

Section 1

#1: Opening paragraph "It began with an empty patch of land—an unloved corner of Maple Street where weeds ruled and old bottles glimmered beneath the sun. Today, that same space bursts with colour: rows of spinach stretch beside bright marigolds, and the air hums with the buzz of bees and gentle laughter."

Strengths:

- Your opening creates a vivid before-and-after picture that immediately shows readers the transformation
- The sensory details (glimmering bottles, buzzing bees, gentle laughter) help readers visualise and hear the scene

Weak opening hook → Whilst your first sentence establishes contrast, it doesn't immediately grab attention or make readers curious about why this matters. Starting with "It began" feels quite distant and passive. Your opening would be stronger if you showed us *why* this empty patch mattered to people or what specific moment sparked the change. For example, you could begin with Hannah noticing her hungry students, then reveal the garden as the solution.

Exemplar: *"Every Monday morning, Hannah Patel watched her Year 3 students trudge into class with rumbling stomachs and tired eyes. She knew something had to change—and it all started with an abandoned corner of Maple Street."*

#2: Margaret Lee's quote and surrounding context "One volunteer, seventy-two-year-old Margaret Lee, puts it beautifully: 'I used to sit by the window and watch the days go by. Now I spend my mornings with friends, hands in the soil, heart full of joy.'"

Strengths:

- Margaret's quote is genuine and touching, showing the personal impact of the garden
- You've chosen a powerful voice that represents older community members

Underdeveloped human interest → Whilst Margaret's quote is lovely, you only give us one sentence about her before and one sentence after. Your readers don't get to know Margaret as a real person. What did her life look like before? Did she live alone? What was her first Saturday like at the garden? Adding specific details about Margaret's story would make your piece more engaging and help readers connect emotionally. Right now, she appears briefly then disappears, which makes the impact feel surface-level rather than deeply explored.

Exemplar: *"Seventy-two-year-old Margaret Lee remembers her first Saturday at the garden. Her hands shook as she planted tomato seedlings, nervous after months spent alone in her flat. 'I used to sit by the window and watch the days go by,' she says. 'Now I spend my mornings with friends, hands in the soil, heart full of joy.' Last month, she taught three children how to prune roses—skills her own grandmother taught her sixty years ago."*

#3: Sustainability paragraph "Sustainability, too, is at its core. The group has installed solar-powered irrigation systems and built compost bins from recycled timber. Their creative blend of tradition and innovation has inspired other suburbs to start similar projects."

Strengths:

- You've included concrete examples (solar irrigation, compost bins) that show rather than just tell
- You've connected the garden's success to wider community influence

Abrupt topic shift → This paragraph feels disconnected from the emotional story you've been telling. You suddenly jump from talking about friendship and community connection to technical details about solar panels and compost bins. Your piece would flow better if you explained *how* these sustainable choices connect to the people and relationships you've been describing. Did the volunteers learn these skills together? Did they disagree about which approach to use? Who built the compost bins—and why does it matter that they used recycled timber?

Exemplar: *"The garden taught the volunteers to think carefully about resources too. When water bills became too expensive, teenagers researched solar-powered irrigation and convinced the council to help fund the project. Retired carpenter Joe Martinez spent three weekends teaching others how to build compost bins from recycled timber. 'Sustainability isn't just about the environment,' Hannah explains. 'It's about building skills we can pass on.'"*

■ Your piece tells an uplifting story about community change, and your descriptive language creates clear mental pictures. However, your writing would be stronger if you explored the substance beneath the surface. Right now, your piece presents the garden's success quite simply—volunteers came together, things improved, everyone feels happy. But real community projects face challenges, disagreements, and setbacks. Additionally, you could deepen your exploration of *how* the changes actually happened. For instance, your second paragraph mentions that Hannah "noticed" students were hungry and "decided" to start a garden, but you don't show us the steps between noticing and doing. How did she convince neighbours to help? Where did the land come from? What obstacles did they face in those early weeks?

Your fourth paragraph would also benefit from more specific evidence. You mention "baskets of fresh herbs and vegetables distributed weekly to families who need them most," but you don't tell us how many families, or share a story about one family's experience. The statement about community engagement rising by 25% feels dropped in without context—what does that actually mean for real people? Furthermore, your conclusion repeats ideas from earlier paragraphs (transformation, small things changing the world) without adding new insight. Instead of restating what you've already said, your ending could look forward or suggest what readers might do next. Your piece has a solid foundation, but pushing yourself to go deeper into the "how" and "why" questions would make your writing more substantial and convincing.

Overall Score: 43/50

Section 2

~~It began with~~ [#1 The transformation started with] an empty patch of land—an unloved corner of Maple Street where weeds ruled and old bottles glimmered beneath the sun. Today, that same space bursts with colour: rows of spinach stretch beside bright marigolds, and the air hums with the buzz of bees and gentle laughter. What was once forgotten has now become the heart of a growing community—the Maple Street Community Garden.

Two years ago, local primary school teacher Hannah Patel noticed that many of her students arrived at school tired and hungry. Fresh fruit and vegetables had become luxuries for some families. One weekend, with just a few packets of seeds and the help of neighbours, she decided to change that. "We didn't plan to start a movement," she recalls with a grin. "We just wanted to grow something good."

And grow they did. What started with five volunteers now brings together over eighty residents every Saturday morning. Children plant seedlings, parents share gardening tips, and older residents finally have a reason to come outside and chat. ~~One volunteer, seventy-two-year-old Margaret Lee, puts it beautifully.~~ [#2 Seventy-two-year-old Margaret Lee, who spent most of last year alone in her flat, remembers her first nervous Saturday planting tomato seedlings with shaking hands. Now she arrives early each week, eager to share stories and skills.] "I used to sit by the window and watch the days go by [," she explains.] Now I spend my mornings with friends, hands in the soil, heart full of joy."

The visible impact is easy to see—baskets of fresh herbs and vegetables distributed weekly to families who need them most. But the hidden impact runs much deeper. The garden has sprouted friendship where there was loneliness, teamwork where there was indifference. It's become a place of learning and laughter, of shared meals and shared dreams.

~~Sustainability, too, is at its core. The group has installed solar-powered irrigation systems and built compost bins from recycled timber.~~ [#3 The volunteers have also embraced sustainability as a shared learning journey. When rising water costs threatened the garden's future, a group of teenagers researched solar-powered irrigation systems and presented their findings to the council, securing partial funding for the installation. Retired carpenter Joe Martinez then spent three weekends teaching others how to construct compost bins from recycled timber, passing on skills whilst reducing waste.] Their creative blend of tradition and innovation has inspired other suburbs to start similar projects. The local council even reports that community engagement has risen by 25% since the garden opened—a number that doesn't quite capture the warmth that blooms there each weekend.

Perhaps the most striking thing about the Maple Street Garden isn't what grows in its soil, but what grows in its people: hope, purpose, and connection. It reminds everyone that transformation doesn't always require grand budgets or sweeping reforms. Sometimes, it begins quietly—with a seed, a smile, and a willingness to dig in together.

As the sun dips low, casting golden light over the leaves, Hannah wipes the dirt from her hands and looks around proudly. "It's more than a garden," she says softly. "It's proof that small things, when nurtured, can change the world."