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Ages 10–11

KENT TEST

Writing Task Pack

Guide · Worked Examples · Practice Tasks



Free video companion for every question

Kent Test Writing Task Pack

Free sample

Ages 10 to 11

In this sample

- The MeritLeap writing ladder, our own guide to what each level of writing looks like
- One complete chapter: Story from a title, with a worked example answered at three levels
- One practice task with planning questions, a checklist and a model plan
- The model answer for that task, with notes on what makes it work
- A planning sheet and writing paper to copy

In the full pack

- 8 types of writing, each with a worked example at three levels
- 32 practice tasks with planning questions and checklists
- 32 model answers and model plans, kept separately at the back
- 6 choose-your-task papers with 30 more tasks
- Planning sheet, writing paper and a progress record to copy

Start here

The MeritLeap writing ladder

This ladder is how the sample answers in this pack are described. It is our own guide, not an official mark scheme. Use it to spot what a piece of writing already does and what it could do next.

What we look at	Developing	Secure	Strong
Ideas and task	Answers part of the task. Ideas are thin or wander off.	Answers the task all the way through with enough detail.	Answers the task fully with well-chosen detail that keeps the reader interested.
Organisation	Few or no paragraphs. The ending is rushed or missing.	Clear paragraphs in a sensible order, with a proper ending.	Paragraphs are linked smoothly. The opening and ending belong together.
Words and style	Everyday words, often repeated. Tells the reader instead of showing.	Some precise words and one or two techniques that fit the task.	Words are chosen with care for the reader and the type of writing. Nothing is overdone.
Sentences and punctuation	Mostly short or run-on sentences. Full stops and capitals sometimes missed.	A mix of sentence types. Full stops, commas and speech marks mostly right.	Sentence length is varied on purpose. Punctuation is accurate, including commas, apostrophes and speech.
Spelling and handwriting	Common words mostly right. Harder words guessed.	Most words right, including many harder ones. Easy to read.	Accurate spelling throughout. Handwriting is neat and easy to read.

How to use the ladder

- After you write, choose the box that fits best in each row. Be honest and be kind.
- Pick one row to work on next time. Only one.
- Read the Strong sample for that type of writing again and find one thing in that row you could borrow.

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1. Story from a title

You are given a short title or a one-line idea, and you write a whole short story to fit it. Your story needs a beginning, a problem and an ending, all finished in the 30 minutes you have to write and check. The secret is to keep it small: one main character, one event, one problem that gets solved.

How to plan it

- Minute 1 to 2: read the title twice and ask yourself what it could mean in an ordinary place you know well, such as school, home, the park or the beach.
- Minute 2 to 3: choose ONE main character and decide what they want today. Keep the cast small: one helper, and at most one or two other people who only say a line.
- Minute 3 to 4: choose ONE problem that could really happen and that a child could sort out in a few minutes of story time.
- Minute 4 to 7: jot five boxes down the page: opening, build-up, problem, resolution (how it is solved), ending. Write a few key words in each box.
- Minute 7 to 8: plan your last line now. Pick a detail from your opening (an object, a sound, a line of speech) that you can bring back at the end.
- Minute 8 to 10: note two things to show instead of tell, and one short piece of speech you will use. Then start writing.

Your toolkit

- Start close to the action. Begin a few minutes before the problem, not when the character wakes up: 'The lunch bell had already rung twice.'
- Show, don't tell. This means you describe what a feeling looks like instead of naming it. Not 'She was nervous' but 'The spoon rattled against her bowl.'
- Use a little speech, set out correctly. Speech marks go round the spoken words, the comma or question mark goes inside them, and each new speaker gets a new line: 'Where are we going?' asked Tom.
- Slow down the big moment with short sentences: 'The door clicked. Nobody spoke.'
- Pick exact details instead of lots of adjectives. 'A gate with one green welly stuck on top' is better than 'a really funny, strange, old gate'.
- Give your character a thought at the hardest moment: 'Count to three, she told herself.'
- Let the character solve the problem by doing something, such as remembering, asking, running or owning up. Luck should not do the work.
- Link the ending to the opening. Bring back an object, a place or a line from your first paragraph, but show that something has changed.

Common slips

- Starting too early. If your story begins with getting up and eating breakfast, you will run out of time. Start a few minutes before the problem.
- Too much plot. Three problems, a chase and a mystery cannot fit into 30 minutes. Choose one small problem and tell it well.
- Forgetting the title. Check that the title matters in your story. A reader should be able to say why the story is called that.
- A rushed or borrowed ending, such as 'then I woke up' or 'then they all went home'. Plan your last line before you start, and start your ending with about ten minutes left, so the last five minutes are free for checking.

- Speech that goes on and on. Two or three short exchanges are enough. Too much talking turns your story into a script and nothing happens.

Story from a title: worked example

One task, answered three ways. Read all three, then the notes under each. The levels use the MeritLeap writing ladder on page 2. It is our own guide, not an official mark scheme.

> Write a story with the title 'The Wrong Bag'.

What the task is asking

You are being asked for a whole story, with a beginning, a problem and an ending, in which a bag that belongs to somebody else really matters. The trap is to make the bag too exciting. If it is full of stolen jewels, you will need police, chases and far more time than you have. Keep the bag ordinary and make the problem matter to your character instead. The other trap is spending half your time on the journey before the bag is even opened.

The plan behind the Strong answer

- Who: Ravi, Year 6, swimming gala today, practised his backstroke turn for weeks
- Opening: rainy bus, wet coats, bag under seat, draws swimmer on steamy window
- Build-up: scramble off the bus, grabs a strap without looking
- Problem: changing room, pink towel, starry goggles, not his! Race is second
- Resolution: name tag says Zofia, runs in socks, she has his bag, swap, laugh
- Ending: comes third but best turn ever. Bus home, steamy window again, hugs bag

Developing answer (183 words)

One day Ravi got up and had his breakfast and got dressed and then he went to get the bus to school. It was the swimming gala today and he was excited. He got on the bus and sat down and put his bag on the floor and then the bus went to school. When he got off he picked up his bag and went in.

Then it was time for the gala so they went to the pool. Ravi opened his bag and it was the wrong bag. He was very shocked and worried. There was a pink towel in it and a hairbrush and it was definately not his. He did not know what to do. He looked for his teacher but she was busy. Then he saw a girl called Zofia and she had his bag so they swapped thier bags and he was happy. He got changed and did his race and he came third. Then he went home and told his mum and had his tea and went to bed. It was a good day in the end.

What we notice

- The writer chose one clear, believable event, and the moment when Ravi finds that "it was the wrong bag" is exactly the right kind of problem for a short story.
- There is a good detail in "a pink towel in it and a hairbrush". It lets the reader see why the bag cannot be his.
- The story starts too early. "got up and had his breakfast" has nothing to do with the bag, so it uses up time the writer needs later.
- "He was very shocked and worried" tells us the feeling. The reader would enjoy it more if we could see what Ravi did.
- The ending trails on. "had his tea and went to bed" carries on after the story has really finished.

Next steps

- Cross out the first sentence and begin with Ravi already on the bus, putting his bag down.
- Change one telling sentence into showing. What do Ravi's hands, face or voice do when he sees the pink towel?
- Split the story into four paragraphs (opening, problem, solving it, ending) and check the spellings of definitely and their.

Secure answer (233 words)

Ravi was on the bus to school. It was the day of the swimming gala and he could not sit still. He pushed his blue bag under the seat and looked out of the window at the rain.

When the bus stopped, everyone rushed to get off. Ravi grabbed his bag and hurried into school. All morning he thought about his race. He was in the fifty-metre backstroke and he really wanted to win.

After lunch the class walked to the pool. In the changing room Ravi unzipped his bag and gasped. Inside were a pink towel, a hairbrush and a pair of goggles with stars on. It was not his bag! He felt very worried because his race was in ten minutes.

'What's the matter?' asked his friend Hugo.

'I've got the wrong bag,' said Ravi. 'Somebody else must have mine.'

Ravi looked on the bag and found a name tag. It said Zofia. He ran out to the corridor and luckily Zofia was there. She was holding a blue bag and looking confused.

'Is this yours?' she said. They swapped bags and both laughed.

Ravi got changed as fast as he could and got to the pool just in time. He came second in his race, which he was pleased with. On the way home he kept his bag on his knee, and it was a day he would never forget.

What we notice

- The story starts in the right place. "Ravi was on the bus to school" puts us straight into the day that matters.
- The speech is short and set out correctly, with a new line for each speaker, as in "I've got the wrong bag".
- "goggles with stars on" is a well-chosen detail that shows the bag belongs to someone else.
- Some feelings are told, not shown. "He felt very worried" could become something Ravi does.
- The problem is solved a little too easily in "luckily Zofia was there", and "a day he would never forget" is an ending many children use. The bag "on his knee" is a much better last picture.

Next steps

- Make Ravi work harder to find Zofia. Give him a corridor to run down or somebody to ask.
- Swap "He felt very worried" for a showing sentence, such as what happens to his hands or his stomach.
- End on the picture of the bag on his knee and delete the words that come after it.

Strong answer (311 words)

The bus smelled of wet coats. Ravi squeezed into a seat by the window, shoved his blue bag underneath and drew a swimmer in the steam on the glass. Today was the gala. He had practised his backstroke turn at every lesson for six weeks.

When the bus jolted to a stop outside school, there was the usual scramble. Ravi reached down, hooked a strap with two fingers and jumped off into the rain.

It was not until after lunch, in the noisy changing room at the pool, that he unzipped the bag. A pink towel. A hairbrush. Goggles with silver stars on the strap. Ravi stared. His hands went cold.

'Hurry up,' said Hugo, already in his trunks. 'Backstroke is the second race.'

'This isn't mine,' Ravi whispered. He dug right down to the bottom of the bag, as if his own things might be hiding there. A name tag swung from the zip. Zofia, Class 6B.

There was no time to tell a teacher. Ravi ran along the corridor in his socks, past the lockers, past the drinks machine, with the pink towel flapping out of the open bag. Outside the girls' changing room stood a tall girl holding a blue bag at arm's length, as though it might bite.

'Are you Zofia?' he panted.

'Are you the boy with the smelly trainers?' she said, and held out his bag.

They swapped without another word, then both burst out laughing.

Ravi reached the poolside with his goggles still in his hand as the whistle blew for the second race. He did not win. He came third, and his turn was the best he had ever done.

On the bus home the windows had steamed up again. This time Ravi did not draw anything. He sat with the blue bag on his lap and both arms wrapped tightly around it.

What we notice

- The first sentence, "The bus smelled of wet coats", puts the reader on the bus straight away without any explaining.
- Very short sentences, some with no verb at all, slow down the big moment, as in "A pink towel. A hairbrush." We find out at the same speed as Ravi does.
- Feelings are shown, not told. "His hands went cold" says more than the word worried would.
- The speech is brief, correctly punctuated and funny. "Are you the boy with the smelly trainers?" tells us a lot about Zofia in one line.
- The ending links back to the opening. "the windows had steamed up again" reminds us of the swimmer he drew, and now he is holding the bag instead.

Next steps

- Add one of Ravi's thoughts while he runs down the corridor, so that we hear what is going on in his head.
- Look at the paragraph about the bus stopping. Could one more detail explain how two bags ended up side by side?

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Task 1.1

Story from a title · 10 minutes to plan, then 30 minutes to write and check

> Write a story with the title 'The Shortcut'.

Planning questions

- Who takes the shortcut, and why are they in a hurry?
- Where does the shortcut go? Choose an ordinary place you can picture clearly.
- What ONE thing goes wrong on the way?
- Who or what helps to put it right, and what does your character have to do?
- What will your character say or do at the end that shows what they have learned?

My plan

Paragraph 1
Paragraph 2
Paragraph 3
Paragraph 4
Paragraph 5

Checklist for when you finish

- [ ] I have written about one main character and one small event.
- [ ] I have a clear opening, build-up, problem, resolution and ending.
- [ ] I have shown at least two feelings through actions instead of naming them.
- [ ] I have used a little speech with speech marks, and a new line for each new speaker.
- [ ] My title matters all the way through the story.
- [ ] My ending links back to something in my opening.

Write on lined paper. The model answer for Task 1.1 is in the Model answers section at the back.

Model answers

Read a model answer only after you have written your own. It is one strong way to answer. Your ideas can be completely different and just as good.

Task 1.1: Story from a title

Write a story with the title 'The Shortcut'.

Model plan

- Who: Leila, always late, walking little brother Idris home. Mum said four o'clock
- Opening: speech, 'home in five minutes', green gate, his new school shoes
- Build-up: quiet allotments, cabbages, scarecrow, checks watch, ten to four
- Problem: far gate padlocked, Idris loses shoe in the mud
- Resolution: Leila asks an old woman in a straw hat for help, through her plot, tomatoes
- Ending: home at twenty past. Idris whispers 'Five minutes?' Leila: the long way tomorrow

Model answer (306 words)

'We'll be home in five minutes,' said Leila, pointing at the green gate. 'It's a shortcut. Trust me.'

Her little brother Idris looked at the muddy path beyond it and then at his new school shoes. He did not look as if he trusted her at all.

The allotments were quiet. They hurried past rows of cabbages, a shed with a crooked door and a scarecrow wearing a bobble hat. Leila checked her watch. Ten to four. Mum had said four o'clock, and Leila had been late twice this week already.

Then the path stopped. In front of them stood a tall gate with a rusty padlock as big as her fist. Leila rattled it. Nothing moved. Behind her there was a squelch and a wail.

'My shoe!' cried Idris. He was standing on one leg like a heron. His shoe sat in the mud a step behind him, slowly filling with brown water.

Leila could not look at him. She fished the shoe out with a stick and tried to wipe it on the grass, which only made it worse.

Over a wall of runner beans Leila spotted a straw hat. She made herself walk over.

'Excuse me,' she called. 'We're stuck. I thought this was a shortcut.'

'It is on Sundays, when that gate is open,' said the old woman under the hat. Her eyes twinkled. 'Come through my plot. Mind the onions.'

She led them between the beans to a little side gate, and before they left she filled a paper bag with tomatoes for their mum.

It was twenty past four when they finally reached their front door, with one clean shoe and one brown one. Mum looked at her watch, then at the shoe, then at the tomatoes.

'Five minutes?' whispered Idris.

'Tomorrow,' said Leila, 'we are going the long way.'

What makes it work

- It opens with speech that makes a promise, "We'll be home in five minutes", so the reader is already waiting to see whether it comes true.

- Exact details bring the allotments to life, such as "a scarecrow wearing a bobble hat".
- Feelings are shown through actions. "Leila could not look at him" tells us she feels guilty without using that word.
- Short sentences mark the moment the problem arrives: "Leila rattled it. Nothing moved."
- The ending brings back the opening line as a question, "Five minutes?", and Leila's reply shows that she has changed her mind.

Stretch

Write the story again from Idris's point of view, using 'I'. What does he notice that Leila does not?

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Pages to copy

Planning sheet

Task:

Who is it for, and what kind of writing is it?

My paragraphs

Paragraph 1
Paragraph 2
Paragraph 3
Paragraph 4
Paragraph 5

Three good words or phrases to use

My last line or final point

Writing paper

Name and task:

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