Grade 4 – Informational Writing Work Sample: Exceeds

Task: Your class is studying about different ecosystems and animal habitats. You are given three sources about various animals and the habitats they live within.

Read the sources carefully to **write an informational article** on animals and their habitats. Using more than one source, develop a main idea about animals and their surroundings. Choose the most important information from the sources to support your main idea.

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

Ideas and Content: 5

The writing is clear, detailed, and shows a strong understanding of how animals adapt to different environments. The main idea is easy to follow, and the writer accurately uses information from several sources to explain survival in cold regions, deserts, and oceans. While a few ideas are repeated or slightly imprecise, overall the development is thorough and well supported.

Evidence from Student Work: Ideas and Content	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Ideas and Content
✓ **Clear Main Idea:** ○ The focus—how animals survive in different environments—is established early: *"We animals and people have different life styles... Some of us live in cold places or hot."* The writer maintains this idea throughout, linking animals' physical and behavioral adaptations to their environments.	➢ **Tighten the Focus:** ○ Avoid repeating general statements about "cold places" or "different life styles."
✓ **Accurate and Detailed Information:** ○ The essay includes multiple correct facts from the sources: ○ *Cold Regions:* Mentions penguins' blubber, polar bears' dens, and fish with special proteins to avoid freezing (*Source #1*). ○ *Deserts:* Describes nocturnal animals and elf owls living in cacti that act as "natural air-conditioning" (*Source #1*). ○ *Oceans:* Accurately refers to volcanic vents providing heat for crabs (*Source #1*).	➢ **Clarify Word Meaning:** ○ Replace unclear phrasing like *"soulution to a promblem"* with *"adaptation that helps them survive."*
✓ **Thorough Development:** ○ Each biome—cold, desert, ocean—is discussed with several specific examples. The details go beyond listing; they include explanations of *how* each adaptation helps survival.	➢ **Enhance Transitions:** ○ Add linking phrases between environments (e.g., "In contrast to the cold Arctic, the desert is hot and dry.").
✓ **Minor Weaknesses:** ○ Some ideas overlap ("cold places" and "icy oceans" repeated), and a few inaccuracies or unclear phrases appear (*"Fish have a special protine… not get ice peices in their bodys"*). Still, these don't obscure meaning or factual understanding.	➢ **Polish Closing Insight:** ○ Strengthen the final line to connect back to the theme of adaptation and survival rather than general living.

Organization: 5

The paper is well organized and easy to follow. Information is grouped logically by environment, with clear topic shifts from cold regions to deserts to oceans. The introduction and conclusion both support the main idea, and transitions make the progression smooth and coherent.

Evidence from Student Work: Organization	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Organization
✓ **Logical Sequencing:** ○ The piece follows a natural pattern that mirrors the structure of the sources and makes sense for readers: ○ Introduction: Establishes the idea that animals and humans live in different environments. ○ Cold Regions: Describes how penguins, polar bears, whales, and fish adapt to the cold. ○ Desert: Explains how nocturnal animals and owls use the cactus for shelter and cooling. ○ Ocean: Describes how deep-sea creatures survive near thermal vents. ○ Conclusion: Connects all environments back to the theme of survival ("Every single animal or person has its way of surviving.").	➢ **Add Paragraph Breaks:** ○ Begin a new paragraph for each biome to make the organization visually clearer.
✓ **Clear Transitions and Flow:** ○ Transitions between sections guide the reader smoothly ("In the icy cold places... There are the complete opposite places in the world like the desert... The last biome is the ocean."). These signals make the text coherent and easy to follow.	➢ **Vary Transitional Language:** ○ Replace "There are" with varied openings such as "In contrast," "Meanwhile," or "Another example is."
✓ **Effective Introduction and Conclusion:** ○ The introduction sets up the idea that "animals and people have different lifestyles" and the conclusion returns to the same idea, creating unity. The ending line ("Whether it's in the Arctic, the desert, or the ocean we all have our ways") provides satisfying closure.	➢ **Refine the Introduction:** ○ Start with a stronger main idea sentence such as "Animals adapt to survive in some of Earth's most extreme environments." ➢ **Deepen the Conclusion:** ○ Expand the final thought to restate what the reader learned about adaptation and survival. ➢
✓ **Minor Weakness:** ○ Some transitional wording is repetitive ("There are also... There are the complete opposite..."), and paragraph breaks could be more visually distinct. However, the logic and pacing remain strong.	➢

Voice: 5

The writing has a confident and engaging tone that reflects curiosity, warmth, and respect for animals. The author's personality and sense of wonder come through clearly, making the piece both enjoyable and sincere. The voice matches the informational purpose and invites the reader to learn more.

Evidence from Student Work: Voice	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Voice
✓ **Engaging and Genuine Tone:** ○ The writer sounds curious and connected to the topic from the opening line: *"We animals and people have different life styles."* The tone feels inclusive and thoughtful, helping readers see the world from both a human and animal perspective.	➢ **Maintain Informative Voice:** ○ Keep the same enthusiasm but reduce "we" statements to sound more like an expert explaining facts.
✓ **Sincere Appreciation for the Topic:** ○ Lines like *"These magnificent creatures also have that layer of blubber under their fur"* and *"It's amazing that we all live today"* reveal admiration and empathy for living things. The writer's positive, appreciative attitude keeps the tone consistent and authentic.	➢ **Add Reflective Insight:** ○ End with a thoughtful observation about what humans can learn from animals' adaptability.
✓ **Balanced Energy:** ○ The piece maintains enthusiasm without becoming too emotional or casual. Exclamation marks are used sparingly and appropriately (*"Some sea creatures even can glow down there!"*), adding excitement without disrupting the informational tone.	➢ **Balance Energy with Clarity:** ○ Make sure exclamation marks are used only where emphasis strengthens meaning.
✓ **Audience Awareness:** ○ The writer speaks directly but respectfully to readers, guiding them with smooth transitions and clear explanations. This shows an understanding of how to keep an audience engaged while teaching factual information.	➢ **Polish Transitions:** ○ Include phrases like "Remarkably," "Interestingly," or "Incredibly" to add natural excitement while staying informative.
✓ **Minor Weakness:** ○ Occasional first-person phrasing ("We animals and people…") softens the academic tone slightly, but it does not detract from the overall effectiveness.	➢

Word Choice: 5

The writer uses clear, vivid, and sometimes expressive vocabulary to describe animal habitats and survival. Content-specific words show understanding of the topic, and the variety of descriptive and scientific language helps the piece sound both informative and engaging.

Evidence from Student Work: Word Choice	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Word Choice
✓ **Strong Content Vocabulary:** ○ The student confidently uses scientific and environmental terms such as *adaptations, blubber, nocturnal, desert, Arctic,* and *volcanoes or geysers.* These show familiarity with academic language drawn from the sources.	➢ **Refine Word Accuracy:** ○ Correct spelling of key vocabulary (*protein, opposite, warmer, natural*).

Evidence from Student Work: Word Choice	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Word Choice
✓ **Descriptive and Engaging Language:** ○ Imagery adds clarity and appeal, as in *"They cuddle together and block the wind from them"* and *"That is like natural air-conditioning."* The comparison helps readers visualize how animals survive in harsh environments.	➢ **Use Advanced Connectors:** ○ Replace repeated sentence openings like "There are" with more precise transitions such as *"In contrast," "Meanwhile,"* or *"Another remarkable adaptation is…"*
✓ **Effective Variety:** ○ Words like *magnificent creatures, freezing, extremely cold, dark and deep, layer of fat,* and *soulution to a problem* (though misspelled) show range and energy in vocabulary. The writer's use of contrast (*"the complete opposite places in the world like the desert"*) demonstrates awareness of word relationships.	➢ **Expand Vocabulary for Variety:** ○ Add higher-level descriptive words such as *arid, frigid, thermal,* or *adaptable* to enrich scientific tone.
✓ **Minor Weakness:** ○ A few misspellings (*protine, oppisist, wammer, natrual*) and repeated structures ("There are…" "They have…") slightly reduce precision, but they do not interfere with meaning or impact.	➢ **Eliminate Redundancy:** ○ Combine similar phrases (e.g., "cold icy oceans" → "frigid oceans") for tighter writing.

Sentence Fluency: 4

The writing flows smoothly in most places and shows a mix of sentence lengths and types. The rhythm is natural when read aloud, though some sentences run long or repeat patterns. With a few adjustments for punctuation and structure, the piece could move from solid to strong fluency.

Evidence from Student Work: Sentence Fluency	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Sentence Fluency
✓ **Readable and Natural Flow:** ○ The paper reads well aloud, with clear pacing and logical progression. Sentences like *"Take penguins for instance, they have a thick layer of body fat or blubber under their feathers"* demonstrate an ear for natural rhythm and phrasing.	➢ **Add Transitional Clauses:** ○ Use connectors like *"Because," "While,"* or *"Even though"* to link ideas and improve flow.
✓ **Varied Sentence Lengths:** ○ The writer alternates between longer descriptive sentences and shorter declarative ones: ○ *"Whales swim away to warmer parts of the ocean."* ○ *"An fish have a special protein in their blood."* This variety keeps the writing lively and prevents monotony.	➢ **Vary Sentence Openings:** ○ Begin with prepositional or descriptive phrases like "Across the frozen sea," or "Beneath the hot desert sand," to add variety.
✓ **Some Repetition and Run-Ons** ○ Several sentences begin with similar words ("There are," "In the," "They have"), which makes sections feel repetitive. A few long sentences would benefit from clearer punctuation (e.g., *"They have fur to keep them warm ,a layer of fat ,or each other"*).	➢ **Separate Long Sentences:** ○ Break multi-idea sentences into two for smoother rhythm and clarity.

Evidence from Student Work: Sentence Fluency	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Sentence Fluency
✓ **Readable but Uneven Flow:** ○ Although the flow remains smooth overall, inconsistent punctuation slightly interrupts rhythm. Still, the reader can follow ideas easily.	➢ **Read Aloud for Sound:** ○ Identify sentences that sound too long or choppy and adjust punctuation to match natural pauses.

Conventions: 4

The paper shows partial control of grade-level conventions. Most sentences are understandable, but frequent spelling, punctuation, and capitalization errors distract the reader. While the writing demonstrates knowledge of basic sentence structure, it requires noticeable editing to reach full proficiency.

Evidence from Student Work: Conventions	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Conventions
✓ **Frequent Spelling Errors:** ○ Numerous spelling mistakes appear throughout the piece, including *diffferent, icie, Antartica, oppisist, squirrals, wammer, protine, peices, bodys, natrual, soulution.* These errors often involve omitted letters or phonetic spelling patterns that obscure meaning.	➢ **Correct Spelling of Key Vocabulary:** ○ Review difficult words like *Antarctica, opposite, solution, natural, pieces, bodies.*
✓ **Punctuation Errors:** ○ Commas and periods are inconsistently placed. For example, *"They have fur to keep them warm ,a layer of fat ,or eachother."* Misplaced commas interrupt the flow and clarity. Some sentences would also benefit from capitalization after periods.	➢ **Proofread Slowly:** ○ Read aloud or use a finger-tracking method to find missing letters or punctuation marks.
✓ **Capitalization and Grammar:** ○ The writer capitalizes most proper nouns (e.g., *Arctic, Alaska, Antarctica*) but misses others (*Artic, The desert , or the ocean*). Minor grammatical errors appear in subject-verb agreement (*"An Fish have"* instead of *"A fish has"*).	➢ **Fix Comma Placement:** ○ Place commas only between listed items, not before or after random phrases.
✓ **Readable but Needs Editing:** ○ Despite frequent mechanical issues, ideas are still clear. The paper is readable and shows understanding of sentence structure, though it lacks polish.	➢ **Check Sentence Boundaries:** ○ Ensure each sentence starts with a capital letter and ends with correct punctuation.

Use of Sources: 5

The writer effectively integrates accurate information from multiple sources, demonstrating a clear understanding of animals' adaptations to different environments. Details are paraphrased in the writer's own words, and examples from various habitats show thoughtful selection and comprehension of source material.

Evidence from Student Work: Use of Sources	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Use of Sources
✓ **Multiple Sources Represented:** ○ The essay clearly draws on factual information from at least two sources—primarily *It's a Cold (Hot, Dry, Dark) Cruel World!* and *Animal Architects.* ○ From *Source #1*, the writer accurately includes icefish with special proteins, penguins huddling, polar bears' dens, and crabs near undersea volcanoes. ○ From *Source #2*, the writer refers to elf owls living inside cacti and the cactus storing water and staying cool like "natural air-conditioning."	➢ **Reference Ecosystem Connections:** ○ Include a small detail from the *Ecosystem* article, such as how animals depend on other living and nonliving parts of their habitat.
✓ **Accurate Paraphrasing:** ○ All information is expressed in the student's own voice rather than copied. The sentence *"Whales swim away to warmer parts of the ocean"* and the explanation of nocturnal desert animals show true understanding and retelling rather than memorization.	➢ **Add Attribution Phrases:** ○ Introduce details with short signal phrases (e.g., "One article explains that…" or "According to scientists in the text…").
✓ **Broad Coverage and Synthesis:** ○ The writer goes beyond listing details—grouping information by biome (cold, desert, ocean) to create a logical comparison across environments. This demonstrates synthesis of ideas from several texts.	➢ **Refine Summary Skills:** ○ Add one concluding statement summarizing what was learned from all sources ("These examples show how animals use special features to survive anywhere on Earth.").
✓ **Minor Weakness:** ○ Although the student uses multiple sources effectively, there are no formal citations or signal phrases to identify where facts came from.	➢ **Create a Simple Source List:** ○ End with a short list of article titles to meet informational writing conventions.

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:

Layered Elaboration Practice:

- Have students take one example (like penguins huddling) and write three follow-up sentences: (1) describe the behavior, (2) explain why it helps, (3) connect to survival. This deepens reasoning and clarity.

Cross-Source Comparison Chart:

- Students build a table showing how animals in *cold, hot,* and *dark* environments adapt differently. This reinforces synthesis and accurate grouping of facts.

Precision Language Mini-Lesson:

- Model replacing vague or general phrases ("there are lots of animals") with precise statements ("Arctic animals rely on thick fur and shared body heat to survive freezing temperatures").

Organization:

Organizational Mapping:

- Have students map their essay structure in boxes labeled *Cold / Hot / Ocean / Conclusion* and list 2–3 supporting details in each. This reinforces logical grouping and transitions.

Transition Ladder:

- Provide a progression chart of transition words from basic ("then," "next") to advanced ("in contrast," "on the other hand," "similarly"). Students select one higher-level phrase for each paragraph.

Circle-Back Closure Lesson:

- Model how to write a conclusion that "circles back" to the introduction by repeating a key word or idea. Students highlight their opening sentence and restate it with new insight in their conclusion.

Voice:

Voice Comparison Exercise:

- Provide two short informational excerpts, one flat, one lively. Students identify what makes the stronger version engaging (word choice, tone, rhythm).

"Sound Like an Expert" Workshop:

- Model how to combine passion with authority by replacing first-person statements ("I think penguins are amazing") with confident, informative phrasing ("Penguins are remarkable because…").

Reflective Closing Practice:

- Have students write one final "lesson learned" sentence that connects their topic to a broader theme, such as cooperation, adaptation, or balance in nature.

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.

Word Choice:

"Precision Word Swap" Routine:

- Have students highlight three repeated or general words and replace each with a more specific synonym (e.g., "cold" → "frigid," "animals" → "species").

Word Bank Integration:

- Create a class "adaptation word bank" from the sources, listing scientific terms like *blubber, nocturnal, habitat, ecosystem.* Students practice using at least three in their next revision.

Figurative Language in Informational Texts:

- Show how subtle comparisons ("like natural air-conditioning") can enhance clarity without sounding like fiction. Students then practice writing one simile or analogy to explain a scientific process.

Sentence Fluency:

Sentence Combining Practice:

- Provide several short, related sentences from the essay and guide students to merge them into longer, more fluent sentences using conjunctions or appositives.

Opening Variety Chart:

- Show examples of sentence beginnings (prepositional phrases, adverbs, dependent clauses). Students revise two paragraphs by varying how each sentence starts.

"Read It Like a Reader" Activity:

- Students read their writing aloud to a partner who marks places where the rhythm breaks. Together they adjust sentence length or punctuation to smooth the flow.

Conventions:

High-Frequency Word Practice:

- Create personalized spelling lists from the student's common errors (e.g., *different, opposite, natural*). Use quick daily practice with sentences using those words.

Sentence Punctuation Stations:

- Provide sample sentences missing punctuation. Students add commas and periods correctly, then compare to a correct version to self-check.

Peer Editing Checklist:

- Pair students and provide a checklist for capitals, punctuation, and spelling. Partners highlight one correct use and one correction needed in each paragraph.

Use of Sources:

Color-Coded Source Integration:

- Have students highlight notes from each source in a different color, then check their drafts to ensure at least two colors appear—showing balanced use of sources.

Signal Phrase Sentence Frames:

- Provide sentence stems like *"The author describes how…"* or *"The article explains that…"* for students to practice inserting before factual details.

Synthesis Paragraph Practice:

- Ask students to combine two related details from different sources into one paragraph (e.g., penguins huddling in cold climates + owls sheltering in cacti) to show how animals adapt in contrasting ways.