Grade 7 – Expository Writing Work Sample: Exceeds

Task: Your science class is completing a class project about invasive plants. Your teacher has given you the topic of non-native plants and why some succeed in new environments while others become nuisances.

*Read the sources carefully to **write an explanatory article** to explain why some non-native plants succeed in new environments while others become nuisances. Using more than one source, select the most relevant information to support your thesis/controlling idea about non-native plants.*

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

Ideas and Content: 4

The essay presents a clear and relevant controlling idea that some non-native plants succeed while others become nuisances. The writing uses more than one source and provides accurate examples of both successful non-native species (tomatoes) and problematic invasive plants (honeysuckle). Explanations are generally correct but lack depth in places, especially regarding why these outcomes occur. Some statements rely on repetition rather than elaboration, but overall the piece demonstrates solid understanding.

Evidence from Student Work: Ideas and Content	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Ideas and Content
✓ **Clear Controlling Idea and Purpose** ○ Introduces the central idea clearly: "Some non-native plants succeed in their new environments, however, some non-native plants end up becoming well-known nuisances, or ○ ven dangerous things to avoid." Repeats this controlling idea in both the introduction and conclusion for coherence. ○ Defines terms accurately: "If the non-native plant thrives and eliminates other organisms, it is classified as an invasive plant."	➢ **Clarify Your Controlling Idea With Specific Causes** ○ Add a sentence early on explaining *why* some non-native plants succeed (fit with climate, human cultivation, slow growth) and *why* others become nuisances (rapid growth, competition, no natural predators).
✓ **Relevant and Accurate Details** ○ Uses multiple correct examples from Source 4 about tomatoes: ▪ "Tomato was native… to Mexico." ▪ "Spanish explorers discovered that the Aztecs had been cultivating tomato for years [Source #4]." ▪ Early fear due to livestock deaths is accurately reported. ▪ Modern popularity supported with a statistic: "over 60 million tons produced… per year." ○ Uses Source 1 accurately for honeysuckle: it "can quickly eliminate other plants in native forests [Source #1]." ○ Correctly defines "invasive species" using phrasing closely aligned to Source 1.	➢ **Add More Precise Source-Based Details** ○ Include specific traits that make honeysuckle invasive, or explain factors that enabled tomatoes to eventually succeed in Europe.

Evidence from Student Work: Ideas and Content	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Ideas and Content
✓ **Development and Elaboration** ○ Provides partial reasoning for tomatoes' initial failure and later success: fear due to cattle deaths to eventual global popularity due to cultivation and acceptance. ○ Provides limited explanation for harm caused by honeysuckle—describes that it "eliminates other plants" but does not explain *how* (rapid reproduction, shading, root competition). ○ The discussion of diversity in paragraph six is correct but underdeveloped ("Sometimes ecosystems may need diversity… but sometimes they can be bad…").	➢ **Deepen Your Explanations of Impact** ○ After describing examples, add a cause-and-effect explanation showing *how* they impact native ecosystems (competition for sunlight, soil nutrients, habitat displacement).
✓ **Focus and Relevance** ○ Stays consistently focused on the prompt: introduces examples, defines non-native and invasive plants, contrasts harmful and successful species. ○ Some concluding statements shift to philosophical or general commentary ("each plant is important to our ecosystem"), which is slightly off-focus but still related. ○ All examples relate to the controlling idea, though some paragraphs rely more on repetition than explanation.	➢ **Maintain Tight Focus in the Conclusion** ○ Replace broad statements about "every plant being important" with a clear synthesis of why some non-native plants thrive and others cause harm.

Organization: 4

The essay is clearly organized with an introduction, logical body paragraphs, and a conclusion that revisits key ideas. Transitions help guide readers, though some paragraphs contain multiple ideas that could be separated for clarity. The conclusion reiterates the central message but becomes more general than necessary.

Evidence from Student Work: Organization	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Organization
✓ **Clear Introduction Establishes Structure** ○ Introduces the topic and defines key concepts: "If the non-native plant thrives and eliminates other organisms, it is classified as an invasive plant." ○ Sets up the contrast between successful and harmful non-native plants.	➢ **Add a Clear Preview Statement** ○ Add a sentence in the introduction previewing that you will explain *why* some species succeed and why others become harmful.
✓ **Logical Sequencing of Ideas** ○ Follows a logical progression: ▪ – Define non-native vs invasive ▪ – Tomato example (successful non-native) ▪ – Honeysuckle example (harmful invasive) ▪ – Importance of biodiversity ▪ – Conclusion reinforcing the contrast ○ Order helps the reader follow the explanations.	➢ **Separate Dense Paragraphs** ○ Break longer paragraphs into smaller ones to emphasize the tomato example and honeysuckle example separately.

Evidence from Student Work: Organization	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Organization
✓ **Transitions Aid Flow** ○ Uses transitions such as "Another example of this," "As seen in Source #4," and "In conclusion…" ○ Some transitions are list-like rather than relational, limiting clarity.	➢ **Strengthen Transitions** ○ Use transitions that indicate relationships, such as cause/effect or contrast, rather than simply signaling a new paragraph.
✓ **Conclusion Provides Closure** ○ Restates the key idea: "Some plants can threaten our ecosystems while some help rejuvenate them." ○ Conclusion shifts to generalities ("each plant is important"), which slightly reduces precision.	➢ **Refine the Conclusion** ○ Summarize the ecological reasons behind success vs. harm instead of shifting to broad statements about plants in general.

Voice: 4

The voice is appropriate for informational writing: formal, clear, and objective. The student shows engagement through thoughtful commentary but occasionally shifts to generalized or inspirational tone that weakens informational focus.

Evidence from Student Work: Voice	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Voice
✓ **Appropriate Tone for Informational Purpose** ○ Maintains formal tone when defining invasive species and discussing examples. ○ Avoids second-person and emotional appeals throughout most of the essay.	➢ **Maintain Scientific Tone Throughout** ○ Replace general inspirational statements with specific scientific conclusions.
✓ **Engaged and Sincere Voice** ○ Shows interest in topic through phrases like "well-known nuisances" or describing tomatoes' historical reputation.	➢ **Maintain Objective Language** ○ Ensure all evaluative statements are grounded in explanation rather than opinion.
✓ **Occasional Shifts Toward Generalization** ○ Conclusion becomes inspirational: "each plant is important to our ecosystem and the Earth." ○ This reduces the scientific tone established earlier.	➢ **Remove Overly Broad Statements** ○ Replace "each plant is important" with a statement that reinforces the controlling idea.
✓ **Consistent Third-Person Explanatory Style** ○ Avoids conversational phrasing and keeps focus on plants and ecosystems.	➢ **Connect Commentary to Evidence** ○ When expressing the importance of diversity, link directly to examples discussed earlier.

Word Choice: 4

The essay uses mostly precise and appropriate vocabulary, including scientific terms. A few words are general or repeated, and some descriptions could be more specific, but overall language choices support clarity.

Evidence from Student Work: Word Choice	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Word Choice
✓ **Domain-Specific Vocabulary Used Correctly** ○ Includes terms such as "invasive," "eliminates other organisms," "ecosystem," "non-native," and "cultivating."	➢ **Strengthen Scientific Precision** ○ When discussing tomatoes' global success, mention specific traits such as adaptability or ease of cultivation.
✓ **Effective Word Choice for Explanation** ○ Uses factual descriptions like "thrives," "well-known nuisances," and "harmful invasive species."	➢ **Use More Precise Ecological Vocabulary** ○ Replace general words with specific terms such as "competitive growth," "resource dominance," or "low predation pressure."
✓ **Some Vague or Broad Word Choice** ○ Uses general words such as "important," "good," and "dangerous," which could be made more specific. ○ Phrases like "very helpful" or "well-known nuisances" could be revised with more precise ecological terminology.	➢ **Clarify Descriptions With Details** ○ Instead of "dangerous," describe how harm occurs (e.g., "displaces native understory plants").
✓ **Repetition in Conceptual Language** ○ Uses "non-native" and "invasive" frequently without introducing synonyms or more nuanced descriptors.	➢ **Reduce Repetition** ○ Use synonyms or domain-specific labels like "introduced species," "invasive spreaders," or "sustainably naturalized plants."

Sentence Fluency: 5

Most sentences flow smoothly, with clear structure and correct punctuation. Some sentences are long or contain multiple clauses, and a few repetitive patterns appear, but fluency is generally strong.

Evidence from Student Work: Sentence Fluency	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Sentence Fluency
✓ **Readable and Varied Sentences** ○ Uses both short and extended sentences effectively, such as the historical explanation of tomatoes.	➢ **Read Aloud for Smoothness** ○ Identify any unnatural pacing or repetitive patterns.
✓ **Varied Sentence Beginnings** ○ Begins sentences with phrases like "Another example," "As seen in Source #4," "In conclusion," showing variation.	➢ **Vary Sentence Beginnings More Purposefully** ○ Use participle phrases, transitions, or topic-specific language to start sentences differently.
✓ **Some Long or Multi-Idea Sentences** ○ Example: "Some non-native plants succeed in their new environments, however, some non-native plants end up becoming well-known nuisances…" ○ Could be split into two for clarity.	➢ **Split Long Sentences** ○ Divide sentences containing multiple clauses into two clearer statements.
✓ **Occasional Repetition** ○ Multiple sentences begin with "Some…" or "Another," reducing variety slightly.	➢ **Combine Short, Related Sentences** ○ Merge shorter, choppy sentences in the conclusion.

Conventions: 5

The writing demonstrates strong command of conventions. Spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and grammar are consistently correct. Minor issues are rare and do not impede meaning.

Evidence from Student Work: Conventions	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Conventions
✓ **Correct Spelling Throughout** ○ Spells challenging content-area terms such as "invasive," "ecosystem," "eliminates," and "cultivating" correctly.	➢ **Continue Using Formal Spelling Practices** ○ Maintain proper spelling of all ecological and historical terms.
✓ **Accurate Punctuation and Sentence Structure** ○ Commas, periods, and quotation marks are used correctly. ○ No run-ons or fragments detected.	➢ **Check Complex Sentences** ○ Ensure commas correctly separate clauses, especially in longer sentences.
✓ **Consistent Capitalization** ○ Capitalizes proper nouns such as "Mexico," "Spanish," and "Aztecs."	➢ **Maintain Careful Proofreading** ○ Continue checking punctuation and capitalization to keep writing polished.
✓ **Minimal Errors** ○ Very few punctuation inconsistencies; those present do not disrupt understanding.	➢ **Verify Citation Formatting Consistency** ○ Double-check that all source citations follow the same format.

Use of Sources: 4

The writer uses information from multiple sources accurately and appropriately. Evidence is relevant and supports the controlling idea. Citations are included but not consistently formatted. Some examples need clearer explanation to show why they illustrate success or harm.

Evidence from Student Work: Use of Sources	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Use of Sources
✓ **Uses Multiple Sources** ○ Uses Source 4 extensively for tomatoes, including origin, cultivation, and modern production statistics. ○ Uses Source 1 for honeysuckle's destructive behavior.	➢ **Blend Sources Across Ideas** ○ Integrate information from more than one source into paragraphs to strengthen explanation.
✓ **Evidence Is Accurate and Relevant** ○ Describes how tomatoes were initially feared because "livestock… were accidently killed by eating the leaves [Source #4]." ○ Accurately cites that honeysuckle "can quickly eliminate other plants in native forests [Source #1]."	➢ **Include Traits Behind Each Outcome** ○ Add details such as growth rate, reproduction patterns, or lack of native predators.
✓ **Inconsistent Citation Formatting** ○ Uses brackets and source numbers but lacks consistent spacing and labeling.	➢ **Standardize Citation Format** ○ Use one consistent structure: (Source 1) or [Source #1], but not both.
✓ **Limited Explanation of Evidence** ○ Repeats examples but does not always explain the *mechanism* behind success or harm (e.g., what traits made tomatoes successful, or how honeysuckle spreads).	➢ **Add Clear Explanations After Each Source Detail** ○ Explain why the tomato example shows success or why honeysuckle causes ecosystem disruption.

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:

Trait Analysis Organizer

- Students complete a chart showing the traits that make certain non-native plants successful or invasive and link each trait to a source.

Cause-and-Effect Elaboration Routine

- Students choose one harmful and one helpful plant example and write two additional sentences showing the ecological mechanism behind each outcome.

Precise Thesis Revision Mini-Lesson

- Students learn to revise general controlling ideas into specific, explanatory statements aligned to the prompt.

Organization:

Transition Type Sort

- Students categorize transitions by purpose and revise drafts to use cause-and-effect or contrast transitions.

Paragraph Focus Frames

- Use frames like “This paragraph explains…” to ensure each paragraph has a clear single purpose.

Conclusion Synthesis Practice

- Students practice summarizing controlling ideas using precise language rather than broad generalizations.

Voice:

Tone Consistency Highlighting

- Students highlight sentences where tone shifts and revise to maintain an academic voice.

Objective Rewriting Practice

- Students convert general or emotional statements into precise, explanatory language.

Mentor Text Comparisons

- Students compare selected sentences with mentor informational texts to identify features of strong informational voice.

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:

Domain Vocabulary Expansion Charts

- Students gather and categorize ecological terms from sources to improve precision.

Replace-and-Refine Revision Routines

- Students replace vague adjectives with precise, explanatory vocabulary.

Nuanced Label Practice

- Students practice labeling species with more precise categories (non-native, naturalized, invasive).

Sentence Fluency:

Sentence Combining and Splitting Practice

- Students work with teacher-created models to improve fluency.

Beginning Variety Tracking

- Students highlight the first word of each sentence and revise repetitive openings.

Read-Aloud Editing Stations

- Students mark areas where reading becomes awkward and revise for flow.

Conventions:

Complex Sentence Editing Mini-Lessons

- Teach students to check comma placement in longer sentences.

Peer Conventions Review

- Students check each other's drafts for capitalization and punctuation consistency.

Citation Format Checks

- Practice revising in-text citations to meet assignment expectations.

Use of Sources:

Attribution and Citation Mini-Lesson

- Teach consistent formatting for source numbers and in-text citation placement.

Evidence + Explanation Pairs

- Students write a follow-up explanation sentence after every cited fact.

Source Integration Practice

- Students combine evidence from two sources in a single paragraph to show relationships.