Grade 7 – Expository Writing Work Sample: Meets

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 controlling idea about how non-native plants can be both beneficial and harmful. The writing includes accurate details from multiple sources and shows a good understanding of ecological interactions. Some explanations remain general, and the controlling idea is not always stated with precision, but overall development is solid and relevant.

Evidence from Student Work: Ideas and Content	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Ideas and Content
✓ **Clear Controlling Idea and Purpose** ○ Establishes a clear idea in the introduction: non-native organisms can thrive and "create an invasive species in a foreign ecosystem." ○ Clarifies purpose early in the second paragraph: "Non-native species are not always harmful, and can actually help maintain diversity in ecosystems." ○ Maintains this purpose throughout, presenting both benefits and problems of non-native species.	➢ **Clarify the Controlling Idea With More Precision** ○ Add a sentence in the introduction or second paragraph that clearly states *why* some non-native plants succeed while others become harmful to directly match the prompt.
✓ **Relevant and Accurate Details** ○ Uses Source 1 accurately: "some species do not grow as fast as others, and can easily be managed so that they don't cause issues." ○ Incorporates relevant examples of non-native but non-problematic species: "tulips, wheat, and apples." ○ Uses data from Source 2 correctly: "22,000 non-native plants in New Zealand, but a total of three extinctions," showing low extinction risk. ○ Uses Source 3 accurately: "a man in North Carolina… bought fifty goats to graze his invasive species covered land."	➢ **Add More Precise Supporting Details From the Sources** ○ Include one more specific example from Source 1 or Source 4 to strengthen distinctions between harmless and harmful non-native species.

Evidence from Student Work: Ideas and Content	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Ideas and Content
✓ **Development and Elaboration** ○ Provides some explanation of ecological impact: if a native plant is disrupted, "the animal will have to move to a new ecosystem to find food." ○ Explains pros and cons: non-native species "can actually help maintain diversity," but can "cause a chain reaction of unfortunate events" when overly aggressive. ○ Some reasoning is broad, such as stating non-native species "help maintain diversity" without explaining the ecological process.	➢ **Deepen Explanations of Ecological Impact** ○ After describing benefits or problems, add a sentence explaining *how* or *why* these effects happen (for example, competition for sunlight, nutrients, or habitat disruption).
✓ **Focus and Relevance** ○ Stays focused on the prompt by addressing why some non-native species succeed (long presence, slow growth, easy management) and why others become nuisances (aggressive growth, ecosystem disruption). ○ Occasional generalities occur ("help balance ecosystems," "better understand your ecosystem"), but most ideas remain relevant. ○ Conclusion shifts slightly toward an instructional tone ("I hope you have learned…") but still relates to the topic.	➢ **Maintain Focus on the Explanatory Purpose** ○ Replace general statements in the conclusion with more specific synthesis connecting back to your controlling idea rather than instructional phrases like "I hope you have learned."

Organization: 4

The essay has a clear introduction, logically ordered paragraphs, and a concluding paragraph that restates key ideas. Some paragraphs contain multiple ideas that could be separated for clarity, and transitions are functional rather than precise, but overall structure effectively supports understanding.

Evidence from Student Work: Organization	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Organization
✓ **Clear and Purposeful Introduction** ○ Opens with an engaging hook about humans unintentionally transporting critters across continents. ○ Establishes the topic and sets up the contrast between helpful and harmful non-native species.	➢ **Refine the Introduction With Greater Specificity** ○ Add a preview sentence identifying the two main ideas: why some non-native plants succeed and why some become nuisances.
✓ **Logical Sequence of Ideas** ○ Follows a logical structure: introduction, benefits of non-native species, harms of non-native species, solutions, conclusion. ○ Each paragraph builds on the previous one, supporting the reader's comprehension.	➢ **Improve Internal Organization Within Paragraphs** ○ Separate ideas about benefits, harms, and management so each paragraph focuses on one concept more fully.

Evidence from Student Work: Organization	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Organization
✓ **Transitions Support Flow** ○ Uses transitions such as "Although these non-native species can be harmful" and "As non-native species move into new ecosystems…" to guide the reader. ○ Some transitions shift abruptly, such as moving directly from ecosystem damage to goats managing kudzu without signaling the change in focus.	➢ **Strengthen Transitions Between Major Ideas** ○ Use transitions that express relationships, such as cause, contrast, or problem–solution.
✓ **Conclusion Provides Closure** ○ Concludes by summarizing key ideas: "it is clear the pros and cons of non-native species." ○ Ends with broader statements about understanding ecosystems, which are relevant but less focused.	➢ **Refine the Conclusion to Reinforce the Controlling Idea** ○ Summarize *why* certain species thrive and why some become harmful rather than shifting to general environmental advice.

Voice: 3

The voice is mostly appropriate for informational writing and shows engagement, but conversational phrases and moments of second-person address weaken the formality expected in this mode.

Evidence from Student Work: Voice	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Voice
✓ **Awareness of Audience and Purpose** ○ Demonstrates interest and investment in the topic. ○ Occasionally shifts to a conversational tone: "you may be carrying over one little critter…" and "I hope you have learned…"	➢ **Maintain Consistent Academic Tone** ○ Use precise ecological terms rather than emotional or casual expressions.
✓ **Consistency of Formal Style** ○ Uses mostly academic language when presenting evidence. ○ Informal language appears in places ("chain reaction of unfortunate events," "great place to be," "with this information presented before you").	➢ **Remove Informal and Conversational Phrases** ○ Replace "you may be carrying…" and "I hope you have learned…" with objective, third-person informational language.
✓ **Appropriate Tone for Expository Writing** ○ Shows some authoritative tone when explaining impacts, such as describing food chains being disrupted. ○ The final paragraph shifts toward persuasive or advisory tone.	➢ **Revise the Conclusion for Formal Tone** ○ Replace advisory language with a summary of the key insights from the essay.
✓ **Limited Use of Objective Language** ○ Some statements use evaluative language ("little critter," "marvelous lights") that does not match informational expectations.	➢ **Strengthen Objectivity** ○ Focus on explaining the scientific or ecological reasons non-native species behave differently in new environments.

Word Choice: 4

The essay uses generally clear and accurate vocabulary with some domain-specific terms. Some words are vague or conversational, but overall word choice supports meaning effectively.

Evidence from Student Work: Word Choice	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Word Choice
✓ **Varied and Effective Vocabulary** ○ Uses ecological vocabulary such as "ecosystem," "balance," "chain reaction," "aggressively," "diversity."	➢ **Replace Informal Words with Scientific Vocabulary** ○ Replace "little critter" and "unfortunate events" with more formal terms like "organism" or "ecosystem disruptions."
✓ **Domain-Specific Terms** ○ Includes accurate scientific and ecological terms, such as "non-native species," "invasive species," "reproduce," and "extinctions."	➢ **Increase Precision With Domain Language** ○ Use terms like "competition," "resource availability," "habitat displacement," or "population growth rate."
✓ **Occasional Vague or Informal Language** ○ Uses conversational words like "little critter," "great place," and "unfortunate events" that weaken precision.	➢ **Avoid Conversational Adjectives** ○ Remove overly general phrases like "great place" and replace with ecological explanation.
✓ **Clear but Sometimes General Descriptions** ○ Some descriptions could be more specific, such as "grow too aggressively" without clarifying what "aggressively" means in ecological terms.	➢ **Clarify Key Terms** ○ Instead of "aggressively," specify mechanisms (rapid reproduction, spreading through root systems, outcompeting plants for sunlight).

Sentence Fluency: 4

Sentences are mostly varied and readable, with a mix of lengths and structures. Some sentences are long or contain multiple ideas, and second-person constructions occasionally disrupt fluency.

Evidence from Student Work: Sentence Fluency	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Sentence Fluency
✓ **Readable and Smooth Sentences** ○ Many sentences read clearly and naturally, such as: "According to source one, some species do not grow as fast as others…"	➢ **Combine Short Choppy Sentences** ○ Where appropriate, combine shorter sentences to improve rhythm.
✓ **Variety in Structure and Beginnings** ○ Uses different sentence types and openers: "Although…," "As stated by source two…," "As non-native species move…"	➢ **Remove Second-Person Openings** ○ Replace "you may be carrying…" with a third-person construction.
✓ **Some Sentences Are Overextended** ○ Example: "With this information presented before you, it is clear the pros and cons of non-native species," which combines too many ideas.	➢ **Split Overly Long Sentences** ○ Divide multi-idea sentences into two or more precise statements.
✓ **Conversational Constructions Affect Flow** ○ Sentences beginning with "you" or addressed to the reader sound less formal and can disrupt fluency.	➢ **Read Aloud to Check Flow** ○ Identify spots where pacing feels uneven or too conversational.

Conventions: 4

The writing demonstrates consistent control of grammar, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling. A few minor errors appear but do not interfere with understanding.

Evidence from Student Work: Conventions	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Conventions
✓ **Accurate Sentence Structure** ○ No run-ons or fragments appear; sentences are complete.	➢ **Double-Check Subject–Verb Agreement** ○ Ensure verbs match plural nouns when discussing species.
✓ **Correct Spelling of Domain Words** ○ Spells key terms such as "ecosystem," "diversity," "extinctions," and "aggressively" accurately.	➢
✓ **Mostly Correct Punctuation** ○ Periods, commas, and introductory phrase punctuation are generally correct.	➢ **Review Comma Use With Introductory Phrases** ○ Add commas after openings like "According to source two." ➢ **Verify Consistent Source Number Capitalization** ○ Use consistent formatting: "Source 1," "Source 2," etc.
✓ **Minor Errors Only** ○ A few small errors occur ("the extinction is not a problem," missing comma after "In some cases"), but they do not hinder readability.	➢ **Proofread for Small Mistakes** ○ Read slowly to catch minor punctuation omissions. ➢ **Review Comma Use With Introductory Phrases** ○ Add commas after openings like "According to source two."

Use of Sources: 4

The writer incorporates accurate, relevant details from multiple sources and references them in-text. Some elaboration is general or incomplete, and citations are not fully formatted, but source integration is solid overall.

Evidence from Student Work: Use of Sources	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Use of Sources
✓ **Uses Multiple Sources Accurately** ○ Draws from Source 1 (growth rates, manageability), Source 2 (New Zealand data), and Source 3 (goat example).	➢ **Use More Than One Source Within Each Main Section** ○ Blend information from multiple sources when discussing single concepts (benefits, harms, management).
✓ **Relevant Evidence** ○ Includes meaningful examples such as the "22,000 non-native plants in New Zealand" and the goat-grazing solution for kudzu.	➢ **Ensure All Examples Relate to the Prompt** ○ Emphasize how each example helps explain why some non-native plants succeed and others cause harm.
✓ **Attribution Is Present but Inconsistent** ○ References "according to source one" and "as stated by source two," but lacks full citation consistency.	➢ Use Consistent Citation Format ○ Use the same structure for each source reference (e.g., "According to Source 1…").
✓ **Limited Explanation of Evidence** ○ Some details are stated without expanded reasoning—for example, stating that certain species "help maintain diversity" but without explaining mechanisms.	➢ **Explain the Significance of Each Source Detail** ○ Follow each fact with a sentence that shows why it matters to your controlling idea.

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:

Cause-and-Effect Expansion Routine

- Students select one detail (e.g., slow growth or aggressive spreading) and write two explanatory sentences showing ecological cause and impact.

Source Differentiation Organizer

- Students sort examples into categories: “Non-native but not harmful” and “Non-native that become invasive,” then explain why each fits its category.

Thesis Refinement Mini-Lesson

- Students practice rewriting vague controlling ideas into specific statements that directly answer the prompt (why some succeed vs. why some become nuisances).

Organization:

Paragraph Focus Organizer

- Students label the purpose of each paragraph and revise sections where too many ideas overlap.

Transition Function Practice

- Students learn transition types (contrast, cause/effect, example) and apply them intentionally.

Conclusion Synthesis Frames

- Provide sentence frames that guide students to restate main ideas more specifically, such as “These examples show that some non-native plants succeed because…, while others become harmful because…”.

Voice:

Formal vs. Informal Tone Sorting

- Students categorize sentences by tone and revise informal ones to academic style.

Third-Person Objective Rewrites

- Students convert second-person sentences to third-person explanatory sentences.

Voice Calibration with Mentor Texts

- Students analyze informational mentor texts for tone and apply those features in revision.

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:

Content Vocabulary Bank

- Students draw words from an ecological word bank to strengthen specificity.

Replace-and-Refine Exercises

- Students revise vague words and replace them with content-appropriate vocabulary.

Context Sentence Practice

- Students practice explaining ecological terms accurately in context.

Sentence Fluency:

Sentence Combining and Splitting Practice

- Students revise teacher-created long or choppy sentences.

Read-Aloud Editing Routines

- Students mark and revise sentences that feel awkward when read aloud.

Sentence Variety Charting

- Students highlight first words of sentences to check for repetition.

Conventions:

Conventions Mini-Lessons

- Short lessons on introductory commas, formal capitalization, and subject–verb agreement.

Peer Editing Using a Checklist

- Students check each other's work for consistent punctuation and spelling.

Error Pattern Identification

- Students highlight recurring minor errors to inform targeted revision.

Use of Sources:

Source Attribution Frames

- Provide sentence frames such as "Source 2 explains that…" to support consistency.

Evidence + Explanation Modeling

- Model how to follow each quoted or paraphrased detail with analysis.

Source Integration Practice

- Students practice combining evidence from two sources in a single paragraph.