

The 5 Biggest Mistakes Parents Make When Preparing for Selective

And What to Do Instead

A free resource from Scholarly Training

For parents of Year 5 and Year 6 students in NSW

INSIDE THIS GUIDE:

- The 5 preparation errors we see families make every year
- Why each mistake directly costs marks on test day
- The specific fix for each (with what to do this week)
- The hidden mistake that costs more marks than all others combined
- The one question every Selective parent should ask right now

You Are Probably Making At Least One of These

Every year, thousands of families across NSW prepare for the Selective High School Placement Test. And every year, we see the same mistakes. Well-intentioned, hardworking parents doing everything they can for their child, but working on the wrong things, in the wrong way, at the wrong time.

The Selective test is different from OC. It has four components instead of three (writing is now 25%). The competition is fiercer. And the stakes feel higher. This makes the mistakes more costly.

"The families who get into James Ruse, North Sydney, and Baulkham Hills are not the ones who work hardest. They are the ones who work on the right things."

Mistake #1**Treating Writing as an Afterthought**

Writing is now worth 25% of the total Selective score. Yet most families spend less than 10% of their preparation time on it. Parents focus on reading, maths, and thinking skills because those feel more "coachable" and "measurable." Writing gets left for later. Later often means the final 2 weeks, or never.

Why This Hurts

A student who scores well across reading, maths, and thinking skills but bombs the writing section loses a full quarter of their total score. We see students miss their top-choice school by a handful of marks every year, and when we look at the breakdown, writing is almost always the weak spot they neglected.

What to Do Instead

Writing should receive at least 20-25% of total preparation time, matching its weight in the test. Your child should practise timed writing (30 minutes, one prompt) at least twice per week. Focus on argument structure, paragraph control, vocabulary precision, and staying on topic. Review and rewrite previous attempts.

Mistake #2**Over-Testing Without Targeted Skill Building**

Parents buy stacks of practice tests and have their child sit one every few days. The logic: more tests equals more practice. But practice tests measure skills. They do not build them. If your child keeps getting inference questions wrong, doing another full test does not fix the inference gap.

Why This Hurts

Test fatigue sets in. Scores plateau or decline. Confidence drops. And the underlying weaknesses remain because they were never specifically trained. By the time families realise, the test is imminent.

What to Do Instead

Use practice tests sparingly (once every 2-3 weeks) to diagnose gaps. Spend the rest of your time on targeted skill-building in the specific areas where your child is weakest. If inference is the gap, do inference exercises. If writing structure is weak, drill paragraph planning. Tests should inform practice, not replace it.

Mistake #3**Ignoring Digital Readiness**

The 2026 Selective test is fully computer-based. 155 minutes of on-screen work including reading, answering, and typing an extended writing response. Yet many families still do the bulk of their preparation on paper.

Why This Hurts

Reading on screen is slower than on paper for most students. Typing speed directly limits writing output. Scrolling between passage and questions costs time. Digital fatigue in the second half kills performance. A student who has only practised on paper will underperform on the actual test.

What to Do Instead

At least 40-50% of practice should be on screen. Your child should be comfortable reading long passages digitally, answering questions by clicking, and typing a full essay in 30 minutes. If their typing speed is slow, address that now. It directly limits their writing score.

Mistake #4**Spreading Effort Evenly Across All 4 Areas**

Most parents divide preparation time equally: 25% reading, 25% maths, 25% thinking skills, 25% writing. This feels fair. But it is inefficient. Every child has one area weaker than the others. That weak area is the constraint that limits their overall score.

Why This Hurts

A child who is strong in maths and reading but weak in writing will not improve their total score by doing more maths. They will improve it by fixing the writing gap. Equal allocation wastes preparation time on areas that are already strong enough while the real bottleneck is starved of attention.

What to Do Instead

Identify your child's weakest component (this requires a proper diagnostic, not a guess). Allocate 35-40% of practice time to that area, with the rest split among the other three. Reassess every 2-3 weeks. This targeted approach is how the top-performing families prepare.

Mistake #5**Not Managing Anxiety (Yours and Theirs)**

Selective preparation is high-stakes. Parents feel it. Children absorb it. Every practice score gets agonised over. Every bad day triggers extra sessions. The child starts associating studying with stress, and that stress follows them into the test room.

Why This Hurts

Test anxiety impairs working memory, which is the exact cognitive function all four Selective test components rely on. An anxious child on test day will score below their true ability regardless of preparation. And parental anxiety is the number one source of child test anxiety.

What to Do Instead

Separate effort from outcome. Praise process, not scores. Keep sessions focused but short (30-40 min max). If your child has a bad practice day, move on without a lecture. In the week before the test, reduce study load and do something enjoyable. A calm, confident child outperforms an anxious, exhausted one every time.

Section 6

The Pattern Behind All 5 Mistakes

All five mistakes come from the same root cause: **preparing without a clear diagnosis of where your child actually stands across all four Selective test components.**

Writing gets ignored because nobody assessed it. Tests replace training because there is no targeted plan. Digital practice gets skipped because format readiness was never evaluated. Effort gets spread evenly because the constraint has not been identified. And anxiety builds because there is no clear picture of whether the child is actually on track.

The One Question to Ask Right Now

"Do I actually know which of the four test areas is my child's biggest constraint, or am I guessing?"

If the answer is guessing, everything you do from here is a gamble.

Your Next Step

For Year 6 families, the Selective test is approaching. For Year 5 families, this is the year to build the foundation so Year 6 is not a scramble. Either way, the right starting point is the same: find out exactly where your child stands across all four test areas.

Free Selective Strategy Call

In a free 15-minute strategy call, we will:

- Discuss your child's level across reading, maths, thinking skills, and writing
- Identify whether you are making any of these 5 mistakes right now
- Pinpoint the single area that will move the needle most
- Map out a targeted plan for your specific timeline (Year 5 or Year 6)

No sales pitch. If Scholarly is the right fit, we will explain how. If not, we will tell you that too.

BOOK YOUR FREE STRATEGY CALL

Limited spots each week. Do not wait until the gaps are baked in.

SCHOLARLY TRAINING

OC | Selective | NAPLAN | Scholarship Exam Preparation

scholarlytraining.com