Grade 3 – Opinion Writing Work Sample: Approaching

Task: Your class is studying about different places people visit. You are given two sources about the life of an astronaut and the type of training that astronauts receive in order to do their job.

Read the sources carefully to **write an opinion essay** in which you give your opinion about which type of island would be better to visit—a hot island or a cold island. Make sure you clearly state your opinion and write several paragraphs supporting your opinion with reasons and details from the sources.

Scores, Justification of Student Evidence, and Suggested Areas of Student Improvement

Ideas and Content: 3

The essay demonstrates progress toward grade-level writing skills. The opinion is clear, and several reasons are provided using information from the sources. However, development is uneven—details are sometimes listed rather than explained, and elaboration is limited. The paper includes enthusiasm but needs stronger focus, connections, and clarity.

Evidence from Student Work: Ideas and Content	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Ideas and Content
✓ **Clear Opinion and Purpose** ○ The writer clearly states an opinion in the introduction: *"In my opinion I think if you're planning a vacation… you should go to a hot island."* ○ This fulfills the rubric's "writer's purpose and main ideas are easy to understand." ○ However, the introduction could better preview the reasons instead of repeating the opinion.	➢ **Strengthen the Introduction:** ○ Add a sentence that previews your main reasons (e.g., "Hot islands are the best because of the weather, the water, the animals, and the plants.").
✓ **Relevant but Basic Details** ○ The student uses ideas drawn from the sources: *"hot island gets a lot of sun," "long rainy season," "huge waterfalls and coral reefs."* ○ These match the rubric's "the writer includes some facts, definitions, or other information about the topic." ○ Still, the evidence is paraphrased loosely and lacks deeper explanation or connection to the opinion.	➢ **Add Explanation to Each Reason:** ○ After listing a detail, explain why it makes hot islands better ("Warm weather means you can swim every day.").
✓ **Limited Elaboration and Development** ○ The writer lists reasons such as *"weather," "water," "creatures," "tropical stuff growing over there"* without explaining why these make hot islands better to visit. ○ According to the rubric, this aligns with "details may be too general or not specific; details may be listed, but not explained."	➢ **Expand Evidence with Specific Facts:** ○ Use details directly from the sources (e.g., mention that tropical islands are near the equator or have palm trees and coral reefs).
✓ **Focus and Relevance** ○ The essay remains mostly on topic but includes off-task or filler statements like *"(But don't sell your house.)"* and *"just reading my opinion writing would make you do all this stuff."* ○ These humorous asides disrupt focus and slightly weaken the purpose.	➢ **Stay on Topic:** ○ Remove unrelated comments like "don't sell your house" and "reading my opinion will make you do this." Keep the focus on reasons and facts.

Organization: 3

The essay shows a basic organizational structure with an introduction, four body sections, and a conclusion. However, transitions are inconsistent, ideas sometimes overlap, and pacing feels uneven.

Evidence from Student Work: Organization	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Organization
✓ **Introduction** ○ Begins with context: *"Today my class is reading a book about islands…"* and leads to an opinion. ○ The introduction identifies the topic but lacks a strong hook or clear overview of reasons.	➢ **Add Clear Topic Sentences:** ○ Begin each paragraph by clearly stating the reason before adding details.
✓ **Grouping and Order** ○ Body paragraphs follow a basic sequence—weather, water, animals, plants—but paragraph breaks are uneven, and one section is overextended with multiple unrelated ideas.	➢ **Vary Transitions:** ○ Replace repetitive transitions with new ones ("In addition," "Another great reason," "Finally").
✓ **Transitions and Connections** ○ Uses simple connectors like *"My first reason," "Another reason," "The third reason,"* which show awareness of sequencing but feel repetitive. ○ Missing internal transitions that connect ideas smoothly.	➢ **Connect Ideas Between Paragraphs:** ○ Add one linking sentence to connect sections logically ("The warm weather also helps many tropical plants grow.").
✓ **Conclusion and Closure** ○ The conclusion restates reasons in a lively tone but adds distracting humor (*"Don't sell your house."*). ○ This meets "concluding statement or section is about the opinion," but the focus is diluted.	➢ **Refine the Conclusion:** ○ Keep enthusiasm but remove jokes; restate the opinion in one strong final sentence ("Hot islands are the best vacation spots because of their weather, water, animals, and plants.").

Voice: 4

The tone is lively, sincere, and shows enthusiasm for the topic. The writer's personality comes through with humor and energy, though the voice sometimes overshadows clarity.

Evidence from Student Work: Voice	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Voice
✓ **Engaging and Honest Tone** ○ The student's personality is evident in phrases like *"How cool would it be to see a real-life chimp?"* and *"Listen to me and take my advice."* ○ This meets the rubric's "writing is lively, sincere, exciting, or honest."	➢ **Use Confident, Persuasive Language:** ○ Replace conversational comments ("Listen to me") with stronger opinion phrases ("This is why hot islands are the best place to visit.").
✓ **Personal Connection** ○ Frequent use of personal pronouns ("I," "you") makes the tone genuine and interactive.	➢ **Add Reflective Phrases:** ○ Include one feeling statement ("I would feel amazed to see all the animals on a hot island.") to deepen sincerity.
✓ **Audience Awareness** ○ The student clearly writes for an audience of peers, using persuasive appeals and humor to connect with the reader.	➢ **Maintain Focused Voice:** ○ Keep your enthusiasm but remove jokes that pull the reader away from your opinion.

Evidence from Student Work: Voice	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Voice
✓ **Consistency of Voice** ○ The tone remains enthusiastic throughout but occasionally becomes too casual or distracting, reducing clarity.	➢

Word Choice: 3

The writer uses some descriptive and content-specific words, but repetition, informal phrasing, and occasional misspellings limit precision.

Evidence from Student Work: Word Choice	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Word Choice
✓ **Variety and Precision** ○ Words like "beautiful," "tropical," "cool creatures," and "fabulous" show attempt at descriptive vocabulary. ○ Many simple or repeated words ("hot island," "cool," "stuff") weaken clarity.	➢ **Add Strong Verbs:** ○ Replace "is" and "have" with stronger verbs like "shine," "grow," or "flow."
✓ **Content Vocabulary** ○ Includes basic topical terms ("coral reefs," "lagoon," "mountains"), showing understanding of island-related content.	➢ **Replace Vague Words:** ○ Change general terms like "stuff" to specific nouns ("plants," "fruits," "trees").
✓ **Appropriate for Audience** ○ Language is lively and understandable, matching a student's persuasive purpose, though word choices sometimes sound exaggerated or informal.	➢ **Simplify Overly Informal Words:** ○ Replace "fabulous house" with "beautiful house" to fit a formal tone.
✓ **Spelling and Word Form Errors** ○ Misspellings ("wheater," "bannanas," "islnds") occasionally distract the reader and reduce precision.	➢ **Check Spelling Carefully:** ○ Correct island-related words using classroom vocabulary lists.

Sentence Fluency: 3

The writing is readable and shows some sense of rhythm, but frequent repetition, inconsistent structure, and uneven sentence control affect flow.

Evidence from Student Work: Sentence Fluency	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Sentence Fluency
✓ **Readability** ○ The essay can be read aloud easily, fulfilling the rubric's "parts of the writing are easy to read out loud."	➢ **Add Short Emphasis Sentences:** ○ Use short, punchy sentences to add rhythm and excitement.
✓ **Repetitive Patterns** ○ Many sentences begin with "My first reason," "Another reason," "The third reason," causing predictable rhythm.	➢ **Vary Sentence Beginnings:** ○ Start sentences in new ways ("Because," "When," "After") to avoid repetition.

Evidence from Student Work: Sentence Fluency	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Sentence Fluency
✓ **Sentence Length Variety** ○ Sentences are mostly medium length with few short or compound structures.	➢ **Combine Simple Sentences:** ○ Merge short, choppy ideas to improve flow.
✓ **Occasional Errors in Structure** ○ Missing commas and run-ons ("Sharks, eels, crabs, many kinds of colorful fish living in the waters") interrupt fluency.	➢ **Fix Run-Ons:** ○ Read aloud and add commas or periods where you naturally pause.

Conventions: 2

The paper contains frequent errors in spelling, capitalization, and punctuation that occasionally disrupt meaning. Basic sentence structure is evident, but errors distract the reader.

Evidence from Student Work: Conventions	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Conventions
✓ **Punctuation and Capitalization** ○ Missing commas, capitalization errors ("i think," "hot island") and inconsistent parentheses reduce readability.	➢ **Review Capitalization and Punctuation:** ○ Make sure each sentence starts with a capital letter and ends with a correct punctuation mark.
✓ **Spelling Errors** ○ Words like "wheater," "bannanas," "mountins," "shelterd," and "chmip" show common phonetic misspellings.	➢ **Use Spelling Resources:** ○ Recheck difficult words using a dictionary or classroom word wall.
✓ **Grammar and Mechanics** ○ Sentence fragments and missing words occasionally appear, making parts confusing.	➢ **Edit for Clarity:** ○ Read your essay aloud to catch missing words or confusing fragments.

Use of Sources: 3

The student uses general ideas from the sources but references them vaguely ("paragraph two," "paragraph three"). Integration is limited, and accuracy is inconsistent.

Evidence from Student Work: Use of Sources	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Use of Sources
✓ **Accurate but General Use of Sources** ○ References details like "lagoon," "coral reefs," and "mountains and hills" that reflect *Source #2.* ○ Mentions reading "paragraph two" and "paragraph three," showing attempt to cite but without clear connection to which source.	➢ **Clarify Source References:** ○ Instead of "paragraph two," write "In Source #2 it says…" to make references clearer.
✓ **Paraphrasing and Integration** ○ Facts are restated loosely, sometimes word-for-word, but integrated within original sentences.	➢ **Check Paraphrasing:** ○ Rephrase source information completely in your own words while keeping facts correct.
✓ **Limited Source Variety** ○ Only hot island information is used; no evidence from *Source #1 (cold islands)* appears.	➢ **Add Contrast Detail:** ○ Include one fact from *Source #1* about cold islands to strengthen comparison.

Suggestions for Teaching Strategies to Support the Student Sample:

The following contain suggestions for teaching strategies and do not encompass a complete list of possible strategies.

Ideas and Content:

"Reason–Evidence–Explanation" Scaffold:

- Provide a three-sentence frame: *Reason* → *Evidence* → *Explanation.* Have students color-code each part in their own writing to visualize complete development.

Focus-Check Activity:

- After drafting, students underline one sentence per paragraph that connects directly to their opinion. Remove or rewrite any sentence that doesn't.

Source Detail Practice:

- Model how to pull one fact from each paragraph of a source and turn it into an opinion-supporting sentence.

Organization:

Paragraph Strip Activity:

- Have students cut their essay into paragraph "strips" and rearrange them in logical order before revising transitions.

Transition Revision Mini-Lesson:

- Provide lists of sequencing, contrast, and conclusion transitions. Students practice replacing overused connectors.

Conclusion Rewrite Workshop:

- Model how to turn casual endings into confident restatements of opinion.

Voice:

Tone Reflection Chart:

- Students highlight sentences that sound lively, then note whether those lines support or distract from the opinion.

Formal vs. Informal Revisions:

- Provide pairs of sentences (casual vs. persuasive) and discuss which tone fits academic opinion writing best.

"Voice with Purpose" Mini-Lesson:

- Model how enthusiasm and formality can coexist by rewriting one paragraph with both energy and focus.

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Word Choice:

Spelling Focus Lists:

- Use frequent word review activities with island-related vocabulary to reinforce accurate spelling.

Word Precision Game:

- Students choose a vague word and replace it with three more specific options.

Verb Variety Lesson:

- Students identify all “is” and “have” verbs in a paragraph and rewrite with stronger, more descriptive verbs.

Sentence Fluency:

Sentence Variety Sort:

- Students label sentences as short, medium, or long, then revise for balance.

Oral Reading Fluency:

- Students record themselves reading their essay to hear where sentences sound awkward or repetitive.

Punctuation Pause Practice:

- Have students read aloud and mark natural pause points to add punctuation or adjust sentence boundaries.

Conventions:

Conventions Editing Pass:

- Provide a step-by-step checklist focusing first on capitalization, then punctuation, then spelling.

Peer Editing Partner System:

- Partners identify three spelling and punctuation errors each before final submission.

Daily Sentence Corrections:

- Use one or two sentences from this paper for short daily editing practice.

Use of Sources:

Source Reference Frames:

- Provide sentence starters like “According to Source #1…” or “The article explains…” for consistent citation.

Fact-Check Partner Review:

- Partners locate each fact in the source to verify accuracy and paraphrasing.

Two-Source Organizer:

- Have students fill out a T-chart listing facts from each source, ensuring evidence from both is used.