Grade 7 – Expository Writing Work Sample: Does Not Yet Meet

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: 2

The essay demonstrates a general awareness of the prompt by discussing positive and negative effects of non-native plants. However, the controlling idea is vague and unfocused, details are mostly generalized opinions rather than source-based evidence, and explanations often rely on repetition instead of ecological reasoning. The writing shows limited use of sources and does not clearly explain why some non-native plants succeed while others become nuisances.

Evidence from Student Work: Ideas and Content	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Ideas and Content
✓ **Clear Controlling Idea and Purpose** ○ Attempts a controlling idea through repeated questions ("why are they good," "why are they a nuisances," "are they good or bad"), but does not clearly articulate a thesis. ○ The purpose remains broad—evaluating whether they are "good or bad"—rather than explaining *why* outcomes differ across environments. ○ Controlling idea shifts from neutral ("positive, or negative effects") to personal opinion ("for me I personally think they are worse").	➢ **Craft a Clear, Precise Controlling Idea** ○ Rewrite the introduction to directly answer the prompt by explaining *why* some non-native plants become successful and *why* others cause harm. ○ Avoid broad "good or bad" framing.
✓ **Relevant but Generalized Details** ○ Provides broad statements with no source attribution: "non-native plants kill the native plants around them," "consume too much space," "cost… 1,000's of dollars to get rid of." ○ Positive claims are also generalized: "create a new food chain," "allowing more resources for food," "creating a better future for the world." ○ No evidence is tied directly to specific source information, examples, or mechanisms.	➢ **Add Accurate, Relevant Details From the Sources** ○ Incorporate specific examples from the articles (e.g., honeysuckle, kudzu, tomatoes) rather than making general statements about killing plants or costing money. ○ Use information about growth rates, reproduction, or human introduction.

Evidence from Student Work: Ideas and Content	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Ideas and Content
✓ **Development and Elaboration** ○ Explanations are mostly repetitive ("This shows that…this shows that…") without adding new insight. ○ Reasons provided for harm ("kill native plants," "cost money," "harm the area itself") are not grounded in ecological explanation or source-based facts. ○ Claims about benefits ("researchers would be able to continue their profession") are speculative and unrelated to the sources. ○ Lacks explanation of *why* certain non-native plants succeed (adaptation, human cultivation, slow growth) or *why* others become invasive (rapid reproduction, competition, lack of predators).	➢ **Deepen Explanations With Ecological Reasoning** ○ Explain *how* invasive plants harm ecosystems (competition for sunlight, water, nutrients; lack of predators). ○ Explain *why* some non-native plants fit into ecosystems without harm (slow spread, human cultivation, long-term presence).
✓ **Focus and Relevance** ○ Focus drifts between informative explanation and personal argument ("I personally think they are worse," "should be exterminated quickly"). ○ Conclusion repeats opinion rather than synthesizing ecological reasons. ○ Most content is loosely related to the prompt but lacks relevancy because it is disconnected from source materials.	➢ **Maintain Focus on Explanation Rather Than Opinion** ○ Remove subjective statements ("I personally think…," "should be exterminated"). ○ Replace them with explanations supported by source evidence.

Organization: 2

The essay has a recognizable structure with an introduction, several body paragraphs, and a conclusion. However, paragraphs are loosely connected, transitions are minimal or missing, and ideas are sequenced more by listing than by purposeful explanation. The conclusion repeats opinions rather than providing synthesis.

Evidence from Student Work: Organization	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Organization
✓ **Introduction Identifies Topic but Lacks Focus** ○ Begins with a general statement about "non-native plants" but does not preview the explanation required by the prompt. ○ Repeated rhetorical questions ("why are they good," "why are they a nuisances") signal uncertainty rather than clear direction.	➢ **Strengthen the Introduction** ○ Preview the specific reasons some plants succeed and others become nuisances.
✓ **Loose and Repetitive Sequencing** ○ Body paragraphs repeat the same idea—plants "hurt the area," "kill native plants," or "harm the plants and animals"—in multiple places without adding new reasoning. ○ Ideas appear in list form rather than following a clear logic.	➢ **Use Purposeful Sequencing** ○ Group harmful impacts together and helpful impacts together, explaining each with supporting detail.

Evidence from Student Work: Organization	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Organization
✓ **Weak or Missing Transitions** ○ Transitions such as "the reason for this is" and "what this means" repeat without adding clarity. ○ Paragraphs often begin abruptly and do not connect logically to one another.	➢ **Add Clear Transitions** ○ Use transitions that indicate cause and effect or contrast (e.g., "However," "As a result," "In contrast").
✓ **Conclusion Restates Opinion Without Synthesis** ○ Returns to the writer's personal view: "for me I personally think they are worse," which shifts away from the requirement to explain ecological reasons. ○ Does not summarize why some non-native plants succeed or become invasive.	➢ **Rewrite the Conclusion for Synthesis** ○ Summarize the key ecological explanations instead of repeating personal preference.

Voice: 2

The writer shows interest in the topic but relies heavily on conversational language, second-person address, and personal opinion. These choices weaken the informational tone expected for expository writing.

Evidence from Student Work: Voice	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Voice
✓ **Inconsistent Awareness of Audience and Purpose** ○ Uses second-person frequently ("when you look at non-native plants…," "this is what you should do"). ○ Shift to persuasive or advisory tone ("should be exterminated quickly") is not appropriate for informational writing.	➢ **Remove Second-Person Address** ○ Replace "you should" with objective, third-person explanations.
✓ **Informal and Opinion-Based Voice** ○ Strong personal statements appear: "for me I personally think they are worse" and "I personally think they should be exterminated." ○ Uses conversational tone rather than objective explanation.	➢ **Eliminate Personal Opinions** ○ Remove statements like "I personally think…" and focus on ecological mechanisms supported by sources.
✓ **Limited Use of Academic Voice** ○ Very few sentences maintain a neutral, scientific tone; most rely on emotional or judgmental phrasing.	➢ **Adopt a Formal Informational Tone** ○ Use clear, neutral language appropriate for scientific explanation.
✓ **Tone Shifts Reduce Clarity** ○ Moves between attempts at explanation and personal judgment, creating inconsistency.	➢ **Ensure Tone Is Consistent** ○ Avoid persuasive or instructional phrasing in an explanatory essay.

Word Choice: 2

Vocabulary is often general, repetitive, or informal. The writing lacks domain-specific ecological terms needed for clarity and accuracy. Several words reflect emotional judgment rather than scientific explanation.

Evidence from Student Work: Word Choice	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Word Choice
✓ **General and Vague Vocabulary** ○ Uses broad terms like "hurt the area," "harm," "bad," "good," "worse," "better future," "costs money," which lack precision.	➢ **Use More Precise Verbs and Nouns** ○ Describe how plants spread (e.g., "expand through root networks," "grow rapidly in sunlight-rich areas").
✓ **Informal or Conversational Words** ○ Repeated use of "for me," "I think," "should be exterminated," and "look around" shifts tone away from informational writing.	➢ **Avoid Emotional or Judgmental Language** ○ Replace "bad" or "should be exterminated" with objective descriptions supported by sources.
✓ **Limited Domain Vocabulary** ○ Does not use important ecological terms such as competition, biodiversity, resource availability, adaptation, reproduction rate, or invasive spread.	➢ **Replace General Words With Ecological Terms** ○ Use vocabulary such as "competition for resources," "displacement," "rapid reproduction," or "biodiversity loss."
✓ **Repetition Without Added Meaning** ○ Repeats phrases like "this shows…" and "this means…" but does not provide additional explanation.	➢ **Eliminate Repetitive Fillers** ○ Replace repeated sentence starters with concrete scientific explanations.

Sentence Fluency: 2

Sentences are often repetitive, choppy, or awkwardly constructed. Many sentences begin with the same pattern and rely on generic starters ("this means," "this shows"). Several long sentences contain multiple ideas without clear structure.

Evidence from Student Work: Sentence Fluency	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Sentence Fluency
✓ **Repetitive Sentence Beginnings** ○ Multiple sentences begin with "This can…," "This shows…," "This means…," creating monotony.	➢ **Vary Sentence Beginnings** ○ Replace repeated starters with different structures to improve flow.
✓ **Choppy or Fragmented Structure** ○ Short, abrupt sentences appear throughout: "Some plants have positive effects. Others have negative effects."	➢ **Combine Choppy Sentences** ○ Merge short, related statements to create smoother rhythm.
✓ **Long Sentences With Multiple Ideas** ○ Example: "They are worse because they hurt the area itself and make it difficult for the native plants to grow and because they cost 1,000's of dollars to get rid of…" ○ Difficult to follow due to lack of breaks.	➢ **Break Up Long, Multi-Idea Sentences** ○ Split complex sentences into two or three simpler, clearer sentences.
✓ **Inconsistent Rhythm** ○ Mixes very long sentences with very short ones, disrupting flow.	➢ **Conduct a Read-Aloud Revision** ○ Read the piece aloud to identify where pacing becomes uneven or awkward.

Conventions: 2

Frequent errors in spelling, capitalization, punctuation, and grammar interfere with clarity. Several sentence structures are incorrect or incomplete.

Evidence from Student Work: Conventions	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Conventions
✓ **Spelling Issues Affect Meaning** ○ Words such as "nuisances," "beneficial," and "ecosystem" are misspelled or inconsistently spelled.	➢ **Correct High-Frequency Spelling Errors** ○ Carefully check spelling of key terms such as "invasive," "non-native," and "ecosystem."
✓ **Punctuation Errors** ○ Missing commas in compound sentences; inconsistent end punctuation. ○ Some sentences run together without proper punctuation.	➢ **Fix Run-Ons and Sentence Fragments** ○ Add end punctuation and separate ideas into complete sentences.
✓ **Capitalization Errors** ○ Errors such as "native plants," "non native plants," and "american" appear without proper capitalization or consistency.	➢ **Review Capitalization Rules** ○ Ensure proper nouns and the beginnings of sentences are capitalized.
✓ **Grammar and Agreement Issues** ○ Run-ons such as "they kill the native plants around them and consume space and cost thousands to get rid of…" ○ Some sentences lack subjects or verbs.	➢ **Edit for Grammar and Agreement** ○ Check that verbs match their subjects and that sentences are complete.

Use of Sources: 1

The essay includes almost no evidence from the provided sources. All examples are general, repeated, or invented. No citations or source-based details appear, and no attempts are made to integrate factual information.

Evidence from Student Work: Use of Sources	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Use of Sources
✓ **No Direct Use of Sources** ○ The essay contains no references to source numbers, titles, or specific details.	➢ **Add Specific Details From Sources** ○ Include accurate examples such as kudzu, honeysuckle, tomatoes, or the New Zealand study.
✓ **Generalized or Inaccurate Claims** ○ Examples such as "cost 1,000's of dollars to get rid of" or "create a new food chain" are not supported by sources.	➢ **Replace Unsupported Opinions With Factual Information** ○ Avoid general claims that are not grounded in the texts.
✓ **No Evidence Integration** ○ No quotations, paraphrases, or attribution phrases are included.	➢ **Use Citations or Signal Phrases** ○ Add "According to Source __…" when paraphrasing or quoting.
✓ **No Explanation of Source-Based Examples** ○ Explanations are hypothetical and unrelated to the specific examples from the articles.	➢ **Explain the Meaning of the Evidence** ○ Follow each source detail with a sentence that explains why it supports 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 Evidence Expansion

- Students practice taking one detail (e.g., kudzu's rapid spread) and writing two cause-and-effect sentences explaining why this leads to invasiveness.

Source-Based Example Sorting

- Students sort examples from the four sources into buckets: "Non-native but not harmful" vs. "Invasive," then write explanations for each category.

Precise Thesis Formulation Workshop

- Students build a controlling idea that directly answers the prompt: "Some non-native plants succeed because…, while others become nuisances because…"

Organization:

Paragraph Purpose Frames

- Students identify and label the purpose of each paragraph to improve focus and sequencing.

Transition Practice by Function

- Students match transitions to their uses (contrast, cause/effect, clarification) and apply them in revision.

Conclusion Synthesis Workshop

- Students practice writing concluding statements that synthesize—not repeat—ideas.

Voice:

Formal vs. Informal Sentence Sorting

- Students categorize statements by tone and revise informal ones.

Third-Person Rewrite Practice

- Students transform personal or directive statements into objective information.

Mentor Text Tone Modeling

- Students compare their writing to informational models to improve tone consistency.

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:

Vocabulary Upgrade Exercises

- Students revise vague phrases using domain-specific vocabulary lists.

Context-Based Vocabulary Practice

- Students write sentences using ecological terms in accurate context.

Replace-and-Explain Routine

- Students identify vague words in their draft and replace them with precise scientific terminology.

Sentence Fluency:

Sentence Variety Mapping

- Students highlight first words of sentences and revise repeating patterns.

Combining and Splitting Practice

- Students practice revising overly long or overly short sentences using teacher-provided examples.

Fluency Read-Aloud Stations

- Students revise sentences based on how they sound when spoken.

Conventions:

Error Pattern Review

- Students identify their most common error types and practice correcting them.

Punctuation and Boundary Mini-Lessons

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

Guided Editing Sessions

- Teacher provides targeted editing practice using sentences similar to those in the student's draft.

Use of Sources:

Source Extraction Practice

- Students pull key facts from each source and match them to the prompt.

Evidence + Explanation Modeling

- Teacher models a two-sentence structure: fact → explanation.

Citation Sentence Frames

- Provide starters such as "Source 1 states…" or "According to the article…" to scaffold integration.