Grade 8 – Expository Writing Work Sample: Exceeds

Task: Your class is studying about the human nervous system and the brain. You are given three articles about the brain and how it impacts memory.

*Read the sources carefully to **write an explanatory article** about improving memory. Using more than one source, select the most relevant information to support your thesis/controlling idea about memory.*

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

Ideas and Content: 5

The essay presents a clear and engaging controlling idea focused on practicing memory strategies. It uses highly relevant and accurate details from all three sources and explains each tip with specific examples. While explanations are mostly thorough, some reasoning leans more toward entertainment than analysis. Overall, the writing shows strong comprehension of the sources and communicates information clearly, but it stops just short of the depth and precision expected for a score of 6.

Evidence from Student Work: Ideas and Content	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Ideas and Content
✓ **Clear Controlling Idea and Purpose** ○ Establishes the purpose effectively in the introduction: "If you need to improve your memory, the key is practice, practice, practice." ○ Frames the article as a set of "tips and tricks to help you practice your memory," which aligns well with the prompt. ○ Maintains this purpose throughout each section of the essay.	➢ **Strengthen the Controlling Idea by Clarifying the Underlying Mechanism** ○ Add a sentence explaining *why* practice improves memory (e.g., neural pathways strengthening, repeated retrieval increasing retention).
✓ **Relevant and Accurate Details** ○ Accurately quotes Source 1: "If you keep using your brain the same way over and over again, it shapes how your brain will be organized." ○ Draws correctly from Source 3 about interpreter training: "Much of an interpreter's brain power is devoted to keeping information in short-term memory." ○ Incorporates Source 2 with precision, including "memory palaces," "picture a building you already know," and vivid examples like "marshmallows strung like pearls." ○ Uses the "Person + Action + Object" strategy accurately and invents appropriate sample combinations.	➢ **Balance Creative Examples With More Precise Source-Based Detail** ○ Keep vivid examples but add more explanations of how techniques like imagery, association, or chunking support memory.

Evidence from Student Work: Ideas and Content	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Ideas and Content
✓ **Development and Elaboration** ○ Explains how each tip works, not just what it is. For example, after describing the interpreter exercise, the writer explains the cognitive task: "You must lock the words in your short-term memory, so practicing this way will help you…" ○ Elaborates with specific applications (e.g., grocery lists, remembering numbers, recalling names). ○ Some elaboration focuses more on humor or creativity (e.g., "milk coming out of your backyard hose") instead of deeper explanation of cognitive mechanisms.	➢ **Deepen Explanatory Reasoning** ○ After describing each strategy, add a sentence showing how the brain processes that technique (visualization, interference reduction, encoding).
✓ **Focus and Relevance** ○ Stays consistently focused on the question of how to improve memory. ○ Each paragraph contributes a distinct, well-developed strategy. ○ Maintains relevance but occasionally shifts into playful or narrative commentary that adds entertainment but not depth ("You'll never forget a name or face again").	➢ **Keep Focus on Informational Purpose** ○ Reduce conversational lines ("You'll never forget a name again") and restate how each example supports memory improvement.

Organization: 5

The essay is clearly structured, beginning with an engaging introduction, followed by logically ordered sections that present distinct memory strategies. Transitions support coherence, and each section maintains internal organization. The conclusion reinforces the main purpose but is slightly repetitive.

Evidence from Student Work: Organization	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Organization
✓ **Clear and Purposeful Introduction** ○ Opens with a strong hook: "Have you ever had trouble remembering something important?" ○ Introduces the controlling idea and signals the purpose: improving memory through practice.	➢ **Add a Brief Preview Sentence in the Introduction** ○ Mention the three strategies you will discuss to strengthen advance organization.
✓ **Logical Sequencing of Ideas** ○ Organizes information by strategy: interpreter training, memory palace, and the Person + Action + Object method. ○ Each tip is presented in a separate paragraph with its own explanation and examples.	➢
✓ **Transitions Support Flow** ○ Uses transitions such as "To start off," "Another tip," and "One more powerful strategy" to guide the reader. ○ Transitions accurately signal movement between strategies and maintain clarity.	➢ **Further Strengthen Connections Between Strategies** ○ Add one sentence explaining how each strategy relates to the idea of practice or mental training.

Evidence from Student Work: Organization	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Organization
✓ **Conclusion Provides Clear Closure** ○ Summarizes the key message: practicing memory strategies improves retention. ○ Slightly repetitive ("Practice makes perfect"), but still reinforces the purpose effectively.	➢ **Ensure All Paragraphs End With Purposeful Closure** ○ Add a final sentence to each section tying strategy back to the larger purpose. ➢ **Reduce Minor Repetition in the Conclusion** ○ Summarize insights more precisely instead of repeating the central phrase.

Voice: 4

The voice is confident, engaging, and accessible for readers. At times, the tone becomes overly conversational or humorous, slightly weakening the informational purpose. However, the overall voice demonstrates clear awareness of audience and purpose.

Evidence from Student Work: Voice	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Voice
✓ **Engaging and Appropriate for Audience** ○ Uses an inviting tone ("Have you ever had trouble remembering something important?"). ○ Maintains a friendly, readable style that supports understanding.	➢ **Balance Engagement With Precision** ○ Maintain reader-friendly tone but pair vivid examples with clear explanations. ➢ **Clarify Audience Purpose** ○ Use voice to present yourself as an informative guide rather than a casual storyteller.
✓ **Sincere and Controlled Voice** ○ Shows investment in the topic ("Well, here are some tips and tricks…").	➢
✓ **Occasional Conversational or Casual Shifts** ○ Some phrases stray from informational tone, such as "You'll never forget a name or face again," or humorous imagery like "milk coming out of your backyard hose."	➢ **Reduce Informal or Playful Phrasing** ○ Replace conversational lines with more objective, explanatory statements.
✓ **Mostly Consistent Purpose and Point of View** ○ Writes in a consistent, helpful, explanatory voice, with brief lapses into entertainment.	➢ **Keep Tone Consistently Informational** ○ Ensure all sentences contribute to explaining how memory techniques work.

Word Choice: 5

The writing demonstrates clear and effective word choice with domain-specific vocabulary and vivid, memorable examples. While some humorous details may slightly distract from precision, word choice overall contributes significantly to clarity and engagement.

Evidence from Student Work: Word Choice	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Word Choice
✓ **Effective Use of Informational Vocabulary** ○ Correctly uses terms such as "short-term memory," "interpreter training," "memory palaces," and "Person + Action + Object."	➢ **Emphasize Domain-Specific Terms** ○ Use additional vocabulary from the sources, such as "retrieval practice" or "encoding."
✓ **Vivid and Original Examples** ○ Examples like imagining "marshmallows strung like pearls" or "milk coming out of your backyard hose" create strong mental images that support the strategy.	➢ **Balance Vivid Examples With Technical Vocabulary** ○ Add a brief clarification after each vivid example to ensure scientific accuracy.

Evidence from Student Work: Word Choice	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Word Choice
✓ **Occasional Imbalance Between Vividness and Precision** ○ Some examples are more humorous than explanatory, making them slightly less suited for academic tone.	➢ **Reduce Humor When It Lessens Precision** ○ Keep imagery but refine it to stay closely tied to memory processes.
✓ **Consistent Clarity and Accuracy** ○ Explanations are easy to understand and well-matched to the sources' technical vocabulary.	➢ **Ensure Vocabulary Matches Purpose** ○ Replace overly playful expressions with clearer phrasing when needed.

Sentence Fluency: 5

Sentences flow smoothly with consistent variation in structure, length, and rhythm. Transitions support coherence, and complex sentences are handled clearly. Minor lapses appear when humorous examples lead to more complex phrasing, but fluency remains strong throughout.

Evidence from Student Work: Sentence Fluency	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Sentence Fluency
✓ **Varied Sentence Structures** ○ Mixes short and long sentences effectively to maintain rhythm.	➢ **Maintain Sentence Variety** ○ Continue using a mix of structures while avoiding overlong sentences.
✓ **Fluid and Natural Flow** ○ Sentences like "Much of an interpreter's brain power is devoted to keeping information in short-term memory" demonstrate advanced fluency.	➢ **Use Read-Aloud Editing** ○ Read the essay aloud to catch any overly playful or complex phrasing.
✓ **Effective Transitional Phrasing** ○ Uses transitions such as "To start off," "Another tip," and "One more powerful strategy" to guide readers.	➢ **Strengthen Strategic Transitions** ○ Add transitional phrases that show relationships between ideas (e.g., contrast, cause).
✓ **Occasional Complex Sentence Stretching** ○ Some vivid imagery leads to longer, more complicated sentences, but meaning remains clear.	➢ **Refine Complex Sentences** ○ Review longer sentences for opportunities to split or clarify.

Conventions: 4

The writing demonstrates strong command of grammar, punctuation, and spelling. A few minor errors do not impede understanding. Sentence boundaries are handled well, and capitalization is correct.

Evidence from Student Work: Conventions	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Conventions
✓ **Accurate Spelling and Grammar** ○ No significant spelling errors; grammar remains consistent throughout.	➢ **Verify Consistent Use of Capitalization** ○ Ensure all proper nouns (e.g., Memory Palace) are consistently capitalized.
✓ **Mostly Correct Punctuation** ○ Commas and periods used correctly in complex sentences.	➢ **Review Comma Placement in Introductory Clauses** ○ Add commas after phrases like "To start off" where needed.
✓ **Occasional Minor Errors** ○ Some sentences could use commas for improved clarity (e.g., after introductory phrases).	➢ **Check for Small Punctuation Refinements** ○ Make minor adjustments to improve clarity.

Evidence from Student Work: Conventions	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Conventions
✓ **Strong Sentence Boundaries** ○ No run-ons or fragments observed.	➢ **Continue Careful Proofreading** ○ Maintain the strong control demonstrated so far.

Use of Sources: 5

The writer effectively uses information from all three sources, integrating accurate details that directly support each strategy. Explanations follow evidence and show understanding of how each strategy works. Some attribution is implied rather than explicit, but evidence remains accurate and well-chosen.

Evidence from Student Work: Use of Sources	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Use of Sources
✓ **Use of All Three Sources** ○ Source 1: accurate explanation of brain organization and repeated practice. ○ Source 2: clear use of the memory palace technique, including building familiar imagery. ○ Source 3: correct description of interpreter training and short-term memory tasks.	➢ **Ensure Balanced Use Across Sources** ○ Confirm that each major strategy includes both evidence and explanation.
✓ **Relevant and Well-Matched Evidence** ○ Each example supports the strategy being described, such as the "Person + Action + Object" technique.	➢ **Further Explain How Each Source Detail Supports Your Point** ○ After each strategy, add a sentence explaining how the brain uses that method to strengthen memory.
✓ **Accurate Paraphrasing and Detail** ○ Information is restated clearly without major distortions.	➢ **Clarify When Examples Are Your Own vs. Source-Based** ○ Distinguish imaginative examples from source information to avoid confusion.
✓ **Minor Gaps in Attribution** ○ Some examples blend into the prose without explicit citation, but accuracy is preserved.	➢ **Use More Explicit Source Attributions** ○ Add phrases like "According to Source 2" to show clear source integration.

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:

Mechanism Modeling Routine

- Teacher models adding "how it works" sentences after each memory strategy, explaining cognitive processes such as encoding or retrieval practice.

Source-to-Reasoning Organizer

- Students map each source detail to an explanation sentence that shows how the strategy improves memory.

Purpose Alignment Mini-Lesson

- Students highlight sentences that lean toward entertainment or opinion and revise them to maintain a precise explanatory tone.

Organization:

Mapping the Structure Organizer

- Students diagram the introduction, strategies, and conclusion to practice intentional planning of informational texts.

Transition Purpose Mini-Lesson

- Teach students to choose transitions that signal relationships (sequence, emphasis, cause).

Conclusion Synthesis Practice

- Students practice writing conclusions that unify main ideas without repeating introductory lines.

Voice:

Voice Calibration With Mentor Texts

- Compare the student's writing to high-quality informational texts to analyze features of formal yet engaging tone.

Informal vs. Formal Rewrite Exercise

- Students revise conversational phrases to more professional wording while retaining clarity.

Purpose Highlighting Routine

- Students highlight sentences that align strongly with purpose and revise those that add entertainment without explanation.

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:

Precision Word Choice Lessons

- Teach how to pair vivid language with precise, content-rich terminology.

Domain Vocabulary Word Walls

- Build a shared bank of informational vocabulary drawn from sources.

Context Revision Routine

- Students revise one paragraph to increase precision and reduce playful or informal wording.

Sentence Fluency:

Sentence Pattern Variety Charts

- Students chart their first words and sentence lengths to monitor variety.

Combining and Splitting Workshops

- Practice with teacher-modeled sentences to improve fluency.

Transition Function Lessons

- Teach how transitions can show cause, emphasis, or example relationships.

Conventions:

Mini-Lessons on Introductory Commas

- Short, focused practice using commas after transition words.

Peer Editing Checklists

- Students review each other's writing for punctuation and capitalization accuracy.

Error Pattern Analysis

- Students identify their own minor error patterns and practice targeted corrections.

Use of Sources:

Evidence + Explanation Sentence Pairing

- Students practice writing one sentence of evidence followed by one of explanation.

Attribution Frame Mini-Lessons

- Provide sentence starters for consistent citation, such as "Source 3 explains…"

Source Integration Practice

- Students practice weaving evidence from multiple sources into a single section of writing.