Grade 8 – Expository 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 purpose—to explain how to improve memory—and includes several relevant details from more than one source. It demonstrates understanding of distractibility, the memory palace strategy, and listening conditions that affect recall. However, explanations are uneven, some reasoning is repetitive or imprecise, and multiple claims are unsupported by the sources. At times, the writing shifts toward personal opinion or narrative instead of informational explanation. Overall, the content is relevant but insufficiently developed.

Evidence from Student Work: Ideas and Content	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Ideas and Content
✓ **Clear Controlling Idea and Purpose** ○ Establishes an explanatory purpose: "how can we remember this information to help us during our school career and even after?" ○ Maintains the broad idea that memory can be strengthened through certain strategies. ○ However, the thesis is implied rather than stated clearly and directly.	➢ **Clarify and Strengthen Your Controlling Idea** ○ Add a clear thesis that directly states the strategies you will explain and how they help memory.
✓ **Relevant and Mostly Accurate Details** ○ Uses a key idea from Source 2's memory palace strategy: "Memories get stronger if you associate them with a place… picture a building you know well… imagine each item in a different part of the house." ○ Cites listening research from Source 3: "if you were listening to someone speak and were also speaking yourself, people couldn't remember the story…" ○ Includes relevant personal examples about distraction (TV while studying), which align loosely with the idea of divided attention from Source 3, though the student does not cite the source. ○ Contains inaccuracies or unsupported claims, such as "within a few minutes, a lot of information will not be available to you," which is not directly stated in the sources.	➢ **Add More Accurate and Specific Source-Based Details** ○ Use exact wording from the sources about divided attention and memory encoding instead of general statements about forgetting. ○ Include more precise descriptions of how memory palaces and listening conditions affect the brain.

Evidence from Student Work: Ideas and Content	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Ideas and Content
✓ **Development and Elaboration** ○ Explains how the memory palace works: "you making a scene in your mind, adding details and adding complexity which makes it easier to retrieve." ○ Attempts to elaborate on divided attention by giving a personal example of TV during studying. ○ Some explanations stop short of deeper reasoning—e.g., the section on recording yourself and listening repeatedly is not tied back to how memory encoding or retrieval works. ○ Several sections repeat similar ideas (distractions, talking vs. listening) without expanding explanation.	➢ **Deepen Your Explanations** ○ After each example, add a sentence explaining *why* the strategy works (visualization, focus, encoding, retrieval practice). ○ Connect your personal examples to the scientific ideas in the sources.
✓ **Focus and Relevance** ○ Stays broadly focused on improving memory but drifts into personal narrative ("I'd rather be watching TV"), advice ("shut your phone off"), and conversational predictions ("I bet you that won't let you down"). ○ Conclusion restates the theme but does not synthesize how the strategies work or connect the ideas into a cohesive explanation.	➢ **Maintain Informational Focus Throughout** ○ Limit personal narrative and conversational tone. ○ Strengthen the conclusion with a summary of how the strategies work rather than broad statements about memory being important.

Organization: 3

The essay has a clear beginning, middle, and end, but internal structure is uneven. Ideas appear in a logical general order, yet paragraphs mix multiple concepts, transitions are basic or abrupt, and the conclusion restates rather than synthesizes. Overall, organization supports understanding but lacks precision.

Evidence from Student Work: Organization	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Organization
✓ **Introduction Establishes Topic but Not Structure** ○ Opens with the broad question: "how can we remember this information…?" ○ Does not preview the specific strategies that will be explained (memory palace, distraction reduction, listening conditions).	➢ **Add a Clear Preview Sentence in the Introduction** ○ List the memory strategies the essay will discuss to set up the structure for the reader.
✓ **Logical but Uneven Sequencing** ○ Ideas appear in sensible order: distractibility, memory palace, divided attention, final advice. ○ However, the distraction and attention sections overlap and repeat similar ideas without clear separation.	➢ **Group Related Ideas Into Purposeful Paragraphs** ○ Keep all distraction-related ideas together and all strategy-based ideas together.
✓ **Transitions Are Basic or Abrupt** ○ Uses conversational connectors like "for example" and "but" without signaling complex relationships. ○ Moves abruptly from memory palace to divided attention without a linking idea.	➢ **Use Transitions That Show Relationships** ○ Add cause/effect or contrast transitions (such as "As a result," or "In contrast") between major ideas.

Evidence from Student Work: Organization	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Organization
✓ **Conclusion Restates but Does Not Synthesize** ○ Ends with: "having a good memory is so important," which restates theme but does not unify key insights. ○ Does not summarize how strategies work together.	➢ **Revise the Conclusion to Provide Synthesis** ○ Summarize how visualization, focus, and reduced distraction work together to strengthen memory.

Voice: 3

The voice is engaged and relatable but often too conversational for informational writing. Frequent direct address, personal anecdotes, and casual comments weaken the explanatory tone. The writer shows sincerity and interest, but tone is inconsistent.

Evidence from Student Work: Voice	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Voice
✓ **Engaged and Sincere Voice** ○ Uses relatable openings and personal reflections ("Once I tried watching TV while studying…").	➢ **Strengthen Academic Tone in the Conclusion** ○ Replace general statements with a precise summary of memory mechanisms.
✓ **Conversational and Informal Tone** ○ Phrases such as "I bet you that won't let you down," "you should shut your phone off," and "trust me" shift away from informational style.	➢ **Reduce Conversational Language and Slang** ○ Replace informal phrases with academic, explanatory language.
✓ **Frequent Direct Address** ○ Repeatedly speaks to the reader ("you want to remember," "you should avoid listening to music"), which creates a persuasive rather than explanatory tone.	➢ **Limit Direct Address** ○ Rewrite sentences in third-person to maintain objective tone.
✓ **Occasional Purpose Drift** ○ The writer shifts into advice-giving instead of explaining the scientific reasons behind strategies.	➢ **Connect Voice to Explanatory Purpose** ○ Focus on how strategies work rather than giving personal advice.

Word Choice: 3

The vocabulary is mostly understandable and occasionally vivid, but it lacks precision. Domain-specific terms are used inconsistently, and several explanations rely on general or casual wording. Some word choices reflect opinion or persuasion more than scientific explanation.

Evidence from Student Work: Word Choice	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Word Choice
✓ **Some Accurate Content Vocabulary** ○ Uses terms like "information," "attention," and "memory palace."	➢ **Increase Use of Scientific Vocabulary From the Sources** ○ Use terms like "short-term memory load," "visual encoding," or "divided attention."
✓ **General or Vague Word Choice** ○ Phrases such as "a lot of information will not be available to you," "a very good strategy," and "distracting things" lack precision.	➢ **Avoid Vague Words and Phrases** ○ Replace general language with precise explanations tied to the sources.

Evidence from Student Work: Word Choice	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Word Choice
✓ **Informal or Opinion-Based Words** ○ Uses casual tone: “trust me,” “won’t let you down,” “crazy things.”	➢ **Eliminate Opinion-Based Vocabulary** ○ Remove persuasive words (“trust me”) and replace with factual explanation.
✓ **Limited Use of Domain-Specific Words** ○ Omits key cognitive terms such as “encoding,” “retrieval,” “association,” “visualization,” or “working memory.”	➢ **Connect Vivid Imagery to Cognitive Purpose** ○ When using examples from the memory palace, clarify how imagery helps memory.

Sentence Fluency: 3

Sentences are generally readable, but fluency is disrupted by repetitive structures, abrupt transitions, and lengthy conversational sentences. Several sentences combine multiple ideas without clear organization.

Evidence from Student Work: Sentence Fluency	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Sentence Fluency
✓ **Readable but Repetitive Patterns** ○ Frequent use of “you” to begin sentences creates a predictable rhythm.	➢ **Vary Sentence Openings** ○ Start sentences with content-based phrases rather than repeated “you.”
✓ **Overly Long Sentences** ○ Example: “If you keep using your brain the same way over and over again… then how will you remember anything or have that kind of memory where you know everything you studied?” ○ Contains multiple ideas and rhetorical flourishes that reduce clarity.	➢ **Break Up Multi-Idea Sentences** ○ Split long sentences into two or three clear statements.
✓ **Abrupt Transitions Between Ideas** ○ Moves from memory palace to listening skills with little connector language.	➢ **Add Transitions Between Ideas** ○ Use transitions that show the relationship between strategies.
✓ **Occasional Choppy or Fragmented Sentences** ○ Short standalone comments (“Crazy right?”) disrupt fluency and academic tone.	➢ **Remove Filler Phrases** ○ Eliminate rhetorical add-ons like “Crazy right?” to improve flow.

Conventions: 3

Grammar, capitalization, and punctuation are mostly correct, but errors occur frequently enough to distract. Some run-on sentences, missing commas, and informal sentence fragments appear. Errors do not obscure meaning but reduce clarity.

Evidence from Student Work: Conventions	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Conventions
✓ **Basic Spelling and Capitalization Are Correct** ○ No major spelling errors; key terms are spelled correctly.	➢ **Proofread Carefully for Punctuation Issues** ○ Conduct a slow reread to catch omissions and formatting errors.
✓ **Run-On or Loosely Structured Sentences** ○ Example: long, multi-clause sentences lacking proper separation.	➢ **Fix Run-Ons and Separate Multi-Idea Sentences** ○ Create clearer boundaries for readability and correctness.
✓ **Missing Commas After Introductory Phrases** ○ Several instances where introductory words (“Once,” “When,” “To conclude”) lack needed commas.	➢ **Add Commas After Introductory Elements** ○ Insert commas after “Once,” “When,” “If,” or transitional phrases.

Evidence from Student Work: Conventions	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Conventions
✓ **Fragments and Conversational Constructions** ○ Short, informal sentences like "Crazy right?" weaken conventions.	➢ **Remove Sentence Fragments** ○ Replace rhetorical fragment sentences with complete statements.

Use of Sources: 3

The writer uses more than one source and includes correct details from the memory palace strategy (Source 2) and divided attention research (Source 3). However, evidence integration is inconsistent, several claims lack clear attribution, and some statements are inaccurate or generalized. Explanation of source material is limited.

Evidence from Student Work: Use of Sources	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Use of Sources
✓ **Uses Multiple Sources** ○ Source 2: memory palace explanation, including placing objects in familiar locations. ○ Source 3: detail about forgetting stories when speaking and listening at the same time.	➢ **Blend Multiple Sources in Each Section** ○ Strengthen paragraphs by connecting ideas across sources rather than presenting isolated facts.
✓ **Evidence Is Generally Accurate but Incomplete** ○ Paraphrases listening study correctly but without attribution. ○ Memory palace examples match Source 2's concepts but lack explicit source connection.	➢ **Correct Generalized Claims** ○ Avoid unsupported claims and replace them with precise source-based information.
✓ **Inconsistent Attribution** ○ No signal phrases like "According to Source 2…" ○ Some statements appear invented or generalized ("within a few minutes, a lot of information won't be available to you").	➢ **Add Clear Source Attribution** ○ Use phrases like "Source 3 states that…" to ensure accuracy and credibility.
✓ **Limited Explanation of Evidence** ○ Source details are mentioned but not fully explained in terms of how they support memory improvement.	➢ **Explain How Evidence Supports the Controlling Idea** ○ Add a sentence after each detail explaining why the strategy 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 Expansion Routine

- Students pair each source detail with a follow-up sentence explaining how the technique strengthens memory.

Thesis Development Mini-Lesson

- Teach students to write a precise controlling idea that previews the strategies they will explain.

Source Accuracy Check

- Students compare their statements with the exact source text to correct inaccurate or generalized claims, especially regarding divided attention and memory encoding.

Organization:

Paragraph Purpose Mapping

- Students label each paragraph's purpose to ensure ideas are grouped logically.

Transition Type Practice

- Students match transitions with functions and revise paragraphs accordingly.

Conclusion Synthesis Modeling

- Teacher models conclusions that connect multiple ideas, not just restate the topic.

Voice:

Formal vs. Informal Tone Sorting

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

Third-Person Rewrite Workshop

- Students practice removing "you" statements and replacing them with objective voice.

Mentor Text Analysis

- Highlight features of strong informational tone in mentor texts and compare to student draft.

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 Precision Exercises

- Students replace vague or informal words with content-specific vocabulary.

Domain Word Walls

- Build a shared class bank of memory-related academic terms.

Example Revision Routine

- Students revise example sentences to increase precision and clarity.

Sentence Fluency:

Sentence Combining and Splitting Practice

- Students practice revising overlong or overly short sentences.

Sentence Beginning Variety Charting

- Students highlight first words and revise repeating patterns.

Transition Purpose Workshops

- Teach students explicit transitions for cause, contrast, or sequence.

Conventions:

Comma Placement Mini-Lesson

- Focused practice on comma use after introductory clauses.

Run-On Identification Routine

- Students correct teacher-provided run-on sentences similar to those in the draft.

Editing Checklist for Final Drafts

- Students review punctuation, capitalization, and sentence boundaries systematically.

Use of Sources:

Evidence + Explanation Modeling

- Teacher shows how to pair each source detail with an explanatory statement.

Citation Sentence Frames

- Students use frames such as “According to Source 3,…” to build consistent attribution.

Source Integration Practice

- Students practice combining evidence from Sources 2 and 3 into a single paragraph.