

SCHOLARSHIP WRITING BENCHMARK PACK™



SEE EXACTLY HOW YOUR CHILD
COMPARES TO BAND 4 VS BAND 6

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Introduction

Target: Year 4–6 students sitting private school scholarship tests (Edutest / ACER-style).

This benchmark pack provides you with authentic examples of Band 4 (competent) versus Band 6 (high scholarship level) writing responses. By comparing your child's writing to these samples, you can identify exactly what needs improvement to reach scholarship standard.

Each prompt includes:

- Clear task instructions as they appear in real tests
- Band 4 response with detailed analysis
- Band 6 response with detailed analysis
- Specific parent feedback using Star  (strength) and Arrow  (next step) format

Mini Rubric – What's "Band 4" vs "Band 6"?

Use this table before you look at the samples.

Area	Band 4 (Competent)	Band 6 (High Scholarship Level)
Ideas	On-topic, clear but a bit simple. Some support.	Insightful, specific, often original. Strong support or vivid detail.
Structure	Beginning–middle–end is there, but may wander or end abruptly. Some paragraphing.	Very clear opening and ending. Logical flow. Paragraphs used deliberately.
Sentence control	Mostly correct sentences; some repetition or clumsy phrasing.	Confident variety (short + long). Mostly error-free; rhythm and "flow".
Vocabulary & detail	Mix of basic and some interesting words. Limited sensory/detail.	Precise, powerful vocabulary. Concrete detail and/or strong imagery.
Voice & tone	Sound like "a student doing a task".	Sound like a real person with personality, confidence and control.
Technical accuracy	Occasional errors with spelling/punctuation but meaning clear.	Very few distracting errors; edits own work under time pressure.

When you read your child's piece, ask: **"Does this feel more like the Band 4 box, or the Band 6 box?"**

Prompt 1 – Persuasive / Argument

Task (20–25 minutes)

Some schools want to ban mobile phones completely. Do you agree or disagree? Write a persuasive piece to explain your opinion to the school principal.

Band 4 Response (Competent, Mid-Range)

Title: Phones Should Be Allowed (But Not All The Time)

I think phones should be allowed at school but not during class because they can be useful and also fun. Some people think phones are just a distraction but they are not always bad.

First of all, phones can be used for learning. If we are doing research in class and there are not enough laptops, we could quickly search things up on our phones. For example, if we are learning about animals we can look at pictures and videos of them. This makes learning more interesting for students.

Secondly, phones help keep us safe. If there is an emergency, we can call our parents or they can call us. Sometimes after school plans change and it is helpful to have a phone to send a message. Then we don't have to worry about not knowing where to go.

Finally, phones are fun in break time. We can listen to music or play games with our friends. This helps us relax from all the hard work in the classroom. If we are happy at school, we will want to come more and do better.

In conclusion, phones should be allowed at school but we should not use them in class unless the teacher says so. This is fair because we can still learn, be safe and have fun but the phones will not disturb the lessons.

Why this sits around Band 4

- ✓ On-topic; clear position.
- ✓ Simple, sensible reasons; basic examples.
- ✓ Clear beginning and conclusion.
- ✓ Paragraphs exist and link with "First of all / Secondly / Finally".
- ✗ Ideas are safe and generic ("phones help us learn... keep us safe... are fun").
- ✗ Vocabulary is mostly basic ("fun", "good", "interesting", "happy").
- ✗ Sentences all have similar rhythm; very little variety in openings or structure.
- ✗ No real acknowledgement of the other side beyond one brief line.

★ **Star:** "You clearly explained your opinion and gave three clear reasons. Your introduction and conclusion match nicely."

→ **Arrow:** "Next time, try to add one paragraph where you mention the problems with phones (like distraction) and then explain how your idea fixes them. That would make your argument feel stronger."

Band 6 Response (High Scholarship Level)

Title: Don't Ban Phones – Teach Us How To Use Them

Dear Principal,

Every day, we are trusted to walk to school alone, cross busy roads and solve complicated maths problems. Yet when it comes to mobile phones, some adults suddenly decide we are not responsible enough to handle them at all. I believe banning phones completely is the wrong solution to a real problem. Instead, we should learn how to use phones wisely.

Firstly, phones are not just toys; they are tools. In the future, almost every job will involve technology. If we hide phones away, we are pretending that the modern world doesn't exist. For example, in science we could use phones to record slow-motion experiments or take photos of results. In English, we could quickly check the meaning of unfamiliar words. If the teacher controls when and how we use them, phones can turn into mini-computers in our pockets instead of noisy distractions.

Secondly, phones can keep students safe and connected beyond the school gate. Many parents work long hours or commute a long way. A quick text saying "The bus is late" or "Our excursion is back at 4:15" prevents panic on both sides. Of course, schools have landlines, but during an emergency they become overloaded. Allowing phones, even if they are switched off during lessons, gives families a backup plan when something goes wrong.

Some people argue that phones cause cyberbullying and stop us from talking face-to-face. They are right to worry. However, banning phones at school does not make the internet disappear when we go home. It simply means students make mistakes without guidance. Instead of a ban, we could have clear rules: no social media during school hours, no photos without permission, and serious consequences for online bullying. Teachers already help us learn how to cross the road safely; they can also help us cross the online world safely.

Finally, a complete ban ignores the fact that self-control is a skill we have to practise. If we only behave well when a device is taken away, we haven't truly learned anything. Letting students earn phone privileges – for example, using them to listen to music quietly during independent work –

teaches us to manage temptation, not just avoid it. That is a lesson that will last much longer than any ban.

In conclusion, phones can cause problems, but a blanket ban treats technology like the enemy instead of a reality we must live with. A better solution is to set clear rules, use phones for learning and safety, and teach students to make wise choices. Please don't ban phones completely. Help us learn to use them properly.

Why this sits around Band 6

- ✓ Clear, strong thesis with nuance: not simply "phones are good", but "bans are wrong; teach wise use".
- ✓ Each paragraph has a distinct function: tools for learning, safety, counter-argument, character/values.
- ✓ Explicitly addresses the opposing view and refutes it.
- ✓ Vocabulary is precise ("blanket ban", "cyberbullying", "self-control is a skill we have to practise").
- ✓ Sentences vary in length and structure; rhetorical questions and contrast used effectively.
- ✓ Tone is appropriate for a principal: respectful but confident.

★ Star: "You didn't just list reasons – you also explained the other side's worries and showed a better solution. That's what makes this feel like high-level persuasive writing."

→ Arrow: "Next time, check if any sentences are a bit long. Reading it aloud once would help you catch one or two that you could split for extra clarity."

Prompt 2 – Narrative / Story

Task (20–25 minutes)

Write a story that begins with this sentence: "The moment I opened the door, I knew something was wrong."

Band 4 Response

The Wrong Room

The moment I opened the door, I knew something was wrong. The classroom was completely silent. Normally, everyone would be talking and laughing before the teacher arrived, but today it felt like a library. My friends were sitting at their desks and staring straight ahead.

"What's going on?" I whispered to Emma. She didn't answer. She just pointed to the front of the room. Our principal, Mr Harris, was standing there with his arms folded. He looked serious.

"Sit down, Oliver," he said in a low voice. I sat down quickly. My heart was beating fast. I thought maybe we were all in trouble even though I hadn't done anything.

Mr Harris cleared his throat. "This morning something happened at the school," he said. "Someone has painted graffiti all over the sports shed."

Everyone gasped. We all loved the sports shed because that was where all the equipment was. Now it was probably ruined.

"If anyone knows anything about this, they need to come and speak to me after class," the principal said. Then he left the room.

The teacher walked in and tried to start maths, but nobody was listening. We were all thinking about the graffiti. I wondered who had done it. Maybe

it was some kids from another school. Maybe it was high school kids trying to be funny.

At lunchtime, I went to look at the shed. There were big black letters saying "NO MORE RULES" on the wall. I felt angry that someone would damage our school.

Later that day, we found out from an email that the security cameras had caught the people who did it, and they were from another school. I was relieved it wasn't anyone from my class. Even though it was scary in the morning, in the end everything was okay.

Why this is Band 4-ish

- ✓ Clear story line; logical sequence.
- ✓ Sticks to the opening sentence and develops a simple problem (graffiti) and resolution.
- ✓ Easy to read; few technical errors.
- ✗ Tension drops quickly; the narrator is mostly watching, not involved.
- ✗ Ending is abrupt and passive ("we found out from an email...").
- ✗ Limited sensory description (what the graffiti looked like, smells, sounds).
- ✗ Little insight into characters' inner thoughts beyond "I felt angry".

 **Star:** "You created a clear sense of something being wrong in the classroom and followed it through until we found out what happened."

 **Arrow:** "To push this higher, try to put the main character into the middle of the problem. For example, what if Oliver discovered a clue or had

to decide whether to tell on someone? That would make the story more intense and memorable."

Band 6 Response

The Rule Breaker

The moment I opened the door, I knew something was wrong. The classroom didn't sound like a classroom any more; it sounded like a funeral. No chairs scraping, no pencils tapping, no whispered "What did you get for question three?" Just silence, thick and heavy, pressing against my ears.

Everyone was in their seats. Everyone except Liam. His chair sat empty, pushed neatly under his desk as if he'd evaporated. On the whiteboard, instead of our spelling list, there were three words written in red marker: NO MORE RULES.

Mrs Patel stood beside the board, arms folded so tightly her knuckles were white. She didn't yell. That was the scariest part.

"Close the door, Ava," she said quietly. "Then sit down."

As I walked to my desk, I could feel twenty-nine pairs of eyes chewing on my back. My legs felt made of rubber bands. It was ridiculous, I told myself. You didn't do anything wrong. But the sinking feeling in my stomach disagreed.

"Something happened this morning," Mrs Patel began. "Someone broke into my classroom before school and wrote this message on the board. They also wiped the homework chart and stuck chewing gum under several desks." She looked slowly around the room. "You all know our school values. This is not what they look like."

I glanced at the empty chair again. Liam. He'd been complaining about "stupid rules" since the day our phones were banned. Yesterday he'd joked about "starting a revolution". I'd laughed, because that's what you do when

your best friend makes a joke, even if a small part of you wonders whether he's serious.

At recess I found Liam behind the sports shed, kicking a stone so hard it bounced off the brick wall.

"You didn't come to roll call," I said. "Everyone's freaking out."

He shrugged without looking at me. "So what? They wanted no more phones. Now they've got no more rules."

"You wrote it?" I hissed. "Liam!"

The worst part was that he was right about one thing. I had told him about the broken camera. Last week, when we walked past the little dark bubble with the cracked glass, I'd joked that we could "get away with anything" in this hallway. I hadn't expected him to test it.

At lunch I stood in the doorway of Mrs Patel's room. She was marking books, a half-eaten sandwich resting on top of the pile.

"Yes, Ava?" she asked, looking up.

My throat felt dry. "I... I know who wrote it," I said. "I'm not happy about the phone rule either, but that doesn't mean it was okay."

I expected her to explode with questions. Instead, she simply nodded. "Thank you for telling me," she said. "Doing the right thing often feels worse at the start. That doesn't mean it isn't right."

That afternoon, Liam's chair wasn't empty any more, but the space between us was. The sentence on the whiteboard was gone, rubbed out so cleanly that not even a red shadow remained. The rules, however, were still there, tighter than ever.

I didn't know if I'd made the best choice. I only knew I'd made a choice that meant I could open the classroom door tomorrow without feeling that heavy silence again.

Why this is Band 6

- ✓ Grabs attention immediately with sensory detail ("sounded like a funeral", "silence, thick and heavy").
- ✓ Builds genuine tension around a moral dilemma (loyalty vs honesty).
- ✓ Clear character arc: Ava moves from confusion to a hard decision.
- ✓ Strong control of structure: the initial "something is wrong" is echoed at the end.
- ✓ Sophisticated vocabulary and figurative language ("twenty-nine pairs of eyes chewing on my back").
- ✓ Very few technical errors despite complex sentences.

★ **Star:** "You didn't just describe a strange day – you showed an actual choice your character had to make and how it changed the friendship. That's the kind of depth scholarship markers look for."

→ **Arrow:** "In an exam, you might trim one or two descriptive sentences to give yourself an extra minute at the end for a quick proofread."

Prompt 3 – Reflective / Personal Response

Task (20–25 minutes)

Write about a time you faced a challenge. Explain what happened and what you learned from the experience.

Band 4 Response

My Piano Exam

A time when I faced a challenge was when I did my Grade 3 piano exam. I had to learn three pieces, scales and some sight reading. It was very difficult for me because I had never done an exam before and I was very nervous.

Every afternoon my mum reminded me to practise. Sometimes I wanted to watch TV instead but she said I had to work hard if I wanted to pass. I practised the pieces many times. I often made mistakes and got frustrated. I thought I would never be ready.

On the day of the exam, we drove to the music school. I was shaking when I went into the room. The examiner was an old man with glasses. He didn't smile much. First I had to play my pieces. I made a small mistake in the middle but I kept going. Then I had to do scales and sight reading. I did my best even though my hands were sweaty.

A few weeks later, the results came in the mail. I was surprised and happy because I got a B. My mum hugged me and said she was proud.

I learned that practising is important and that even if you are scared, you can still do something. If I have another challenge in the future, I will

remember that I got through my piano exam and I can get through other things too.

Why this is Band 4-ish

- ✓ Clear sequence of events; understandable story.
- ✓ The "lesson" is stated clearly.
- ✓ Some emotional content (nervous, frustrated, happy).
- ✗ The challenge feels fairly ordinary and is described in a generic way.
- ✗ Reflection is shallow: "practising is important" is obvious and not personalised.
- ✗ Very little specific detail.
- ✗ Same sentence structure repeated often; reads like a recount, not an insightful reflection.

★ Star: "You clearly explained what happened in your exam and told me how you felt at different stages."

→ Arrow: "To make this closer to top-level, choose one or two moments and describe exactly what went through your mind. That will make your reflection feel more personal and powerful."

Band 6 Response

Learning to Fall Forward

The first time I tried to ride my new skateboard, I lasted exactly three seconds. One to push off, two to wobble, three to crash into the driveway

with all the grace of a falling wardrobe.

The board rolled away and clanged into the garage door. My knees were scraped, my palms were stinging and my pride was lying somewhere between the wheelie bin and the rose bush. I seriously considered throwing the skateboard back into its box and pretending I liked chess instead.

The problem was that I had begged for this board for months. I had watched videos of people gliding down ramps and flipping the board like it was glued to their feet. It looked effortless on YouTube. In real life, it felt like trying to balance on a bar of soap.

For the next week, I practised every afternoon. At first I only went as far as the crack in the driveway. I would roll, wobble, jump off before I fell, and drag the board back to the start. My neighbour, who is six, zoomed past me on her scooter and shouted, "Why are you walking your skateboard?" That didn't help.

One afternoon, after my tenth almost-fall, Dad came outside. "You're leaning back every time you get scared," he said. "That's why you're losing balance. Try lowering your centre of gravity and leaning slightly forward instead. It feels wrong at first, but it actually gives you more control."

I didn't like the idea of leaning towards the thing that was trying to kill me. But I tried it. I bent my knees, shifted my weight forward and pushed off. For a horrible moment the board shook under my feet. My brain screamed, Jump off! I made a different choice. I leaned into the fear.

This time, I rolled past the crack, then past the chalk line, then all the way to the end of the driveway. When I stepped off, my legs were shaking, but not just from nerves. They were shaking from the realisation that I had finally done it.

I still can't do any fancy tricks. I still fall sometimes. But that first successful ride taught me something important: often, the safest way through a challenge is not to run from it, but to lean into it. Now, when I face other hard things – a difficult maths topic, speaking in front of the class, trying for a school I'm not sure I'll get into – I remember the

skateboard. I remember that leaning forward feels scarier than leaning back, but it's the only way to move at all.

Falling is still uncomfortable. The difference is, I don't see it as proof that I should give up. I see it as part of the practice of learning to ride, and sometimes, of learning to live.

Why this is Band 6

- ✓ Vivid anecdote with sensory detail and humour ("all the grace of a falling wardrobe").
- ✓ The challenge is concrete and specific, not a vague experience.
- ✓ Reflection goes beyond obvious lessons to a transferable insight ("lean into fear").
- ✓ Strong structural echo: physical leaning forward → metaphorical leaning into challenges.
- ✓ Voice is confident and engaging; feels like a real person, not a formula.
- ✓ Technical accuracy is high, despite varied sentence structures.

★ Star: "You turned a simple story about skateboarding into a meaningful reflection that applies to exams, school and even life in general. That's exactly the sort of insight scholarship examiners look for."

→ Arrow: "In a timed exam, just watch your length—you might need to trim one description so you can still finish and do a quick edit at the end."

How Parents Can Use This Pack (In 3 Steps)

1 Pick one prompt (1, 2 or 3) and get your child to write under exam conditions (15–25 minutes, no help).

2 Put their writing next to the Band 4 and Band 6 examples for that prompt. Look at:

- Ideas & depth
- Structure & paragraphs
- Vocabulary & detail
- Sentence flow
- Reflection / insight (for persuasive & reflective pieces)

3 Decide: "Does this feel more like the Band 4 column, or closer to the Band 6 column?"

From there, you know exactly what's missing:

If it reads like Band 4 → focus on depth of idea + specificity.

If it's almost Band 6 but messy → focus on editing, trimming, and time management.

You can then bring those focus points into your own program or into structured writing classes as clear, concrete goals.

Conclusion

The difference between Band 4 and Band 6 writing isn't mysterious—it's measurable and teachable. This benchmark pack gives you the tools to:

- **Accurately assess** your child's current writing level
- **Identify specific gaps** that need attention
- **Set targeted goals** for improvement
- **Track progress** over time

Remember: Band 4 writing is perfectly competent. Many students achieve scholarship entry with solid Band 4+ work. The goal isn't perfection—it's clarity about where your child stands and what steps will make the biggest difference.

Use this pack regularly throughout your scholarship preparation. Each time your child writes to a new prompt, compare it against these benchmarks. You'll quickly see patterns in their strengths and areas for growth.

Most importantly: Focus on one improvement area at a time. Trying to fix everything at once often leads to no improvement at all. Pick the area that will give the biggest impact—usually ideas and depth for Band 4 writers, or editing and precision for near-Band 6 writers—and work systematically on that first.

Good luck with your scholarship preparation!