

# The Selective Writing Masterclass

## How Top-Scoring Students Approach the Writing Section

A free resource from Scholarly Training

For parents of Year 5 and Year 6 students in NSW

### **INSIDE THIS GUIDE:**

- Why writing is the most underestimated section (worth 25%)
- The 3 prompt types your child will face (image, quote, statement)
- The essay structure top-scoring students use
- Vocabulary techniques that impress markers
- The 5 most common writing mistakes and how to avoid them
- How to practise timed writing effectively
- Why your child's writing may be weaker than you think

# Writing Is Where the Most Marks Are Won or Lost

Writing is worth 25% of the total Selective test score. That is equal to reading, equal to maths, equal to thinking skills. Yet it is the most neglected section in most families' preparation. The reason is simple: writing feels hard to coach, hard to measure, and hard to improve quickly.

But here is what the data shows: **writing is the section with the widest score spread.** The gap between top-scoring writers and average writers is larger in writing than in any other component. This means writing is where the biggest gains are available for students who know what markers are looking for.

*"A student who moves from an average writing score to a strong one can gain more marks than improving reading, maths, and thinking skills combined."*

## The Writing Section at a Glance

- Duration: 30 minutes
- Format: 1 prompt (image, quote, or statement)
- Response: Extended writing (typically 350-500 words for top scores)
- Weight: 25% of total Selective score
- Typed on computer (typing speed matters)

## Section 1

# The 3 Prompt Types Your Child Will Face

The writing section uses one of three prompt types. Your child will not know which type they will get until test day. They need to be comfortable with all three.

### Image Prompt

A photograph, illustration, or visual scene. The student must write a response inspired by or connected to the image. This could be a narrative (story), a description, or a reflective piece. The trap: many students simply describe what they see instead of using the image as a launching point for deeper ideas.

### Quote Prompt

A short quote from a known or unknown author. The student must write a response that engages with the ideas in the quote. This could be persuasive, reflective, or narrative. The trap: students who have not practised this format often struggle to connect their writing to the quote in a meaningful way.

### Statement Prompt

A statement or opinion (e.g., "Technology makes us less connected."). The student must write a response that explores, agrees with, or challenges the statement. The trap: students who take a one-sided position without acknowledging complexity tend to score lower than those who show nuanced thinking.

### Key Takeaway

Your child should practise all three prompt types regularly. If they have a preference for one type, spend extra time on the other two. The test does not let them choose.

## Section 2

# The Essay Structure Top Students Use

Top-scoring students do not write better because they are more creative. They write better because they use a clear, repeatable structure that organises their ideas and makes them easy for markers to follow.

### Opening (2-3 sentences)

Hook the reader with a vivid image, a question, or a bold statement. Establish the direction of your piece. Do NOT start with "I think..." or "This essay is about...". Top openers are specific and engaging.

### Body Paragraph 1 (5-7 sentences)

Your strongest idea or argument. Use a clear topic sentence, supporting detail or evidence, and a specific example. Show, do not just tell. Use sensory language for narratives or logical reasoning for persuasive pieces.

### Body Paragraph 2 (5-7 sentences)

Your second idea, a different perspective, or a development of the first paragraph. This is where nuance matters. The best writers show complexity: they acknowledge the other side, introduce a complication, or shift the lens.

### Closing (2-3 sentences)

Circle back to your opening. Do NOT simply repeat your thesis. The best closings leave the reader thinking. End with a resonant image, a provocative question, or a statement that reframes the entire piece.

### Section 3

## Vocabulary Techniques That Impress Markers

Markers are reading hundreds of responses. The students who stand out use precise, varied vocabulary that is appropriate to the context. Here is what works and what does not:

#### What works:

- Precise verbs: "murmured" instead of "said quietly", "sprinted" instead of "ran fast"
- Sensory language: sight, sound, touch, smell (for narratives)
- Connectives that show reasoning: "consequently", "despite this", "whereas"
- Vocabulary that matches the tone: formal for persuasive, descriptive for narrative

#### What does not work:

- Thesaurus words used incorrectly ("the boy was very pulchritudinous")
- Overuse of adjectives: stacking 3 adjectives before every noun signals weak writing
- Cliches: "as cold as ice", "at the end of the day", "in this day and age"

## The 5 Most Common Writing Mistakes

### 1. Spending too long planning and running out of writing time

Limit planning to 3-4 minutes maximum. A brief dot-point plan is enough. The marks are in the writing, not the plan.

### 2. Writing a retell instead of a response (for image prompts)

Markers want original thinking, not a description of the picture. Use the image as a starting point, then go deeper.

### 3. No clear paragraph structure

A wall of unbroken text signals an undisciplined writer. Use 3-4 clear paragraphs with distinct ideas in each.

### 4. Starting every sentence the same way

"I think... I believe... I feel..." Vary your sentence openings. Start with adverbs, prepositional phrases, or dependent clauses.

### 5. Not finishing

An incomplete response with no conclusion scores significantly lower. If time is short, write a 1-sentence closing. A finished piece always scores higher than an unfinished one.

## Section 4

# Why Your Child's Writing May Be Weaker Than You Think

This guide gives you the framework: the structure, the techniques, the mistakes to avoid. But writing is the one Selective test component that is nearly impossible to assess at home.

Parents can check maths answers. They can score a reading comprehension test. They can even evaluate thinking skills responses. But assessing writing quality requires expertise. Is the vocabulary genuinely sophisticated or just showy? Is the argument structure clear to a marker, or only to the child? Is the response engaging, or just competent?

### **The Writing Blind Spot**

Most parents cannot tell the difference between a Band 4 and a Band 6 Selective writing response. This means they cannot tell whether their child's writing is competitive or not. And if they cannot tell, they cannot target the specific improvements that would make the biggest difference.

This is why writing is the section where expert assessment has the highest impact. A trained eye can identify in 5 minutes what a parent might miss for months.

## Your Next Step

You now understand what the Selective writing section demands, how top students structure their responses, and the most common mistakes. But the critical question remains: is YOUR child's writing Selective-competitive?

Writing is 25% of the total score. If it is your child's hidden weakness, every other area of preparation is working against a ceiling. Fixing writing may be the single highest-impact thing you can do.

### Free Selective Strategy Call

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

- Discuss your child's current writing level and overall Selective readiness
- Identify whether writing is the hidden constraint in their preparation
- Recommend specific, targeted improvements for maximum score impact
- Map out a preparation 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. Writing is 25% of the score. Do not leave it to chance.*

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