# NAPLAN Writing Strategies - Narrative

Here is a basic formula for successful NAPLAN narratives. Following, there is a table with suggestions for 'value adding' to aim for higher scores.

The 'swoosh' narrative

Rules:

- Your story has only four sections
- Your story has two or three characters
- Stick to Aristotle's 'three unities': explore just a single time, place and action
- Your protagonist must grow or change because of some catalyst (this catalyst can be a character or an event)
- You don't need a resolution, but one should be implied (the reader should be able to anticipate how the story will end)

4. Climactic Resolution

1. Inciting incident

3. Rising action
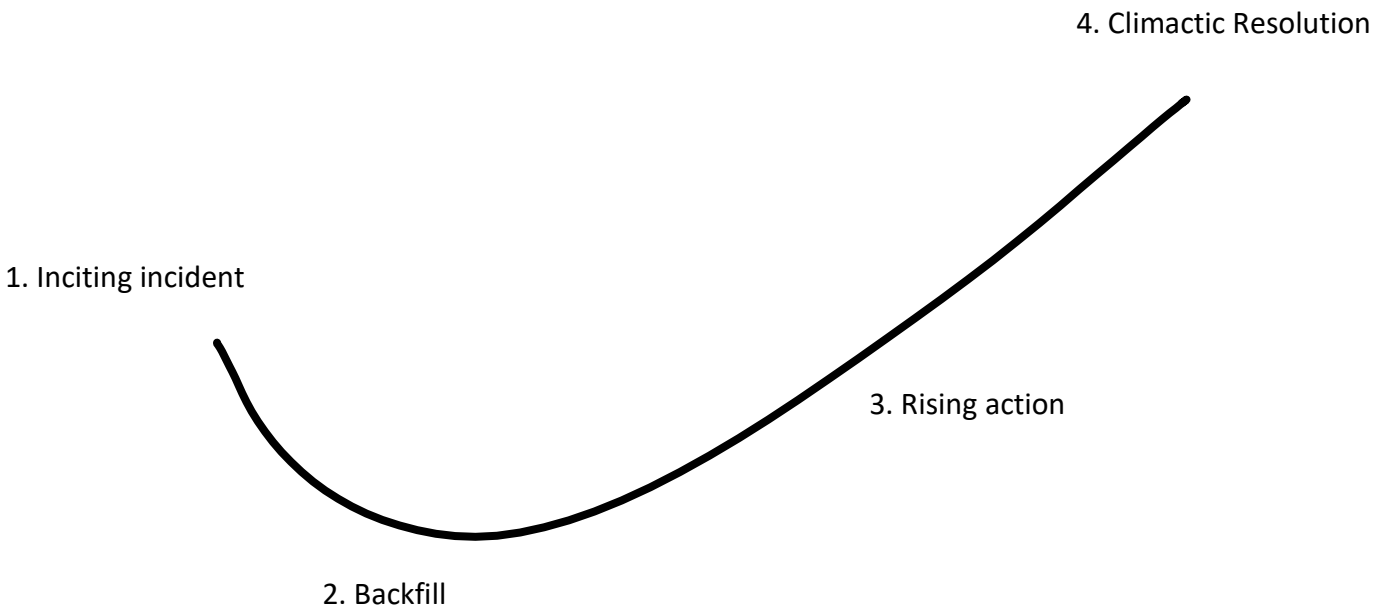
2. Backfill

1. Inciting incident: start *in media res*, in the middle of action, to grip your reader's attention and engage them
2. Backfill: with careful signposting, provide the back story as to how the characters arrived in this situation
3. Rising action: build tension, progress the plot towards the climax
4. Climactic resolution: finish at a high point of tension, but one where the reader can imagine how the rest of the story plays out

Example 1

4. The other driver approaches. John stands up, enraged. The driver is shadowed by their car's rear lights, indistinct. They get closer. John steps forward towards the driver, fists clenched. They reach the light from the streetlamp....
Play around with who the driver might be.

1. Open with the sound of approaching sirens and the stench of petrol in the air. John is cradling his wife Lucy by the side of the road after a car accident. She is begging him not to leave her.

3. Lucy starts greying out. John is shaking her, frantic. He reminds her of their life together, reminiscing over past joys, future plans they had made etc. Then she goes limp. A car door slams.

2. Earlier, they were arguing in the car on their way home from a family dinner. They were speeding angrily along the dark or wet roads. Play with audience sympathies by considering who was driving, who was yelling and what the argument was over.

Example 2

4. There is an aggressive banging at the door. Callum and his mother look at each other. She goes to the door and opens it to find soldiers in combat uniforms standing on the other side.

1. Open with the sound of gunfire and voices yelling military commands. Callum eyes an enemy soldier, getting him in his laser sights. He pulls the trigger and the soldier drops to the ground.

3. Grumbling, Callum turns down the volume and returns to his game. A phone rings, snatches of one-sided conversation are heard. Mum's voice becomes increasingly concerned. Callum flicks her a couple of looks but continues playing. Mum puts down the phone and makes him turn off the game, switching on the TV instead. News flash: civil war (or some other conflict) has broken out.

2. Callum calls out in excitement. A voice – his mother - asks him to turn it down. We realise he is playing a video game in the living room of his home.

Value adding

These tips come from the descriptors for the top of the range for each criterion in NAPLAN Narrative Marking Guide.

Criteria	Tips	Examples
Audience	• Aim for an audience who are not your peers • Have an ending that surprises or subverts expectations of the genre • Aim to make an emotional impact on your reader – decide at the beginning how you want your reader to feel and select language that provokes that reaction	• Write a story to interest your older sibling • Put a twist in the tail of your tale • Try to make your reader feel tense and anxious, sad and sympathetic, warm and fuzzy, or amused and happy
Text Structure	• The 'swoosh' structure manipulates time, avoiding a purely linear structure • Even if you don't use it, incorporate foreshadowing or flashbacks to reveal details • Experiment with cliff-hanger endings (see example 2 above) but make sure the reader can reasonably assume what will happen next • Experiment with different plot structures – parallel or circular (can be difficult in the short time frame though)	• Use flashback to show your character got into this situation, or to reveal a past secret • Finish on a cliff-hanger – have an ending where your character faces something surprising or unexpected
Ideas	• Identify a clear theme that you want your reader to come away with before you start writing • Make sure your theme stems from the stimulus! • Add a twist or development to your theme to take it beyond cliché to something original • Make sure your idea or theme is apparent to the reader – but never just state it directly!	• Start with a well-known theme (e.g. the importance of friends) but add a twist to make it your own (the main character is a runaway and the best friend is a stray dog) • Make your theme the same lesson your protagonist learns
Character and Setting	• Use sensory imagery to establish a sense of place – and the create a particular atmosphere • Show, don't tell – reveal character through actions and others' reactions • Include correctly punctuated dialogue to add character details • Include character thoughts and feelings • Make sure your character grows or learns as a result of their experience • Don't forget to reveal who your narrator is – especially in first person narratives	• Think about the feel of your story – dark and scary, quiet and dreamy, fast-paced and exciting – and choose a setting to match • Use scent and sound as well as visual details • If you're character is angry, don't use the word angry – show their anger through them *stomping* around the house, *snapping* at other characters and silently *fuming*.
Vocabulary	• Use figurative language – but sparingly and avoiding cliché • Add descriptive detail with interesting verbs and nouns, not just loading up on adjectives and adverbs • Create unique voices in dialogue	• Aim for two or three well-thought out similes or metaphors – but no more! • Personification can be a better option • Avoid clichés such as 'it was as hot as an oven' in favour of originality – 'it felt like the desert sun was roasting his eyeballs on a spit'
Cohesion	• Use appropriate connectives and transition markers • Avoid repetition of words – use synonyms • Proofread to catch accidental shifts in tense	• Use clear connections and transition markers such as meanwhile, earlier, later on, just as, even though etc. • Use synonyms – if your story features a threatening dog, use words like beast, monster, canine, Alsatian or other breed), vicious bag of drool and teeth
Paragraphing	• Proofread to ensure there is a new paragraph for each shift in speaker, time, place, event or idea • Use a couple of one sentence paragraphs to create dramatic effect – but only one or two!	• Use a single sentence as a concluding paragraph – great for cliff-hangers or a character's final thought! o *It was then Lee realised he was never making it home.*

			o *'Dad?' Meg breathed. 'Is that you?'*
Sentence structure	- Aim for a balance of simple, compound and complex sentences - Use phrases to add in occasional extra bits of detail – and use commas to mark these in your sentence - Avoid overuse of 'and' and 'then' - Practise shifting clauses around in complex sentences to give emphasis to particular details		- Swap phrases or clauses around for effect: *Bindi realised there was nowhere left to run as she heard a twig snap behind.* *There was nowhere left to run, Bindi realised, as she heard a twig snap behind her.* *As she heard a twig snap behind her, Bindi realised there was nowhere left to run.*
Punctuation	- Punctuate dialogue correctly - Avoid overusing exclamation marks - Aim for two or three examples of complex punctuation (brackets, dashes, semicolons, ellipses etc.) but don't overuse any single one! - Proofread to avoid comma splicing		- Use dashes instead of commas to draw attention to an important or interesting detail: *Art realised with dismay he was going to have to share his tent with the shaggy dog – and his fleas!*
Spelling	- Use 10+ difficult words - Use a few challenging words - Proofread to check spelling, particularly of simple and common words		- Swap in some difficult or challenging words during the editing stage: 'being watched' to 'under surveillance' 'very cold' to 'brutally cold' 'yes, sir!' to 'yes, Lieutenant!'

The importance of the Writing Process

So much of these 'value-adding' tips arise from careful attention to the writing process:

- Planning
- Drafting
- Editing

When **planning**:

- Determine audience
- Determine purpose
    - Emotional response you want from the reader
    - The theme and ideas you want to share with the reader
- Plan the overall structure (the 'swoosh' or other structure)

When **drafting**:

- Remember to start with an engaging opening scene
- Remember to establish character, setting and inciting incident in the exposition
- Remember to paragraph
- Remember to add detail

When **editing**:

- Check spelling, punctuation and grammar
- Substitute more complex or nuanced words and sentence structures
- Check text connectives for cohesion
- Identify opportunities for additional detail

Finally, **practise** writing narratives in timed conditions and seek **feedback**!