



NAPLAN Sentence Surgery

Instant Fixes for Clearer Writing

Years 3–9

A Comprehensive Guide for Australian Students

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1. Introduction to NAPLAN Sentence Structure

Welcome to your comprehensive guide for mastering sentence structure in NAPLAN writing assessments. This guide is specifically designed for Australian students in Years 3, 5, 7, and 9 who want to improve their sentence construction and achieve higher bands in their NAPLAN writing results.

Why Sentence Structure Matters

Sentence structure is one of the 10 criteria assessed in NAPLAN writing tasks. It focuses on your ability to produce grammatically correct, structurally sound, and meaningful sentences that enhance your writing's clarity and effectiveness.

What This Guide Offers

Instant Fixes

Quick, practical solutions to common sentence structure problems that you can apply immediately.

Year-Level Progression

Clear expectations and requirements for each NAPLAN year level (3, 5, 7, 9).

Quick References

Easy-to-use checklists and guides for revision and practice.

Practice Exercises

Targeted activities with detailed solutions to reinforce your learning.

How to Use This Guide

- 1 Start with Your Year Level**
Navigate to your specific year level section to understand the expectations.
- 2 Identify Problem Areas**
Review the common problems section to recognise issues in your writing.
- 3 Apply Instant Fixes**
Use the provided solutions to immediately improve your sentence structure.
- 4 Practice Regularly**
Complete the exercises and use the checklists for ongoing improvement.

2. Understanding the NAPLAN Sentence Structure Criterion

Official NAPLAN Definition

"Sentence structure – The production of grammatically correct, structurally sound and meaningful sentences."

What NAPLAN Markers Look For

Grammatical Correctness

- ✓ Subject-verb agreement
- ✓ Correct verb tenses
- ✓ Proper pronoun usage
- ✓ Appropriate prepositions

Structural Soundness

- ✓ Complete sentences (not fragments)
- ✓ Clear sentence boundaries
- ✓ Appropriate sentence length

- ✓ Varied sentence beginnings

Meaningfulness

- ✓ Clear communication of ideas
- ✓ Logical word order
- ✓ Appropriate complexity for year level
- ✓ Effective sentence variety

NAPLAN Sentence Structure Scoring Scale

0-1

Limited Control

Some correct formation of sentences, but control is very limited. Many errors affect meaning.

2-3

Developing Control

Most simple sentences correct. Some compound and complex sentences attempted. Meaning predominantly clear.

4-5

Good Control

Simple and compound sentences correct. Most complex sentences correct. Demonstrates variety in structure.

6

Excellent Control

All sentences correct with sophisticated variety. Controlled and well-developed sentences that express precise meaning.

3. Year-Level Progression Guide

Understanding what's expected at each year level is crucial for achieving your best results. NAPLAN uses the same marking criteria for all year levels, but expectations increase with age and educational experience.

3

Foundation

Simple sentences with basic variety

5

Development

Compound sentences and complexity

7

Expansion

Complex sentences and sophistication

9

Mastery

Advanced variety and control

3

Year 3 Expectations

What You Should Master

- ✓ **Simple Sentences:** Subject + Verb + Object structure
- ✓ **Basic Variety:** Different sentence beginnings
- ✓ **Subject-Verb Agreement:** Singular and plural forms match
- ✓ **Basic Conjunctions:** And, but, so, because

Examples of Good Year 3 Sentences

"The dog ran quickly across the park."

"Sarah loves reading books because they are exciting."

"After school, we played football in the backyard."

"The storm was fierce, but we stayed safe inside."

Year 3 Instant Fix Strategy

The "Who-Did-What" Check: Every sentence needs someone (who) doing something (what). Ask yourself: "Who is this sentence about?" and "What did they do?"

Before: "Running in the playground."

✗ Missing 'who'

After: "The children were running in the playground."

✓ Clear 'who' and 'what'

5 Year 5 Expectations

What You Should Master

✓ **Compound Sentences:** Join ideas with coordinating conjunctions

✓ **Complex Sentences:** Begin using subordinating conjunctions

✓ **Sentence Variety:** Mix of short and longer sentences

✓ **Descriptive Details:** Add when, where, and how information

Examples of Good Year 5 Sentences

"The match was exciting, and the crowd cheered loudly."

"Although it was raining, we decided to continue our bushwalk."

"The curious koala, which lived in the tall eucalyptus tree, watched us carefully."

"When the bell rang, students quickly packed their bags and headed home."

Year 5 Instant Fix Strategy

The "Connect and Expand" Method: Join related ideas and add descriptive details.

Before: "It was hot. We went swimming."

After: "Because it was extremely hot, we decided to go swimming at

✗ Two choppy sentences

the local pool."

✓ Connected with details

7

Year 7 Expectations

What You Should Master

✓ **Advanced Complex Sentences:**

Multiple clauses and sophisticated connections

✓ **Varied Sentence Lengths:**

Strategic use of short and long sentences

✓ **Advanced Punctuation:**

Semicolons, colons, and dashes for effect

✓ **Sentence Fluency:** Smooth flow between sentences

Examples of Good Year 7 Sentences

"The investigation revealed startling results; however, further research was needed to confirm the findings."

"Despite the challenging conditions that tested every competitor, the determined athlete persevered until the final whistle."

"Technology has revolutionised education. Students now access information instantly."

"The ancient building—weathered by centuries of storms—stood majestically against the sunset."

Year 7 Instant Fix Strategy

The "Rhythm and Flow" Technique: Vary sentence length to create engaging rhythm and emphasis.

Before: "The experiment was complex and required careful preparation and we needed to measure everything precisely and

After: "The experiment was complex, requiring careful preparation. We measured everything precisely. All data was

record all data accurately."

✗ Run-on sentence

recorded accurately."

✓ Varied lengths for impact

9

Year 9 Expectations

What You Should Master

✓ **Sophisticated Structures:**

Complex sentences with multiple layers

✓ **Stylistic Variety:** Sentences crafted for specific effects

✓ **Advanced Grammar:** Perfect control of all sentence types

✓ **Precise Expression:** Every word serves a purpose

Examples of Good Year 9 Sentences

"The protagonist's journey, fraught with internal conflicts that mirror society's broader struggles, ultimately leads to profound self-discovery."

"Climate change demands immediate action: governments must collaborate, businesses must innovate, and individuals must adapt."

"What began as a simple misunderstanding escalated into a conflict that would reshape their entire relationship."

"The silence was deafening. No one dared speak."

Year 9 Instant Fix Strategy

The "Precision and Polish" Method: Every sentence should demonstrate sophisticated control and clear purpose.

Before: "There are many factors that contribute to the problem and they are all important and need to

After: "Multiple critical factors contribute to this complex problem, each requiring careful

be considered by everyone."

✗ Wordy and unclear

consideration and decisive action."

✓ Precise and sophisticated

4. Common Sentence Problems and Instant Fixes

Based on NAPLAN marking data and classroom observations, Australian students commonly struggle with specific sentence structure issues. Here are the most frequent problems with immediate solutions you can apply.

⚠ Problem 1: Sentence Fragments

Incomplete sentences that lack either a subject or a verb, leaving readers confused about the complete thought.

Common Fragment Examples

"Running down the street." (No subject)

"The big red car." (No verb)

"When I arrived at school." (Incomplete thought)

"Because it was raining heavily."
(Dependent clause only)

Fixed Versions

"The dog was running down the street." (Added subject)

"The big red car sped past us." (Added verb and object)

"When I arrived at school, the bell had already rung." (Completed thought)

"Because it was raining heavily, we stayed indoors." (Added main clause)

Instant Fix: The Complete Sentence Test

Ask yourself these three questions about every sentence:



WHO?

Does it have a subject?



WHAT?

Does it have an action/verb?



COMPLETE?

Does it make sense alone?

Problem 2: Run-on Sentences

Sentences that continue for too long without proper punctuation, making them difficult to follow and understand.

Run-on Example:

"Yesterday I went to the shops with my mum and we bought lots of groceries and then we went to the park and played on the swings and met our friends and had a picnic and it was really fun and we didn't want to go home."

✗ Too many ideas joined with "and" - reader gets lost

Fixed Version:

"Yesterday I went to the shops with my mum, and we bought lots of groceries. Then we went to the park and played on the swings. We met our friends and had a picnic. It was really fun, and we didn't want to go home."

✓ Clear sentence breaks make it easy to follow

Instant Fix: The Breathing Test

Read your sentence aloud. If you run out of breath or need to pause more than twice, it's probably too long!

Split Method

Break long sentences into shorter, clearer ones

Punctuation Method

Use semicolons, colons, or commas appropriately

Conjunction Method

Replace some "ands" with better connectors

⚠ Problem 3: Subject-Verb Disagreement

When the subject and verb don't match in number (singular/plural), creating grammatically incorrect sentences.

Common Agreement Errors

"The dogs was barking loudly."

"Each student have their own book."

"The group of friends were eating lunch."

"Neither Tom nor his brothers was there."

Corrected Versions

"The dogs were barking loudly."
(plural)

"Each student has their own book."
(singular)

"The group of friends was eating lunch." (collective noun)

"Neither Tom nor his brothers were there." (nearest subject)

✏ Instant Fix: Find the True Subject

Step 1: Cross out prepositional phrases (of friends, in the park, etc.)

Step 2: Identify the main subject

Step 3: Ask "Is it one thing or more than one?"

Step 4: Match the verb accordingly

⚠ Problem 4: Lack of Sentence Variety

Using the same sentence structure repeatedly, creating monotonous and boring writing.

Repetitive Example:

"I went to the beach. I saw dolphins. I took photos. I had lunch. I went home. I was tired."

✗ All sentences start with "I" and follow the same pattern

Varied Version:

"During my visit to the beach, I was delighted to see dolphins playing in the waves. After taking several photos, I enjoyed a peaceful lunch by the shore. The day was so perfect that I felt tired but satisfied when I finally returned home."

✓ Different beginnings, lengths, and structures create engaging flow

✎ Instant Fix: The VARIETY Method

V

Verb starters

A

Adjective starters

R

Relative pronouns

I

-ing starters

E

Examples/evidence

T

Time connectors

Y

Yes/No questions

⚠️ Problem 5: Incorrect Punctuation

Poor punctuation that obscures meaning and makes sentences difficult to understand.

Punctuation Problems

"Lets eat grandpa" (Missing apostrophe changes meaning!)

"The teacher said the students are brilliant" (Missing quotation marks)

"After dinner we played games watched TV and went to bed" (Missing commas)

"I love reading cooking my family and my pets" (Confusing without commas)

Properly Punctuated

"Let's eat, grandpa!" (Clear meaning with apostrophe and comma)

'The teacher said, "The students are brilliant."' (Clear speech)

"After dinner, we played games, watched TV, and went to bed." (Clear sequence)

"I love reading, cooking, my family, and my pets." (Clear list)

✏️ Instant Fix: The Pause and Clarity Check

Read your sentence aloud and pause where you naturally breathe. Those pauses often need punctuation!

Short pause

Comma (,)

Medium pause

Semicolon (;)

Long pause

Full stop (.)

Voice change

Speech marks (" ")

⚠️ Problem 6: Weak Sentence Beginnings

Starting too many sentences with basic words like "I," "The," "It," or "There," creating dull writing.

Weak Beginnings:

"The weather was terrible. It was raining heavily. There were puddles everywhere. The children couldn't play outside. They were disappointed."

✗ Every sentence starts with "The," "It," "There," or "They"

Strong Beginnings:

"Unfortunately, the weather was terrible yesterday. Heavy rain poured down relentlessly. Massive puddles formed everywhere across the playground. Disappointed, the children pressed their faces against the classroom windows."

✓ Varied, engaging sentence beginnings

Instant Fix: Strong Starter Toolbox

Time Words

Yesterday, Meanwhile, Finally, Suddenly

-ing Words

Running quickly, Thinking carefully, Realising the truth

Descriptive Words

Exhausted, Surprisingly, Without warning

Prepositional Phrases

In the distance, Under the bridge, Despite the weather

5. Quick Reference Guides and Checklists

Sentence Types Quick Reference

Simple Sentences

1

One independent clause

"The cat slept peacefully."

Structure: Subject + Verb (+ Object)

Compound Sentences

2

Two independent clauses

"The cat slept peacefully, but the dog was restless."

Connectors: and, but, or, so, yet

Complex Sentences

1+

Independent + dependent clause

"When night fell, the cat slept peacefully."

Starters: when, because, although, if

Pre-Writing Sentence Planning Checklist

Before You Start Writing

☐ Understand what type of text you're writing (narrative/persuasive)

☐ Know your audience (who will read this?)

☐ Plan to use different sentence types

☐ Think of varied sentence beginnings

While You're Writing

☐ Vary your sentence lengths

☐ Check each sentence makes sense alone

☐ Use punctuation to guide your reader

☐ Connect sentences smoothly

Post-Writing Sentence Editing Checklist

Grammar Check

- ☐ Subject-verb agreement is correct
- ☐ Verb tenses are consistent
- ☐ Pronouns are clear and correct
- ☐ No sentence fragments
- ☐ No run-on sentences
- ☐ Word order makes sense

Structure Check

- ☐ Mix of simple, compound, complex sentences
- ☐ Varied sentence beginnings
- ☐ Appropriate sentence lengths
- ☐ Clear connections between sentences
- ☐ Sentences flow smoothly
- ☐ Each sentence serves a purpose

Punctuation Check

- ☐ Every sentence starts with a capital
- ☐ Every sentence ends with proper punctuation
- ☐ Commas are used correctly
- ☐ Apostrophes are correct
- ☐ Speech marks are used properly
- ☐ Proper nouns are capitalised

Sentence Starters Reference Bank

Time & Sequence

- First, Second, Finally
- Meanwhile, Afterwards
- Suddenly, Eventually
- At first, Later on
- In the beginning

Cause & Effect

- Because of this
- As a result
- Consequently
- Due to
- Therefore

Contrast & Comparison

- However, Nevertheless
- On the other hand
- In contrast
- Similarly, Likewise
- Despite this

Description & Detail

- In particular
- For example
- Most importantly
- Without doubt
- Surprisingly

6. Practice Exercises with Solutions

Practice makes perfect! These exercises are designed to reinforce your learning and help you apply the sentence structure techniques in your own writing.

1 Fix the Sentence Fragments

Instructions: Turn these fragments into complete sentences.

a) Running through the forest at night.

b) The old wooden house with broken windows.

c) After we finished our homework and had dinner.

d) Because the weather was perfect for a picnic.

e) The fastest runner in our school.

Solutions:

a) The frightened deer was running through the forest at night.

Added subject (deer) and helping verb (was)

b) The old wooden house with broken windows stood abandoned on the hill.

Added verb (stood) and additional information

c) After we finished our homework and had dinner, we watched a movie together.

Added main clause to complete the thought

d) Because the weather was perfect for a picnic, our family decided to visit the park.

Added independent clause to complete the sentence

e) The fastest runner in our school won the regional championship.

Added verb (won) and object (championship)

2 Split the Run-on Sentences

Instructions: Break these run-on sentences into clearer, shorter sentences.

a) The school excursion was fantastic and we visited the museum and saw dinosaur fossils and then we had lunch at a café and played in the park and everyone had a great time and we didn't want to go home.

b) My sister loves animals and she has three cats and two dogs and they all get along well and she feeds them every morning and takes the dogs for walks and the cats like to sleep in her bed.

Solutions:

a) The school excursion was fantastic! We visited the museum and saw incredible dinosaur fossils. Afterwards, we had lunch at a cosy café and played in the nearby park. Everyone had such a great time that we didn't want to go home.

Split into 4 clear sentences with varied lengths

b) My sister loves animals and has three cats and two dogs. Remarkably, they all get along well together. Every morning, she feeds them and takes the dogs for their daily walks. Meanwhile, the cats prefer to sleep comfortably in her bed.

Organised into logical sentence groups with connecting words

Add Sentence Variety

Instructions: Rewrite this paragraph to include varied sentence beginnings and structures.

I woke up early. I got dressed quickly. I ate breakfast. I walked to school. I met my friends. I went to class. I had a maths test. I found it difficult. I finished eventually. I felt relieved.

Solution:

Early this morning, I woke up and got dressed quickly. After eating a hurried breakfast, I walked to school where I met my friends. Once we arrived at class, I realised we had a maths test. The test was quite difficult, but I persevered and eventually finished. Relief washed over me!

Uses varied beginnings: "Early this morning," "After eating," "Once we arrived," "The test," "Relief"

4 Fix Subject-Verb Agreement

Instructions: Correct the subject-verb agreement errors in these sentences.

a) The group of students were working on their project.

b) Each of the players have their own locker.

c) The books on the shelf is covered in dust.

d) Neither the teacher nor the students was ready for the test.

Solutions:

a) The group of students was working on their project.

"Group" is singular, so use "was"

b) Each of the players has their own locker.

"Each" is always singular, so use "has"

c) The books on the shelf are covered in dust.

"Books" is plural, so use "are"

d) Neither the teacher nor the students were ready for the test.

With "neither...nor," match the verb to the nearest subject (students = plural)

5 Create Complex Sentences

Instructions: Combine these simple sentences into complex sentences using the given connecting words.

a) It started to rain. We continued our picnic. (*Use: although*)

b) Sarah studied hard. She wanted to pass the exam. (*Use: because*)

c) The concert finished. We walked home slowly. (*Use: after*)

d) You finish your homework. You can watch television. (*Use: when*)

Solutions:

a) Although it started to rain, we continued our picnic.

Dependent clause first, followed by main clause

b) Sarah studied hard because she wanted to pass the exam.

Main clause first, followed by reason clause

c) After the concert finished, we walked home slowly.

Time clause first, then main action

d) When you finish your homework, you can watch television.

Condition first, then result

7. Resources and Further Support

Additional Learning Resources

Official NAPLAN Resources

- National Assessment Program website (nap.edu.au)
- NAPLAN Writing Marking Guides
- Sample NAPLAN tests and exemplars
- State education department resources

Practice Opportunities

- Daily writing practice (10 minutes minimum)
- Reading diverse texts for sentence models
- Peer editing and feedback sessions
- Teacher conferences and support

Support Networks

Grammar Support

- Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO) writing guides
- State curriculum documents
- School library grammar resources
- Educational websites approved by teachers
- English teachers and classroom support
- School learning support coordinators
- Tutoring services if needed
- Parent and family support

Key Reminders for NAPLAN Success



Time Management

Plan 5 minutes, write
30 minutes, edit 5
minutes



Sentence Variety

Use simple,
compound, and
complex sentences for
best results



Always Edit

Check for fragments,
run-ons, and
agreement errors

Final Tips for Sentence Surgery Success

Before the Test

- Practice writing different text types (narrative and persuasive)
- Review this guide regularly
- Read quality writing to see sentence variety in action
- Complete practice exercises until techniques become automatic

During the Test

- Stay calm and follow the time allocation
- Plan your sentence variety before you start writing
- Write clearly and legibly
- Always leave time for editing and checking

Remember

- Good sentence structure serves your ideas, not the other way around

- Clarity is more important than complexity
- Every sentence should add value to your writing
- Consistent practice leads to automatic improvement

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This guide is designed to support Australian students in achieving their best possible NAPLAN writing results through improved sentence structure and control.