SMART

Year 9 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 26/30 to the lowest scoring at 6/30. 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 9 — Starting School Later

Year 9 writing progress marker

By the end of Year 9, students who are **proficient** in writing, can:

- confidently craft texts for a range of purposes and audiences, applying appropriate language, structural, and stylistic features
- use accurate grammar, punctuation, and vocabulary to communicate meaning, adjusting tone and formality to suit context
- when writing to entertain, inform, persuade, or discuss ideas, plan and develop a sequence of ideas at conceptual, paragraph, and whole text levels; use appropriate language, structural, and stylistic features for the selected audience and purpose; and support their ideas with well-chosen details
- when writing literary essays, develop a thesis statement, structure paragraphs around topic sentences, use evidence from the text to support their interpretations, and conclude by summarising their main points.

Year 9 writing prompt

Research has shown that teenagers experience a change in their internal sleep clocks so that waking up early and going to sleep early are difficult.

Should high school classes begin later in the day and end later to accommodate students' natural sleep cycles? Consider some of the benefits and disadvantages to starting and finishing the school day later.

Write a speech to be given in a school assembly, introducing this issue to other students.

Include some possible benefits and disadvantages to changing the school day.

Conclude by stating your opinion and supporting it with reasons and examples.

Score 5 and 6 Exemplar, Year 9: total score 26/30

Te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga
Ministry of Education

Feedback for Score 5 and 6 Exemplar, Year 9

Audience and Purpose [5/6]

The response shows a clear understanding of purpose and audience. The assembly is addressed directly and the position is established through the personal anecdote opening. Both sides of the issue are presented before the position is argued. The position is clear and sustained throughout. All parts of the task are completed.

Content Development/Elaboration [5/6]

The benefits section presents the biological sleep science argument honestly and respectfully ('There is real science behind the argument for later starts, and I respect that'). Three arguments against change follow: responsibility and habit formation (the early start as preparation for working life); after-school activity disruption (sport, kapa haka, homework, family dinner — specific activities named); and the staying-up-later argument (students will adjust bedtimes, no net gain). The counterargument is addressed in the conclusion.

Good morning, everyone.

For years I have woken up in the mornings thinking: why can't school just start a bit later? I would lie in bed as long as I possibly could, wishing the alarm would not go off. Well, something is finally being done about that question, and the school board is considering starting school two hours later. And now that I think about it carefully, I am not sure I want the change. Today I want to share both sides of this issue with you before I tell you my own view.

I will start with the case for change, because it is worth taking seriously. Research has shown that teenagers' sleep cycles are genuinely different from those of adults. During puberty, the body's natural clock shifts so that falling asleep early and waking up early become genuinely difficult. Some mornings, arriving at school on time and concentrating for the first two hours is a real challenge that is not simply a matter of going to bed earlier. There is real science behind the argument for later starts, and I respect that.

However, having thought about it carefully, I do not think changing the start time is the right answer. The first reason is that our current early start actually teaches us responsibility. Because school starts at such an early time, we learn to get ourselves up, get ourselves ready, and get ourselves there on time. This skill matters. Most jobs will require you to be somewhere on time in the morning, and the habit of doing that starts here. If we start school later, we are just giving ourselves more reason to stay up later at night, and the amount of sleep we get will not change much.

If school ended later, there would also be less time after school for the things that really matter to many of us. A lot of students are involved in sport, kapa haka, part-time work, or other activities that run in the late afternoon. If school finishes at five o'clock instead of three, these become very difficult to maintain. Outdoor sport becomes impossible once it gets dark, and evening activities would eat into the time needed for homework, family dinner, and sleep. The disruption to life outside school would outweigh whatever small benefit comes from a slightly later alarm.

Finally, the students who stay up too late are already making that choice. They know they have to be up early. A later start would not make them go to bed earlier. It would just give them permission to stay up even later, and they would arrive at a nine-thirty school just as tired as they currently arrive at eight-thirty. In the years I have been at school, I have heard people say they want school to start later, but when it comes down to it, what they really want is to not have to go at all. Since that is not an option, the current schedule is actually fine. We do not need to change it.

Structure [5/6]

The response has a mostly unified speech structure. It includes a personal anecdote opening, both-sides framing, honest benefits section, three argument paragraphs, and a conclusion that reframes the issue. Transitional language is effective ('However, having thought about it carefully,' 'If school ended later,' 'Finally').

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

The response has appropriate language with consistent voice and a clear sense of audience. Some evidence of voice through the personal anecdote and the direct concluding observation. Sentence variety is present.

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

Grammar and punctuation are mostly correct throughout. Spelling is accurate.

Score 5 Exemplar, Year 9: total score 25/30

Te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga
Ministry of Education

Feedback for Score 5 Exemplar, Year 9

Audience and Purpose [5/6]

The audience is addressed directly. The issue was introduced honestly, with both sides explored substantively, and a qualified position taken with conditions specified. The response references specific international evidence and requires conditions for change rather than simple advocacy.

Content Development/Elaboration [5/6]

Two benefits are elaborated: biological circadian science (neurological, not character-based, with international trial evidence); and health outcomes (anxiety, depression, decision-making). Two genuine disadvantages are outlined: scheduling conflicts (sport, primary school pickup); and staying-up-later risk (evidence-referenced). The position conclusion specifies three conditions for change, and argues benefits outweigh disadvantages, with reasoning.

Tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou katoa.

My name is Mere Tuhou, and I am standing here today to talk to you about something that directly affects every single person in this hall. The question is this: should our school start later in the day? This is a more complicated question than it might seem, and I want to be honest with you about both sides of it before I tell you where I personally stand and why.

Let me begin with the case for a later start, because the scientific evidence is genuinely compelling. Research into adolescent biology consistently shows that during puberty, the human brain's circadian rhythm shifts. Teenagers are biologically programmed to fall asleep later at night and to wake later in the morning than younger children or adults. This is not a character flaw or a failure of discipline. It is a documented neurological change that happens to everyone going through puberty. When our school starts at eight-thirty in the morning, it is asking many of us to perform complex cognitive tasks at a time when our biology is telling us we should still be asleep. Schools in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia that have trialled later start times have reported measurable improvements in attendance, reductions in lateness, and in several cases, genuine improvements in academic outcomes. The second benefit is for our physical and mental health. Chronic sleep deprivation in teenagers is linked to increased rates of anxiety, depression, and poor decision-making. Getting an extra hour of sleep each night does not just make teenagers feel better. It makes them healthier, more emotionally stable, and better able to learn.

But the disadvantages of a later school start are also real, and they deserve honest engagement rather than dismissal. The most significant practical problem is the effect on after-school activities and family logistics. If school starts at ten and finishes at four-thirty, sport training sessions that currently run from four to six o'clock get pushed into evening darkness. Families who pick up younger children from primary school at three o'clock face a scheduling conflict that is not easy to resolve. These are genuine complications that affect real families and real commitments.

A second disadvantage, and one that is often overlooked by people who support later starts, is the very real possibility that teenagers will simply use a later start as an opportunity to stay up even later at night. If bedtime shifts from midnight to one in the morning to compensate for a ten o'clock start, then the net benefit in terms of sleep is zero. This concern is supported by evidence, and any policy change in this area must address it directly.

Having considered both sides honestly, my position is that our school should move to a later start time, but that this change cannot happen in isolation. It must be paired with real investment in sleep education, with coordinated changes to after-school activity scheduling, and with genuine engagement with families about how to make the transition work. The biological case for change is too strong to ignore. The disadvantages are real but they are manageable. We should not continue to ask students to learn at a time when their own biology is working against them. Ngā mihi.

Structure [5/6]

The response includes a te reo Māori greeting, speaker identification, issue framing, a benefits section, a disadvantages section, a qualified position conclusion, and a farewell. There are natural transitions between sections.

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

Precise and rhetorically sophisticated language is used. The response includes an emphatic contrast sentence ('not a character flaw… a documented neurological change'), direct assembly address, and conditional framing in a position conclusion. The register is formal but accessible.

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

Grammar, punctuation and spelling are all correct.

Score 3 and 4 Exemplar, Year 9: total score 16/30

Te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga
Ministry of Education

Feedback for Score 3 and 4 Exemplar, Year 9

Audience and Purpose [3/6]

The speech writer clearly understands that the audience is a school assembly and that the purpose is both to introduce the issue and persuade students of a position. The writer handles that dual purpose well by presenting the issue fairly before taking a clear stance. The opinion is maintained consistently and the ending feels measured and well judged. The speech sounds like it is designed to persuade peers through reason, not just emotion. Sentences are varied, well formed, and used confidently to support the persuasive purpose.

Content Development/Elaboration [3/6]

The response is well developed because it includes both benefits and disadvantages, then weighs them before concluding. The benefits are explained clearly in terms of focus, mood, productivity, lateness, and attendance. The disadvantages are also treated seriously, especially the impact on sport, jobs, transport, and the possibility that students may stay up later. This balance makes the final position more convincing because it feels considered rather than one-sided. Sentences extend the ideas clearly and make the overall argument thoughtful and persuasive.

Good morning everyone,

The question of whether school should start later matters because it affects how students feel, learn, and function every day. Teenagers are often expected to perform well early in the morning even though their sleep patterns naturally shift later. For that reason, I believe high school should begin later in the day.

One major benefit is learning. Students who are less tired are more likely to focus, participate, and remember what they are taught. A later start could also improve mood and reduce the stress of rushed mornings. If students are more awake, the first lessons of the day may become far more productive than they are now.

There are practical benefits too. A later start might reduce lateness and improve attendance because fewer students would be struggling to get to school half-awake. It could also make school feel more manageable for students who find early starts especially difficult.

However, there are disadvantages that should be taken seriously. A later finish could affect sport, part-time work, transport, and family routines. Some students might also use the later start as a reason to stay up even later. Those are real concerns, and they should not be ignored.

Even so, I think the benefits are stronger. If the main purpose of school is learning, then students need to be awake enough to learn well. On balance, starting school later would support students better, even if it would require changes to the rest of the day.

Structure [3/6]

The writer opens by establishing why the issue matters, develops benefits in one direction, then introduces disadvantages, and finally weighs the issue before concluding. This gives the response a strong argumentative arc and fits the task requirement very closely. Each paragraph has a distinct purpose, and the final judgment feels earned. The speech is complete, balanced, and easy to follow. Sentences connect smoothly and support the logical progression of ideas.

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

The language is precise, audience-aware, and mature. Phrases such as “half-awake,” “main purpose of school,” and “on balance” help create a thoughtful persuasive voice. The tone is balanced and credible, which is especially important in a speech introducing an issue to peers. The writer sounds calm, informed, and convincing. Sentences are well structured and varied enough to keep the speech controlled and engaging.

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

Grammar is secure, punctuation is accurate, and spelling supports smooth reading throughout. Paragraphing is strong and helps separate the discussion into clear stages. Longer sentences are handled well without becoming confusing. Overall, the speech looks polished and complete. Sentences are correctly structured and support clear communication throughout.

Score 2 Exemplar, Year 9: total score 10/30

Te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga
Ministry of Education

Feedback for Score 2 Exemplar, Year 9

Audience and Purpose [2/6]

The speech shows a basic understanding of how to persuade students in an assembly about the issue. The position is clear and mostly stays aligned to the task. The writer does include both advantages and disadvantages, which helps the response fit the prompt. However, the persuasion is still fairly simple and depends on repeating the broad point that students are tired. The ending helps make the speech feel complete. 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 tiredness, better learning, easier mornings, and later finishing affecting after-school activities. These points do support the position and stop the response from being empty. However, they are only partly developed. The writer states the ideas clearly, but does not explore them in much depth or add much detail. The balancing of benefits and disadvantages is present, but brief. Sentences add some detail, though more elaboration is needed.

Good morning,

I think school should start later because many students are tired early in the morning. If they are more awake, they might do better in class and listen more.

A later start could help with learning and maybe make mornings easier. But it could also make school end later, and that could affect sport and other things after school. So there are both good and bad parts.

That is why I support a later start to school. Students need to be awake if they are going to learn properly, and I think that matters most.

Structure [2/6]

The speech has an opening, a body, and a conclusion. The order of ideas mostly makes sense, and the ending gives the speech closure. However, the internal structure is still fairly simple and feels more like short grouped points than a strongly shaped speech. The linking between ideas is limited, though the response remains readable and complete.

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

The language is understandable and suitable for the audience, but it is repetitive. The writer uses simple persuasive wording and shows some awareness of audience by keeping the tone school appropriate. However, the vocabulary is fairly broad and the style is not especially strong or precise. Sentence patterns repeat and would benefit from more variety.

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

There is growing control of conventions. Most of the writing can be followed clearly, and the paragraphing supports the structure. However, the control is less steady than in the higher bands, especially in the repeated sentence patterns. The speech is readable, but it does not yet feel polished. A few simple sentences are correctly structured, although sentence control is not yet fully consistent.

Score 1 and 2 Exemplar, Year 9: total score 6/30

Te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga
Ministry of Education

Feedback for Score 1 and 2 Exemplar, Year 9

Audience and Purpose [1/6]

The response establishes a position and clearly tries to persuade the audience that school should start later. The speech stays on task and the opinion is obvious. However, the control of persuasion is still basic, and much of the response sounds like broad opinion rather than carefully developed speaking for an assembly audience. The ending does help the speech feel complete. The frequent errors interfere with clear communication, which fits this score point.

Content Development/Elaboration [1/6]

There are relevant ideas here: tiredness, better learning, feeling better in the morning, and the disadvantage of a later finish affecting activities. These ideas do connect clearly to the task and stop the response from being empty. The writer also attempts to weigh the good and bad sides. 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 morning,

I think school shood start later because students are tired and that makes learning harder and if students are more awake then maybe they will do better in class and feel better in the mornings to. I think that is a good reason because school is ment to be for learning and if pepol are tired then it is harder for them to do well and that makes the early start not work as good as it should.

There are disadvantages because school will finish later and that can affect sport and other things after school and maybe jobs for some pepol. But I still think the good parts are better because school is for learning and tired students dont learn as well and that is why I think school shood start later for most students.

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 the disadvantages before returning to the main view. 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 [1/6]

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,” “to,” “ment,” “pepol,” and “dont,” and these problems interfere with smooth communication. The tone remains school-appropriate, but the voice is weak and not carefully shaped for an assembly audience. The speech sounds rough rather than controlled.

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

Errors are frequent enough to interfere with clear communication, but not so severe that the message becomes impossible to follow. 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.