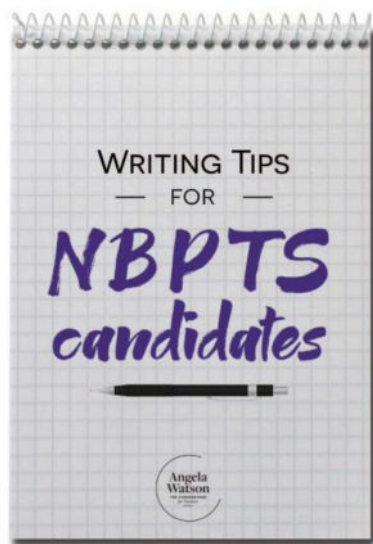


## NBPTS Writing Tips by Angela Watson

<https://thecornerstoneforteachers.com/nbpts-writing-tips/>

Writing for your portfolio is, in my experience, completely unlike any other writing assignment you have ever or will ever have. Transitional phrases, introductory sentences, and tidy conclusions are all out the window. The idea is to cram as much evidence as possible into your writing at the expense of flow. I wrote these national board certification writing tips to help candidates understand how to save space, make every word count, and focus their writing on citing evidence.

Some people resent having to “play the game” of changing their writing style and using little tips and tricks to cram as much information as possible into each entry. However, NBPTS is about accomplished teaching first and foremost, not flowery writing or the excellent use of transition phrases. In fact, if you focus on those things, you’re actually detracting from your ability to give evidence of your accomplishments. This page will explain what I learned as both a candidate and an assessor for the National Board of Professional Teaching Standards. It’s truth, whether you like it or not. Don’t shoot the messenger!



## How to write National Board Certification entries

- **Use all of the space you’re allowed and make EVERY word count.** If you can use 12 pages, don’t stop at 11 and three-quarters or even aim for precisely 12. Write 15 pages and then cut out the words and sentences that provide the least amount of evidence that you’ve met the standards.

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- **Cut out anything unscorable or ‘fluff’.** If it doesn’t directly answer a prompt, the assessor can’t use it. Quoting the standards, quoting prompts, rephrasing prompts, and using introductory or conclusion sentences are all unscorable pieces of information. So are cute anecdotes such as “His face lit up when he finally figured it out!” or “She was so happy”. ONLY evidence is scorable!
- **Replace general statements with more anecdotes. Specifics are always better.** It’s not enough to say that you did something: you must SHOW, in detail, that you’ve met the standards.
- **If you don’t know what else to say and you have extra lines, give more specific evidence to support your claims.** Use more anecdotes and specific examples.
- **Don’t write like you did in college...or like a good writer, period.** *Transition words are unscorable. Paraphrasing the question is unscorable. Introductory and conclusion sentences are unscorable.* These things make your paper sound better but waste space you could have used citing evidence. Cut to the chase and don’t worry about flow.
- **Remember that you are not being scored on grammar, spelling, or punctuation.** Assessors are looking for the things you see in the rubric, period.
- **Skip the ‘education-ese’.** Using big words, impressive vocabulary, and educational jargon can actually make it more difficult for a tired assessor to figure out what you’re talking about. Choose precise words, but don’t try to be fancy just for the sake of sounding good.
- **Don’t quote the standards.** Assessors know them, so there’s no need to cite directly. You do need to SHOW how you IMPLEMENT the standards in your classroom.
- **Include guide words to help the assessor know which prompts you are answering, but don’t write out the whole question or rephrase it.** Jump right in there and start answering it! Examples are below.

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<i><b>Prompt</b></i>	<i><b>Wastes space with unscorable info:</b></i>	<i><b>Saves space with:</b></i>
<i><b>What are the relevant and important characteristics of the student?</b></i>	<i><b>The relevant and important characteristics of the student are...</b></i>	<i><b>Characteristics-</b></i>
<i><b>What are the specific needs and abilities of this student that influence your planning for this period of instruction?</b></i>	<i><b>The specific needs of this student are...</b></i>	<i><b>Needs/Abilities-</b></i>
<i><b>What are the relevant features of your teaching context that influenced the selection of this period of instruction?</b></i>	<i><b>The relevant features of my teaching context that influenced the selection of this period of instruction are...</b></i>	<i><b>Relevant Features-</b></i>

- **Use bold print sparingly to introduce new topics or prompt responses.** Assessors are trained to find and credit you for evidence wherever they find it, but the easier you make things, the less likely it is for them to overlook something and misunderstand it. There are lots of ways to do this, but it's important to think carefully about WHY you are putting something in bold or italics.
- **Answer ALL parts of ALL prompts, no matter how redundant they seem.** You may feel like you are answering the same questions over and over, but each is slightly different and needs to be addressed.
- **Compare your entry to each of the four rubrics (not just the level 4.)** There may be things that assessors are looking for according to the rubric that aren't really emphasized in the prompts. For example, in the EC-Gen literacy entry, verbal development is part of the rubric but not stated implicitly in the prompts,

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and many people only address development as a reader and writer. Checking out all 4 rubrics is important when trying to figure out where your entry falls for each criteria.

## National Board space-saving tips

- Use numerals instead of number words (ie '8' instead of 'eight' and '10<sup>th</sup>' instead of 'tenth').
- Put one space in between sentences instead of two.
- Don't type out students' name repeatedly: write 'Thomas (T)' the first time you refer to him and 'T' every time thereafter.
- When describing kids in the videos, say 'the girl with the green sweater, S.' and refer to her as 'S' from then on.
- Make up abbreviations for words you will use frequently: in entry one, write 'Work Sample 1 (S1)' the first time and then 'S1' thereafter.
- Check your margins with a ruler after printing. Although you may have it set for 1 inch, it may actually print as more. This happened to me and I was able to get 2 extra lines on each page!
- Indent only 2 spaces.
- Set your ID # and page #'s as headers & footers so they will be within the 1 inch margins rather than in the body of your page.
- Titles for entry sections (such as "Instructional Context") don't need to be by themselves on a line. You can bold them and insert a colon and begin typing on the same line. Better yet, don't use titles at all (see chart above.)
- Your word processing program may, by default setting, keep you from ending a page with one line of a new paragraph and instead send the new line to the next page, causing you to lose a whole line on the current page. Check your orphan control feature—go to Format, then Paragraph, then Line & Page Breaks. Doing this added numerous lines to my entries that would have otherwise been lost.

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- With a fresh mind go back & reread an entry to look for redundant language or other ways to reword your sentences. Do you overuse a word or phrase, such as *that, also, in order to, or as well as*?
- When you mention something once, it's there! If you're repeating yourself, you've misread the question. Use different anecdotes to prove a point.
- Don't repeat what's in the Contextual Information Form.

*(Tips #6-13 adapted from the National Board Online Support Groups May, 2004)*

## Angela Watson

Angela is a National Board Certified Teacher with 8 years experience as a K-12 instructional coach and 11 years experience in the classroom. As founder of Due Season Press and Educational Services, she has created [printable curriculum resources](#), [online courses](#), [4 books](#), the [Truth for Teachers podcast](#), and the [40 Hour Teacher Workweek Club](#). She's been supporting teachers through this website since 2003.