they dismiss it as weather phenomena or fishing boats. They're wrong. These lights move with purpose, with intelligence. Elizabeth says I'm becoming obsessed, but she hasn't seen what I've seen through the telescope.

April 20, 1973 – I've made contact. The lights responded to my signal lamp. I don't know who they are or what they want, but they're definitely trying to communicate. Elizabeth and I argued again. She's threatening to leave for her sister's in London if I don't stop "this foolishness." How can I make her understand the importance of what's happening here?

The entries continued, becoming increasingly frantic as Oliver described the lights coming closer each night. The final entry sent a shiver down Maya's spine:

May 7, 1973 – They're here. The storm is a cover. I hear something on the stairs. Elizabeth was right. I should have left with her. The key is for the—

The entry ended abruptly. Maya looked at the brass key in her hand, then back at the journal. What was the key for? And who were "they"?

A sudden noise above made Maya jump. It sounded like footsteps on the metal staircase that spiralled up to the lamp room. She froze, listening intently. The lighthouse had been abandoned for decades; there shouldn't be anyone else here.

"Hello?" she called again, her voice smaller this time.

The only response was another metallic creak from above.

Despite her growing apprehension, Maya felt compelled to climb the stairs. The brass key clutched tightly in her hand, she began the ascent, each step creating a hollow echo that reverberated through the tower. As she climbed, she noticed small symbols etched into the wall at irregular intervals – circles with strange patterns inside them, similar to the descriptions in Oliver's journal.

At the top of the stairs was a locked door leading to the lamp room. With a sense of inevitability, Maya inserted the brass key. It turned with a smooth click. Beyond the door, the enormous prismatic lens of the lighthouse stood dormant, its complex system of prisms and mirrors designed to project light far out to sea. The glass was immaculately clean – not a speck of dust, unlike everything else in the lighthouse.

And there, scratched into the lens itself, was a message: "They come with the lights. They take. They replace. Trust no one who doesn't cast a shadow."

As the sun began to set, casting long shadows across the lamp room, Maya noticed something even more disturbing. On the floor beneath the lens was a perfect circle of small objects:

lighthouse keeper uniform buttons, watches, eyeglasses, wedding rings – personal effects spanning what looked like decades, perhaps centuries.

A cold breeze suddenly whipped through the room, though all the windows were closed. Maya's phone torch flickered and died. In the gathering darkness, she saw them – lights on the horizon, moving against the wind, heading directly toward the lighthouse.

Maya ran. Down the spiral stairs, through the living quarters, out the heavy door, and didn't stop until she reached her bicycle. Only then did she look back. The lighthouse stood silhouetted against the darkening sky, and for just a moment, she thought she saw a figure in the lamp room, watching her. A figure that didn't cast a shadow.

That night, Maya couldn't sleep. She placed Oliver's journal, the photograph, and the brass key on her bedside table, wondering what to do. Should she tell someone? Would anyone believe her?

In the morning, she decided to return to the lighthouse with her mother. But when they arrived, they found emergency vehicles and a police cordon around the structure.

"What's happened?" Maya's mother asked a nearby officer.

"Structural collapse," the officer replied. "The entire interior staircase has crumbled. Lucky no one was inside. They're going to demolish it now – it's been deemed unsafe."

Maya said nothing, but clutched the journal tighter in her pocket. She watched as workers erected scaffolding around the lighthouse, preparing for its demolition. And as she watched, she noticed one of the workers standing perfectly still, staring directly at her. A worker who, despite the bright morning sun, cast no shadow on the ground.

Expert Breakdown:

Audience 6/6

This narrative expertly engages and affects the reader through atmospheric writing and escalating suspense. The opening immediately establishes the intriguing setting and mysterious backstory of Oliver Blackwood's disappearance. The story skilfully builds tension through Maya's discoveries, culminating in the chilling revelation and open-ended conclusion that leaves the reader with lingering unease. The narrative successfully combines elements of mystery, horror, and adventure to maintain high reader engagement throughout.

Text Structure 4/4

The narrative demonstrates a sophisticated structure with an evocative orientation that establishes both setting and character context (Maya's relocation following her parents' divorce). The complication develops through multiple stages: the discovery of the lighthouse, finding the hidden box, reading the journal, ascending to the lamp room, and finally witnessing the mysterious lights. The resolution maintains the story's eeriness with the lighthouse's convenient

"structural collapse" and the shadowing worker, creating a concluding sense of ongoing danger and mystery.

Ideas 5/5

The narrative presents highly original and engaging ideas, blending supernatural elements with realistic human emotions and situations. The concept of entities that "replace" people and "don't cast shadows" creates a genuinely unsettling premise. The lighthouse as a location of cosmic significance and the suggestion of decades of disappearances (evidenced by the circle of personal effects) demonstrate exceptional creativity and thoughtful worldbuilding that extends beyond the immediate story.

Character and Setting 4/4

Both character and setting are developed with depth and authenticity. The lighthouse is portrayed as almost a character itself, with detailed descriptions that appeal to multiple senses. Maya's character is well-established through her feelings about her parents' divorce, her boredom in the new town, and her curiosity that drives the plot. Oliver Blackwood comes alive through his journal entries, which convey his increasing paranoia and ultimately his fear. The relationship dynamics (Maya and her distracted mother, Oliver and the skeptical Elizabeth) add emotional complexity to the narrative.

Vocabulary 5/5

The vocabulary is sophisticated and precisely chosen to create atmosphere and tension. Notable examples include "lonely sentinel," "jagged cliff edge," "dust motes dancing," and "prismatic lens." The nautical and lighthouse-specific terminology ("Trinity Lighthouse Authority," "western reef," "signal lamp") adds authenticity. The journal entries employ a different register that effectively captures Oliver's voice and escalating fear, demonstrating the writer's ability to vary vocabulary for characterisation.

Cohesion 4/4

The narrative maintains excellent cohesion through careful management of time, place, and action. Transitions between scenes are smooth and logical, with clear connections between paragraphs and sections. The integration of the journal entries is particularly well-handled, with Maya's reactions linking back to the main narrative. Reference chains track important elements (the lighthouse, the box, the key, the mysterious lights) throughout the story, creating a unified and coherent text.

Paragraphing 2/2

Paragraphing is used strategically to enhance the narrative's impact and control its pacing. New paragraphs effectively signal shifts in time, place, perspective, and tension level. The journal entries are appropriately set apart as separate paragraphs in italics, creating visual distinction. Short paragraphs are used effectively to build tension, particularly during Maya's ascent of the lighthouse and her final flight from the structure.

Sentence Structure 6/6

The narrative demonstrates sophisticated control of sentence structures for specific effects. There is excellent variation in sentence length, from short sentences that create tension ("Maya ran.") to complex sentences that develop setting and atmosphere. Sentences begin in varied ways, avoiding repetitive patterns. Questions, exclamations, and fragments are used purposefully to enhance the voice and create emphasis. Dialogue is correctly integrated and punctuated throughout.

Punctuation 5/5

Punctuation is used accurately and effectively throughout, including more sophisticated punctuation like semicolons, colons, dashes, and parentheses. Dialogue is correctly punctuated, including internal thoughts. Quotation marks are used appropriately for both speech and the sign text. Italics are correctly applied to the journal entries to set them apart from the main narrative. The careful punctuation enhances meaning and supports the narrative's pacing and emotional impact.

Spelling 6/6

The narrative demonstrates perfect spelling throughout, including challenging vocabulary ("sentinel," "obsolete," "apprehension," "prisms") and technical terms specific to lighthouses. The consistent accuracy with sophisticated vocabulary exceeds year-level expectations.

Lessons Learned:

- Create atmosphere through detailed setting descriptions that appeal to multiple senses and establish mood.

- Develop backstory and context to give depth to your narrative world, making the central mystery more compelling.
- Use found objects (journal, photograph, personal effects) as plot devices to reveal information and advance the story.
- Build tension gradually through a series of increasingly unsettling discoveries rather than a single revelation.
- End with an element of ambiguity or unresolved tension to leave a lasting impression on the reader.

Exemplar 4: The Last Letter

Year 5-6

Original Prompt:

Write a narrative about receiving an important message or letter. Who sent it? What did it say? How did it change things?

Student Response:

The Letter That Arrived Fifty Years Late

On my twelfth birthday, Grandpa Joe gave me a wooden box filled with old stamps. He'd been collecting them since he was a boy, and now that his eyesight was failing, he wanted me to continue the tradition.

"These little pieces of paper have travelled all over the world, Sam," he told me, his wrinkled hand resting on the box. "They've carried people's hopes, dreams, and secrets across oceans and continents."

I nodded politely, but secretly felt disappointed. I'd been hoping for a new cricket bat or perhaps a video game. What would a twelve-year-old boy in 2023 do with a box of musty old stamps? Nevertheless, I thanked him and took the box to my room. That evening, I decided to at least look through the collection. The stamps were organised in small plastic sleeves inside an album, each one carefully labelled with its country of origin and year of issue. I had to admit, some of them were quite interesting – colourful depictions of exotic animals, famous landmarks, and historical figures.

As I turned the final page of the album, something fell out – a yellowed envelope that had been tucked inside the back cover. It was addressed to "Mr Joseph Carlton, 24 Wisteria Lane, Millfield, Surrey," which I recognised as Grandpa's old address before he moved in with us. The postmark was dated May 17, 1973 – exactly fifty years ago! But the strange thing was, the envelope was still sealed. Grandpa had never opened it.

The return address was from someone named Eleanor Wright in Cornwall. I turned the envelope over in my hands, wondering what to do. Should I take it to Grandpa? Should I open it myself? Curiosity got the better of me. Carefully, I slid my finger under the flap and eased it open, trying not to tear the fragile paper.

Inside was a handwritten letter on pale blue stationery:

Dear Joe,

I hope this letter finds you well. It has taken me many months to find the courage to write to you, and I still don't know if I'm doing the right thing.

I've thought of you often over the years, especially when I walk along the cliffs where we used to meet during that summer of '55. Do you remember the promises we made, sitting on our bench, watching the waves crash against the rocks below? I've never forgotten them, even though life took us in different directions.

I'm writing because something has happened that changes everything. My husband Richard passed away last winter. His last wish was that I should find happiness in whatever time I have left. And so, after all these years, I find myself wondering if you ever think of me too.

I understand that you have built a life with Margaret, and I would never wish to disrupt that. But if there is any part of you that remembers what we once meant to each other, perhaps you might write back to me.

The cottage by the sea is still here, still blue-doored and windswept, waiting for someone to love it again.

With fond memories,

Eleanor

I stared at the letter, my head spinning with questions. Who was Eleanor? What promises had she and Grandpa made? And why had he never opened her letter?

That night, I couldn't sleep. I kept thinking about the letter and what it might mean. Grandma Margaret had passed away five years ago, and Grandpa had been lonely ever since. Could this Eleanor person still be alive? And if she was, would Grandpa want to know she had written to him?

In the morning, I made a decision. I took the letter and went to Grandpa's room. He was sitting by the window, as he often did in the mornings, his gnarled hands resting on his walking stick. "Grandpa," I said, my voice shaking slightly, "I found something in the stamp collection." I held out the envelope.

He frowned, taking it from me with trembling fingers. "Where did you get this?" he asked, his voice barely a whisper.

"It was in the back of the album. I—I opened it. I'm sorry."

He didn't seem angry, just stunned. "Eleanor," he murmured, running his thumb over the handwriting on the envelope. "After all these years..."

Slowly, he took out the letter and read it, his expression changing from shock to something I couldn't quite identify – a mixture of sadness, regret, and perhaps a flicker of hope.

"I never knew," he said finally. "This letter must have arrived just after I moved houses. It would have been forwarded to the new address, but by then..." He trailed off.

"By then, what?" I prompted gently.

"By then, your grandmother and I were expecting your father," he explained. "Life was busy, full of change. This must have gotten mixed up with my stamp collection during the move, and I never noticed it."

He was quiet for a long time, lost in thought. Then he asked me to fetch his laptop – something he rarely used. With my help, he began searching online for "Eleanor Wright, Cornwall."

To our amazement, we found her – or at least, someone who might be her. There was an article about a local art exhibition in a Cornish village, featuring paintings by an E. Wright, described as "an 85-year-old artist who captures the rugged beauty of the coastal landscape she has called home for six decades."

There was a photograph of an elderly woman with silver hair and bright blue eyes, standing beside a painting of a cottage with a blue door.

Grandpa's hands trembled as he stared at the screen. "That's her," he whispered. "That's Eleanor."

Two weeks later, I found myself sitting in the back seat of a car, watching the countryside roll by as we drove toward Cornwall. Grandpa sat in the passenger seat, nervously straightening his tie every few minutes while Dad drove, occasionally glancing over at his father with a mixture of concern and amusement.

"Are you sure about this, Dad?" he asked for what must have been the tenth time.

Grandpa nodded. "It's time to keep an old promise," he replied simply.

As we rounded a bend in the coastal road, a small village came into view, nestled between rolling green hills and the vast blue expanse of the sea. And there, perched on the edge of a cliff, was a cottage with a blue door.

Grandpa smiled, and in that moment, he didn't look like an old man anymore. His eyes sparkled with the light of distant memories and new possibilities – all because of a letter that had arrived fifty years late.

Expert Breakdown:

Audience **6/6**

This narrative captivates the reader from the beginning with the intriguing concept of an unopened letter found in a stamp collection. The narrative creates genuine emotional connection through the relationship between Sam and his grandfather, and the poignant story of missed opportunities and second chances. The resolution is emotionally satisfying while remaining

realistic, taking readers on a journey from initial disappointment (Sam's reaction to the stamp collection) to understanding the profound significance of reconnection in later life.

Text Structure 4/4

The narrative demonstrates a sophisticated structure that unfolds naturally. The orientation establishes character relationships and introduces the stamp collection that becomes the vehicle for discovery. The complication develops through the finding of the letter, the decision to share it with Grandpa, and the search for Eleanor. The resolution is thoughtfully developed, moving from discovery to action to the journey toward reconciliation, with the final image of the blue-doored cottage creating a sense of completion and new beginnings.

Ideas 5/5

The narrative presents a highly original take on the "important message" prompt through the concept of a decades-delayed letter. The idea of the stamp collection—objects that have "carried people's hopes, dreams, and secrets"—becoming the vehicle for this discovery creates a meaningful thematic connection. The narrative explores complex ideas about timing, missed opportunities, and the possibility of renewal in later life, adding intellectual and emotional depth to what could have been a simple story.

Character and Setting 4/4

The characters are developed with depth and authenticity. Sam is portrayed with the realistic mindset of a contemporary twelve-year-old while showing growth in his understanding of his grandfather. Grandpa Joe is complex—a man with a full life history that extends beyond his current role as a grandparent. Eleanor emerges as a character through her letter and later the photograph, creating a sense of a complete person with her own life journey. Settings are established effectively through specific details, particularly the coastal imagery and the blue-doored cottage that becomes a symbol of reconnection.

Vocabulary 5/5

The vocabulary is precise and sophisticated, with effective use of descriptive language ("wrinkled hand," "gnarled hands," "rugged beauty," "vast blue expanse") and carefully selected verbs that convey specific actions and emotions ("trembled," "murmured," "nestled"). The letter employs a distinct voice and register appropriate to Eleanor's character and the period. Vocabulary choices effectively establish tone, from the initial disappointment to the growing excitement and eventual emotional resolution.

Cohesion 4/4

The narrative maintains excellent cohesion through careful management of time and logical progression of events. Transitions between scenes are smooth and natural. The letter itself serves as a cohesive device, connecting past to present and providing context for subsequent events. Reference chains track important elements (the stamps, the letter, the cottage with the blue door) throughout the story. The conclusion effectively circles back to earlier elements, particularly the image of the blue-doored cottage mentioned in Eleanor's letter.

Paragraphing 2/2

Paragraphing is used strategically to enhance the narrative's impact and control pacing. The letter is appropriately set apart in italicized paragraphs, creating visual distinction from the main narrative. New paragraphs effectively signal shifts in time, focus, and emotional tone. Shorter paragraphs are used for emphasis at key moments, particularly in the dialogue exchanges between Sam and his grandfather and in the final reflective paragraph that serves as the resolution.

Sentence Structure 6/6

The narrative demonstrates sophisticated control of sentence structures for specific effects. There is excellent variation in length and complexity, from shorter sentences that emphasize key moments ("That's her," he whispered. "That's Eleanor.") to complex sentences that develop setting and reflection. Sentences begin in varied ways, avoiding repetitive patterns. The narrative effectively incorporates dialogue with correct attribution and punctuation. Different sentence types (statements, questions, exclamations) are used purposefully to enhance voice and meaning.

Punctuation 5/5

Punctuation is used accurately and effectively throughout, including correct use of quotation marks for dialogue, commas for clauses and phrasing, apostrophes for possession and contraction, and dashes for parenthetical information. The letter format correctly employs commas after salutations and paragraphing for different ideas. Italics are appropriately used to set off the letter text. Throughout the narrative, punctuation enhances meaning and supports the intended pacing and emotional impact.

Spelling 6/6

The narrative demonstrates perfect spelling throughout, including challenging vocabulary ("gnarled," "windswept," "possibilities") and proper nouns. The consistent accuracy with sophisticated vocabulary exceeds year-level expectations.

Lessons Learned:

- Frame your story with symbolism (the stamps that "carried people's hopes, dreams, and secrets" and the blue-doored cottage) to add thematic depth.
- Create a first-person narrator who undergoes a shift in understanding or perspective throughout the narrative.
- Use a "story within a story" technique, such as the letter, to provide backstory and emotional context without lengthy exposition.
- Develop intergenerational relationships that demonstrate how different age groups can learn from and help each other.
- End with an image or moment that echoes an earlier element of the story, creating a sense of narrative completion.

Exemplar 5: The Photograph

Year 5-6

Original Prompt:

Write a narrative about finding something unusual or unexpected. What was found? What happened because of this discovery?

Student Response:

The Girl in the Photograph

The floor of Gran's attic was a sea of cardboard boxes, each one overflowing with the collected treasures of her eighty-seven years. Dust particles danced in the shafts of afternoon sunlight that streamed through the small dormer window. It was the hottest day of summer, and I was spending it sorting through decades of memories, trying to decide what to keep and what to give away before Gran moved to the retirement village next month.

"Lottie! Have you found my recipe book yet?" Gran's voice carried up from the kitchen two floors below.

"Not yet!" I called back, wiping sweat from my forehead. I'd been searching for three hours already, and the legendary recipe book – containing Gran's secret scone recipe that had won the village fête for twenty consecutive years – was still missing in action.

I pulled another box toward me. This one was different from the others – a sturdy wooden chest with brass hinges and a small lock that hung open. Inside were stacks of photographs, nearly all in black and white or faded sepia tones. I began flipping through them: Gran as a young woman with her hair in victory rolls; Grandad in his RAF uniform; my father as a gap-toothed schoolboy; aunts, uncles, and distant relatives I barely recognised.

At the bottom of the box was a small envelope, yellowed with age. Inside was a photograph unlike the others. It showed Gran as a teenager, maybe fifteen or sixteen, her arm around another girl of similar age. They stood in front of a cottage with roses climbing the walls, both smiling broadly at the camera. What made this photo unusual was that Gran's companion had been systematically erased – someone had scratched out her face with what must have been a pin or needle, leaving just a rough white space where her features should have been.

I turned the photograph over. Written in faded ink was: "Elizabeth and Charlotte, summer 1948." Elizabeth was Gran's name, but who was Charlotte? I'd never heard Gran mention anyone by that name, and I'd certainly never heard of my grandmother having a sister.

Intrigued, I tucked the photograph into my pocket and continued my search. An hour later, I finally unearthed the recipe book inside a hatbox along with Gran's wedding veil. Mission accomplished, I headed downstairs.

Gran was in the kitchen, rolling out pastry for an apple pie, flour dusting her wrinkled hands. The radio played softly in the background – one of those nostalgic stations that specialised in music from the 1940s.

"Found it!" I announced triumphantly, placing the recipe book on the kitchen table.

Gran's face lit up. "Wonderful! I knew it had to be somewhere." She wiped her hands on her apron and reached for the book, her eyes sparkling behind her spectacles.

I hesitated, then pulled out the photograph. "Gran, I also found this. Who's Charlotte?"

The change in Gran's expression was immediate and shocking. The colour drained from her face, and her hands began to tremble so violently that she had to grip the edge of the table to steady herself.

"Where did you get that?" she whispered, her voice suddenly frail.

"It was in a box of old photographs," I explained, alarmed by her reaction. "Gran, are you all right? Should I call Mum?"

She shook her head, taking a deep breath. "No, no, I'm fine. Just... surprised. I haven't seen that photograph in many years." She sank into a chair, still staring at the image. "Charlotte Winters. She was my best friend."

"Why is her face scratched out?" I asked gently, sitting opposite her.

Gran was quiet for so long that I thought she might not answer. When she finally spoke, her voice was distant, as if she were speaking from the depths of the past.

"We were inseparable, Charlotte and I. Did everything together from the time we were small girls. But then the summer we turned sixteen, everything changed."

Gran told me how Charlotte had fallen in love with a boy from the next village – a handsome, reckless boy named James whom Gran herself had secretly admired from afar. When Charlotte discovered Gran's feelings, she'd been furious, accusing Gran of betrayal. Harsh words were exchanged, promises broken.

"The last time I saw her was at the village dance in August 1948," Gran continued. "We argued again, and she ran out in tears. That night, trying to make her way home in the dark, she took a shortcut across Miller's Field."

Gran's voice cracked. "They found her the next morning. She'd fallen into the old well. It had been dry for years, but it was deep – thirty feet or more. They said she would have died instantly."

I sat in stunned silence, watching tears slide down Gran's cheeks.

"I scratched out her face because I couldn't bear to look at it," she admitted. "Couldn't bear the reminder of how our last words to each other had been in anger. Over a boy I didn't even end up with." She gave a hollow laugh. "James went off to National Service and never came back to the village. I met your grandfather two years later."

I reached across the table and took her flour-dusted hand in mine. "It wasn't your fault, Gran."

"I know that now, dear. But for years, I carried such guilt. If we hadn't argued, she wouldn't have run off alone in the dark. We would have walked home together, arm in arm, as we always did."

The following Saturday, I drove Gran to the village cemetery in the next county. It took us some time to find the grave – a simple headstone nearly obscured by overgrown grass and

wildflowers. CHARLOTTE ANNE WINTERS, 1932-1948, BELOVED DAUGHTER.

Gran knelt with difficulty, placed a small bouquet of forget-me-nots on the grave, and whispered something I couldn't hear. When she stood, her face was peaceful.

"Thank you for bringing me here, Lottie," she said, squeezing my hand. "I should have come long ago."

It was only on the drive home that I realised something I'd never thought about before. "Gran," I said, "am I named after her? After Charlotte?"

Gran smiled, her eyes on the passing landscape. "Yes, dear. Your father never knew why I suggested the name so strongly when you were born. I think perhaps it was my way of making amends."

Two weeks later, as we prepared for Gran's move to the retirement village, I presented her with a gift – the photograph, carefully restored by a specialist who had digitally reconstructed Charlotte's face based on similar photographs of young women from the same era. It wasn't perfect, but it was better than the scratched-out void.

Gran cried when she saw it. "Oh, Lottie," she whispered, tracing Charlotte's reconstructed features with a fingertip. "It's like getting back a piece of my heart I thought was lost forever."

She looked up at me, her eyes brimming with tears and gratitude. "Some things should never be forgotten, even when remembering hurts."

The photograph now sits in a silver frame on Gran's bedside table in her new room at Sunnyside Village. Sometimes when I visit, I catch her talking to it, sharing memories and secrets with the friend she lost seventy-five years ago. I like to think that somewhere, somehow, Charlotte is listening, and that their friendship has been mended across the divide of time and loss.

Expert Breakdown:

Audience 6/6

This narrative immediately engages the reader through the relatable scenario of sorting through an elderly relative's possessions, then skilfully builds interest with the discovery of the mysterious photograph. The story creates a powerful emotional connection through its exploration of friendship, regret, guilt, and reconciliation. The resolution is deeply satisfying, offering both closure for Gran and a meaningful connection between past and present through the narrator's name. The final image of Gran talking to the photograph creates a lingering emotional resonance.

Text Structure 4/4

The narrative follows a sophisticated structure that seamlessly integrates the present-day storyline with the historical revelation. The orientation effectively establishes setting, characters, and context. The complication develops through the discovery of the photograph, Gran's reaction, and the gradual unveiling of Charlotte's story. The resolution extends beyond a simple conclusion to show meaningful emotional growth and healing across multiple scenes (the cemetery visit, the photograph restoration, and Gran's new beginning with the past reconciled).

Ideas 5/5

The narrative presents a highly original and nuanced exploration of how past tragedies and regrets can continue to affect a person decades later. The concept of a deliberately defaced photograph as the physical manifestation of emotional pain is powerful and evocative. The story explores complex themes of friendship, guilt, remembrance, and healing with sensitivity and depth. The connection between the narrator's name and the lost friend adds another layer of meaning that enriches the narrative.

Character and Setting 4/4

Characters are developed with exceptional depth and authenticity. Gran is portrayed as a complex individual with a rich interior life beyond her grandmother role, showing both vulnerability and strength. The narrator (Lottie) demonstrates sensitivity and thoughtfulness in her responses to her grandmother's revelation. Even Charlotte, though physically absent, becomes a vivid character through Gran's recollections. Settings are established through specific sensory details, from the dusty attic to the overgrown cemetery, creating a strong sense of place and atmosphere.

Vocabulary 5/5

The vocabulary is sophisticated and precisely chosen to create atmosphere and convey emotion. Notable examples include "dust particles danced in the shafts of afternoon sunlight," "systematically erased," "colour drained from her face," and "digitally reconstructed." Age-appropriate terms from the 1940s period (victory rolls, RAF, National Service) add historical authenticity. Emotive language effectively conveys the complex feelings of the characters, particularly Gran's guilt, grief, and eventual peace.

Cohesion 4/4

The narrative maintains excellent cohesion through careful management of time shifts between present action and past recollections. Transitions between scenes are smooth and logical, with clear connections between paragraphs. The photograph serves as a central cohesive device, appearing at key moments throughout the narrative. Reference chains track important elements (the photograph, Charlotte, Gran's emotional journey) across the text. The naming connection between Charlotte and Lottie creates another thread of cohesion that ties the past to the present.

Paragraphing 2/2

Paragraphing is used strategically to enhance the narrative's impact and control its pacing. New paragraphs effectively signal shifts in time, place, speaker, and emotional tone. Shorter paragraphs are used to emphasize key moments of revelation or emotional impact. The structure of paragraphs supports the narrative flow, particularly during Gran's account of what happened to Charlotte, where paragraph breaks create natural pauses that reflect her difficulty in telling the story.

Sentence Structure 6/6

The narrative demonstrates sophisticated control of sentence structures for specific effects. There is excellent variation in length and complexity, from short impactful sentences ("Mission accomplished, I headed downstairs") to complex sentences that develop setting and reflection.

Sentences begin in varied ways, creating a natural rhythm and flow. Different sentence types (statements, questions, exclamations) are used purposefully to enhance voice and develop character. Dialogue is correctly structured and integrated naturally into the narrative.

Punctuation 5/5

Punctuation is used accurately and effectively throughout, including correct use of quotation marks for dialogue, commas for clauses and phrasing, apostrophes for possession and contraction, semicolons to connect related ideas, and dashes for emphasis or additional information. More sophisticated punctuation is employed with confidence to enhance meaning and support the narrative's pacing and emotional impact.

Spelling 6/6

The narrative demonstrates perfect spelling throughout, including challenging vocabulary ("systematically," "triumphantly," "reconciliation") and proper nouns. Historical terms are correctly spelled, and there is consistent accuracy with sophisticated vocabulary that exceeds year-level expectations.

Lessons Learned:

- Use a physical object (the defaced photograph) as both a plot device and a symbol of deeper emotional significance.
- Create realistic intergenerational conversations that reveal family history and secrets gradually and naturally.
- Develop scenarios that allow characters to move toward healing or reconciliation with their past regrets.
- Include meaningful connections between past and present (Lottie being named after Charlotte) that add thematic depth.
- Craft an ending that shows how addressing the past can lead to personal growth and new beginnings.

Common Elements of Band 6 Narratives

After analyzing these exemplary Band 6 narratives, we can identify several key elements that consistently appear across successful NAPLAN writing responses:

1. Sophisticated Structure

All Band 6 narratives demonstrate a clear and effective structure with:

- Engaging orientations that efficiently establish context, character, and setting
- Well-developed complications that build tension in multiple stages
- Meaningful resolutions that go beyond simply ending the story to show character growth or thematic significance
- Logical progression of events with clear cause-and-effect relationships

2. Rich Character Development

Superior narratives create authentic, multidimensional characters through:

- Realistic internal thoughts and emotions that reveal character motivation
- Natural dialogue that sounds authentic to each character's age and background
- Characters who change or grow as a result of the narrative events
- Consistent characterisation throughout the narrative

3. Vivid Setting Description

Top-scoring narratives create immersive settings by:

- Appealing to multiple senses (sight, sound, smell, touch, taste)
- Using specific, concrete details rather than general descriptions
- Creating atmosphere that enhances the emotional tone of the story
- Making setting an integral part of the narrative rather than merely a backdrop

4. Precise and Varied Vocabulary

Exemplary narratives demonstrate vocabulary sophistication through:

- Precise noun and verb choices that create specific images
- Effective use of modifiers (adjectives and adverbs) without overreliance
- Age-appropriate technical or specialized vocabulary when relevant
- Varied word choices that avoid repetition

5. Varied Sentence Structures

6. Thematic Depth

Band 6 narratives employ a range of sentence types and structures:

- Deliberate variation in sentence length for emphasis and pacing
- Different sentence beginnings to avoid repetitive patterns
- Complex and compound sentences to show relationships between ideas
- Strategic use of short sentences for impact at key moments

Exceptional narratives go beyond plot to explore meaningful themes:

- Universal themes that readers can connect with emotionally
- Subtle exploration of ideas rather than explicit "messages"
- Thematic elements integrated naturally into the story
- Complexity of ideas appropriate to the writer's year level

7. Strategic Paragraphing

Top-scoring responses use paragraphing as a narrative tool:

- Paragraph breaks that signal shifts in time, place, speaker, or focus
- Variation in paragraph length to control pacing and emphasis
- Single-sentence paragraphs for dramatic impact at key moments
- Logical grouping of related ideas within paragraphs

8. Sophisticated Narrative Devices

Band 6 narratives employ literary techniques such as:

- Symbolism (objects or elements that represent larger ideas)
- Foreshadowing (subtle hints of what is to come)
- Flashbacks or time shifts handled smoothly
- Circular structures where ending elements connect to the beginning

These elements appear consistently across different prompts, genres, and year levels in Band 6 responses. However, they are always integrated naturally into the narrative rather than being forced or formulaic. The most successful writers adapt these elements to suit their specific story and create a genuine reading experience rather than simply displaying technical skills.

Practical Strategies for Students

Based on the exemplars in this collection, here are effective strategies students can apply to improve their own narrative writing for NAPLAN assessments:

Before Writing

1. Plan Strategically

Spend 5-7 minutes planning your narrative before beginning to write:

- Brainstorm 2-3 possible ideas for the prompt, then select the strongest one
- Create a quick outline of beginning, middle, and end
- Consider what complication or problem will drive your narrative
- Identify a clear resolution that shows character growth or change

2. Choose a Manageable Scope

Focus on a limited timeframe and number of characters:

- Concentrate on a single significant event or discovery rather than a complex plot
- Include only 1-3 main characters to allow for depth rather than breadth
- Limit the number of settings to 1-2 that you can describe vividly
- Remember that a meaningful small story is better than an underdeveloped epic

3. Prepare Your Beginning and Ending

Plan these crucial components with special care:

- Craft an opening sentence or paragraph that immediately engages the reader
- Consider starting with action, dialogue, or an intriguing statement
- Plan a meaningful conclusion that connects to your story's themes or character journey
- Avoid clichéd endings like "it was all a dream" or "they lived happily ever after"

During Writing

4. Create Vivid Images

Help readers visualize your narrative world:

- Use specific, concrete details rather than general descriptions
- Include sensory information beyond just visual details
- Select precise verbs that show exactly how something happens
- Use similes and metaphors sparingly but effectively

5. Develop Authentic Characters

Make your characters feel real to readers:

- Show their thoughts, feelings, and reactions to events
- Create dialogue that sounds natural and reveals character
- Include small physical gestures or habits that make characters distinctive
- Ensure characters' actions are consistent with their established personality

6. Control Your Pacing

Manage the flow and rhythm of your narrative:

- Expand important moments with detail and reflection
- Summarize less important time periods to maintain momentum
- Use dialogue to move the story forward efficiently
- Vary sentence and paragraph length to create rhythm and emphasis

7. Create Tension and Release

Engage readers by building and resolving tension:

- Introduce complications that create genuine obstacles for characters
- Build suspense by raising questions readers want answered
- Create moments of heightened emotion or conflict
- Provide resolution that feels earned and satisfying

After Writing

8. Review and Edit

If time permits, review your narrative for:

- Spelling errors, especially in commonly misspelled words
- Punctuation, particularly in dialogue and complex sentences
- Sentence variety and paragraph structure
- Consistency in tense, point of view, and character details

9. Strengthen Weak Areas

Look for opportunities to enhance:

- Bland or general vocabulary that could be replaced with more precise words
- Repetitive sentence structures that could be varied
- Underdeveloped settings that need more sensory detail
- Character motivations or reactions that need clarification

10. Perfect Your Ending

Ensure your conclusion is strong:

- Check that all major plot threads are resolved
- Consider whether the ending reflects character growth or change
- Look for ways to connect the ending thematically to earlier elements
- End with a strong final line that leaves an impression on the reader

Remember that while these strategies are valuable, they should be applied thoughtfully to your own unique story. The most successful narratives are those that balance technical skill with genuine creativity and emotional authenticity. Practice incorporating these techniques into your writing regularly, not just during test preparation, to develop your narrative writing abilities.

Conclusion

The exemplary Band 6 narratives in this collection demonstrate that excellence in NAPLAN writing is achievable across all year levels when students combine technical skill with creative storytelling. While each narrative is unique in its approach, characters, and themes, they all share qualities that assessors recognize as exceptional: engaging storylines, authentic characters, vivid settings, precise language, and thoughtful structure.

What stands out most across these exemplars is that they go beyond merely displaying writing techniques—they use these techniques in service of telling meaningful stories that resonate emotionally with readers. The writers have crafted narratives that feel authentic rather than formulaic, with complications that create genuine tension and resolutions that offer satisfying closure while often leaving room for reflection.

As you prepare for your own NAPLAN writing assessment, remember that the most important element is your unique voice and perspective. The technical aspects of writing—grammar, spelling, sentence structure, and paragraphing—provide the foundation, but it is your ideas, imagination, and emotional truth that will bring your narrative to life.

Practice regularly, read widely, and don't be afraid to experiment with different approaches to find what works best for you. Use the exemplars in this collection not as templates to copy but as inspiration for your own creative expression. With dedication and thoughtful application of the strategies outlined here, you can develop the skills needed to craft narratives that not only score well but also genuinely engage and affect your readers.

Above all, remember that becoming a skilled writer is a journey rather than a destination. Each narrative you write is an opportunity to grow, experiment, and discover new aspects of your writing voice. The techniques and insights you develop through NAPLAN preparation will serve you well beyond the assessment itself, becoming valuable tools for self-expression throughout your academic journey and beyond.

Final Writing Tips

- Write about what interests and moves you—authentic emotion translates to powerful writing
- Trust your creative instincts while applying the technical skills you've developed
- Remember that specific, concrete details create more impact than general statements
- Balance dialogue, action, and description to create a well-rounded narrative
- Approach the writing task with confidence in your preparation and abilities