

Purpose: Describe

This section describes the *key characteristics* of “describe, classify, organise and report information” purpose writing.

Using the Scoring Rubric

The progress indicators in the scoring rubric have been developed to help teachers understand and evaluate their students’ progress and achievement in writing. Teachers are asked to make a “best-fit” judgement as to the level at which their student’s writing most predominantly sits for each of the seven content areas: *Audience Awareness and Purpose, Content/Ideas, Structure/Organisation, Language Resources, Grammar, Spelling, and Punctuation.*

Deep Features

Audience Awareness and Purpose:

The purpose of this type of writing is to document, organise and store factual information on a given topic. It usually classifies and describes whole classes of living and non-living things (e.g., reports on scooters, blue whales, etc.) or specific living and non-living things (e.g., descriptions of Pikachu, my teddy, etc.). There are many types. This progress indicator deals specifically with information reports and factual descriptions.

Content/Ideas:

Texts that report and describe contain information statements, which are often declarative or stating. Elements of the purpose include a general classification statement that provides information for the reader about the nature of the subject of the text (e.g., “Kiwis are flightless birds”, “My teddy is the most precious toy that I have”).

Elaborated, information-laden sections follow to tell what the phenomenon or item under discussion is like, and to provide details about, depending on the topic of the report or description, components and their functions, properties, behaviours, uses, locations or habitats, types, and their relationship to the writer. The writer may conclude the text in a simple manner, although such a conclusion is optional. The writer may round off with a general statement about the topic (e.g., “Today the Kiwi is well known around the world as a symbol of New Zealand”, or “I love my teddy more than any other toy I have. I hope I never lose him”).

Structure/Organisation:

The text is generally organised around things and their description. There is a logical ordering of information (i.e., no temporal/time sequence is evident). Content is grouped or structured according to common themes evident in the information presented. Sentences are linked thematically to the topic of a paragraph or section. Text organisers such as titles, headings, and sub-headings are commonly used to orient or organise reading.

Language Resources:

Descriptions name and describe specific people or things (e.g., my teddy) while reports name and describe generalised participants or whole classes of things (e.g., blue whales or the kiwi – as a species). Declarative or stating mood choices are employed to make statements of fact. Precise, descriptive, factual language is used rather than flowery or aesthetically pleasing language, while technical language related to the topic is common in reporting. The language of comparison is common (i.e., comparatives and superlatives) and similes and metaphors may also be utilised as devices of comparison.

Many existing and relational verbs (i.e., being and having verbs such as is, are, have, belongs to) are used. These verbs are used to classify, to identify what the phenomenon is like and what it comprises. Some action verbs are used to describe behaviours (if living) or uses (if non-living). The choice and use of verb-vocabulary often reflects the desire to create particular information laden meanings for the reader (e.g., forage rather than search for food). Verbs are commonly in the “timeless” present tense. This adds to the authority of the text as readers are given a version of the world as it is. Passive structures are also employed to make the text seem more objective and formal.

With respect to other parts of speech, noun-packing is a common device for developing concise and precise descriptions. Adjectivals are often stacked to produce densely packed noun-groups. As additive relations are common in these texts, conjunctions are used which define and elaborate through descriptions (e.g., in addition to, and).

Surface Features

Grammar:

This dimension of text refers to accepted patterns in language use rather than with grammatical choices made by writers to achieve particular purposes. Here we refer to aspects of grammar such as subject-verb agreement, the use of complete verbs/verb groups, and the appropriate and consistent use of tense-choices for verbs. It is a student’s ability to control language patterns at this level of text that is judged here.

Spelling:

Spelling is considered separately and is related to increasing skill and knowledge about high-frequency words (HFW), simple spelling patterns, complex spelling patterns, and the spelling of irregular or technical vocabulary. The judgement of spelling is made in the context of the student’s text but evidence to support the judgement needs to be considered carefully.

Punctuation:

This dimension of text refers to the degree of control a writer shows over punctuation. This control ranges from showing an awareness of sentence punctuation to being able to use complex punctuation effectively. Again scorers are required to locate evidence to support their judgements about a student’s competence.

Scoring Rubric, Purpose: DESCRIBE

Content	Level 2 (Proficient)	Level 3 (Proficient)	Level 4 (Proficient)	Level 5 (Proficient)	Level 6 (Proficient)
<p>Audience Awareness and Purpose</p>	<p>Writer recognises they are writing for an audience other than self.</p> <p>Some attempt to describe, classify, and organise information.</p> <p>Assumes shared information of the context with the audience.</p>	<p>Shows some awareness of purpose and audience through choice of content, language, and writing style.</p> <p>Assumed information required by the audience but does not interfere with meaning.</p>	<p>Shows awareness of purpose and audience through choice of content, language, and writing style.</p> <p>Awareness of audience/purpose most evident in introduction and conclusion.</p>	<p>Shows awareness of purpose and targets the audience through deliberate choice of content, language, and writing style.</p> <p>Audience included directly or indirectly in text and referred to at the beginning and end.</p>	<p>Appropriate background and context to meet intended audience's needs.</p> <p>Consistent/sustained reference to audience needs and own purpose throughout text.</p>
<p>Content/Ideas</p>	<p>Writing covers some domains appropriate to purpose (e.g., attributes, behaviours, properties, functions, location).</p> <p>Can include many statements unrelated to the topic and/or task.</p>	<p>Most domain elements appropriate to the purpose are present (e.g., the writer classifies and deals with attributes, behaviours, properties, functions, location).</p> <p>Elaboration in description evident.</p> <p>May include some material unrelated to the topic of the given task.</p>	<p>Domain elements are present for the given purpose (e.g., title, classification of content to be described or reported).</p> <p>Uses factual statements to deal with attributes, behaviours, properties, functions, and location as appropriate.</p> <p>Elaboration added to the described domain element.</p> <p>Almost all material is related to the topic of the given task.</p>	<p>Uses factual statements to deal with attributes, behaviours, properties, functions, location, etc. as appropriate, and makes use of a final statement to round off the text in some way.</p> <p>Elaboration of most domain elements.</p> <p>Description/report answers the task set.</p> <p>Some complexity of content or perspectives (two or more).</p>	<p>The writer classifies and deals with attributes, behaviours, properties, functions, location, etc.</p> <p>Describes and adds some interpretation or evaluation material.</p> <p>May include poetic detail.</p> <p>Comprehensive, information-laden, and consistent elaboration.</p>
<p>Structure</p>	<p>Semblance of framework evident (e.g., some grouping of information. These might include, for example, opening followed by a description of aspects of the topic and summarising comment).</p>	<p>The writer is using a simple framework for ordering content (e.g., categorising or classifying).</p>	<p>Frameworks for ordering report or description are evident.</p>	<p>Clearly organised, thematic framework utilised but may be inconsistent.</p> <p>Introduction and conclusion are used to develop focus on topic.</p>	<p>Coherent, logical, thematic structure throughout.</p> <p>Introduction and conclusion enhance writer's purpose.</p>

Content	Level 2 (Proficient)	Level 3 (Proficient)	Level 4 (Proficient)	Level 5 (Proficient)	Level 6 (Proficient)
Structure (continued)	Text may be limited because fact statements presented as discrete elements or topic sentences. Generally organised at sentence level.	Is gaining control over sequence and ordering of information elements. Attempts at sectioning or paragraphing .	Complex , thematic structures may be attempted. Sectioning or paragraphing is evident , shows linking of main ideas and supporting details.	Elements of description appropriately assigned. Paragraphs used with main ideas and supporting details. Thematic linking of sentences to topic of paragraph or section.	Description has shape, begins with general statement then moves to particular. Structure enhances and strengthens ideas in text.
Language Resources	Language is simple , factual, and descriptive with verbs written in the present tense (e.g., use of verbs that link bits of information to tell what "it is" or what "they have"). Topic-related language present but little detail conveyed through language (e.g. nouns may have basic descriptors). Shows some understanding of the use of pronoun. Some language appropriate to purpose and audience. Simple and compound sentences used; may attempt complex sentences .	Language is appropriate to task and topic for classifying (e.g., linking verbs is, have, belongs to; action verbs for describing behaviours or uses, most often present tense). Topic-related language evident with use of adverbs and adjectives that attempt to provide the audience with detail . Use of pronouns largely controlled. Language is generally appropriate to purpose and audience. Uses a variety of sentence structures, beginnings, and lengths.	Language is appropriate to task and topic and handled with adequate command of descriptive and factual language. Reference links clear. Language of comparison is evident to help the audience visualise aspects of the subject (e.g., are similar to) Evidence of attempts to add information by noun-group "packing" or by the use of complex adverbials . Language is appropriate to purpose and audience. Uses a variety of sentence structures, beginnings and lengths for effect .	Consistent use of appropriate language for task and topic (e.g., uses timeless action verbs effectively for example teach, fight - most often present tense). Some figurative language used for effect. Competent descriptive, factual language and technical vocabulary generally used successfully to compare, contrast, define, or classify. Uses a variety of sentence structures, beginnings and lengths for effect and impact .	Uses a range of appropriate language for task and topic (including figurative language) deliberately to create an effect in text. Controlled/rich vocabulary evident (e.g., makes consistent use of singular and plural generic participants for example <i>Humanity faces</i>). Complex, appropriate, varied sentence construction.
Grammar	Uses most basic grammatical conventions correctly when writing simple and compound sentences (e.g., consistent use of tense, subject-verb agreement, consistent use of pronouns , and correct use of prepositions). Errors may interfere with meaning.	Uses most grammatical conventions correctly when writing simple , compound , and some complex sentences .	Uses most grammatical conventions correctly when writing simple , compound , and complex sentences .	Uses almost all grammatical conventions correctly when writing simple , compound , and complex sentences .	Sustained control of sentence grammar evident throughout piece. Control enhances communication.
Errors may interfere with meaning.			Uses the conventions of grammar with few intrusive errors.		

Content	Level 2 (Proficient)	Level 3 (Proficient)	Level 4 (Proficient)	Level 5 (Proficient)	Level 6 (Proficient)
Punctuation	Some simple sentence indication evident (i.e., caps, full stops, question marks).	Simple correct sentence indication evident (i.e., caps, full stops, question marks).	Consistent correct sentence indication (i.e., caps, full stops, question marks, exclamations).	Uses the conventions of punctuation with few intrusive errors.	
	Errors may interfere with comprehension.		Errors do not interfere with comprehension.		
	Some other basic punctuation attempted (e.g., caps for proper nouns , commas in lists, speech marks, apostrophes for contraction).	Some other basic punctuation correct (e.g., caps for proper nouns , commas in lists, speech marks, apostrophes for contraction).	Mostly accurate use of complex punctuation (e.g., commas, colons, hyphen, ellipsis, apostrophe of possession, and dialogue accurately punctuated when used).	Accurate use of complex punctuation (e.g., apostrophes, colons, hyphens). Some success with embedded, parenthetical, and conditional phrases or clauses using commas, semicolons.	
Spelling	Spells most HFW (Lists 1-4) correctly. Frequently used spelling patterns evident (e.g., changing y to ies, double consonant when adding ing). Approximate spellings show knowledge of consonant sounds, blends, and vowel sounds.	Spells most HFW (Lists 1-6) correctly. Understands most spelling patterns including some complex patterns (e.g., plurals using ch,sh,x,o).	Few errors within HFW (Lists 1-7). Understands most spelling patterns including most complex patterns (e.g., soft 'g' or 'c', keep the 'e' manageable). Some success with multi-syllabic (e.g.,hygienic), irregular (e.g.,yacht), or technical words .	Demonstrates a good understanding of spelling patterns with few intrusive errors.	
				Some success with complex multisyllabic, irregular, or technical words .	Sustained control of complex multisyllabic, irregular, or technical words .

Selected glossary of terms for the ‘to describe’ purpose

Purposes:

- to document, organise and store information on a given topic and
- make a reader understand, picture, or appreciate a body of information.

Description is used in all forms of writing to create a vivid impression of a person, place, object or event and may occur in other text types such as explanation and narrative. It may:

- describe a special place and explain why it is special;
- describe / create characters or an important person in your life or
- give information, such as describing an animal within an information report.

Terms	Explanation	General example
Task appropriate domains	Domain elements: The main elements that make up the structure of a description. Title: names or classifies the topic. Introduction: The first sentence introduces and classifies the topic, (<i>the person, place, object, event, or character.</i>) Series of paragraphs: that describe the most important and interesting details of the topic, e.g., <i>physical appearance, qualities, behaviour, significant attributes.</i> Concluding paragraph: a rounding off general statement about the topic. Character: appearance, behaviours or actions, feelings: likes/ dislikes, contexts/settings. Information report: classification: appearance, behaviour, habitat, reproduction.	
Content described is largely one faceted	Only concentrates on one aspect and does not consider wider contexts, e.g., <i>Dogs: classification and a list of types of (pet) dogs only or a character description where only the appearance is shown.</i>	
Discrete elements	Each domain element is treated in a completely separate way and not linked in any way.	
Sectioning or paragraphing	The writing has paragraphs, each one focusing on a different aspect and may be used to segment the text by grouping related elements or information by: headings, bullet points and or numbering.	
Nouns	Answer the question: who or what?	<i>baby, bird, food, Fish, boat, shoes</i>
	Strong nouns have more specific meanings.	<i>Papanui road, oak or willow (as opposed to tree)</i>
	Noun phrases: phrases acting as nouns in a sentence. Particularly long noun phrases are referred to as ‘ noun packing ’.	<i>All the people in the audience began to clap.</i>
	Noun groups: provide information about the subject.	<i>a tall thin man, the small girl, it was a <u>large open rowboat</u> with a tall front and tall back</i>
Pronouns	Pronouns are used often, but not always, to ‘replace’ a noun or noun phrase and help the writer to avoid repetition. They can be confusing to a reader if the pronoun references are not clearly made.	Some categories of pronoun are: Demonstrative: <i>this, that, these, those</i> Indefinite: <i>anybody, anything, everything, nobody</i> Personal: <i>I/me, you, he/him, we/us, they/them, it</i> Possessive: <i>mine, yours, his, hers, ours, theirs, its</i> Relative: <i>who, whom, which, whose, that</i>
Reference may be unclear or overused	Pronoun references are not clearly linked to the relevant noun already mentioned. The pronoun is repeatedly used, e.g., <i>he</i> or <i>it</i> .	The teenage <u>boy's</u> bedroom was silver and black. <u>He</u> had... <i>Snakes</i> are reptiles. <i>They</i> ...
Verbs	Words that express an action, happening, process or a state of being. Action verbs: are generally the more physical actions or behaviours that can be observed.	Some types of verbs Action: <i>slithers, hops, runs, eats, drinks, lives, turns, croaks, erupts, slobbers</i>
	Stative verbs: give information about a state of being or a state of mind. Sensing verbs: can be used in descriptions to describe the character's thoughts, feelings, opinions or beliefs.	Stative: <i>am, hoped, felt, seem, prefer, hate, heard</i> Sensing /feeling: <i>think, decide, hope, feel, prefer, love, believe, like, assume, consider, know, want, fear, understand, imagine, enjoy, wonder, disgust, observe</i>
Present tense verbs	The present tense uses the base form of the verb, which changes only in the third person singular where there is an (s) ending.	<i>She <u>looks</u> like my mother. Harry <u>looks</u> cheerful today. I <u>wait</u>/ She <u>waits</u>. (present tense)</i>
Verbs may be limited and lack simple adverbials.	Writers overuse verbs and the verbs used are weak and do not add specific information to the description.	Weak verbs: <i>got, went, go, come, said, look</i> Instead of <i>The old woman was in his way.</i> <i>The old woman <u>barred</u> his path.</i>
Adverbs/ Adverbials	Adverbs add detail and weight to the description. They give extra meaning to a verb, an adjective, another adverb or a whole sentence. Adding -ly to an adjective forms many adverbs, but there are many that do not end in -ly.	In many cases, adverbs tell us: how (manner): <i>slowly, happily, carefully, easily</i> where (place): <i>here, there, away, home, outside</i> when (time): <i>now, tomorrow, later, soon, early</i> how often (frequency): <i>often, regularly, sometimes</i> why (reason): <i>because, so, for</i>
	An adverbial phrase is a group of words that functions in the same way as adverbs.	<i>They left <u>a few days ago</u>. (adverbial phrase)</i> <i>Giraffes move <u>in a strange way</u>. (adverbial phrase)</i>

Terms	Explanation	General example
Adjectives/ Adjectivals	Adjectives are words that describe someone or something. They build up information around the noun or pronoun. They answer the question: which, whose, how many, what like, or what type?	Some types of adjective re: Numeral/Number: <i>five, sixth</i> Descriptive: <i>old, white, busy, careful, horrible, friendly</i> Distributive: <i>each, every, either</i> Interrogative: <i>which, what, whose</i> Indefinite: <i>some, few, many, most</i> Verbal adjectives: <i>walking tour, singing lesson</i>
	An adjectival is a group of words that are used to give more information about the noun. They may be preceded by a preposition.	with (prep) <i>dirty old jeans</i> , (adjectival phrase) animals <i>with <u>backbones</u> are called vertebrates</i> (adjectival phrase)
Plain descriptive prose	<i>My granddad wears slippers and is the former owner of the apple orchard that covers most of his land. He has the look of an old bagpiper and he has greying hair that is balding.</i>	
Figurative language	Alliteration: is the repetition of consonants, especially the initial consonant so that the words are linked together by sound.	<i>Her crunchy chocolate chip cookies are cool.</i>
	Idiom: an expression which is not meant literally and whose meaning cannot be figured out from the individual words. They can be special to a particular country or its language.	<i>under the weather, rings a bell, kicks the bucket, It's choice! She is such a pain in the neck.</i>
	Imagery: use of language to create a vivid sensory image. May include vocabulary and or choice of synonym, adjectives and adverbs. The image may be visual (picture), auditory (sound), tactile (feel), olfactory (smell) or gustatory (taste).	<i>He sits there like I'm a king and he's a shoes salesmen. She had been like the wind passing through the air.</i>
	Metaphor: the writer writes about something or someone as if they were really something else, without using the words: like or as.	<i>The trip was a nightmare and something James would remember for the rest of his life.</i>
	Personification: language relating to human action, motivation and emotion is used to refer to non-human agents or objects or abstract concepts.	<i>The wind whistled through the trees.</i>
	Simile: the writer creates an image in by comparing a subject to something else, by using the words: <i>like</i> or <i>as</i> .	<i>Her face shone like a beacon. Our caretaker has hair like snow. Her hair looks like a black birds nest.</i>
Purple prose	Descriptive prose that is exaggerated or ridiculously elaborate, i.e., over writing.	<i>The long, wavy, dry, brown tussock swirled around the rock.</i>
Technical and less-frequent vocabulary	Precise and subject specific language is used in descriptive reports. Language that is factual rather than imaginative is used.	<i>snout, tusks, gill slits, cartilage Possums are <u>nocturnal mammals</u>. Turtles are covered with a <u>hard, box like shell</u>.</i>
Conjunctions	Conjunctions join two or more clauses together and only occur within a sentence.	<i>and, but, so, or, because, since</i>
Connectives/ linkages	Connectives are words or phrases that also link clauses or sentences. They can be placed at various positions within the sentence and help contribute to the cohesion of the text.	<i>however, for that reason, in fact, although, after that</i> Connectives have the following functions: adding information: <i>also, apart from that, likewise,</i> explaining: <i>for example, in other words, that is to say</i> indicating result: <i>therefore, consequently, as a result</i>
Simple sentences	Simple sentences have a single clause. They have one main idea expressed as subject, verb and object.	Character: <i>Dad has got green eyes.</i> Report: <i>Snakes have not got legs.</i>
Compound sentences	Compound sentences have two or more clauses joined together by conjunctions such as 'and' and 'but'. The clauses are of equal weight; that is, they are main clauses.	Character: <i>Dad has green eyes and they get large when he laughs.</i> Report: <i>Snakes have not got legs and have not got arms either.</i>
Complex sentences	Complex sentences contain at least one clause that does not make sense without the rest of the sentence.	Character: <i>Her car was old so Nana sold it.</i> Report: <i>Although snakes have not got legs or arms they can move with speed.</i>