Grade 8 – Expository Writing Work Sample: Meets

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: 4

The essay clearly explains the three types of memory and provides several accurate strategies for improving memory using Source 2. It uses relevant information from the sources and maintains focus on memory improvement. However, explanations are sometimes general, repetitive, or uneven in depth. The essay describes what each type of memory is but only partially explains how memory training works in connection to these processes. Overall, it demonstrates solid understanding with room for more precise development and source integration.

Evidence from Student Work: Ideas and Content	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Ideas and Content
✓ **Clear Controlling Idea and Purpose** ○ States a clear purpose in the introduction: people can improve memory by "exercising their brain." ○ Maintains an explanatory focus on "three types of memory" and "abstract techniques" for remembering. ○ Returns to this purpose in the conclusion: "there are many ways to improve your memory."	➢ **Clarify Your Controlling Idea by Explaining the Mechanism** ○ Add a sentence stating *how* practicing memory exercises strengthens the brain (e.g., repeated retrieval, improved encoding).
✓ **Relevant and Accurate Details** ○ Accurately defines sensory memory: "remembers things for a split second… only clings to pictures and ideas for a few seconds." ○ Uses correct information from Source 1 about short-term memory: "Short-term memory stores what you are actively thinking about at any given moment." ○ Includes vivid, accurate imagery from Source 2: "Picture a building you know well… marshmallows strung like pearls… chocolate bars popping out of the toaster." ○ References the long-term memory quote from Source 1: "stored vast amounts of information… Much more than an encyclopedia!"	➢ **Include More Source-Based Scientific Detail** ○ Add explanation from the sources about how visualization and repeated thinking help store information more deeply.

Evidence from Student Work: Ideas and Content	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Ideas and Content
✓ **Development and Elaboration** ○ Provides clear examples to illustrate memory strategies, such as associating names with objects ("Briana" sounds like "banana") and using a memory palace for shopping lists. ○ Some reasoning explains the process ("If you keep thinking about a specific thing… it will get stuck in your long-term memory"). ○ However, several explanations stop at describing techniques without explaining *why* they work (e.g., encoding, visualization, repetition). ○ Parts of the narrative rely on storytelling ("your mother needed you to grab ingredients for s'mores") instead of deepening analysis.	➢ **Deepen Your Explanatory Reasoning** ○ After each strategy, explain why it works for memory (imagery strengthens recall, association helps retrieval, chunking reduces load on working memory).
✓ **Focus and Relevance** ○ Stays focused on memory processes and strategies throughout the essay. ○ The second half shifts slightly toward anecdotal storytelling, which distracts from the informational purpose. ○ Repeated conclusions ("to conclude") signal closure but do not synthesize insights from the essay.	➢ **Maintain Focus on Informational Purpose** ○ Reduce narrative examples ("your mother," "new kid in your class") and strengthen explanatory focus connected to the strategies.

Organization: 4

The essay has a clear introduction, a logical structure (three types of memory → strategies → conclusion), and generally effective transitions. Some paragraphs combine multiple ideas, and the conclusion is repetitive rather than synthesizing insights. Overall, the structure supports comprehension but lacks the precision and cohesion of a 5.

Evidence from Student Work: Organization	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Organization
✓ **Clear and Purposeful Introduction** ○ Opens with a clear frame: "People can improve their memory by exercising their brain." ○ Introduces the three types of memory to be explained.	➢ **Add a Preview Sentence in the Introduction** ○ Introduce both the three memory types and the strategies you will explain.
✓ **Logical Sequencing of Ideas** ○ Follows a logical flow: sensory memory to short-term memory to long-term memory to strategies for improving memory. ○ Order reflects the structure of the sources.	➢ **Improve Internal Paragraph Focus** ○ Give each major idea its own paragraph—avoid combining strategies and examples in the same section.
✓ **Transitions Support Movement** ○ Uses clear transitions such as "The first type of memory…," "To conclude the second type…," and "One more technique…" ○ However, some transitions are repetitive ("to conclude") and do not always show relationships.	➢ **Use More Purposeful Transitions** ○ Replace repetitive phrases with transitions that signal relationships (cause, contrast, sequence).

Evidence from Student Work: Organization	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Organization
✓ **Conclusion Provides Closure but Lacks Synthesis** ○ Ends with: "To conclude there are many ways to improve your memory," which restates rather than synthesizes. ○ Final paragraph does not clearly tie the three types of memory back to the strategies.	➢ **Revise the Conclusion for Synthesis** ○ Summarize how understanding the three memory types supports the strategies described.

Voice: 3

The voice is friendly and engaging, showing awareness of the reader. However, frequent conversational moments, direct address, and imagined scenarios shift tone away from a formal informational style. At times, the voice becomes more narrative than explanatory.

Evidence from Student Work: Voice	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Voice
✓ **Engaging and Accessible Tone** ○ Uses friendly openings ("Have you ever had trouble remembering something important?"). ○ Adds personality through examples and rhetorical questions.	➢ **Ensure All Sentences Support Explanation** ○ Remove filler phrasing and tighten focus on the purpose of informing the reader.
✓ **Conversational and Informal Language** ○ Uses lines such as "your mother needed you to grab ingredients," "the new kid in your class," and "make up random images." ○ These reduce the informational tone.	➢ **Remove Conversational Second-Person Address** ○ Replace "you" scenarios with neutral, third-person examples.
✓ **Occasional Shift Into Storytelling Voice** ○ The shopping list scenario and several hypothetical examples sound narrative rather than explanatory.	➢ **Limit Narrative Storytelling** ○ Keep examples short and tied directly to the strategy, avoiding full scenarios.
✓ **Awareness of Audience but Inconsistent Tone** ○ Attempts to speak directly to the reader, but this sometimes becomes directive rather than informative.	➢ **Use a More Formal Informational Tone** ○ Replace casual phrases with precise explanations drawn from the sources.

Word Choice: 4

Vocabulary is mostly clear and accurate, including correct use of memory-related terms. Some words are general or informal, and a few examples rely on imaginative imagery rather than precise terminology. Overall, word choice is effective but not consistently precise.

Evidence from Student Work: Word Choice	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Word Choice
✓ **Correct Domain Vocabulary** ○ Accurately uses "sensory memory," "short-term memory," "long-term memory," and "memory palace."	➢ **Strengthen Clarity in Technical Explanations** ○ Explain memory palace imagery using clearer, content-specific vocabulary.

Evidence from Student Work: Word Choice	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Word Choice
✓ **Clear Descriptions of Cognitive Processes** ○ Describes sensory memory as "remembers things for a split second," which is understandable and source-aligned.	➢ **Focus Imagery on Cognitive Purpose** ○ Keep vivid examples but connect them to how the brain processes information.
✓ **General or Informal Phrasing** ○ Uses phrases such as "get stuck in your long-term memory," "stuff you have seen before," and "make up random images."	➢ **Replace Informal Phrases With Precise Language** ○ Use accurate verbs such as "store," "retrieve," or "transfer" instead of "get stuck."
✓ **Overreliance on Story-Based Vocabulary** ○ Examples such as "your backyard hose" and "new kid in your class" prioritize vividness over scientific precision.	➢ **Increase Use of Scientific Vocabulary** ○ Add terms such as "encoding," "retrieval," "association," or "repetition."

Sentence Fluency: 4

Sentences are generally varied and easy to follow. Some are long or loosely connected, and transitions between ideas sometimes repeat or feel formulaic. Overall fluency supports comprehension but lacks the sophistication of a 5.

Evidence from Student Work: Sentence Fluency	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Sentence Fluency
✓ **Variety in Sentence Structure** ○ Uses both simple and complex sentences effectively.	➢ **Combine Short Related Sentences** ○ Strengthen flow by merging sentences with similar ideas.
✓ **Mostly Smooth Flow** ○ Ideas progress logically, and sentences are readable.	➢ **Use Read-Aloud Editing** ○ Identify places where phrasing sounds repetitive or heavy.
✓ **Occasional Long or Rambling Sentences** ○ Example: "If you keep thinking about a specific thing… it will get stuck in your long-term memory," which combines multiple ideas loosely.	➢ **Revise Overlong Sentences** ○ Split long sentences into shorter, clearer components.
✓ **Repetitive Transitions** ○ Repeats phrases like "to conclude" and "one more technique," reducing fluency.	➢ **Vary Transitions More Strategically** ○ Use transitions that reflect relationships (contrast, cause).

Conventions: 4

The writing demonstrates generally strong control of punctuation, capitalization, and spelling. A few sentences contain unnecessary commas or missing commas, but errors do not interfere with meaning.

Evidence from Student Work: Conventions	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Conventions
✓ **Spelling Is Accurate** ○ All memory-related terms spelled correctly: "sensory," "short-term," "long-term," "abstract," "information."	➢
✓ **Generally Strong Grammar** ○ Sentences are complete with no fragments or significant run-ons.	➢ **Verify Sentence Boundaries** ○ Ensure all sentences are punctuated cleanly to avoid confusion. ➢ **Proofread Carefully** ○ Identify small errors in punctuation during a final review.

Evidence from Student Work: Conventions	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Conventions
✓ **Minor Comma Usage Issues** ○ Missing commas after introductory clauses ("To conclude the first type of memory"). ○ Occasional unnecessary commas within sentences.	➢ **Check for Unnecessary Commas** ○ Remove commas that break up subjects and verbs. ➢ **Add Commas After Introductory Elements** ○ Improve clarity by inserting commas after phrases like "To start off" or "To conclude."
✓ **Consistent Capitalization** ○ Proper nouns and key concepts are correctly capitalized.	➢

Use of Sources: 4

The essay draws from all three sources, accurately explaining key ideas about sensory, short-term, and long-term memory and describing memory palace techniques. Most evidence is accurate, but attribution is inconsistent. Explanations sometimes rely on storytelling rather than integrating source-based reasoning.

Evidence from Student Work: Use of Sources	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Use of Sources
✓ **Uses All Three Sources** ○ Source 1: accurately defines the three types of memory. ○ Source 2: uses vivid examples of the memory palace technique. ○ Source 3: briefly mentions learning techniques but lacks deeper details.	➢ **Increase Depth of Source 3 Integration** ○ Add details about how interpreters train memory to strengthen use of that source.
✓ **Evidence Is Accurate and Relevant** ○ Correct details about how long-term memory stores "vast amounts of information… much more than an encyclopedia."	➢ **Clarify When Examples Are Original vs. Source-Based** ○ Distinguish vivid invented examples from actual source content.
✓ **Limited Attribution** ○ Some details are clearly from sources but lack explicit signal phrases.	➢ **Use Explicit Attribution** ○ Add phrases such as "According to Source 1" to clearly show source integration.
✓ **Uneven Explanation of Evidence** ○ Memory palace descriptions are vivid but not fully linked to how memory works. ○ Source 3 is referenced lightly and without deeper explanation.	➢ **Connect Evidence to Reasoning More Strongly** ○ After describing the technique, explain scientifically why it improves memory.

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:

Evidence-to-Explanation Modeling

- Teacher models how to add an explanation sentence after each detail showing *how* memory improves (encoding, retrieval, visualization).

Mechanism Mapping Organizer

- Students map each memory strategy to the brain process it supports (short-term vs. long-term memory, visualization, repetition).

Informational Focus Mini-Lesson

- Students highlight sentences that are narrative or story-based and revise them to maintain an academic explanatory tone.

Organization:

Matching Transition Types Routine

- Students practice selecting transitions that clarify relationships (cause/effect, addition, emphasis).

Paragraph Purpose Cards

- Students label the main function of each paragraph and revise paragraphs with mixed purposes.

Conclusion Synthesis Lesson

- Teach students how to connect key ideas in a final paragraph rather than restating the introduction.

Voice:

Formal vs. Informal Tone Sorting Activity

- Students identify conversational phrases and rewrite them in academic tone.

Objective Point-of-View Mini-Lesson

- Teach students how to shift from second-person to third-person informational voice.

Mentor Text Tone Study

- Students compare their writing to a mentor informational article to identify strong academic 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 Word Banks

- Create and reference academic vocabulary specific to memory and cognition.

Replace-and-Refine Revision Practice

- Students revise vague or informal words with more precise alternatives.

Precise Example Modeling

- Teacher models how to give examples that are vivid *and* linked directly to cognitive processes.

Sentence Fluency:

Sentence Combining and Splitting Practice

- Students practice revising sentences with multiple ideas or overly short sentences.

Transition Variety Lessons

- Teach students a range of transition types and their specific purposes.

Rhythm and Flow Read-Aloud Sessions

- Students listen for irregular pacing and revise accordingly.

Conventions:

Introductory Comma Mini-Lessons

- Teach targeted rules for comma placement after introductory phrases.

Peer Editing for Conventions

- Students use a conventions checklist to review each other's work.

Punctuation Practice Drills

- Use sample sentences with capitalization and punctuation edits.

Use of Sources:

Evidence + Explanation Pairs

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

Citation Sentence Frames

- Provide frames such as "Source 2 suggests…" to ensure consistent attribution.

Source Integration Practice

- Students combine details from multiple sources within a single section to show relationships.