Grade 7 – Expository Writing Work Sample: Approaching

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: 3

The essay presents a clear controlling idea that some non-native plants can be harmful while others are not always invasive. It includes multiple relevant examples from the sources, but explanations are often basic, repeated, or incomplete. The writing shows developing understanding of ecological relationships but lacks a precise explanation of why some non-native plants succeed while others become nuisances. Several statements oversimplify or misinterpret source ideas.

Evidence from Student Work: Ideas and Content	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Ideas and Content
✓ **Clear Controlling Idea and Purpose** ○ Introduces a central idea: "Most people say non-native plants are harmful… but that is not always true." ○ States that some are invasive, some are not, which aligns partially with the prompt. ○ Purpose is generally clear but does not fully define *why* these differences occur.	➢ **Clarify Your Controlling Idea With Specific Causes** ○ Add a sentence explaining why some non-native plants become invasive (rapid growth, few predators) and why others do not (competition, natural controls).
✓ **Relevant and Mostly Accurate Details** ○ Uses an accurate example from Source 2 about ballast introducing seeds: "the soil holding down the ballast can have seeds in it… when they reach their destination… the seeds will be transported." ○ Includes an example from Source 3 about kudzu in North Carolina: "kudzu took over the fence… they brought in goats to eat the invasive plant but it grew back worse." ○ Correctly references Source 2/4 information about New Zealand: "only wiped out three of New Zealand's native plants." ○ Some statements are overly broad or unsupported, such as "plants… can become extinct" without citing source evidence.	➢ **Include More Precise Source-Based Details** ○ Add more mechanisms from the sources—how kudzu spreads, why ballast introduces species, and how New Zealand's ecosystems maintain balance.

Evidence from Student Work: Ideas and Content	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Ideas and Content
✓ **Development and Elaboration** ○ Attempts explanation: unmanaged non-native plants "can crowd the native plants" and cause animals to "die or migrate," which shows partial understanding of ecological impact. ○ Explanations are occasionally simplistic or incomplete—e.g., stating "non-native plants are also adding things to our food web every day" but not explaining how. ○ Does not clearly explain ecological reasons why some non-native plants remain controlled (predators, climate, slow reproduction).	➢ **Deepen Explanations of Ecological Impact** ○ After each example, explain *how* the plant disrupts or fits into the ecosystem (competition for sunlight, nutrients, habitat displacement).
✓ **Focus and Relevance** ○ Mostly stays focused on harmful vs. non-harmful non-native plants. ○ Sometimes repeats ideas ("can wipe out native plants but not usually"; "crowd native plants… but add new things") without deeper meaning. ○ Conclusion restates the main idea but does not synthesize ecological processes.	➢ **Maintain Focus and Reduce Repetition** ○ Replace repeated ideas ("can wipe out native plants but not always") with a clear summary that connects directly to your controlling idea.

Organization: 3

The essay follows a logical order and includes an introduction, body paragraphs, and a conclusion. However, transitions are basic, some ideas are repeated rather than sequenced, and paragraphs occasionally shift topics without clear signals. The conclusion restates the controlling idea but lacks synthesis.

Evidence from Student Work: Organization	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Organization
✓ **Introduction Establishes Topic but Lacks Specific Preview** ○ Begins with a general idea about harmful vs. helpful non-native plants: "Most people say non-native plants are harmful… but that is not always true." ○ Does not preview *why* these differences occur, which the prompt requires.	➢ **Add a Clear Preview in the Introduction** ○ Explain that the essay will describe *why* some non-native species succeed and why others become invasive.
✓ **Logical Sequence of Ideas** ○ Orders ideas clearly: introduction → harmful effects → transportation of species → examples (ballast, kudzu) → conclusion. ○ Sequence mostly supports understanding but mixes explanation with repetition.	➢ **Strengthen Internal Structure** ○ Group related examples together and avoid switching topics mid-paragraph.
✓ **Basic or Abrupt Transitions** ○ Uses simple transitions such as "another example," "for example," but these do not explain relationships. ○ Shifts abruptly from harmful impacts to ballast example without a transition showing how they relate.	➢ **Use Purposeful Transitions** ○ Add transitions showing cause/effect ("As a result…," "This leads to…") or contrast ("however," "in contrast").

Evidence from Student Work: Organization	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Organization
✓ **Conclusion Provides Closure but Lacks Depth** ○ Restates: "not all non-native plants are harmful," but does not summarize ecological reasons behind this. ○ Ends with a broad statement ("some good… some bad") instead of synthesizing key insights.	➢ **Revise the Conclusion for Synthesis** ○ Summarize the ecological reasons behind success vs. harm, not just the difference between "good" and "bad."

Voice: 3

The voice is generally appropriate and sincere, but there are moments of conversational tone, direct address, and informal phrasing. These weaken the informational style expected for an expository task.

Evidence from Student Work: Voice	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Voice
✓ **Appropriate Voice With Occasional Informality** ○ Mostly uses a neutral explanatory tone but occasionally shifts into direct address: "If people don't keep it maintained…" ○ Uses conversational phrases: "not always good" and "this can wipe out plants."	➢ **Eliminate Direct Address** ○ Remove "if people don't keep it maintained" and rewrite in third-person.
✓ **Some Engagement With Topic** ○ Shows interest in examples like kudzu and ballast, contributing to a committed voice.	➢ **Connect Tone to Purpose** ○ Maintain an explanatory tone across all paragraphs to best meet the prompt.
✓ **Inconsistent Academic Tone** ○ Uses informal vocabulary ("goes wild," "not usually," "wipe out") that does not always match the scientific nature of the prompt.	➢ **Use a Consistently Formal Tone** ○ Replace phrases like "goes wild" with scientific descriptions.
✓ **Minimal Emotional Language** ○ Avoids overly evaluative tone but sometimes drifts into general evaluation ("can be harmful" repeated without explanation).	➢ **Strengthen Objectivity** ○ Focus explanations on evidence rather than subjective or conversational language.

Word Choice: 3

The vocabulary is clear and understandable but sometimes general or repetitive. Domain-specific terms are present but used inconsistently, and some explanations would benefit from more precise ecological vocabulary.

Evidence from Student Work: Word Choice	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Word Choice
✓ **Correct Use of Some Domain Vocabulary** ○ Uses "non-native," "invasive," "ecosystems," "native plants," and "food web."	➢ **Replace General Words With Specific Ecological Terms** ○ Use vocabulary such as "outcompete," "resource competition," "habitat disruption," "rapid reproduction."
✓ **General or Vague Language** ○ Uses words like "good," "bad," "harmful," "not usually," which lack specificity.• Statements such as "adding things to our food web" are imprecise.	➢ **Ensure Accuracy in Word Choice** ○ Use source-based language when referring to ballast, kudzu, or plant competition.

Evidence from Student Work: Word Choice	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Word Choice
✓ **Repetition Without Precision** ○ Repeats "can kill native plants" and "wipe out" without expanding on the mechanism.	➢ **Avoid Repetition** ○ Replace repeated phrases ("wipe out," "kill plants") with more detailed, varied explanations.
✓ **Occasional Misinterpretation** ○ Claim that non-native plants "can also be beneficial" is correct, but the explanation ("add things to the food web") is vague and unsupported.	➢ **Clarify Mechanisms Using Scientific Terms** ○ Add terms describing how plants spread (root systems, climbing vines, fast germination).

Sentence Fluency: 3

Sentences are generally readable, but some are repetitive, choppy, or overly long. Sentence structures often begin the same way, and transitions between ideas can be abrupt.

Evidence from Student Work: Sentence Fluency	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Sentence Fluency
✓ **Readable But Repetitive Sentence Patterns** ○ Many sentences begin with "This can…," "They…," or "Non-native plants can…" ○ Creates a predictable rhythm.	➢ **Vary Sentence Beginnings** ○ Combine sentences and reword openings to avoid repetition.
✓ **Choppy or Fragmented Sentences** ○ Example: "This can wipe out native plants." ○ Very short and disconnected from the surrounding context.	➢ **Combine Short Related Sentences** ○ Merge simple sentences into more complex ones to create mature flow.
✓ **Overly Long Sentences With Multiple Ideas** ○ Example: "If not kept in check they can go wild and wipe out native plants and cause animals to die or migrate and then it ruins the food web." ○ Needs separation into multiple clear statements.	➢ **Break Up Long Sentences** ○ Split multi-idea sentences to improve clarity and readability.
✓ **Abrupt Paragraph Shifts** ○ The switch from harmful effects to ballast occurs without fluency markers.	➢ **Improve Transitions for Sentence-Level Flow** ○ Add connecting phrases to guide readers from one idea to the next.

Conventions: 3

The writing shows general control of spelling, capitalization, and punctuation, but errors occur with inconsistent grammar, punctuation omissions, and occasional awkward constructions. Errors do not completely obscure meaning but weaken clarity.

Evidence from Student Work: Conventions	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Conventions
✓ **General Spelling Accuracy** ○ Most common words are spelled correctly; occasional misspellings appear but do not impede meaning.	➢

Evidence from Student Work: Conventions	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Conventions
✓ **Some Punctuation Errors** ○ Missing commas after introductory clauses ("If not kept in check they can go wild"). ○ Some long sentences lack proper separation or conjunctions.	➢ **Proofread for Small Errors** ○ A slow, deliberate review would catch errors currently overlooked. ➢ **Add Commas in Introductory Clauses** ○ Improve readability by placing commas after sentences that begin with "If…"
✓ **Inconsistent Grammar** ○ Sentences such as "This can wipe out native plants but not usually" lack clarity and formal structure.	➢ **Proofread for Small Errors** ○ A slow, deliberate review would catch errors currently overlooked. ➢ **Correct Sentence Boundaries** ○ Separate run-on ideas and ensure all sentences are complete.
✓ **Capitalization Generally Correct** ○ Proper nouns are typically capitalized correctly; minor inconsistencies appear.	➢

Use of Sources: 3

The essay demonstrates partial use of sources by providing examples from ballast transport, honeysuckle, and kudzu. However, citations are inconsistent or missing, source details are only lightly explained, and the writer sometimes repeats details without deeper analysis.

Evidence from Student Work: Use of Sources	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Use of Sources
✓ **Use of Multiple Sources** ○ References ballast transport from Source 2 (soil carrying seeds). ○ Shows knowledge of kudzu and goat grazing from Source 3. ○ Mentions New Zealand having "only wiped out three… native plants" (Source 2 or 4).	➢ **Blend Sources When Discussing One Category** ○ Combine examples (e.g., ballast + kudzu) to deepen explanations of impact.
✓ **Evidence Is Generally Accurate** ○ Kudzu example ("took over the fence… grew back worse") matches the source broadly. ○ Ballast example accurately reflects how seeds move with ships.	➢ **Explain Evidence More Deeply** ○ After each source example, add a sentence explaining why the plant is successful or harmful.
✓ **Inconsistent Citation or Attribution** ○ Uses occasional brackets, e.g., "[source #3]," but without consistent formatting. ○ Some claims lack citation or repeat examples without attribution.	➢ **Use Consistent Citation Format** ○ Choose one style (e.g., "Source 3 states…") and apply it uniformly.
✓ **Limited Explanation of Evidence** ○ States examples but rarely explains *why* they demonstrate invasive or non-invasive success.	➢ **Avoid Repetition** ○ Use each example with clear purpose rather than repeating similar statements.

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 take one detail (e.g., kudzu's growth) and write two sentences explaining the cause (rapid growth rate) and effect (shading out native plants).

Source Comparison Organizer

- Students compare examples from the sources by sorting them into "non-native but not harmful" and "invasive" categories with explanations.

Thesis Precision Mini-Lesson

- Students revise vague controlling ideas into specific answers to the prompt:
  "Some non-native plants succeed because…, while others become nuisances because…"

Organization:

Transition Purpose Sort

- Students sort transition words by function and apply them to revise key sentences.

Paragraph Focus Frames

- Students write or underline the main idea of each paragraph to improve clarity and alignment.

Conclusion Synthesis Workshop

- Students practice rewriting conclusions to highlight causal explanations rather than restating general ideas.

Voice:

Formal vs. Informal Tone Identification

- Students highlight informal phrases and revise them into formal academic statements.

Objective Tone Mini-Lesson

- Teach students how to remove direct address and personal tone from informational writing.

Mentor Text Comparison

- Analyze expert informational texts to identify features of a consistent scientific tone.

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

- Build a class word bank of precise ecological terms from the sources.

Replace-and-Revise Exercises

- Students identify general words and replace them with scientific vocabulary.

Contextual Sentence Writing

- Students practice writing sentences using ecological terminology in accurate context.

Sentence Fluency:

Sentence Variety Charting

- Students track the first words of sentences and revise repeating patterns.

Combining/Splitting Activities

- Practice balancing long and short sentences through guided exercises.

Read-Aloud Fluency Checking

- Students listen for places where the flow stalls or feels abrupt.

Conventions:

Sentence Boundary Mini-Lessons

- Focused instruction on fragments, run-ons, and comma placement.

Peer Editing Checklist

- Students review each other's drafts with a structured list of conventions to check.

Guided Correction Practice

- Teachers provide sentences with similar issues for students to correct.

Use of Sources:

Evidence + Explanation Practice

- Students pair each cited fact with two explanatory sentences.

Source Integration Mini-Lessons

- Teach strategies for blending evidence from multiple sources in a single paragraph.

Citation Consistency Exercises

- Students practice revising inconsistent source citations into one standard format.