SMART

Year 8 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 six writing exemplars in this set, with total scores ranging from the highest scoring at 27/30 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 8 — Extend the School Day

Year 8 writing progress marker

By the end of Year 8, students who are **proficient** in writing, can:

- confidently express and record their ideas using both handwriting and keyboarding, demonstrating mostly accurate spelling and correct use of a range of punctuation
- write multi-paragraph texts that deliberately combine modes and text types to suit the purpose
- when writing to entertain, sequence events, thoughts, or experiences clearly, signal shifts between settings or ideas, and conclude with a resolution or sense of closure that follows logically from the rest of the text
- when writing to inform, clearly introduce the topic, provide a preview of what will be covered, and organise ideas and information logically within and across paragraphs, using carefully selected and varied transition words and phrases
- write concluding paragraphs highlighting the most important points
- when writing to persuade, introduce a preferred position, acknowledge alternative or opposing views, support their position with logical reasoning and relevant evidence, and conclude by restating their position.

Year 8 writing prompt

The school board plans to add one and a half hours to school each day. Do you agree or disagree with extending the school day?

Student representatives have the opportunity to speak to the school board and persuade them of the students' position.

Write a speech to persuade the school board to accept your position.

Remember to include reasons and examples.

Score 5 and 6 Exemplar, Year 8: total score 27/30

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Feedback for Score 5 and 6 Exemplar, Year 8

Audience and Purpose [6/6]

The speech is written clearly for a school board with appropriate formal register maintained throughout. The opening begins with a rhetorical hook before moving to a research-grounded position statement. The position is precise and sustained. All parts of the task are completed. The speech also references research into extended school programmes and offers a constructive alternative ('not more hours but better conditions').

Content Development/Elaboration [5/6]

Three developed arguments are included in the response: the learning-quality argument (concentration decline, retention research, the false equation of time with learning); the recovery argument (attention, mood, physical activity, unstructured time — research referenced); and the broader cost argument (sport, family, part-time work, kapa haka — specific commitments named). The counterargument paragraph acknowledges the board's achievement concern as legitimate before arguing that extended hours create new problems.

Tēnā koutou, members of the school board.

Rest — the time when our bodies and brains can process everything from the day, recover, and prepare for the next. But are students at Rangimarie School getting enough of it? Students at our year level need on average eight to ten hours of rest each night to function as efficiently as possible. Unfortunately, the demands already placed on us by our current school day put many of us in conflict with those requirements. Based on what research tells us about how students learn and recover, this school board should not extend the school day. A longer school day, without equivalent changes to what happens outside of school, will reduce the quality of student learning, not improve it.

Students who struggle to keep up at the end of a school day are not lazy or unmotivated. Research has consistently shown that concentration and memory retention decline significantly after sustained periods of mental effort. By the time our current school day ends, many students are already running on very low reserves of focus and energy. Adding ninety minutes to that point does not add ninety minutes of effective learning. Research into extended school programmes has found that the final hours of a longer school day produce significantly lower rates of information retention than the earlier hours. The idea that more time in class automatically means more learning is not supported by the evidence.

Rest and recovery matter enormously for the success of students. Not getting enough downtime affects students' abilities to pay attention, to regulate their mood, to communicate with peers and teachers, and to retain what they have been taught. In some learning contexts, students who have adequate recovery time between sessions perform measurably better on assessments than those who do not. Research has also shown that physical activity, meals with family, and unstructured time are important in consolidating new learning. Extending the school day reduces access to all of these things, and the recommendations from learning scientists are clear: structured downtime and recovery are not optional extras. They are part of what makes learning stick.

Some schools have tried extending their days and found that the results were more complicated than expected. While more time in school can help in specific, targeted circumstances, broad extensions without changes to pedagogy, support, and student wellbeing infrastructure have rarely produced the academic gains that were promised. At Rangimarie School, what students need is not more hours but better conditions within the hours we already have. The complications of extending the school day, including the impact on after-school sport, family time, part-time work, and community commitments, are significant. These complications do not measure up against the limited learning advantages that a longer day actually delivers.

I know that the board has concerns about student achievement, and I take those concerns seriously. They are the right concerns to have. But the answer to improving achievement is not simply to add time. There are a few real obstacles that come with extending the school day, and most of them are significant rather than trivial. Sport training, kapa haka, part-time work, and family responsibilities all happen after school, and for many students at this school, those commitments are not optional. Studies of schools that have changed their daily schedules have found that the disruption to these commitments creates new stresses that can actually make learning harder, not easier. The complications of extending the school day do not measure up against the genuine learning advantages of protecting student recovery time.

On behalf of the students of Rangimarie School: please vote against this proposal. Protect our time to recover, to move, to be with our families, and to rest. That time is not wasted time. It is the time that makes the time in school worth something. Ngā mihi

Structure [5/6]

The response has a cohesive and unified speech structure. It includes a rhetorical hook opening, three elaborated argument paragraphs, a counterargument paragraph, and a direct concluding appeal with a call to action. Oral signposting is present ('Based on what research tells us,' 'Some schools have tried,' 'I know that the board').

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

The language is precise and rhetorically controlled. The opening hook begins with a statement about the core concept before pivoting to the argument. Sentence variety is strong. The closing appeal is direct and memorable. The register is formal and appropriate for a Year 8 student addressing a school board.

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

Near-perfect accuracy is sustained throughout. No errors interfere with communication.

Score 4 and 5 Exemplar, Year 8: total score 24/30

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Feedback for Score 4 and 5 Exemplar, Year 8

Audience and Purpose [5/6]

Opens by accepting the board's goal and then repositioning the argument on shared ground. Formal board register maintained throughout. Response introduces equity as a distinct dimension, referencing Finland, and challenges the quality-vs-quantity assumption with a specific example.

Content Development/Elaboration [5/6]

Three main arguments are given in the response: learning quality vs. quantity (Finland reference, concentration evidence); specific after-school commitments at stake (siblings, work, kapa haka, faith communities named); and equity impact on vulnerable students (logistical and financial hardship specified). The counterargument paragraph accepts the board's pressure before arguing extended hours is the wrong response and offers a constructive alternative framing.

Tēnā koutou, members of the school board.

My name is Matiu Hapai, and I am a Year 8 student at Rangimarie School. I am speaking today on behalf of my fellow students to argue against the proposal to extend our school day by ninety minutes. I want to start by saying that I genuinely understand why this proposal has been made. We all want students at this school to achieve to the very best of their ability, and I share that goal completely. But I also need to tell you, as clearly and as respectfully as I can, that extending the school day will not deliver what this proposal promises. Let me explain why.

The core assumption behind this proposal is that more time in the classroom equals more learning. That assumption is not supported by evidence. Consider Finland, whose students consistently achieve among the highest results in the world on international assessments: Finland has shorter school days than New Zealand, not longer ones. What the evidence shows, consistently, is that the quality of learning matters far more than the quantity of time spent in a classroom. By the end of our current school day, many students are already experiencing significantly reduced concentration and retention. Adding ninety minutes to that point does not give us ninety minutes of additional learning. It gives us ninety minutes of tired students sitting in a room, which is an entirely different thing.

Consider what Year 8 students actually do after school. Many of us have responsibilities that are not optional. We pick up younger siblings from primary school. We contribute to household tasks that our families depend on us to complete. Some of us are already in part-time work. Many of us train three or four afternoons a week for sports that are important to our health and to our futures. Others participate in kapa haka, in faith communities, or in cultural activities that are central to who we are. If school ends at 4:30 instead of 3:00, these things do not simply shift to a later time. For most of us, they become impossible. And the students who would be most severely affected are not the students who can afford to lose those opportunities. They are the students who need them most.

That brings me to the equity dimension of this proposal, which I would ask the board to consider very carefully. Extending the school day does not affect all students equally. For students from families with flexible schedules, comfortable homes, and after-school resources, ninety extra minutes of school is an inconvenience. For students from families where both parents work full-time, where younger children need to be collected, where home is crowded or unsettled, an extended school day creates real logistical and financial hardship. If this board is committed to equity, which I believe it is, then this proposal deserves very serious scrutiny on those grounds.

I know the board is under real pressure to improve outcomes for our students, and I know that pressure is genuine. But I would ask you to look carefully at what is actually limiting learning at this school before deciding that the answer is more time. If students are arriving tired, hungry, or distracted, the solution is not a longer school day. It is better support for the conditions that enable learning in the first place. More time in the classroom is not the same thing as more learning. Please vote against this proposal.

Ngā mihi. Thank you for listening.

Structure [4/6]

The response has a cohesive speech structure. It includes a formal Māori greeting, speaker identification, three body arguments, counterargument that reframes rather than simply rebuts, and a direct concluding appeal. Oral signposting ('Let me explain why,' 'Consider what,' 'That brings me to') is used purposefully.

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

The response includes a direct board address, emphatic contrast sentences, and conditional structures throughout. The formal register is sustained throughout the writing.

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

Grammar, punctuation and spelling all correct.

Score 4 Exemplar, Year 8: total score 20/30

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Feedback for Score 4 Exemplar, Year 8

Audience and Purpose [4/6]

The response shows understanding of the audience and purpose. The board is addressed, the speaker identified, and three reasons provided. Basic speech conventions are used. Counterargument briefly engages with the board's rationale. Most parts of the task are completed.

Content Development/Elaboration [4/6]

Three reasons were given in the response: fatigue, after-school commitments, and sleep. Each is adequately elaborated with one or two relevant sentences. A counterargument is present with a brief rebuttal.

Good morning, board members.

My name is Jordan and I am a Year 8 student. I am here today to say that I think extending the school day by ninety minutes is a bad idea and I would like to explain my reasons. I have three main reasons why I believe this proposal would not be good for students at our school.

The first reason is that students are already tired by the end of the school day. By three o'clock many of us have been concentrating for a long time and we are running low on energy. Adding another ninety minutes at the end of that would just mean more time sitting in class feeling too tired to learn properly. We would be there for longer but we would not be learning more.

The second reason is that many students have important commitments after school. Things like sport training, music lessons, and helping with things at home are all part of our lives and they are all things that help us develop as people. If school ends at four-thirty instead of three o'clock, most of these things would no longer be possible. Students would have to give up activities that are genuinely important to them.

The third reason is the effect on sleep. If school ends later, everything else happens later too, including homework and going to bed. Students who do not get enough sleep find it much harder to concentrate and learn the next day.

I know the board wants students to achieve better results. But exhausted students sitting in a classroom for longer will not achieve better results. I hope you will vote against this proposal. Thank you for listening.

Structure [4/6]

The response has a generally unified speech structure. It includes a formal address, speaker identification, three body paragraphs, and a brief conclusion. Oral signposting is minimal.

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

The response includes appropriate but functional language. The speech register is generally maintained and there is some sentence variety.

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

Competent control of writing conventions. Minor errors do not interfere significantly with the message.

Score 3 Exemplar, Year 8: total score 15/30

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Feedback for Score 3 Exemplar, Year 8

Audience and Purpose [3/6]

The speech writer clearly understands that it is addressing the school board and keeps that audience in mind throughout. The position is stated early and remains steady across the whole response. The writer frames the argument around learning and student wellbeing, which strengthens the persuasion. The ending returns directly to the request and makes the speech feel complete. Most sentences are correctly structured and support clear reading.

Content Development/Elaboration [3/6]

The writer gives several relevant and effective reasons, including fatigue, lower attention, and pressure on after-school life. These are sensible points for this issue and are clearly linked to the main claim. The response also includes a brief counterargument and answers it in a reasonable way. The development is effective, though not as layered or textured as needed for a higher score. Sentences provide enough detail to make the argument convincing.

Good afternoon members of the school board,

I do not agree with extending the school day by one and a half hours. I understand that the idea may be meant to help students learn more, but I believe a longer day would create more difficulties than benefits.

One reason is that students are already tired by the end of a normal school day. If the day becomes even longer, many people will struggle to focus and stay motivated. That means the extra time may not actually improve learning very much. More time does not always mean better results.

Another reason is that students have important things to do after school. Many take part in sport, music, clubs, homework, family jobs, or cultural activities. If school finishes much later, all of those things become harder to fit in. That could make students more stressed and less balanced.

Some people might say the extra time would be helpful for teachers and students, but I think the better solution is to improve the time we already have. For those reasons, I ask you not to extend the school day.

Structure [3/6]

The structure is secure and easy to follow. The speech begins with the position, develops two clear reasons, addresses another viewpoint, and ends with a direct request. This gives the response a strong persuasive shape. Paragraphing is purposeful, and the speech form is obvious from the opening and closing. The response is mostly unified.

Language Use, Choice, and Style [3/6]

The language is appropriate, controlled, and persuasive. Words such as “motivated,” “balanced,” and “solution” help the speech sound thoughtful and school-board-appropriate. The tone is respectful and serious without sounding stiff. The voice is steady and audience aware. Sentences show good control with some natural variety, although they are less precise than needed for a higher score.

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

The response shows effective control of conventions. Grammar and punctuation are mostly secure, and spelling does not interfere with the message. Paragraphing helps organise the ideas clearly. Sentence boundaries are well handled, including in longer sentences. Any small weaknesses do not significantly interfere with meaning.

Score 2 Exemplar, Year 8: total score 10/30

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Feedback for Score 2 Exemplar, Year 8

Audience and Purpose [2/6]

The response does establish a position and clearly tries to persuade the school board. The task is recognisably understood, and the speech stays on topic. However, the persuasive shaping is still basic, and much of the response sounds like broad opinion rather than carefully developed speaking for a decision-making audience. The ending helps the speech feel complete, but the audience awareness remains limited. The frequent control issues interfere with clear communication.

Content Development/Elaboration [2/6]

There are relevant ideas here: students get tired, work quality may drop, the day may become harder instead of better, and after-school life becomes more stressful. These points connect clearly to the task and stop the response from feeling empty. However, the development is uneven and harder to follow because spelling, wording, and sentence control interfere with clarity. Some ideas are repeated instead of extended. The support is partial rather than strong, and the reader has to work to follow the reasoning.

Good afternoon school board,

I dont think school shood be longer because students are already at school a long time and many pepol get tired and want to go home and then the work wont be as good if the day keeps going and going. If we stay longer then people may not do better work because they are tired and that can make the day harder instead of better and I think that matters because the plan is ment to help learning but it might do the oposite.

A longer day can also make it hard for sport and homework and family time after school and that makes the week more stresfull. I still think the school day shood not be longer because students need time for other things to and if they are worn out then the extra time is not helping much anyway.

Structure [2/6]

This response shows an attempt at paragraphing. The first paragraph gives the main position and one main line of reasoning, and the second adds another reason. However, the organisation is still weak because the internal flow of each paragraph is loose and not clearly shaped. Several ideas run together without clean separation. The speech remains readable, but the overall structure is basic and only partly effective.

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

The language shows a basic attempt to persuade, but the word choice and sentence control are limited. There are noticeable spelling mistakes such as “shood,” “pepol,” “ment,” “oposite,” “stresfull,” and “to,” and these problems interfere with smooth communication. The tone remains school-appropriate, but the voice is weak and not carefully shaped for a formal audience. The speech sounds rough rather than controlled.

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

Errors are frequent enough to interfere with clear communication. Sentence boundaries are weak, punctuation is limited, spelling mistakes are noticeable throughout, and grammar is inconsistent. The reader can still work out the main point, but not easily or smoothly.

Score 1 Exemplar, Year 8: total score 5/30

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Feedback for Score 1 Exemplar, Year 8

Audience and Purpose [1/6]

The response only partly addresses the task. It does suggest that a longer day is bad and seems to oppose the change, but the position is not clearly shaped or strongly maintained as a persuasive speech for the school board. The writing feels more like a stream of thoughts than a controlled spoken argument for decision-makers. There is no real ending, and the sense of audience is weak. Communication of purpose is limited and incomplete.

Content Development/Elaboration [1/6]

A few relevant ideas appear, such as tiredness, wanting to go home, after-school commitments, and the idea that more time does not automatically mean more learning. However, these ideas are only touched on briefly and are not properly developed. Some parts are vague or repetitive, and the writing circles around the same point instead of building reasons clearly. The content feels scattered and reaction-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.

Good afternoon school board the longer day is bad because school is already long and students get tired and wana go home and if it keeps going then pepol wont do good work and it will just feel long and bad and there is sport and family and home stuff and all that after school and i think if you make it longer then the day is just to much and not good for kids and i dont think more time means more learning because when your tired you dont do things good and thats why i think the school day shouldnt be bigger because it sounds bad and hard and people will be over it and thats what im saying for this

Structure [1/6]

This response does not use paragraphing. It reads as one long stream of writing, and the ideas blur together without clear organisation. There is no real shaping into opening, middle, and conclusion. The lack of structure significantly weakens clarity and makes the speech 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 “wana,” “pepol,” “to much,” and “your tired,” and there are also places where repetition weakens the writing. The tone is inconsistent and does not sound carefully shaped for the school board. 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]

Control of conventions is limited at this stage. Errors are frequent and make the response harder to read. Sentence structure is not yet controlled and consistent. Overall accuracy is still emerging.