SMART

Year 3 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 28/30 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 3 — Class Pet

Year 3 writing progress marker

By the end of their third year at school, students who are **proficient** in writing, can:

- produce legible handwriting with automaticity
- accurately spell most single-syllable words with long vowel patterns, as well as some words with simple suffixes or contractions
- write using a range of sentence structures, including complex sentences, to express their ideas
- write stories that describe lived or imaginary events
- write single-paragraph texts that develop an idea or opinion about a topic.

Year 3 prompt

A class pet is an animal that lives in a classroom. The children in the class take care of it and make sure that it has a good life that meets its needs, including having good food and enough rest periods, and being kept clean and healthy.

Write to persuade your principal explaining why it is or is not a good idea for your class to have a pet.

Remember to:

- think about how to greet your principal
- say what type of pet
- share your opinion why it is or is not a good choice
- include reasons that support your opinion
- think about your ending.

Score 5 and 6 Exemplar, Year 3: total score 28/30

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Feedback for Score 5 and 6 Exemplar, Year 3

Audience and Purpose [6/6]

This is a thorough and insightful response. The principal is addressed by name and the letter anticipates exactly the concerns a school leader would have — cost (with a specific dollar figure and a fundraising plan), workload (with a supervision commitment), holiday care (with three named volunteer families), and allergies (with a checked fact). The position is precise and maintained throughout. All parts of the task are completed and the response goes beyond the task limits. The argument structure is preserved directly from the Vantage SP6 model: hook introduction, three elaborated reasons, dedicated counterargument paragraph, call-to-action conclusion.

Content Development/Elaboration [5/6]

Three fully elaborated reasons: health and happiness (stress reduction, concentration, productive class); companionship and teamwork (shared purpose, mutual benefit for class and animal); genuine responsibility (contrast with worksheet responsibility, teacher testimony, named life skills). The counterargument paragraph addresses four distinct objections with specific, credible responses. This matches the Vantage SP6 benchmark description: 'effectively develops arguments using a wide variety of specific, accurate, and relevant details' and 'convincingly addresses readers' opposing points of view.'

Dear Mr Tūhoe,

One of the things our class has always wanted is a real animal of our own that we could look after and call ours. Clearly, the best choice for Room 7 would be a guinea pig. I have three great reasons why we should be allowed to get one. First, science proves that if you spend time with a pet it decreases depression and increases happiness, and I know you want us to be happy and focused at school. Also, looking after a guinea pig is a very good way to learn real responsibility. Lastly, animals are wonderful companions and make any place feel warmer and more welcoming. As you read through my reasons below, I am sure you will find yourself saying yes.

As I mentioned, having a class pet will help us to be happier and healthier learners. Do you know why? When you spend time with a gentle animal like a guinea pig, it reduces stress and increases the kind of calm that helps children concentrate. I know how important good learning is to you, Mr Tūhoe, and I am telling you that a class pet would actually support that. Some students in our class find the school day hard at times, and having a friendly animal in the room gives them something soothing to focus on. A calmer class is a more productive class.

Now, being happy leads right into my next reason: guinea pigs are wonderful companions. If someone in our class is having a hard day, they can spend a moment with our guinea pig and feel better. It helps us connect with something beyond worksheets and screens. Also, looking after our guinea pig together would make our class feel more like a team. We would share the responsibility of feeding it and cleaning its cage, and that kind of shared purpose is good for everyone. Not only does this benefit us, but the guinea pig benefits too because it gets company and care. Every class should have a companion to look after.

My last reason is that a class guinea pig would teach us real responsibility. I am not talking about pretend responsibility, like on a worksheet. I mean actual, daily responsibility for a living creature. We would learn to feed it, clean its cage, and check that it has fresh water, all of which are life skills. Mrs Parata says that children who care for animals develop more patience and more reliability. These are exactly the kinds of skills you want us to develop, and all you have to do is say yes to our guinea pig.

Now, I know that you have concerns about this idea. Before you say anything, I know the first question is about cost. But if we get a guinea pig from a rescue centre, the initial cost is under $80 for the cage and equipment, and our class could raise that through a bake sale at the next school event. You might also say it is too much work. Well, our whole class has agreed to take turns with feeding and cleaning, and Mrs Parata has already said she will supervise. I also know you might worry about holidays. Three families in our class have already offered to take the guinea pig home in the school holidays, so it will never be left without care. And if you are wondering about allergies, we have checked and no one in Room 7 is allergic to guinea pigs.

So now that you have read our letter, the choice is yours, Mr Tūhoe. But I am telling you, you would be making a wonderful decision by saying yes. A class guinea pig will help us be happier, more responsible, and more connected as a team. Thank you so much for your time.

Ngā mihi nui from all of Room 7.

Structure [5/6]

The introduction maps all three reasons and a counterargument before the body paragraphs. The three body paragraphs each have a clear topic sentence. The counterargument paragraph is dedicated and substantive. The conclusion is a compelling call to action. Transitional language is varied and purposeful ('As I mentioned,' 'Now, being happy leads,' 'My last reason,' 'Now, I know that').

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

Language is precise, confident, and audience-appropriate throughout. Complex sentences sit alongside shorter emphatic ones for rhythm and impact. Te reo Māori is used naturally in the sign-off. Persuasive devices include direct address ('Do you know why?'), rhetorical concession ('I know that you have concerns'), and contrast ('not pretend responsibility… actual, daily responsibility'). Voice is consistent and appropriate for writing to a principal.

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

There is near-perfect accuracy throughout this sustained and complex piece of writing. All sentences are correctly formed. Apostrophes, commas, and varied punctuation are used correctly. No spelling errors are present.

Score 5 Exemplar, Year 3: total score 25/30

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Feedback for Score 5 Exemplar, Year 3

Audience and Purpose [5/6]

This response demonstrates a thorough and insightful understanding of both audience and purpose. The writer addresses the principal by name throughout, anticipates the principal's concerns precisely, and adopts a formal but warm register that is entirely appropriate for writing to a school leader. The position — a guinea pig for Room 7 — is established immediately and maintained with precision throughout. The writer also names the teacher, references the school's enviro programme, and provides a call to action in the conclusion.

Content Development/Elaboration [5/6]

Three well-elaborated reasons are provided: responsibility (with specific tasks named), wellbeing linked to the school's hauora framework, and curriculum integration through the enviro project and science journaling. The counterargument section is substantive — it pre-empts three distinct objections (cost, allergies, workload) and provides a specific, credible rebuttal for each. No reason is left as a single sentence.

Dear Mr Tūhoe,

Have you ever walked into a classroom and felt something was missing? I think I know what it is. Our class needs a pet — and not just any pet. I am writing to persuade you that a guinea pig would be a wonderful addition to Room 7 at Riverside School. I have three strong reasons why this is a great idea, and I am also going to explain why the concerns you might have are not as big as you think.

First of all, having a class guinea pig would help us learn about responsibility. Looking after a living creature is one of the best ways to learn that our actions matter. In our class we would take turns giving our guinea pig fresh water and vegetables, cleaning its hutch, and making sure it has enough space to move around. These are real skills that we will use for the rest of our lives. Our teacher, Mrs Parata, has told us that children who care for animals at school often become more caring and more careful in all parts of their learning.

Secondly, a class pet would support our wellbeing. Research shows that spending time with animals helps to lower stress and makes people feel calmer and happier. At our school we talk a lot about hauora and looking after the whole person. A guinea pig would be a gentle, friendly reminder that looking after something else also looks after us. Many children in our class feel anxious about reading aloud or doing maths tests. Having a small, quiet animal in the corner of the room gives us a calm place to look before we begin.

Thirdly, caring for a class pet connects brilliantly to our learning. Guinea pigs eat only plants, so we could grow their food in our school garden as part of our enviro project. We could write observations in our science journals. We could graph how much food our guinea pig eats each week. Learning would feel real and connected in a way it does not always feel when we are only reading from a book.

I know you might have some worries. You might think a guinea pig would be too expensive. However, guinea pig hutches and food are quite affordable, and our class is already planning a small fundraiser to help pay for the first month. You might also worry about allergies. We have checked with our class and no one has a known allergy to guinea pigs. If a new student joins who does have one, the hutch could easily be moved to a different area. Finally, you might think it would be too much work for one person. But that is exactly the point — no one person would be responsible. It would be shared fairly across the whole class, with a rotating roster.

I hope you will consider our request seriously. A class guinea pig would teach us responsibility, support our wellbeing, and enrich our learning in ways no textbook can. Our class is ready, and we are excited. Please say yes, Mr Tūhoe — Room 7 is ready to step up.

Ngā mihi,

Aroha Tane (on behalf of Room 7)

Structure [5/6]

The letter is cohesively organised: a formal salutation, an engaging opening paragraph that hooks with a question and maps the argument, three body paragraphs each with a clear topic sentence and developed support, a full counterargument paragraph, and a strong conclusion with a call to action and a formal sign-off. Transitional language is used. Paragraphing is consistent throughout.

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

Language is precise and audience-aware throughout. The writer uses te reo Māori naturally (hauora, and ngā mihi). Rhetorical devices are used purposefully: a question opener, direct address, inclusive 'we,' and an appeal to shared school values. Sentence variety is strong — short declarative sentences sit alongside longer periodic ones. The voice is confident, warm, and appropriately formal.

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

High level of accuracy. Grammar is correct throughout. Punctuation is used purposefully including an em dash, parentheses, and a rhetorical question mark. All words are spelled correctly.

Score 4 Exemplar, Year 3: total score 20/30

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Feedback for Score 4 Exemplar, Year 3

Audience and Purpose [4/6]

The response clearly addresses the principal and maintains a persuasive purpose throughout. The recommendation is stated early and remains consistent. The writer keeps the focus on why the pet would be good for the class, not just personally desirable. The ending completes the request effectively and helps the piece feel like a proper persuasive letter.

Content Development/Elaboration [4/6]

The content is relevant and well supported. The writer explains why a guinea pig is suitable, how it could be cared for, and how it could support learning. The details are useful and connected to the argument, though not as layered or specific as they would be in higher scoring responses. The development is strong enough to feel purposeful and convincing.

Dear Principal,

I think our class should have a guinea pig for a class pet. I believe it would be a very good choice because guinea pigs are small, friendly, and easier to look after than many other animals. It would also give our class something important to care for together.

A guinea pig would suit our classroom because it would not need too much room. It could live in a cage and we could make sure it had food, water, and a clean place to stay. We could take turns helping with the jobs so that one person would not have to do everything. That would help us learn responsibility and show that we can work together to care for something properly.

A guinea pig would also make learning more interesting. We could watch what it does and learn about what animals need to live healthy lives. We could write about it, draw it, and talk about what we notice. That would be better than only talking about animals in a lesson because we would be learning from a real experience in our classroom.

Some people might think a class pet could be hard to manage or that students might get too excited and distract the pet. I think that is a fair concern, but I still think a guinea pig would work well because it is calm and small, and because the teacher could make clear rules about how to behave around it. If everyone did their part, I think it could be looked after very well.

Please choose a guinea pig for our class pet. I think it would help our class learn, cooperate, and become more responsible.

Yours sincerely,

Sione M.
Room 3

Structure [4/6]

The letter is well organised and easy to follow. It begins with a clear view, then develops practical care reasons, then learning reasons, before ending with a direct conclusion. The sequencing is effective and gives the response a solid persuasive shape.

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

The language is appropriate and controlled. Words such as “responsible,” “care,” and “interesting” help make the writing purposeful and clear. The tone remains respectful and well suited to a principal. The style is consistent and shows a good sense of audience.

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

Grammar and punctuation are mostly secure, and spelling does not interfere with meaning. The paragraphing helps the structure, and the overall presentation is clear and readable.

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

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Feedback for Score 3 Exemplar, Year 3

Audience and Purpose [3/6]

The response clearly understands that it is writing to the principal and keeps that audience in mind throughout. The position is stated early and remains steady. The letter is persuasive because it connects the pet to class benefit rather than only saying the writer wants one. The ending returns clearly to the request and helps the piece feel complete. Most sentences are correctly structured and support clear reading.

Content Development/Elaboration [3/6]

The writer provides several relevant reasons, including size, cage care, class jobs, responsibility, and interest. These are good supporting details for this level. The explanation moves beyond "it would be fun" and explains how the class would manage the pet. Sentences provide enough detail to make the argument strong.

Dear Principal,

I would like our class to have a guinea pig. I think it would be a very good class pet because it is friendly, not too big, and something we could all help take care of together. It would make our classroom more interesting and help us learn responsibility too.

A guinea pig is a good choice for a class because it can stay in a cage and does not need lots of space. We could give it food and water every day and make sure its cage is clean. If we had a class roster, everyone could have a turn helping. That would teach us to remember our jobs and look after something properly.

A guinea pig would also be fun to watch. We could learn what it likes to eat and how it moves around. It would make the class feel special. Please think about letting our class have a guinea pig because I believe it would be good for both our learning and our classroom.

Yours sincerely,

Sione M.
Room 3

Structure [3/6]

The piece has a clear opening, body, and ending. The reasons are grouped sensibly: care and responsibility first, then enjoyment and learning. This makes the argument easy to follow. The letter form is complete, and the sign-off strengthens the sense that this is a finished student letter. The structure is mostly unified.

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

The language is appropriate, clear, and purposeful. Words like "responsibility," "roster," and "properly" help lift the quality. The tone remains polite and suitable for the audience. The voice is steady and sincere. Sentences show good control with some natural variety.

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

The writing shows effective control of conventions. Grammar and punctuation are mostly secure, and spelling does not interfere with meaning. Sentence boundaries are mostly well managed, and the letter is easy to read. Any minor weaknesses do not get in the way of communication.

Score 2 Exemplar, Year 3: total score 10/30

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Feedback for Score 2 Exemplar, Year 3

Audience and Purpose [2/6]

The response does establish a position and does attempt to persuade the principal, so it is recognisably on task. The writer knows what they want and says it directly. However, the control of purpose is weak and the writing often slips into loose, unclear explanation rather than a clearly shaped argument. The letter is completed with an ending and sign-off, but the persuasion remains basic. The frequent control issues interfere with clear communication.

Content Development/Elaboration [2/6]

There are relevant ideas here: the guinea pig is small, it can stay in a cage, students can learn from it, and class jobs could be made to care for it. Those ideas are useful and keep the piece connected to the task. However, the development is uneven and hard to follow at times because the wording and sentence control interfere with clarity. Some ideas are started and not fully explained. The support is partial rather than strong, and the reader has to work to understand the point being made.

Dear Principal

I think our class shud get a guinea pig because it is smal and nice and it can stay in a cage in the class and we can feed it and give it water and look after it but it might be hard some days and I still think it wuld be good because then we can lern about an animal for real and not just from books. A big pet wuld be to much and a guinea pig is more easy for kids and the techer.

We can make jobs for it and one kid can do food and one can help clean and maybe one can check the water but if people forget it that is bad and it needs care all the time. I still think yes because it wuld make the class better and more happy and we can try are best to look after it proper.

From,

Hana P.
Room 3

Structure [2/6]

This response shows an attempt at paragraphing, which is appropriate for this score. The first paragraph introduces the idea and the second adds more about jobs and care. However, the organisation is still weak because the internal flow of each paragraph is loose and hard to track. Several ideas run together without being clearly separated. The sign-off helps complete the letter, but the overall structure remains 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 “shud,” “smal,” “wuld,” “lern,” “techer,” and “are best,” and some incorrect or awkward wording such as “more easy.” These do not make the text unreadable, but they do interfere with smooth understanding. The tone remains school-appropriate, but the voice is weak and not carefully shaped for the audience.

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 3: total score 5/30

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Feedback for Score 1 Exemplar, Year 3

Audience and Purpose [1/6]

The response only partly addresses the task. It begins to suggest a topic and at times seems to favour a guinea pig, but the position is not clearly established or strongly maintained. The writing sounds more like a stream of thoughts than a shaped persuasive letter to the principal. There is very limited control of audience beyond mentioning the principal at the start, and there is no proper letter ending. Communication of purpose is limited and incomplete.

Content Development/Elaboration [1/6]

A few relevant ideas appear, such as guinea pigs being small, classrooms being boring, feeding a pet, and the teacher having to do things. However, these ideas are only briefly touched on and are not properly developed. The writing wanders, changes direction, and does not clearly build reasons. Some parts are not focused on the task or are uncertain, such as "maybe not if it runs away i dont know,". The content stays at the level of scattered preference rather than a built argument.

Dear Principal i want to say about the pet and maybe a guinea pig because they are fluffy and nice and i saw one one time and it was squeeking and eating and it was funny and good and maybe we can have one in the class but maybe not if it runs away i dont know but pets are nice and kids like them and school is better with nice things in it and if there is a pet we can look and maybe feed it and it can live in a box or cage and be there all day and that would be good because class is sometimes boring and i think that is why a pet could be there and also animals are cool and little ones are more better for classrooms because big pets are to much and the teacher would have to do lots of things and it might smell and be messy but i still like guinea pigs and that is what i think from Noah room 3

Structure [1/6]

This response does not use paragraphing. It reads as one long stream of writing, and the ideas mix together without clear organisation. There is limited shaping into a beginning, middle, and ending.

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

The language is simple and has some repetition. There are noticeable spelling and word choice issues such as "squeeking," "more better," and "to much," and there are also places where uncertainty and repetition reduce clarity. The tone is inconsistent and does not sound carefully shaped for a principal. The writing is one long run-on sentence. 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 limited grammar throughout. The reader can still work out parts of the meaning, but it takes effort, and some parts remain unclear.