Grade 4 – Opinion Writing Work Sample: Approaching

Task: Your class is studying about weather and weather patterns in the United States. You are given three sources about thunderstorms.

Read the sources carefully to write an opinion essay in which you give your opinion about which place you would rather live, Florida or Colorado. 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: 4

The paper develops a clear main idea with strong supporting details from the sources. The writer expands with explanations and examples, showing good understanding of what astronauts do before and during space travel. Some minor parts could use more elaboration, but overall, ideas are relevant, organized, and engaging.

Evidence from Student Work: Ideas and Content	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Ideas and Content
✓ **Clear Opinion and Purpose** ○ The opinion is stated directly: *"I'd rather stick with Colorado."* ○ The writer maintains focus on preferring Colorado throughout the essay. ○ Meets the rubric's "writer's purpose and main ideas are easy to understand."	➢ **Clarify Your Reasons:** ○ After each funny comment, add one serious sentence explaining *why* it supports your opinion ("Colorado has sunshine most days, so people can enjoy outdoor activities without storms.").
✓ **Relevant Details and Source Use** ○ Incorporates accurate information: *"In some parts of Florida there are over 80 days with thunder and lightning,"* and *"in Colorado you get more than 300 days of sweet sunshine."* ○ Shows understanding of both states, aligning with "the writer includes accurate facts and examples."	➢ **Connect to Source Evidence:** ○ When using facts (like thunderstorm days), explain where they come from ("According to the National Weather Service map…").
✓ **Development and Elaboration** ○ Reasons such as dramatic weather, outdoor snow activities, and too many thunderstorms in Florida show understanding. ○ However, elaboration is inconsistent. Statements like *"I could make myself an igloo!"* and *"Take me off the waiting list for the houses there!"* are entertaining but lack factual explanation.	➢ **Add Factual Support:** ○ Include more explanation from the sources (e.g., mention how Florida's humidity causes thunderstorms).
✓ **Focus and Relevance** ○ The essay stays on topic but occasionally wanders into humor or exaggeration ("better than Florida (of course not better than Maine)!"). ○ This reduces focus on factual reasoning and elaboration.	➢ **Stay Focused on the Opinion:** ○ Keep the humor, but avoid unrelated comments ("better than Maine") that distract from your reasons.

Organization: 3

The essay has an introduction, body, and conclusion, but ideas are unevenly grouped. The structure relies on storytelling and humor instead of clear, logical sequencing.

Evidence from Student Work: Organization	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Organization
✓ **Introduction** ○ Creative and engaging ("Well see you later, I'm going to sunny sunny always sunny Florida!"), but the humor delays clarity of purpose. ○	➢
✓ **Grouping and Order** ○ Paragraphs mix facts with commentary, causing uneven pacing. For example, the thunderstorm data appears mid-paragraph rather than being introduced earlier. ✓	➢ **Reorganize Paragraphs:** ○ Start each paragraph with a reason ("One reason I'd rather live in Colorado is the weather variety").
✓ **Transitions and Flow** ○ Some connecting words ("Another reason why…") appear, but transitions between ideas are inconsistent. ✓	➢ **Use Transitions:** ○ Add connecting words to guide readers ("In addition," "Because of this," "Finally").
✓ **Conclusion and Closure** ○ The essay ends with a strong voice ("It's igloo time!!!!") but lacks a focused restatement of reasons or final summary.	➢ **Add a Clear Closing Sentence:** ○ End with a confident summary that restates your opinion instead of humor alone.

Voice: 5

The writing is lively, sincere, and highly engaging. The humor and expressive phrasing show strong audience awareness and individuality.

Evidence from Student Work: Voice	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Voice
✓ **Expressive and Engaging Tone** ○ The student's playful tone ("What? it isn't always sunny?" "It's igloo time!!!!") captures reader attention.	➢
✓ **Sincerity and Personality** ○ The writing feels genuine and confident, aligning with "writing is lively, sincere, exciting, or honest."	➢ **Add Reflection:** ○ Include a short statement showing personal connection ("I'd rather shovel snow than sit through thunder every day!").
✓ **Audience Awareness** ○ The writer speaks directly to readers with humor and exaggeration, engaging them throughout.	➢ **Balance Humor with Information:** ○ Keep your funny voice but follow jokes with supporting facts to maintain credibility.
✓ **Consistency of Voice** ○ The tone remains consistent, although it sometimes overshadows factual content.	➢ **Refine Tone at the End:** ○ Replace multiple exclamation marks with a strong, confident final line ("Colorado is where the weather—and life—stay exciting.").

Word Choice: 4

The vocabulary is expressive and vivid but uneven. Some words show creativity and imagery, while others are informal or repetitive.

Evidence from Student Work: Word Choice	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Word Choice
✓ **Vivid and Original Phrases** ○ Creative expressions like *"sweet sunshine," "crazy rain,"* and *"It's igloo time"* add flair.	➢ **Refine Word Choice for Formal Writing:** ○ Replace slang with precise words ("crazy rain" → "intense thunderstorms").
✓ **Content Vocabulary** ○ Incorporates source-based terms such as "thunderstorm capital" and "300 days of sunshine."	➢ **Expand Descriptive Vocabulary:** ○ Add sensory detail ("the snow sparkles under the sun") for imagery.
✓ **Repetition and Informality** ○ Overuse of casual words ("crazy," "stuff," "better") lowers precision.	➢ **Limit Repetition:** ○ Vary sentence openings and replace "Florida" or "Colorado" with pronouns when appropriate.
✓ **Word Choice for Purpose** ○ Language matches opinion writing but could use stronger academic transitions.	➢

Sentence Fluency: 3

The essay is readable and lively but lacks control and variety. Run-ons and inconsistent punctuation interrupt smooth flow.

Evidence from Student Work: Sentence Fluency	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Sentence Fluency
✓ **Readable and Natural** ○ The essay reads easily but has run-ons ("Some sun here a little rain there and some snow to end the day.").	➢
✓ **Variety in Sentence Lengths** ○ Sentences range from very short to overly long, affecting rhythm.	➢ **Combine Short Sentences for Impact:** ○ Join ideas using conjunctions to avoid choppiness.
✓ **Transitions Between Ideas** ○ Transitions exist but are limited ("Another reason why…").	➢ **Vary Sentence Openings:** ○ Begin sentences with transitions or prepositional phrases to create rhythm.
✓ **Readability and Structure** ○ Punctuation errors disrupt fluency in multiple spots (missing spaces after periods, commas misplaced).	➢ **Add Punctuation for Flow:** ○ Break up long sentences into smaller ones for clarity.

Conventions: 2

Frequent punctuation, spacing, and capitalization errors distract from meaning. Grammar control is inconsistent but ideas remain clear.

Evidence from Student Work: Conventions	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Conventions
✓ **Punctuation** ○ Missing commas and spaces throughout (e.g., "Florida!What?it isn't always sunny?").	➢ **Add Spaces and Commas:** ○ Insert spaces after punctuation and commas to make writing easier to read.

Evidence from Student Work: Conventions	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Conventions
✓ **Punctuation** ○ Missing commas and spaces throughout (e.g., "Florida!What?it isn't always sunny?").	➢ **Add Spaces and Commas:** ○ Insert spaces after punctuation and commas to make writing easier to read.
✓ **Capitalization** ○ Inconsistent ("i don't want Florida," "lets hop on that plane").	➢ **Edit for Capitalization:** ○ Check every sentence beginning and proper noun ("Florida," "Colorado," "I").
✓ **Spelling and Grammar** ○ Mostly correct spelling but several informal fragments and missing capitalization. ○ Grammar errors interrupt sentence flow.	➢ **Proofread Out Loud:** ○ Read each sentence aloud to hear where punctuation or capitalization is missing.

Use of Sources: 4

The writer integrates factual information from both Florida and Colorado sources, though references are indirect and informal.

Evidence from Student Work: Use of Sources	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Use of Sources
✓ **Accurate Information** ○ Mentions facts such as "Florida has over 80 days with thunder and lightning" and "Colorado has more than 300 days of sunshine." ○ Both are accurate and reflect comprehension of the readings.	➢ **Explain Facts:** ○ After using a statistic, explain how it supports your opinion.
✓ **Paraphrasing and Integration** ○ Facts are rewritten in the student's own words but without formal citation.	➢ **Avoid Overgeneralization:** ○ Keep factual claims specific ("In Colorado, the weather changes quickly because of mountain winds.").
✓ **Balance of Sources** ○ Uses facts from both *Source #1* (thunderstorm data) and *Source #2* (Colorado's sunshine and weather changes).	➢
✓ **Citation and Clarity** ○ References are natural but missing signal phrases ("According to Source #1…").	➢ **Add Clear Citations:** ○ Use phrases like "In Source #2 it says…" before quoting information.

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:

"Fact + Reason + Explanation" Scaffold:

- Have students use a three-sentence pattern: one fact from the source, one reason, one explanation linking the fact to their opinion.

Focus Filter Revision:

- Students highlight any sentence not directly supporting their opinion and decide whether to delete, move, or revise it for focus.

Humor with Purpose Mini-Lesson:

- Model how to keep playful voice while connecting every joke back to the central argument.

Organization:

Paragraph Structure Frames:

- Use a planning organizer where each box includes: reason, evidence, explanation.

Transition Word Practice:

- Provide a list of transition types (sequence, contrast, cause-effect) and have students insert them where ideas shift.

Strong Conclusion Modeling:

- Show how to write a final paragraph that restates opinion and main reasons without repeating humor.

Voice:

Tone Ladder Exercise:

- Have students rewrite a humorous line three ways (serious, persuasive, funny) to analyze tone impact.

Audience Reaction Peer Review:

- Peers identify where the writer's voice feels strongest and where humor distracts from argument.

"Voice Balance" Practice:

- Model how to keep personality while grounding it in purpose by alternating emotional and factual sentences.

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:

Synonym Revision Challenge:

- Students replace informal words with more academic or descriptive synonyms.

Word Bank Expansion:

- Build a list of topic-related words (humidity, altitude, hail, lightning) for precision.

Imagery Writing Mini-Lesson:

- Model how to add sensory descriptions to factual writing.

Sentence Fluency:

Sentence Combining Practice:

- Students merge short, related sentences using conjunctions and commas.

Read-Aloud Fluency Checks:

- Students read their writing aloud to locate where breath breaks indicate missing punctuation.

Transition Variety Exercise:

- List transition types and practice inserting them in drafts to improve flow.

Conventions:

Conventions Editing Checklist:

- Students use a checklist (capitals, commas, spaces, spelling) for self-editing before peer review.

Peer Punctuation Review:

- Partners underline missing punctuation marks and add corrections.

“Capital or Not?” Mini-Quiz:

- Provide quick examples to practice capitalization of proper nouns and sentence starts.

Use of Sources:

Source Reference Mini-Lesson:

- Model how to blend facts from sources using sentence starters and transitions.

“Explain the Evidence” Routine:

- After each fact, students write one sentence answering “So what?” to connect to their opinion.

Source Balance Chart:

- Students list one supporting detail from each source to check for balanced evidence.