ILLUSTRATING THE WRITING STANDARD

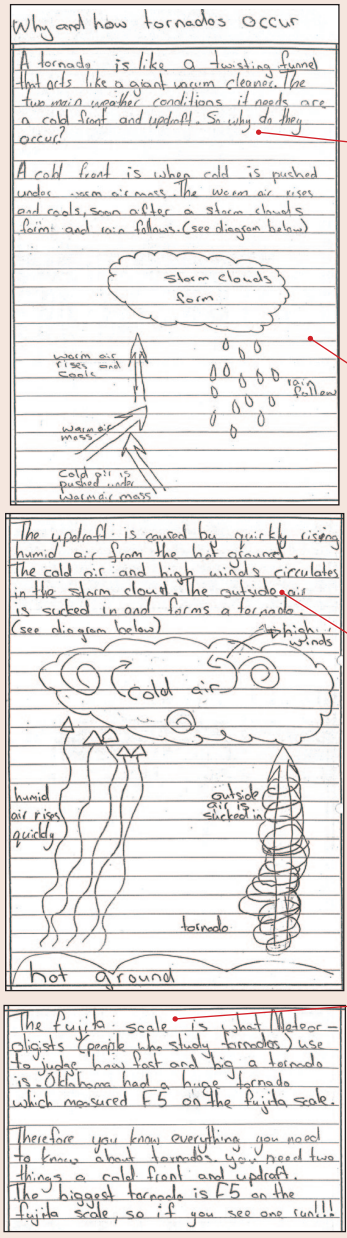
Why and how tornados occur

By the end of year 5, students are required to create a variety of texts in order to think about, record, and communicate experiences, ideas, and information across the curriculum. To meet the standard, students draw on the knowledge, skills, and attitudes for writing described in the Literacy Learning Progressions for students at this level.

The difference in the standard for year 6 [as compared with year 5] is the students' increased **accuracy** and **fluency** in writing a variety of texts across the curriculum, their **level of control** and **independence** in **selecting writing processes and strategies,** and the range of texts they write. In particular, by the end of year 6, students will be required to **write more complex texts** than students in year 5 and to **be more effective in selecting different strategies** for different writing purposes. (*Reading and Writing Standards,* page 31)

During their science unit on extreme weather (part of an overall focus on making sense of Planet Earth and Beyond), the students in this year 5–6 class are explaining how and why a particular natural phenomenon occurs (in this example, a tornado). This task provides an authentic context for students to use appropriate language and structures and, at the same time, demonstrate an understanding of the science concepts. The students' writing will be published on the school's website, to be shared with parents.

The following example illustrates aspects of the task and text and demonstrates how a student engages with both task and text to meet the writing demands of the curriculum. A number of such examples would be used to inform the overall teacher judgment for this student.



Transcript: Why and how tornados occur

A tornado is like a twisting funnel that acts like a giant vacum cleaner. The two main weather conditions it needs are a cold front and updraft. So why do they occur?

A cold front is when cold is pushed under warm air mass. The warm air rises and cools, soon after a storm clouds form and rain follows. (see diagram below)

The updraft is caused by quickly rising humid air from the hot ground. The cold air and high winds circulates in the storm cloud. The outside air is sucked in and forms a tornado.

The fujita scale is what Meteorologists (people who study tornados) use to judge how fast and big a tornado is.

The student shows a developing understanding of how to shape text in order to explain a natural phenomenon. She shows awareness of her audience and engages the reader through the use of figurative language (the two similes "like a twisting funnel" and "like a giant vacum cleaner") in the opening sentence. The student identifies the factors necessary for a tornado to occur and uses some appropriate subject-specific vocabulary ("cold front", "updraft", "warm air mass", "fujita scale", "Meteorologists"). The student also includes precise verbs ("circulates", "sucked in").

The student describes the process of tornado formation in some detail. She uses supporting diagrams to clarify the process. The student groups her ideas in paragraphs and uses simple, compound, and complex sentences. The use of brackets for two distinct purposes demonstrates a developing understanding of complex punctuation.

Overall, the process of how a tornado is formed is presented in a series of simple factual statements. It does not include clear links that would enable the reader to understand what actually happens and how effect follows cause. This developing control of processes and strategies and a simple presentation of ideas and information demonstrate that the student is meeting the writing demands of the science curriculum as she works towards level 3, as expected by the end of year 5.