Grade 4 – Informational Writing Work Sample: Does Not Yet Meet

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: 3

The paper demonstrates progress toward meeting grade-level expectations. The writer shows an understanding of how animals survive in different environments, using facts from at least one source, but ideas are unevenly developed. Some details are accurate and interesting, while others are limited, repeated, or only partly explained.

Evidence from Student Work: Ideas and Content	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Ideas and Content
✓ **Partially Clear Main Idea:** ○ The central idea—that animals live in harsh environments and must survive difficult conditions—is present but inconsistently expressed. The introduction focuses on animals being unprotected and "outside where people can shoot them," which shifts away from the informational purpose of the task.	➢ **Clarify the Purpose:** ○ Focus on *how animals survive in extreme environments* rather than how humans treat them.
✓ **Some Accurate Source Details:** ○ The writer correctly includes factual information from *Source #1*: ○ "In Antarctica near the South Pole, it can be super cold." ○ "Ice fish have a special protein that lets them swim deep down through layers of ice." These details reflect basic understanding of how animals adapt to cold climates.	➢ **Include More Source Facts:** ○ Add another example from a second source, such as how crabs use heat from vents or how owls live in cactus homes.
✓ **Limited Development:** ○ Information about the desert section ("snakes, lizards, mice, owl, squirrels… most hunt at night") is accurate but brief. The writer lists animals without elaborating on *how* these behaviors help them survive.	➢ **Organize Around Environments:** ○ Separate ideas into clear sections—cold, hot, and maybe dark (ocean)—to make the structure more logical.
✓ **Off-Topic and Minimal Explanation:** ○ The paragraph about being "safe with our families" and "people shooting animals" shows empathy but drifts from the task's informational focus. There is little synthesis or explanation of how the examples connect to the main idea.	➢ **Add Explanations:** ○ After each fact, add a "why" or "how" sentence (e.g., "They come out at night to stay cool and avoid the desert heat").

Organization: 3

The writing shows developing control of organization. The ideas are presented in a loose sequence that moves from introduction - cold environments - hot deserts - conclusion, but transitions are minimal and paragraphing is unclear. While the overall flow makes sense, missing connections and abrupt shifts make it harder for the reader to follow.

Evidence from Student Work: Organization	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Organization
✓ **Basic Structure Present:** ○ The paper follows a general order: ○ Introduction: Opens with a comparison between people and animals ("we are protected and safe with our families… but animals aren't"). ○ Cold Environment: Describes icefish and Antarctica. ○ Hot Environment: Discusses desert animals and nocturnal behavior. ○ Conclusion: Ends with a brief closing line ("This has been Mrs. Odom's class reporting the news"). ○ This shows awareness of beginning, middle, and end, but transitions between sections are weak.	➢ **Refocus the Introduction:** ○ Introduce the main idea about *animal survival* more directly.
✓ **Limited Transitions:** ○ Phrases like "Here we go!!!" and "The opposite of cold is hot" show enthusiasm but do not clearly link ideas in an informational way. The shift between topics feels abrupt.	➢ **Add Transition Phrases:** ○ Replace casual transitions with clearer ones, such as "In cold places like Antarctica…" or "In contrast, desert animals face heat and dryness."
✓ **Weak Paragraph Breaks:** ○ All ideas are written in a single block of text, which makes it hard for readers to distinguish between the introduction, body, and conclusion.	➢ **Use Paragraph Breaks:** ○ Separate the cold and hot environments into distinct paragraphs, and create a short concluding paragraph that summarizes how animals survive.
✓ **Attempt at Closure:** ○ The ending mimics a news sign-off rather than a summary of key points. While creative, it doesn't provide informational closure.	➢ **Strengthen the Ending:** ○ Conclude by restating what was learned (e.g., "Animals use special adaptations to live in different parts of the world.").

Voice: 3

The writer's enthusiasm and empathy for animals come through clearly, giving the piece sincerity and personality. However, the tone often shifts away from the purpose of informational writing, becoming more emotional or conversational than explanatory. While heartfelt, the voice needs more control and focus to sound confident and informative.

Evidence from Student Work: Voice	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Voice
✓ **Personal Engagement:** ○ The writer begins with feeling: *"Wow, it's great to know that we are protected and safe with our families. But animals aren't…"* This reveals genuine care and interest, which makes the opening engaging and expressive.	➢ **Reframe the Conclusion:** ○ Replace the "news report" ending with a reflective or summarizing sentence that connects back to the main idea.

Evidence from Student Work: Voice	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Voice
✓ **Inconsistent Tone:** ○ Phrases such as *"Here we go!!!"* and *"This has been Mrs. Odom's class reporting the news"* add personality but distract from the informational tone expected for the task. The style feels more like a class announcement or a creative story than an article explaining how animals survive.	➢ **Refine the Tone:** ○ Keep the enthusiasm but reduce exclamation marks and "reporting" phrases. Focus on explaining rather than entertaining.
✓ **Audience Connection:** ○ The student attempts to connect with readers through humor and exclamation but relies on feeling rather than facts to hold interest. While lively, these moments can make the piece sound less credible.	➢ **Balance Personality with Purpose:** ○ Replace emotional phrases (e.g., "pore animals") with precise, factual statements about survival challenges.
✓ **Emerging Author's Voice:** ○ Despite tone inconsistencies, the voice shows confidence and curiosity—especially when the writer asks, *"I know what you're thinking, 'How do ice fish stay alive?'"* This conversational style is a strength that could be refined into a more academic tone.	➢ **Sound More Like an Expert:** ○ Use confident, informative sentences like "Animals have special body features that help them survive extreme temperatures."

Word Choice: 3

The writing shows developing vocabulary and includes a few vivid or scientific words from the sources, but many word choices are repetitive, misspelled, or too general. Some casual phrasing adds energy, yet the imprecise or informal language limits clarity and reduces the strength of the explanations.

Evidence from Student Work: Word Choice	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Word Choice
✓ **Some Content Vocabulary Used:** ○ The writer includes accurate scientific terms such as *Antarctica, South Pole, Fahrenheit,* and *protein,* demonstrating awareness of topic vocabulary from the sources.	➢ **Use More Domain Vocabulary:** ○ Replace general words with precise terms from the sources such as *adaptations, survive, environment,* and *habitat.*
✓ **Repetitive and Casual Language:** ○ Frequent use of words like *cold, hot, cruel,* and *animals* gives the writing a repetitive rhythm. Phrases such as *"pore animals," "Here we go!!!,"* and *"I know what you're thinking"* sound conversational but detract from the precision expected in informational writing.	➢ **Avoid Emotional or Casual Phrases:** ○ Change *"pore animals"* to *"many animals face challenges in harsh environments."*
✓ **Limited Word Variety:** ○ The paper relies heavily on emotional and everyday words (*pore, cruel, great, lucky*), which could be replaced with more specific terms that describe conditions or adaptations (e.g., *harsh, extreme, unique, nocturnal*).	➢ **Expand Variety:** ○ Use synonyms for *cold* (e.g., *freezing, icy, frigid*) and *hot* (e.g., *scorching, blazing, dry*).

Evidence from Student Work: Word Choice	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Word Choice
✓ **Misspellings That Affect Meaning:** ○ Words like *nactural (nocturnal), opisit (opposite), creul (cruel), thier (their)* interfere with the reader's understanding and obscure some otherwise strong ideas.	➢ **Fix Misspellings for Accuracy:** ○ Correct words like *nactural* → *nocturnal* to show understanding of scientific terms.

Sentence Fluency: 2

The writing contains several complete ideas but many sentences are uneven, run together, or lack clear punctuation. Some sections read smoothly when spoken aloud, while others are choppy or confusing. Repetitive sentence openings and missing transitions make the flow inconsistent.

Evidence from Student Work: Sentence Fluency	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Sentence Fluency
✓ **Some Attempt at Variety:** ○ The writer occasionally varies structure by using exclamatory and question forms ("I know what you're thinking 'How do ice fish stay alive?'"), which adds liveliness and rhythm.	➢ **Combine Short Sentences:** ○ Join related ideas using transition phrases like "because," "so," or "which helps them."
✓ **Frequent Run-Ons and Fragments:** ○ Many sentences are fused together without proper punctuation or conjunctions. For example: ○ *"Thing Mrs. Odom's class learned. Wow, its great to know that we are protected and safe with our families. But animals aren't, they are outside where poeple can shoot them and thing are destroring thier homes.They can be in hot, cold ,dark cruel weather!."* This section blends incomplete ideas and fragments, making it hard to follow.	➢ **Break Long Sentences:** ○ Separate ideas with proper punctuation or conjunctions (e.g., "Animals face harsh weather. Some live in the desert where it is very hot.").
✓ **Repetitive Beginnings:** ○ Several sentences begin with "But," "They," or "This," creating a predictable rhythm that lacks sophistication.	➢ **Vary Sentence Starters:** ○ Begin sentences with descriptive phrases ("In the icy South Pole…") or transitions ("Meanwhile, in the desert…").
✓ **Choppy and Uneven Flow:** ○ Abrupt topic shifts ("The opposite of cold is hot, so that leads us to the desert") disrupt pacing. Reading aloud reveals stops and starts that affect clarity.	➢ **Read Aloud for Flow:** ○ Practice reading each paragraph aloud to hear where pauses or confusion occur and revise accordingly.

Conventions: 2

The writing contains frequent and noticeable errors in spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and grammar that interfere with readability. While the student's meaning can be understood, extensive editing is needed for accuracy and clarity.

Evidence from Student Work: Conventions	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Conventions
✓ **Spelling Errors:** ○ Many common and high-frequency words are misspelled throughout the piece, including *poeple (people), thing (things), destroring (destroying), thier (their), creul (cruel), opisit (opposite), nactural (nocturnal),* and *Anarctica (Antarctica).* These errors occur repeatedly and make the text difficult to read fluently.	➢ **Check Spelling Carefully:** ○ Use a dictionary or spell-check for frequently misspelled words (*Antarctica, nocturnal, cruel, opposite*).
✓ **Punctuation and Sentence Boundary Issues:** ○ Sentences frequently run together without correct punctuation: ○ *"…where poeple can shoot them and thing are destroring thier homes.They can be in hot, cold ,dark cruel weather!."* ○ Missing commas and periods blur sentence boundaries and require editing for sentence separation.	➢ **Edit for Sentence Boundaries:** ○ Read one sentence at a time aloud and mark where each should end.
✓ **Capitalization:** ○ Capitalization is inconsistent, with proper nouns occasionally correct (*Mrs. Odom's class*) but mid-sentence capital letters sometimes missing or unnecessary.	➢ **Capitalize Proper Nouns and Beginnings:** ○ Double-check capitalization at the start of every sentence and for names like *Mrs. Odom.*
✓ **Grammar and Usage:** ○ Errors such as *"it's great to know that we are protected…"* (missing apostrophe) and inconsistent verb forms (*"thing are destroring"*) show incomplete control of standard grammar.	➢ **Punctuate for Clarity:** ○ Add commas between listed items (*hot, cold, dark, cruel weather*).

Use of Sources: 3

The writer uses some accurate details from at least one source and demonstrates partial understanding of how animals survive in different environments. However, the response relies mostly on general knowledge and paraphrased ideas without clear integration of multiple sources or signal phrases.

Evidence from Student Work: Use of Sources	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Use of Sources
✓ **Some Accurate Source Information:** ○ The paper includes factual content from *Source #1: It's a Cold (Hot, Dry, Dark) Cruel World! —* ○ Correctly mentions Antarctica near the South Pole and icefish having a special protein that keeps them alive in freezing water. ○ Refers to desert animals like snakes, lizards, mice, owls, and squirrels that hunt at night to stay cool. ○ These show a developing ability to recall and paraphrase key information.	➢ **Include a Simple Source List:** ○ At the end, list the article titles used in the report.

Evidence from Student Work: Use of Sources	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Use of Sources
✓ **Limited Source Integration:** ○ Only one source is represented (the adaptation article). Information from *Animal Architects* or *Don't Step in that Ecosystem!* is not included, leaving gaps in the overall coverage of the topic.	➢ **Use Two or More Sources:** ○ Add details from the *Animal Architects* article (e.g., "Some animals, like beavers and termites, build homes to survive harsh environments") or the *Ecosystem* article (e.g., "Plants and animals depend on each other to live").
✓ **Lack of Signal Phrases:** ○ The writer does not identify where the information came from ("according to the article," etc.), so the reader cannot tell which ideas are from the texts.	➢ **Add Signal Phrases:** ○ Introduce facts with language like "One article explains…" or "In the text about animals in cold places…" to clarify the source of information.
✓ **Minimal Synthesis:** ○ Facts appear separately without explicit connections across habitats or explanations of how they relate to the larger theme of animal survival.	➢ **Explain the Connection:** ○ After each fact, add a short explanation linking it back to survival ("This helps the icefish survive where the water would freeze other fish.").

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 + Explanation Practice:

- Use a T-chart labeled *Fact* and *Why It Matters.* Have students list facts from the sources and then write one explanatory sentence for each to deepen understanding.

Purpose-Focus Mini-Lesson:

- Compare an *opinion paragraph* and an *informational paragraph* to help students see how to stay focused on explaining rather than persuading.

Source Integration Sorting:

- Give students short excerpts from the sources (cold, desert, ocean). Ask them to match each fact to a heading and discuss how it supports a clear main idea.

Organization:

Paragraph Mapping:

- Give students a color-coded organizer showing where to place the introduction, details for each environment, and a closing statement. Model how spacing and order help clarity.

Transition Practice:

- Create a transition word chart grouped by function (time, contrast, example). Students choose appropriate transitions to connect each paragraph.

"Introduction and Closing" Mini-Lesson:

- Show how a strong lead sets up the topic and how a conclusion circles back to it. Students practice rewriting the first and last sentences of their own paper for better alignment.

Voice:

Tone Shift Activity:

- Provide sentences written in an overly emotional style and have students revise them to sound informative. Example: "These poor animals!" to "Many animals face danger when their habitats are destroyed."

"Expert Voice" Modeling:

- Show mentor texts where writers sound both knowledgeable and interested (e.g., National Geographic Kids). Students identify how those writers balance energy and information.

Reader Awareness Exercise:

- Students read their drafts aloud to a partner, who identifies whether each section sounds "informative," "emotional," or "story-like." Students then revise to keep tone consistent with purpose.

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:

Word Upgrade Chart:

- Have students list overused words (cold, hot, big, nice) and work together to brainstorm more specific replacements that match the topic.

Content Vocabulary Bank:

- Create a class wall of words drawn from the sources—*adaptation, climate, nocturnal, environment, habitat*—and have students use at least three in their next draft.

"Emotion to Information" Practice:

- Show how to replace emotional words with factual descriptions. For example, "pore animals" becomes "animals that face danger in extreme weather." This builds precision while keeping empathy.

Sentence Fluency:

Sentence Fix-It Workshop:

- Provide samples of student sentences with run-ons and fragments. Have students rewrite them correctly using periods, commas, and conjunctions.

Sentence Combining Practice:

- Use short related sentences (e.g., "Ice fish live in Antarctica. The water is cold. They don't freeze.") and guide students in combining them into one fluent sentence.

"Read and Mark" Oral Fluency Routine:

- Students read their drafts aloud and mark places where they pause naturally. They then check that punctuation matches those pauses.

Conventions:

High-Frequency Word Correction Chart:

- Create a personal spelling list of the student's most common errors. Have the student rewrite each word correctly five times and use it in a new sentence.

Sentence Surgery:

- Provide a paragraph from the student's writing without punctuation. Students work in pairs to "operate" by adding periods, commas, and capital letters to restore clarity.

Focused Editing Passes:

- Teach students to proofread in layers—first for spelling, then punctuation, then capitalization. Each pass should target one skill to avoid overwhelming them.

Use of Sources:

Source Matching Activity:

- Provide short excerpts from the three sources. Have students match each fact to its correct article, building awareness of using multiple texts.

Signal Phrase Sentence Starters:

- Teach and post examples like *"The author explains…"* and *"According to the text…"* for students to use when paraphrasing facts from sources.

Synthesis Practice:

- Ask students to write one paragraph that combines facts from two different sources (e.g., penguins huddle for warmth and owls build homes in cacti) to practice connecting ideas.