Grade 8 – Argumentative Writing Work Sample: Approaching

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: 3

The essay presents a clear claim to keep the penny and offers three relevant reasons (sentimental value, charity benefits, and concerns about price rounding). The writer uses one correct piece of evidence from the sources (penny drive donation example), shows some understanding of opposing views, and attempts to include rebuttal. However, much of the reasoning is based on misunderstandings or inaccurate interpretations of the sources. Key economic evidence is missing, explanations are often general or partially inaccurate, and several claims directly contradict the information provided in the source set. Overall, the ideas are organized and mostly relevant but lack accuracy, depth, and source-based support.

Evidence from Student Work: Ideas and Content	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Ideas and Content
✓ **Clear Claim & Purpose** ○ The claim is stated immediately: "The penny has sentimental value… and can be a benefit to charities." ○ Reinforced in the conclusion: "You can see that if we don't have it… it will make a big difference in America."	➢ **Strengthen the Claim by Adding a Preview of Reasons** ○ Clearly list your three main reasons in the introduction to set up the structure of the essay.
✓ **Relevant Reasons (But Mostly Unsupported or Inaccurate)** ○ Sentimental value (penny history, designs). ○ Charity benefits (Source 4 example is used accurately). ○ Price rounding concerns (claim that rounding up harms consumers). ○ While these are relevant reasons, most supporting details are not from the assigned sources and some are incorrect.	➢ **Use Accurate Evidence From the Sources** ○ Replace unsupported history facts with real data from Sources 1–3 (minting cost, government losses, time inefficiency). ○ Correct misunderstandings about price rounding based on Source 3.

Evidence from Student Work: Ideas and Content	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Ideas and Content
✓ **Use of Evidence (Mixed Accuracy)** ○ Correct: Uses Source 4 accurately—"a middle school raised over $3,000 dollars in one week… just by collecting pennies." ○ Incorrect or Unsupported: ▪ Claims about sentimental value use historical facts not provided in the sources. ▪ Claim that the penny is "the first coin created by the U.S. Mint" is not supported by the sources. ▪ Significant misunderstanding of Source 3: the essay claims consumers will "always" pay more with rounding, but Source 3 indicates price rounding does not systematically harm consumers and may even reduce prices.	➢
✓ **Development, Reasoning & Explanation** ○ Some reasoning is present ("if you save up pennies, it adds up"), but explanations are general and sometimes inaccurate. ○ Sentimental value reasoning lacks connection to economic arguments. ○ Rounding-up example uses invented numbers ("$49.97 would be $50.00"), but ignores Source 3's explanation of standard rounding rules. ○ Several claims are repeated without deeper explanation ("it can add up to a big amount of money").	➢ **Deepen Reasoning for Each Reason** ○ Explain *why* sentimental value should matter, *how* penny drives help charities, and *why* consumer rounding concerns matter economically.
✓ **Focus & Relevance to the Argument** ○ Stays focused on reasons to keep the penny. ○ Includes a partial counterargument ("You can argue that collecting pennies won't make much of a difference…"). ○ No major off-topic drift, but some details (like penny design history) do not advance the assignment's economic focus.	➢ **Address Counterarguments More Accurately** ○ Use Source 3 to acknowledge concerns about rounding and respond with correct economic reasoning.

Organization: 3

The essay has a clear introduction, body paragraphs grouped by reason, and a conclusion. The structure is easy to follow, but transitions are basic, reasoning sometimes jumps abruptly, and the counterargument is incomplete and not source-accurate. Although the essay is organized, it needs clearer sequencing, stronger transitions, and a more fully developed rebuttal.

Evidence from Student Work: Organization	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Organization
✓ **Introduction States Claim Clearly** ○ Opens with a direct position: "Some think the penny is useless… but I think the penny has sentimental value… can be a benefit to charities."	➢ **Add a Clear Preview Sentence in the Introduction** ○ Identify the three reasons early—sentimental value, charity impact, rounding concerns.

Evidence from Student Work: Organization	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Organization
✓ **Body Paragraphs Organized by Reason** ○ Paragraphs address: ▪ sentimental value ▪ charity benefits ▪ price rounding concerns	➢ **Strengthen Paragraph Sequencing** ○ Connect ideas more logically and remove unrelated historical lists.
✓ **Transitions Are Basic but Functional** ○ Uses simple phrases like "Another reason," "Finally." ○ Transitions do not explain relationships between ideas.	➢ **Use More Purposeful Transitions** ➢ • Add transitions that indicate cause/effect, contrast, or elaboration ("as a result," "specifically," "in contrast").
✓ **Abrupt Shifts in Reasoning** ○ Some paragraphs move quickly from sentimental value to design history without connecting to argument. ○ Rounding paragraph uses invented examples without linking back to source-based reasoning.	➢
✓ **Weak Counterargument Structure** ○ Includes a brief nod to opposing views ("You can argue that collecting pennies won't make much of a difference…") ○ Lacks evidence-based rebuttal required by the task.	➢ **Develop a Source-Based Counterargument and Rebuttal** ○ Address concerns using Source 3 and rebut them with accurate evidence.
✓ **Conclusion Restates but Does Not Synthesize** ○ Ends with "it will make a big difference in America," but does not unify the main reasoning threads.	➢

Voice: 3

The voice is sincere and engaged, with moments of passion for the topic. However, the tone is sometimes informal, overly sentimental, and not fully aligned with a policy-focused argument. Confidence fluctuates, and some statements rely on emotional appeals rather than evidence.

Evidence from Student Work: Voice	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Voice
✓ **Engaged and Expressive Tone** ○ "The power of the penny," "even though it is a small coin, it can add up."	➢ **Shift Toward a More Academic Tone** ○ Replace emotional phrasing with more policy-oriented language.
✓ **Informal or Sentimental Voice** ○ Emotional language like "big difference in America," "pennies help families" without evidence weakens formality.	➢ **Balance Sincerity With Evidence** ○ Keep genuine interest but anchor claims in research from the sources.
✓ **Limited Audience Awareness** ○ Arguments sound conversational rather than directed at policymakers.	➢ **Strengthen Audience Awareness** ○ Speak directly to decision-makers—explain economic impacts, not just personal feelings.
✓ **Confidence Varies** ○ Some claims are assertive ("pennies can add up"), while others are speculative ("two cents can be a lot").	➢ **Use More Confident, Precise Language** ○ Strengthen your voice by relying on evidence rather than hypothetical examples.

Word Choice: 3

Word choice is generally clear, but often broad, repetitive, or inaccurate. Emotional vocabulary replaces precise economic or policy terminology, and several claims use invented or misleading examples. A stronger command of academic language would elevate the argument.

Evidence from Student Work: Word Choice	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Word Choice
✓ **Some Clear Phrases** ○ "benefit to charities," "make a difference," "adds up."	➢ **Use Vocabulary From the Sources** ○ Integrate key phrases such as "2.4 cents to mint," "government loses money," "rounding rules," etc.
✓ **Vague or Overgeneralized Vocabulary** ○ "A big difference," "a lot of people don't want to give quarters," "it really will affect charities."	➢ **Eliminate Vague Words** ○ Replace general words like "big difference" with precise statements.
✓ **Invented or Inaccurate Examples** ○ Uses a fictional rounding example ("$49.97 would be $50.00"). ○ Claims the penny is the "first coin created by the U.S. Mint," which is not in the sources.	➢ **Correct Inaccurate Claims** ○ Remove or revise historically incorrect or unsupported statements.
✓ **Missing Academic Economic Terminology** ○ No use of terms such as "production cost," "inflation," "government losses," "consumer rounding rules," etc.	➢ **Use Specific Economic and Policy Vocabulary** ○ Include terms from Source 1 and 3 related to cost, efficiency, and rounding.

Sentence Fluency: 3

Sentences are mostly understandable, but fluency is affected by repetitive structures, shifts in focus, and awkward phrasing. Some sentences are overly long or contain multiple ideas that could be separated for clarity.

Evidence from Student Work: Sentence Fluency	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Sentence Fluency
✓ **Readable but Uneven Sentences** ○ "Even though it is a small coin it can make a big difference in someone's pocket…" is long and slightly overloaded.	➢ **Add Internal Transitions for Smoother Flow** ○ Add phrases such as "for example," "specifically," "in contrast."
✓ **Repetitive Sentence Beginnings** ○ Several sentences begin with "This," "It," or "Another reason," creating predictable rhythm.	➢ **Vary Sentence Beginnings** ○ Use introductory clauses or transitions.
✓ **Occasional Run-Ons or Awkward Constructions** ○ Some ideas are tacked together without strong transitions.	➢ **Break Up Long Sentences** ○ Separate multi-idea statements into shorter, clearer sentences.
✓ **Flow Interrupted by Lists and Examples** ○ Historical coin list and invented rounding examples disrupt pacing.	➢ **Remove or Streamline Off-Topic Lists** ○ Shorten the coin-design descriptions to improve pacing.

Conventions: 4

Conventions are generally strong. A few minor errors appear, but meaning remains clear, and sentence boundaries are mostly correct. Punctuation could be improved in places, but overall control is solid.

Evidence from Student Work: Conventions	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Conventions
✓ **Mostly Correct Grammar and Spelling** ○ Everyday vocabulary is spelled correctly. ○ Grammar errors are minimal.	➢ **Maintain Strong Conventions Accuracy** ○ Keep applying strong spelling and grammar habits.
✓ **Minor Punctuation Issues** ○ Missing commas in longer sentences ("Even though it is a small coin it can…"). ○ Occasional run-on tendencies.	➢ **Add Commas After Introductory Clauses** ○ Strengthen readability in sentences that begin with dependent clauses.
✓ **Clear Sentence Boundaries** ○ Sentences are complete and maintain clarity even when fluency is uneven.	➢ **Correct Run-On Tendencies** ○ Use conjunctions or periods to separate ideas.
✓ **Meaning Always Clear** ○ No errors that significantly interfere with comprehension.	➢ **Proofread for Minor Errors** ○ Look for small punctuation improvements.

Use of Sources: 2

The essay includes some evidence from the sources (e.g., the penny drive from Source 4) and mentions opposing views, but most of the reasoning is unsupported, inaccurate, or contradicts the actual content of the Penny sources. Many claims rely on personal assumptions or invented examples rather than source-based information. Evidence integration is minimal and sometimes used incorrectly.

Evidence from Student Work: Use of Sources	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Use of Sources
✓ **Correct Use of One Source** ○ Accurate use of Source 4: "a middle school raised over $3,000 in one week by collecting pennies."	➢
✓ **Major Gaps in Source Use** ○ No use of economic cost data from Source 1 or Source 3. ○ No mention of time inefficiency (Source 1). ○ No accurate use of price-rounding research (Source 3).	➢ **Add Accurate Evidence From the Required Sources** ○ Include minting-cost data, time-waste evidence, and economist analysis of rounding.
✓ **Inaccurate or Contradictory Evidence** ○ Claims that rounding always raises prices contradict Source 3's findings. ○ Historical claims ("first coin ever created") are unsupported.	➢ **Correct Misinterpretations** ○ Revise claims about price rounding using actual findings from Source 3.
✓ **Minimal Attribution** ○ Does not identify source numbers when providing information.	➢ **Add Clear Attribution** ○ Use phrases like "According to Source 1…" when integrating evidence.
✓ **Weak Counterargument Support** ○ Acknowledges opposing views but does not use source-based evidence to rebut them.	➢ **Strengthen the Counterargument Section** ○ Use Source 3 and Source 2 to present and respond to opposing viewpoints.

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:

Source Accuracy & Evidence Matching Routine

- Have students match each claim in their essay to a specific source excerpt to ensure accuracy.

Evidence–Explanation Chain Practice

- Teach students to follow every claim with: evidence → explanation → link to claim.

Rounding & Economic Reasoning Mini-Lesson

- Explicit instruction on how Source 3 explains rounding rules can prevent the common misconception that rounding always harms consumers.

Organization:

Reason Preview Modeling

- Teach students to introduce reasons clearly in the opening paragraph.

Transition Function Lessons

- Show how transitions signal relationships among ideas.

Counterargument–Rebuttal Frames

- Provide sentence starters aligned to the Penny sources.

Voice:

Tone Calibration Exercises

- Students compare informal and formal versions of their own sentences.

Audience Lens Revision

- Rewrite a paragraph with policymakers as the target audience.

Evidence-Anchored Voice Modeling

- Show students how to maintain a confident voice by grounding statements in evidence.

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:

Replace-and-Refine Practice

- Students revise broad terms into precise economic terminology.

Vocabulary Banks From Sources

- Build a class bank of key Penny task vocabulary.

Precision Modeling

- Model replacing vague language with specific, evidence-based terms.

Sentence Fluency:

Sentence Variety Exercises

- Practice rewriting repeated sentence starters.

Combining/Splitting Workshops

- Teach students to adjust pacing by breaking up or combining sentences.

Read-Aloud Fluency Routine

- Students revise sections that sound choppy or overloaded when spoken aloud.

Conventions:

Comma Placement Mini-Lessons

- Practice comma rules for complex sentences.

Editing Stations

- Students focus on punctuation, capitalization, and sentence boundaries.

Conventions Checklists

- Provide checklists for self-editing before publication.

Use of Sources:

Source Accuracy Comparison Exercise

- Match student claims to source passages to ensure alignment.

Evidence–Explanation Pairing Practice

- Teach students to always explain the significance of each piece of evidence.

Counterargument Evidence Workshop

- Practice using Source 3 to construct accurate rebuttals.