Grade 8 – Expository Writing Work Sample: Does Not Yet Meet

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: 2

The essay attempts to explain how memory works and includes some details from the sources, but the controlling idea is unclear, development is minimal, and key explanations are inaccurate or incomplete. Source details are referenced but not integrated, and several claims are misunderstood or misapplied. The writing shows emerging understanding of the topic but lacks the clarity, accuracy, and depth needed for a higher score.

Evidence from Student Work: Ideas and Content	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Ideas and Content
✓ **Clear Controlling Idea and Purpose** ○ Attempts a general purpose: "there are many tricks and tips for memorization in the world today." ○ Focus shifts between explaining memory, celebrating "the brain," and listing interesting information without a coherent thesis. ○ No clear statement about how or why memory can be improved.	➢ **Clarify and Strengthen the Controlling Idea** ○ Rewrite the introduction with a clear thesis that explains *how* people can improve memory using strategies from the sources.
✓ **Relevant but Often Inaccurate or Misinterpreted Details** ○ Attempts to use Source 2's PAO strategy: "Start by thinking of a person, an action, and an object for each number from 00 to 99…" ○ Incorrectly states that bilingual vocabulary size proves they "have a bigger memory," which is not supported by the sources. ○ Claims that bilinguals "graduate hischool with a vocabulay twice the size of a average hischool graduate," which is not in any source. ○ Misstates how divided attention works: "watching T.V while trying to remember something but it wasn't stored properly so your brain cant retreive it corectly," blending partial source ideas with invented reasons.	➢ **Use Accurate, Relevant Details From the Sources** ○ Remove incorrect claims (e.g., bilingual vocabulary size) and replace them with precise examples from the articles, such as memory palace, short-term vs. long-term memory, and divided attention research.

Evidence from Student Work: Ideas and Content	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Ideas and Content
✓ **Development and Elaboration** ○ Provides minimal explanation of how strategies work beyond briefly describing them. ○ Repeats general ideas ("the brain is an amazing thing," "it controls our body") without connecting them to memory. ○ Fails to explain the cognitive mechanisms behind memory strategies discussed in the sources (e.g., visualization, repetition, encoding). ○ Contains broad lists of things the brain does without supporting detail.	➢ **Deepen Your Explanations** ○ After describing a strategy, add sentences explaining why it works (repetition strengthens long-term memory, visualization enhances recall, etc.).
✓ **Focus and Relevance** ○ Drift into unrelated commentary: "the brain… controls are body," "that's a lot of words to remember," "the brain is an amazing thing." ○ Several statements are off-topic or overly general and do not support the task of explaining memory improvement. ○ Repetition of vague statements instead of focused explanation.	➢ **Stay Focused on the Topic** ○ Remove unrelated statements about the brain controlling the body or general comments like "the brain is amazing." ○ Keep every sentence connected to memory improvement.

Organization: 2

The essay has a beginning, middle, and end, but ideas are loosely arranged, transitions are minimal, and paragraphs mix unrelated concepts. The conclusion repeats earlier statements rather than synthesizing information. The structure does not guide the reader effectively through an explanation of memory improvement.

Evidence from Student Work: Organization	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Organization
✓ **Introduction Lacks Clear Focus and Preview** ○ Opens with: "there are many tricks and tips for memorization…" but does not specify which strategies will be explained. ○ Immediately shifts to unrelated commentary about the brain.	➢ **Rewrite the Introduction With a Clear Preview** ○ Identify the specific memory strategies you will explain.
✓ **Weak Sequencing of Ideas** ○ Jumps from tips to unrelated brain facts to vocabulary size, then back to memory strategies. ○ Ideas appear in list form rather than in a logical explanatory progression.	➢ **Group Related Ideas Together** ○ Keep PAO, memory palace, and divided attention ideas in separate, clearly focused paragraphs.
✓ **Limited Use of Transitions** ○ Rarely uses transitions that show relationships between ideas. ○ Paragraphs shift abruptly ("There are also many things that can impact memorization…," "The brain has control…") without clear connection.	➢ **Use Clear Transitions** ○ Add transitions that show cause/effect or elaboration ("As a result," "This strategy works because…").

Evidence from Student Work: Organization	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Organization
✓ **Conclusion Restates Without Synthesis** ○ Restates: "the brain is an amazing thing that can do so much," which does not connect to the prompt about memory training. ○ No summary of strategies or explanatory insights.	➢ **Revise the Conclusion to Synthesize Key Insights** ○ Summarize how memory strategies work rather than repeating general statements.

Voice: 2

The voice is inconsistent and shifts between informational, conversational, and opinion-based tones. The writer occasionally shows interest in the topic, but informal phrasing and speculative claims weaken the informational purpose.

Evidence from Student Work: Voice	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Voice
✓ **Mixed Tone That Drifts Away From Purpose** ○ Uses informal, conversational statements: "the brain is an amazing thing," "that's a lot of words to remember." ○ Shifts into personal commentary instead of explanation.	➢ **Maintain a Consistent Informational Style** ○ Present facts and reasoning without opinion-based or emotional statements.
✓ **Limited Awareness of Informational Audience** ○ Gives personal opinions instead of focusing on evidence-based explanation.	➢ **Use Domain-Specific Vocabulary** ○ Incorporate scientific language to strengthen the author's voice.
✓ **Purpose Drift** ○ Focus changes from memory strategies to general brain facts, to students being bilingual, without maintaining tone appropriate to informational writing.	➢ **Ensure Tone Supports Purpose** ○ Focus voice on explaining how strategies improve memory.
✓ **Minimal Authoritative or Academic Tone** ○ Does not use scientific vocabulary or objective phrasing expected in expository writing.	➢ **Replace Conversational Language With Objective Tone** ○ Remove comments like "the brain is amazing" and focus on explanation.

Word Choice: 2

Vocabulary is often general, imprecise, or informal. Several terms are misused or invented, and key academic language from the sources is missing. The writing lacks the precision needed to explain memory processes effectively.

Evidence from Student Work: Word Choice	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Word Choice
✓ **General and Vague Vocabulary** ○ Uses broad, nonspecific terms ("tips," "bad things," "impact memorization"). ○ Lacks detail needed for scientific clarity.	➢ **Replace Vague Words With Precise Vocabulary** ○ Clarify meaning with specific terms tied to the sources.
✓ **Inaccurate or Misused Terms** ○ Incorrectly states bilingual students "have a bigger memory," which misapplies vocabulary. ○ Misuses "memory stored properly" to explain divided attention.	➢ **Eliminate Inaccurate Claims** ○ Remove or correct unsupported ideas about bilingual memory or brain size.

Evidence from Student Work: Word Choice	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Word Choice
✓ **Missing Domain-Specific Terms** ○ Does not use memory-related vocabulary such as "encoding," "retrieval," "short-term load," "association," or "visualization."	➢ **Incorporate Correct Scientific Vocabulary** ○ Use terms such as "retrieval practice," "visual encoding," and "association."
✓ **Informal Phrasing Weakens Explanation** ○ Statements like "the brain is an amazing thing" and "that's a lot of words" do not contribute to clarity.	➢ **Avoid Informal Expressions** ○ Use academic, neutral phrasing to strengthen clarity.

Sentence Fluency: 2

The writing includes run-on sentences, fragments, repetitive beginnings, and inconsistent rhythm. Sentences often contain multiple loosely connected ideas, reducing clarity. Fluency issues make explanations harder to follow.

Evidence from Student Work: Sentence Fluency	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Sentence Fluency
✓ **Repetitive Sentence Starters** ○ Many sentences begin similarly ("There are…," "The brain…," "This can…").	➢ **Vary Sentence Beginnings** ○ Start sentences with different structures to avoid repetition.
✓ **Run-On Sentences** ○ Example: "Watch TV while trying to remember something but it wasn't stored properly so your brain can't retreive it corectly…" ○ Contains multiple ideas without proper boundaries.	➢ **Fix Run-Ons and Fragments** ○ Break long sentences into smaller, clear units.
✓ **Sentence Fragments and Short, Choppy Lines** ○ "That's a lot of words." ○ "The brain is an amazing thing."	➢ **Combine Overly Short Sentences** ○ Merge short, choppy sentences to create smoother flow.
✓ **Uneven Rhythm** ○ Mixes fragments, long run-ons, and simple sentences, creating awkward pacing.	➢ **Use Read-Aloud Editing** ○ Read aloud to detect awkward pacing and revise accordingly.

Conventions: 2

Frequent errors in spelling, capitalization, punctuation, and sentence boundaries interfere with clarity. Several grammar issues and missing punctuation disrupt the reader's understanding.

Evidence from Student Work: Conventions	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Conventions
✓ **Spelling Errors Throughout** ○ Examples: "retreive," "hischoool," "vocabualy," "are body," "retreived," "corectly."	➢ **Fix Repeated Spelling Errors** ○ Use tools or peer support to correct high-frequency misspellings.
✓ **Punctuation Issues** ○ Missing commas in complex sentences; inconsistent end punctuation. ○ Run-on sentences lack appropriate separation.	➢ **Correct Run-Ons and Add Needed Punctuation** ○ Use periods and commas purposefully to break ideas apart.
✓ **Capitalization Mistakes** ○ "are body" should be "our body," and several sentence starts are lowercase.	➢ **Review Capitalization Rules** ○ Capitalize sentence beginnings and proper nouns consistently.

Evidence from Student Work: Conventions	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Conventions
✓ **Grammar Errors Affect Readability** ○ Incorrect subject-verb agreements and word forms reduce clarity.	➢ **Edit for Grammar and Agreement** ○ Check for missing words, incorrect verb forms, and unclear pronouns.

Use of Sources: 2

The writer references Source 2's PAO strategy but misinterprets or misapplies other source ideas. Citations are missing, and several claims contradict or go beyond what the sources state. Evidence is limited, and explanations are loosely connected to the task.

Evidence from Student Work: Use of Sources	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Use of Sources
✓ **Some Attempt to Use Sources** ○ Uses PAO strategy accurately in structure ("for each number 00 to 99"), showing partial understanding of Source 2.	➢ **Use Accurate Details From the Sources** ○ Replace incorrect claims with correct information from Source 1 (types of memory), Source 2 (memory palace, PAO), and Source 3 (divided attention).
✓ **Frequent Inaccurate or Unsupported Claims** ○ Claims about bilingual vocabulary and "bigger memory" are not supported. ○ Misinterprets Source 3's ideas about divided attention when describing TV and forgetting.	➢ **Remove Invented Examples** ○ Replace unsupported statements with factual source-based explanations.
✓ **Lack of Attribution** ○ No citations, signal phrases, or source numbers appear. ○ Examples are blended with invented details, making it unclear what comes from the sources.	➢ **Add Clear Attribution** ○ Introduce source details using phrases like "According to Source 2…"
✓ **Minimal Explanation of Source Material** ○ Strategies are named but not explained using the scientific reasoning found in the sources.	➢ **Explain How Evidence Supports Ideas** ○ After citing a detail, add a sentence explaining how the strategy helps 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:

Source Accuracy Verification Routine

- Students compare their statements line-by-line with the sources to correct misinformation and align content with evidence.

Cause-and-Effect Memory Strategy Modeling

- Teacher models how to follow each detail with explanation showing the cognitive process involved (encoding, retrieval, attention).

Focused Thesis Development Workshop

- Students craft a precise controlling idea that previews strategies they will explain, using frames like: "People can improve memory by practicing strategies such as…, which help the brain by…"

Organization:

Paragraph Purpose Sort

- Students sort sentences by purpose and reorganize them into coherent paragraphs.

Transition Function Lessons

- Teach transitions that clarify relationships (contrast, cause).

Conclusion Synthesis Workshop

- Students practice writing conclusions that restate key explanatory mechanisms.

Voice:

Formal vs. Informal Voice Sorting Activity

- Students revise conversational phrases into academic tone.

Point-of-View Consistency Lessons

- Practice third-person informational writing.

Mentor Text Comparison

- Identify features of strong informational voice in mentor texts.

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 Vocabulary Word Banks

- Build lists of accurate memory-related terms.

Replace-and-Refine Vocabulary Practice

- Students revise vague language with scientific vocabulary.

Contextual Example Revision

- Students rewrite examples using precise cognitive terminology.

Sentence Fluency:

Combining and Splitting Sentence Practice

- Students revise modeled run-ons and fragments.

Sentence Beginning Variety Charts

- Students highlight first words to spot and revise repetition.

Fluency Read-Aloud Routine

- Students revise based on places where reading becomes bumpy.

Conventions:

Error Pattern Mini-Lessons

- Teach spelling patterns and grammar rules based on recurring student errors.

Sentence Boundary Editing Stations

- Practice correcting run-ons and fragments.

Peer Editing With Conventions Checklists

- Support accurate capitalization and punctuation.

Use of Sources:

Source Accuracy Checklist

- Students compare each claim with the article to avoid misinterpretation.

Evidence + Explanation Modeling

- Teacher models combining accurate citation with explanatory reasoning.

Citation Frames Practice

- Students practice writing consistent attribution using scaffolded sentence starters.