SMART

Year 4 writing exemplars

Te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga
Ministry of Education

Introduction

These exemplars and the accompanying feedback are written using the year-level prompt for assessment window 1. Each exemplar illustrates the level of writing quality for this year-level that would achieve the assigned scores; all scores were produced by SMART's Vantage scoring system.

There are five writing exemplars in this set, with total scores ranging from the highest scoring at 26/30 to the lowest scoring at 5/30. Across the exemplars, most individual scores from 1 to 6 for each criterion in the rubric are covered. The rubric is available here: Writing to Persuade Rubric

The writing samples are intended to show a range of student achievement and at this stage they are not equated with curriculum expectations. This is a process that will take place after assessment window 1 closes, and at that point raw scores and exemplars at each year-level will be linked to progress descriptors.

For ease of use we have provided the writing progress marker from the Reporting to Parents Guidelines on this page. Use the writing progress marker information as your guide to curriculum expectations for this year-level; it outlines what students who are **proficient** in writing are expected to be able to do by the end of the year.

These exemplars, scores, and accompanying feedback can be used to support teachers to:

- mark any pieces of writing that SMART cannot (e.g. pieces that are too short). Find the exemplars that most closely match the student's piece of writing to inform your scoring decisions
- confirm or change the AI-scoring for students' pieces of writing. Find the exemplars that most closely match the AI-assisted scoring for a student's piece of writing to determine whether the scores can be confirmed or need adjustments.

Note that the writing samples and the accompanying feedback have been produced with the assistance of AI. They will be updated later in the year, to incorporate information from the standard setting, scaling and equating processes, which will make explicit how the exemplars align with curriculum expectations.

Year 4 — Adopt a Zoo or Sanctuary Animal

Year 4 prompt

Zoos and wildlife sanctuaries often have programmes that allow people to "adopt" one of their animals. When you "adopt" an animal you give money to help with its care. What type of animal would you adopt if you had this opportunity? Write a letter to the principal of your school persuading them to adopt your choice of animal for the school.

Remember to:

- explain why you chose that animal
- persuade them how adopting an animal will be good for the school
- provide reasons that support your opinion

Year 4 writing progress marker

By the end of Year 4, students who are **proficient** in writing, can:

- spell many multisyllabic words with long vowels and common affixes correctly
- plan and write with a clear audience in mind, selecting appropriate text types and vocabulary suited to the purpose of their writing
- write non-fiction paragraphs that include a topic sentence, supporting detail sentences, and a concluding sentence
- write narratives that introduce characters and a setting followed by a clear sequence of events.

Score 5 and 6 Exemplar, Year 4: total score 26/30

Te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga
Ministry of Education

Feedback for Score 5 and 6 Exemplar, Year 4

Audience and Purpose [6/6]

Thorough and insightful. Principal addressed by name throughout and formal register maintained. Position established clearly and sustained. Response provides specific cost figures, a fundraising plan, and symbolic justification for the animal choice.

Content Development/Elaboration [5/6]

Three fully elaborated reasons: kaitiakitanga linked to specific school programmes; cross-curriculum integration with four subjects named specifically; school identity and community pride with supporting example. Counterargument addresses three distinct objections (cost with exact figures and fundraising plan, sustained engagement with Zealandia programme explanation, animal choice with symbolic argument).

Dear Mr Ngapo,

I am writing on behalf of Room 9 to ask whether our school could adopt a kiwi through the Zealandia wildlife sanctuary adoption programme. This is not just a fun idea. It is one that connects directly to our school's values, to our curriculum, and to the wider Mahia School community. I have three strong reasons to share with you, and I would also like to address the concerns you may have.

The first reason is that adopting a kiwi aligns perfectly with our school's commitment to kaitiakitanga. The kiwi is a taonga species and our national bird. It is endangered, and without programmes like the one at Zealandia, kiwi could disappear entirely from Aotearoa. By choosing to adopt one, Mahia School would be making a visible, meaningful statement that we take our responsibilities as guardians of the natural world seriously. This fits directly with our enviro programme and with the values we already practise in our school garden and our sustainability projects.

The second reason is that the adoption would create outstanding, real-world learning opportunities across multiple curriculum areas. The Zealandia programme sends participating schools regular updates about their adopted bird throughout the year. We could use these updates as rich texts for reading and writing activities, create population graphs in maths, explore kiwi biology in science, and investigate the role of the kiwi in te ao Māori in social studies. Learning that is connected to something living and local is always more engaging and more memorable than learning from a textbook alone.

The third reason is that adopting a kiwi would build a powerful sense of shared identity and pride across our whole school community. When students, whanau, and visitors to Mahia School know that we are actively helping to save New Zealand's national bird, it creates a sense of common purpose that extends beyond the classroom. Other schools with animal adoptions have reported that it becomes one of the things their school is known and admired for in their community.

I know you may have some concerns, and I would like to address them directly. The first is cost. The Zealandia kiwi adoption programme costs approximately $75 per year. That is less than $1.50 per student in our class. We have already planned a sausage sizzle for the next school event which we estimate could raise $120, more than enough for the first year and part of the second. You may also wonder whether students will stay engaged after the initial excitement fades. Zealandia sends updates, photos, and invitations to special sanctuary events throughout the year, which means the connection is renewed regularly rather than being a one-off experience. Finally, if you are wondering why a kiwi rather than another animal, the answer is that no other animal connects te reo Māori, conservation science, and our national identity as powerfully as the kiwi does.

We are confident this would be one of the best decisions our school makes this year, Mr Ngapo. Room 9 is fully committed to caring for our kiwi with pride and dedication.

Ngā mihi nui from all of us.

Structure [5/6]

Cohesive and unified. Strong opening that frames the request as value-based rather than merely personal. Three body paragraphs each with a clear claim. Dedicated counterargument paragraph. Confident conclusion with collective commitment.

Language Use, Choice, and Style [5/6]

Precise and audience-aware. Te reo Māori used naturally (kaitiakitanga, taonga, Aotearoa, te ao Māori, whanau, nga mihi nui). Complex sentences used purposefully. Persuasive framing consistent ('This is not just a fun idea').

Writing Conventions, Grammar, Punctuation, and Spelling [5/6]

Grammar, punctuation and spelling all correct.

Score 4 Exemplar, Year 4: total score 20/30

Te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga
Ministry of Education

Feedback for Score 4 Exemplar, Year 4

Audience and Purpose [4/6]

The letter clearly addresses the principal and keeps the persuasive purpose in view throughout. The response explains why the school should choose this animal rather than simply saying that it is nice or interesting. The closing request is clear and helps the letter feel complete.

Content Development/Elaboration [4/6]

The writer gives relevant and effective reasons, including helping a real animal, learning about its habitat and food, and involving the whole school through posters and fundraising. These ideas are well connected to the task and make the response feel purposeful. The development is strong, though less layered and detailed than needed to get a higher score.

Dear Principal,

I think our school should adopt a kororā, or little penguin. I chose this animal because it is from New Zealand, it needs help, and it would be something special for our school to support.

Adopting a kororā would be a good idea because the money would help care for it. That means our school would be helping a real animal, not just learning about one in class. We could find out where kororā live, what they eat, and why they need safe places to stay. I think that would make learning about animals much more interesting because we would know our school was making a difference.

It would also be good for our school because everyone could join in. Classes could make posters, write facts, or help with a fundraiser. We could also hear updates about the kororā and learn how our support is helping. That would make the project feel important for the whole school and not just one class.

Some people might think we should choose a bigger or more famous animal. I can understand that, because some animals seem more exciting at first. But I think a kororā is the better choice because it connects to New Zealand and gives us a chance to learn about protecting a native animal that really needs help.

Please think about choosing a kororā for our school to adopt. I believe it would be a very good choice because it would help an animal and also give our school something meaningful to learn about together.

Yours sincerely,

Mila T.
Room 8

Structure [4/6]

The structure is clear and effective. The writer begins with the chosen animal and the overall case for it, then develops the care and learning benefit, then adds the whole-school value, before ending with a firm conclusion. The order of ideas supports the argument well. The response is organised and easy to follow.

Language Use, Choice, and Style [4/6]

The language is appropriate, controlled, and persuasive. The tone stays respectful and school-appropriate. The voice is steady and purposeful.

Writing Conventions, Grammar, Punctuation, and Spelling [4/6]

The response shows effective control of conventions. Grammar and punctuation are mostly secure, and spelling does not interfere with the message. Paragraphing supports readability and helps shape the argument. The letter reads clearly from beginning to end.

Score 3 Exemplar, Year 4: total score 16/30

Te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga
Ministry of Education

Feedback for Score 3 Exemplar, Year 4

Audience and Purpose [3/6]

The letter clearly understands that the audience is the principal and that the purpose is to persuade the school to adopt this animal. The position is clear from the beginning and stays consistent throughout the letter. The writer does not simply ask for a penguin; they explain why a kororā is the right kind of school project. The ending returns clearly to the main request and makes the response feel complete and purposeful. Sentences are varied, well formed, and used confidently to support the persuasive purpose.

Content Development/Elaboration [3/6]

The support is thoughtful and practical for a Year 4 student. The writer explains how adoption money would help with food, shelter, and care, then connects that to student learning. The details about nesting places, posters, fundraising, and assembly updates make the letter feel believable and grounded. The content is not just informative; it is consistently tied back to why this would benefit the school. Sentences extend the ideas clearly and make the argument convincing.

Dear Principal,

I would like our school to adopt a kororā, which is a little penguin. I chose this animal because it is special to New Zealand, it needs help and protection, and it would give our school a meaningful project to care about together.

Adopting a kororā would be good for the school because the money would help pay for its food, shelter, and care. That means our school would be doing something real to help an animal instead of only reading about wildlife. We could learn where kororā live, what they eat, and why they need safe places to nest. That would make our learning more interesting because we would be helping a real animal at the same time.

A kororā would also bring the school together. Different classes could make posters, write facts, or help with fundraising. We could even share updates in assembly so everyone knows how our adopted animal is doing. Please choose a kororā for our school because it would help a native animal and also help our whole school learn and care more.

Yours sincerely,

Ava N.
Room 8

Structure [3/6]

The structure is cohesive and well-shaped. The letter begins with the chosen animal and the main reason for choosing it, then develops the care and learning benefit, then adds a whole-school community reason, before ending with a direct request. This gives the response a clear persuasive arc rather than just a list of reasons. Each paragraph has a clear job, and the sign-off strengthens the sense of a finished school letter. Sentences connect smoothly and support the logical progression of ideas.

Language Use, Choice, and Style [4/6]

The language is precise for a Year 4 student. Words such as “meaningful,” “protection,” “native,” and “fundraising” lift the quality. The tone stays respectful and persuasive throughout. The writer’s voice sounds sincere and purposeful. Sentences are well structured and varied enough to keep the writing lively and controlled.

Writing Conventions, Grammar, Punctuation, and Spelling [3/6]

The response demonstrates effective control of conventions for this year-level. Sentence boundaries are secure, punctuation is used correctly, and spelling appears strong even in more demanding words. The grammar supports meaning throughout and nothing distracts the reader. Sentences are correctly structured and support easy reading throughout.

Score 2 Exemplar, Year 4: total score 10/30

Te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga
Ministry of Education

Feedback for Score 2 Exemplar, Year 4

Audience and Purpose [2/6]

The letter shows a basic understanding that the writer is trying to persuade the principal. The opinion is clear and mostly stays aligned to the task. The closing request helps the purpose remain visible, and the sign-off makes the piece feel complete as a letter. However, the persuasion is still fairly simple and depends a lot on repeated statements that the animal is "good" or "special." Some sentences are correctly structured, although sentence control is not yet fully consistent.

Content Development/ Elaboration [2/6]

The response includes relevant reasons such as helping the animal, learning about it, and making posters. That gives the piece enough support to move beyond a bare opinion. Still, the ideas are not deeply developed and the explanation often stays general. The support remains basic and does not give as much practical detail or extension as the higher bands. Sentences add some detail, though more elaboration is needed.

Dear Principal,

I think our school should adopt a kororā. It is a good animal because it is from New Zealand and it is special. I think it would be nice for the school and students could learn about it.

If we adopt one, the money can help look after it. That means it can get food and care. We could learn about the kororā in class and maybe make posters. It would be good to know our school is helping an animal.

Please pick a kororā for our school because it will help the animal and help students learn too. I think it is a good choice for the school.

From,

Wiremu
Room 8

Structure [2/6]

The writing has an introduction, body, and ending, which is a strength at this level. The ideas move in a rough logical order, and the ending plus sign-off help complete the letter form. However, the internal structure is still fairly simple, and the piece reads more like short grouped reasons than a strongly shaped persuasive letter. The linking between ideas is limited, though the overall piece remains readable and complete.

Language Use, Choice, and Style [2/6]

The language is understandable and suitable for the audience. The writer uses simple persuasive wording and some audience awareness, but the voice is not yet very strong. Expressions such as "good animal" and "special" fit the year-level, though they are not especially precise. Sentence patterns repeat and would benefit from more variety and stronger word choice.

Writing Conventions, Grammar, Punctuation, and Spelling [2/6]

There is growing control of conventions. Most of the writing can be followed clearly, and the overall meaning is clear. However, the control is less steady than where longer sentences carry simple repeated ideas. A few simple sentences are correctly structured, although sentence control is not yet fully consistent.

Score 1 Exemplar, Year 4: total score 5/30

Te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga
Ministry of Education

Feedback for Score 1 Exemplar, Year 4

Audience and Purpose [1/6]

The response only partly addresses the task. It suggests an animal and seems to lean toward a penguin, but the position is not clearly or strongly established or maintained. The writing reads more like a stream of thoughts than a shaped persuasive letter to the principal. There is no proper ending or organised closing, and the sense of audience is weak beyond naming the principal at the start. Communication of purpose is limited and incomplete.

Content Development/Elaboration [1/6]

A few relevant ideas appear, such as the animal being small, school being more interesting with animals, and money helping with care. However, these ideas are only touched on briefly and not properly developed. Some parts are vague or uncertain, such as “i dont realy know all the zoo part,” which weakens the task response further. The content feels scattered and preference-based rather than like a built argument. The reader can see bits of relevance, but the writing does not shape them into a clear case.

Dear Principal i am writing about the zoo animal and i think maybe a pengin one because they are cute and little and i seen one on tv and it was wobbling and funny and the school could maybe have that one for the adopt thing because animals are nice and children like animals and when there is animals it is more intresting then just normal class all the time and also i like birds but maybe not a big one because that is differant and to much and i dont realy know all the zoo part but if it is money for it then maybe that helps and maybe it can have fish and water and things and the school can do posters and maybe just have one because that sounds good and i think kids would like it and that is why im saying about it from Tom room 8

Structure [1/6]

This response does not use paragraphing. It reads as one long stream of writing, and the ideas are mixed without clear organisation. There is no real shaping into beginning, middle, and ending. The lack of structure significantly weakens clarity and makes the letter hard to follow.

Language Use, Choice, and Style [1/6]

The language is simple, repetitive, and weakly controlled. There are noticeable spelling and word choice issues such as “pengin,” “intresting,” “differant,” and “realy,” and there are also places where uncertainty weakens the writing. The tone is inconsistent and does not sound carefully shaped for the principal. The run-on style makes the voice feel unstructured and underdeveloped. Overall, the language control is very limited.

Writing Conventions, Grammar, Punctuation, and Spelling [1/6]

Errors significantly interfere with communication. There are major sentence-boundary problems, missing punctuation, inconsistent capitalisation, spelling problems, and weak grammar throughout. The reader can still work out parts of the meaning, but it takes effort, and some parts remain unclear.