

NAPLAN Narrative Pace Accelerator

Keep Markers Turning the Page




(Years 5–7)

A Comprehensive Guide to Mastering
Narrative Pacing for NAPLAN Success

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Foundation Knowledge

-  Understanding NAPLAN Narrative Criteria
-  The Science of Story Pacing
-  Year-Level Progression (Y5-Y7)
Marker Psychology & Engagement





Core Techniques

-  The Pace Accelerator Framework
-  The "Swoosh" Narrative Structure
-  Tension Building Strategies
-  Advanced Engagement Techniques

Practical Application

-  Pacing Tools & Techniques
-  Common Pacing Problems & Fixes
-  Year-Specific Examples
-  Self-Assessment Checklists

Resources & References

-  Quick Reference Guides
-  Practice Exercises
-  High-Band Examples
-  Time Management Strategies

Why Pacing Matters in NAPLAN

Every year, thousands of Australian students sit the NAPLAN writing assessment, crafting narratives that will be marked by trained assessors. But here's the secret: the difference between a Band 6 and a Band 10

Key Insight

NAPLAN markers read hundreds of narratives. The stories that stand out are those that grab attention immediately and maintain

narrative isn't just about perfect spelling or complex vocabulary.

It's about *pace*. It's about keeping your marker so engaged that they can't wait to see what happens next. It's about creating a story that accelerates through tension, builds momentum, and delivers satisfaction.

engagement throughout. This guide teaches you exactly how to achieve that.



Capture Attention

Learn to hook your reader from the very first sentence



Maintain Momentum

Master the art of building and sustaining tension



Achieve Excellence

Score in the highest bands with compelling narratives

The 10 Assessment Criteria & Pacing

NAPLAN narrative writing is assessed against 10 specific criteria. Understanding how pacing influences each criterion is crucial for success:

1. Audience

Your capacity to orient, engage, and affect the reader

Pacing Impact: Fast-paced openings grab attention; varied pacing maintains engagement

2. Text Structure

Organisation of narrative components into effective structure

Pacing Impact: Strategic pacing creates compelling narrative arcs

3. Ideas

Creation, selection, and crafting of narrative ideas

Pacing Impact: Well-paced revelation of ideas builds intrigue

4. Character & Setting

Portrayal and development of characters and sense of place

Pacing Impact: Controlled pacing allows effective character development

5. Vocabulary

Range and precision of language choices

Pacing Impact: Vocabulary choices can accelerate or slow narrative flow

6. Cohesion

Control of multiple threads and relationships across text

Pacing Impact: Smooth transitions maintain narrative momentum

7. Paragraphing

Segmenting text to assist reader navigation

Pacing Impact: Strategic paragraphing controls reading rhythm

8. Sentence Structure

Grammatically correct, structurally sound sentences

Pacing Impact: Sentence variety creates rhythm and flow

9. Punctuation

Correct and appropriate punctuation to aid reading

Pacing Impact: Punctuation controls reading speed and emphasis

10. Spelling

Accuracy of spelling and difficulty of words used

Pacing Impact: Correct spelling maintains reading flow

Three Levels of Pacing



Story Level

Overall narrative arc and major plot movements



Scene Level

Individual scenes and their internal rhythm



Line Level

Sentence structure and word choice effects

The Pacing Spectrum



Fast Pace

Short sentences, action words, immediate conflict



Medium Pace

Balanced sentences, character development, rising tension



Slow Pace

Longer sentences, description, reflection, atmosphere

Fast Pacing Techniques

- ✓ Short, punchy sentences
- ✓ Active voice constructions
- ✓ Action-oriented vocabulary
- ✓ Minimal description
- ✓ Immediate dialogue
- ✓ Present tense narration

Slow Pacing Techniques

- ✓ Longer, complex sentences
- ✓ Detailed descriptions
- ✓ Internal thoughts and reflection
- ✓ Sensory imagery
- ✓ Background information
- ✓ Atmospheric setting

Year 5: Building Foundations

Pacing Expectations

- Simple but effective story openings
- Clear beginning, middle, and end
- Basic tension building
- Appropriate sentence variety

Year 5 Quick Win

Start your story in the middle of action or conversation. Instead of "Once upon a time," try "The alarm was ringing, but nobody was moving."

Example Year 5 Opening:

"The door slammed shut behind me. I tried the handle, but it wouldn't budge. From somewhere in the darkness came a strange scratching sound."

This opening immediately creates tension and questions that make the reader want to continue.

Year 6: Developing Skills

Pacing Expectations

- More sophisticated tension building
- Varied sentence structures for effect
- Strategic use of dialogue for pacing
- Effective scene transitions

Year 6 Strategy

Use short paragraphs and sentences during action scenes, then slow down with longer sentences for reflection or description.

Example Year 6 Pacing Variation:

"Run!" Sarah's voice echoed behind me.

I ran.

My feet pounded against the wet pavement, splashing through puddles that reflected the streetlights like scattered stars. Each breath burned in my chest, but I couldn't stop. Not now. Not when we were so close to discovering the truth about what really happened that night.

Notice how the pace accelerates with short sentences, then slows for atmospheric description.

Year 7: Mastering Techniques

Pacing Expectations

- Complex narrative structures
- Sophisticated tension and release patterns
- Advanced characterisation through pacing
- Masterful use of literary devices

Year 7 Challenge

Experiment with non-linear storytelling, flashbacks, or multiple perspectives to create sophisticated pacing effects.

Example Year 7 Advanced Technique:

"The photograph trembled in my hands. Twenty years. Had it really been twenty years since—"

"Jamie, put that down." Mum's voice cut through my memories. "We're leaving in five minutes."

But I couldn't put it down. In the faded colours of the Polaroid, I saw my younger self, grinning beside a boy whose face I'd tried so hard to forget. The boy who'd disappeared that summer. The boy everyone said had run away.

The boy I knew was buried behind the old barn.

This uses time shifts and revelation pacing to create intrigue and tension.

The H.O.O.K.S Framework

Remember this acronym to create narratives that accelerate engagement:

H

Hook

Grab attention immediately

O

Orient

Establish context quickly

O

Oscillate

K

Keep

Maintain momentum

S

Satisfy

Deliver a fulfilling conclusion

H - Hook (First 20 words)

Your opening must immediately engage the reader. Use one of these proven hook techniques:



Action Hook:

Start in the middle of excitement



Dialogue Hook:

Begin with compelling speech



Question Hook: Pose an intriguing query



Statement Hook:

Make a surprising declaration

O - Orient (Next 50 words)

Quickly establish the essential story elements without slowing momentum:

Who: Main character (name and key trait)

Where: Setting (specific and atmospheric)

When: Time context (if relevant)

What's at stake: Hint at the central conflict

O - Oscillate (Throughout)

Create a rhythm by alternating between fast and slow pacing:

Fast moments: Action, dialogue, conflict, revelation

Slow moments: Description, reflection, character development

Pattern: Generally accelerate towards climax, then slow for resolution

K - Keep (Momentum Strategies)

Maintain reader interest through strategic techniques:

Cliffhangers: End paragraphs/sections with unresolved tension

Questions: Raise new mysteries as old ones are resolved

Transitions: Connect scenes smoothly to avoid jarring stops

Stakes: Continuously remind readers what matters

S - Satisfy (Final 30 words)

Conclude with impact that feels both inevitable and surprising:

Resolution: Answer the main story question

Growth: Show character change

Emotion: Leave readers with a strong feeling

Resonance: Connect to your opening or theme

The Proven NAPLAN Formula

Why "Swoosh" Works

The swoosh structure manipulates time and creates immediate engagement while maintaining narrative momentum. It's specifically designed for the 40-minute NAPLAN timeframe and consistently produces high-scoring narratives.

The Four-Section Structure

Inciting Incident

Start in media res (middle of action) to immediately engage readers

Backfill

Provide backstory with careful signposting to show how characters arrived

3

Rising Action

Build tension progressively towards the climactic moment

4

Climactic Resolution

Finish at high tension where readers can anticipate the ending

Essential Rules

- ✓ **Four sections only** - keeps focus tight
- ✓ **Two to three characters** - prevents confusion
- ✓ **Single time, place, action** - maintains unity
- ✓ **Character growth** - shows development
- ✓ **Implied resolution** - readers can predict ending

Pro Tip:

The swoosh works because it front-loads excitement while giving you time to develop character and setting. Markers are hooked from sentence one!

Swoosh Example: "The Discovery"

1. Inciting Incident

"The metal detector screamed. Emma dropped to her knees, scraping away centuries of dirt with trembling fingers. What she uncovered would change everything she thought she knew about her grandfather."

2. Backfill

"Three hours earlier, Emma had reluctantly agreed to help clean out Grandfather's house. He'd passed last month, leaving behind decades of what Mum called 'junk.' The metal detector was the only thing that interested Emma..."

3. Rising Action

"Now, staring at the tarnished medal in her palm, Emma read the inscription: 'For Valour - Sergeant James Mitchell.' But Grandfather's name was Thompson. He'd always said he never

fought in the war..."

4. Climactic Resolution

"'Emma?' Mum's voice called from the house. 'Found anything interesting?' Emma closed her fist around the medal. Some secrets, she realised, died with their keepers. But others were just waiting to be discovered."

Why This Works:

Immediate hook: "The metal detector screamed" - action and sound

Time manipulation: Starts at discovery, goes back, then forward

Character growth: Emma moves from reluctant helper to keeper of family secrets

Implied resolution: We know Emma must decide what to do with this discovery

Emotional resonance: Family secrets and inheritance themes

Sentence-Level Pacing

Fast Pacing Sentences

Short & Sharp

"Run. Now. Don't look back."

Creates urgency and panic

Action Verbs

"Sarah sprinted across the courtyard, vaulted the fence, and disappeared into the shadows."

Active verbs propel the story forward

Present Tense

"The door creaks open. A shadow moves. I hold my breath."

Creates immediacy and tension

Slow Pacing Sentences

Descriptive Detail

"The ancient oak stretched its gnarled branches towards the cloudy sky, its leaves whispering secrets that only the wind could understand."

Rich imagery slows the pace

Internal Reflection

"As I stood there, memories of my childhood flooded back - summer afternoons by the river, grandmother's gentle voice, the smell of fresh-baked bread."

Reflection and memory slow time

Complex Structures

"Although the storm had passed, leaving behind only puddles that reflected the clearing sky, I could still feel the electricity in the air."

Complex sentences slow reading rhythm

Paragraph-Level Pacing

Short Paragraphs

Use for:

- Action sequences
- Dramatic moments
- Dialogue exchanges
- Building tension

Medium Paragraphs

Use for:

- Character development
- Plot advancement
- Balanced narration
- Standard storytelling

Long Paragraphs

Use for:

- Detailed descriptions
- Flashbacks
- Complex explanations
- Atmospheric building

The One-Sentence Paragraph Technique

Strategic single-sentence paragraphs can create powerful dramatic effects:

"The investigation had taken months. We'd followed every lead, interviewed every witness, searched every possible location. The case seemed hopeless. Then we found the photograph. Everything changed."

The isolated sentences create pause and emphasis, making the revelations more impactful.

Dialogue as a Pacing Tool

Fast Dialogue

"Where is it?"
"I don't know!"
"Don't lie to me!"
"I'm not lying!"

Quick exchanges create tension and urgency

Techniques:

- Minimal dialogue tags
- Short, clipped sentences
- Interruptions and overlapping speech
- Questions and commands

Slow Dialogue

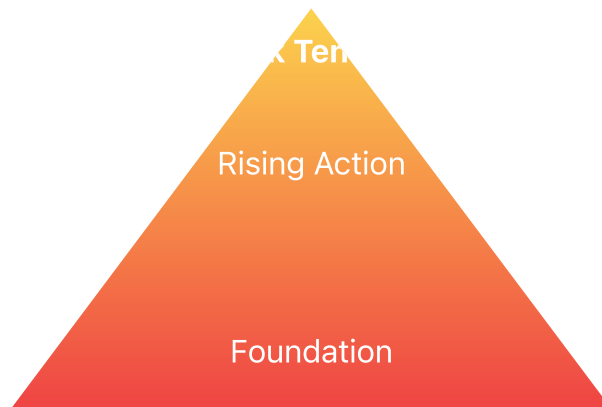
"You know," she said softly, gazing out at the sunset, "I never thought I'd see this place again." He nodded, understanding the weight of her words. "It brings back memories, doesn't it?" "Good ones," she replied, her voice barely above a whisper.

Thoughtful exchanges with description slow the pace

Techniques:

- Descriptive dialogue tags
- Pauses and hesitations
- Interspersed action/description
- Longer, reflective speeches

The Tension Pyramid



Foundation Level

Establish Stakes: What does your character want? What happens if they fail?

- Introduce the character's goal
- Show what they have to lose
- Hint at obstacles ahead
- Create reader investment

Rising Level

Escalate Problems: Make things progressively harder for your character.

- Add complications and obstacles
- Raise the stakes
- Create time pressure
- Build anticipation

Peak Level

Maximum Pressure: Your character faces their biggest challenge.

- Everything comes together
- Highest emotional intensity
- Make-or-break moment
- Character must choose/act

12 Proven Tension Techniques

1. The Ticking Clock

Add time pressure to any situation

"The bomb would explode in thirty minutes."

2. Dramatic Irony

Reader knows something character doesn't

"She smiled and opened the door, unaware of the danger inside."

3. False Security

Let character think they're safe, then...

"Finally, we were safe. Or so we thought."

4. The Near Miss

Character almost gets caught/hurt

"The footsteps stopped outside my door."

5. Unanswered Questions

Raise mysteries to keep readers hooked

"But why had she been lying?"

6. Escalating Stakes

What they might lose keeps getting bigger

"It wasn't just about the money anymore."

✖ Problem: Slow Start

Signs: Too much background information before the story begins

"My name is Sarah and I'm twelve years old. I live in Melbourne with my mum and dad. We moved here three years ago from Sydney. My dad works in an office and my mum is a teacher. I go to Westfield Primary School..."

✓ Fix: Start with Action

Solution: Begin in the middle of an interesting moment

"The school bell rang, but Sarah didn't move. She couldn't. The letter in her locker changed everything, and she had no idea what to do next."

✗ Problem: Flat Middle

Signs: Story loses momentum, becomes predictable

"Then we went to the shop. Then we bought some food. Then we went home. Then we had dinner. Then we watched TV..."

✓ Fix: Add Complications

Solution: Introduce obstacles and surprises

"At the shop, I grabbed the milk, but as I turned to leave, I spotted Mrs Henderson from next door. If she saw me, she'd tell Mum I wasn't at school. I ducked behind the cereal aisle, my heart pounding."

✗ Problem: Rush to Finish

Signs: Sudden, unsatisfying ending with no build-up

"...and then the police arrived and caught the bad guy and everything was fine. The end."

✓ Fix: Plan Your Ending

Solution: Build towards a satisfying climax

"The footsteps grew closer. I had one chance to get this right. Taking a deep breath, I stepped out of the shadows. 'Looking for this?' I held up the evidence that would finally prove his innocence."

✗ Problem: Monotone Pacing

Signs: Every sentence is the same length and structure

"I walked to school. I met my friend. We talked about homework. We went to class. The teacher was late."

✓ **Fix: Vary Your Rhythm**

Solution: Mix short and long sentences strategically

"I walked to school, my backpack heavy with the weight of unfinished homework and unspoken fears. Tom was waiting by the gate. 'You're late,' he said. 'I know.' The classroom was empty. Where was everyone?"

Exercise 1: Hook Challenge

Write 5 different opening hooks for the same story prompt:

Prompt: A student discovers something unexpected in their school locker

Action Hook

Start with immediate action or movement

Dialogue Hook

Begin with someone speaking

Question Hook

Start with an intriguing question

Statement Hook

Make a surprising declaration

Mystery Hook

Create immediate intrigue

Exercise 2: Pacing Transformation

Original Passage (Slow)

"I walked slowly down the long, dark hallway towards the door at the end. The hallway was very quiet and I could hear my footsteps echoing. The door looked old and mysterious. I was feeling nervous about what might be behind it."

Your Task: Rewrite this passage to create fast, exciting pacing.

Original Passage (Fast)

"Run! Now! The monster chased us. We ran fast. It was scary. We hid. It passed by. We were safe."

Your Task: Rewrite this passage to create slower, more atmospheric pacing.

Exercise 3: Swoosh Structure Practice

Plan a complete narrative using the swoosh structure:

Prompt: A student finds an old diary hidden in the library

1. Inciting Incident

Start in the middle of action

2. Backfill

Show how they got there

3. Rising Action

Build tension to climax

4. Climactic Resolution

End with impact

NAPLAN Pacing Checklist

Planning Stage (5 minutes)

- ☐ Hook planned (first 10-15 words)
- ☐ Main character identified
- ☐ Central conflict clear
- ☐ Structure chosen (swoosh recommended)
- ☐ Ending planned

Writing Stage (30 minutes)

- ☐ Strong opening hook written
- ☐ Character and setting established quickly
- ☐ Tension builds throughout
- ☐ Pace varies (fast/slow moments)
- ☐ Dialogue used effectively

Editing Stage (5 minutes)

- ☐ First sentence grabs attention
- ☐ No slow/boring sections
- ☐ Sentence length varies
- ☐ Paragraphs control pacing
- ☐ Ending feels satisfying

Danger Signs to Avoid

- ☐ ❌ Starting with "Once upon a time"
- ☐ ❌ Long descriptions before action
- ☐ ❌ All sentences same length
- ☐ ❌ Sudden "and then I woke up" ending
- ☐ ❌ No tension or conflict

High-Impact Sentence Starters

Action Starters

- "The door slammed..."
- "Racing through..."
- "Without warning..."
- "The ground shook..."
- "Suddenly..."

Dialogue Starters

- "Don't move!"
- "You need to see this."
- "That's impossible!"
- "I can explain..."
- "Listen to me."

Mystery Starters

- "Something was wrong."
- "The message was clear:"
- "Nobody saw it coming."
- "The truth was worse than..."

- "Everything changed when..."

Tension Builders

- "Time was running out."
- "The footsteps grew closer."
- "One chance remained."
- "The silence was broken by..."
- "Too late."

Pace-Setting Vocabulary Bank

Fast-Pace Words

Action Verbs:

sprint, bolt, dash, leap, crash, explode, shatter, pierce, thrust, launch

Time Words:

instantly, immediately, suddenly, quickly, rapidly, swiftly, abruptly

Intensity Words:

urgent, desperate, frantic, fierce, violent, explosive, intense, critical

Slow-Pace Words

Descriptive Verbs:

drift, meander, linger, contemplate, observe, ponder, whisper, caress

Atmospheric Words:

serene, tranquil, peaceful, gentle, soft, mellow, dreamy, ethereal

Reflective Words:

gradually, slowly, thoughtfully, carefully, deliberately, gently, quietly

40-Minute Writing Strategy

5

Planning

Structure & hook design

30

Writing

Draft your complete narrative

5

Editing

Polish and pace-check

0

Buffer

Submit with confidence

Planning Phase (5 minutes)

Minute 1: Read prompt, identify key requirements

Minute 2: Choose story idea and main character

Minute 3: Plan swoosh structure (4 key moments)

Minute 4: Design opening hook and ending

Minute 5: Quick vocabulary brainstorm

Writing Phase (30 minutes)

Minutes 1-5: Write compelling opening (inciting incident)

Minutes 6-15: Develop backfill and character establishment

Minutes 16-25: Build rising action and tension

Minutes 26-30: Write climactic resolution

Focus on maintaining momentum - don't stop to perfect individual sentences

Editing Phase (5 minutes)

First read: Check overall flow and pacing

Second read: Fix obvious spelling/grammar errors

Final check: Ensure opening hooks and ending satisfies

Prioritise pace and engagement over perfect grammar

Master Your NAPLAN Narrative Pace

You now have the tools to create narratives that captivate markers and achieve top bands. Remember the key principles:



Hook Hard

Grab attention from the first word



Pace Purposefully

Vary rhythm to maintain engagement



Satisfy Completely

Practice these techniques regularly. Time yourself. Seek feedback. Most importantly, trust in your ability to tell compelling stories that markers will remember long after the assessment ends.

Your narrative pace is your pathway to NAPLAN success!

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