High School – Expository Writing Work Sample: Approaching

Task: Your class is studying about "green" energy options. You are given four articles about sunflowers and their use as biofuels or alternate fuel sources.

*Read the sources carefully to **write an explanatory essay** about on sunflowers. Using more than one source, craft a thesis to explain the ways in which sunflower seeds can be used to create biofuel and the economic implications of this process.*

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

Ideas and Content: 3

The essay presents a clear thesis and attempts to address both required components: (1) how sunflower seeds can be used to create biofuel, and (2) the economic implications of that process. The writer uses some source material accurately—especially the hybrid car example from Source #2—and shows a basic understanding of biofuel production. However, explanations are uneven, economic reasoning relies heavily on speculation instead of evidence, and several claims are unsupported or factually incorrect. The piece shows emerging understanding, but limited development, synthesis, and accuracy prevent it from reaching proficiency.

Evidence from Student Work: Ideas and Content	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Ideas and Content
✓ **Clear Overall Thesis but Not Fully Precise** ○ The opening paragraph introduces both components of the task: ▪ "Sunflower seeds can be used to create biofuel, but also may have economic implications…" ○ However, the thesis relies on generalities rather than specific, focused claims.	➢ **Clarify and Strengthen the Thesis** ○ Identify specific ways sunflower biofuel is produced and give a clear economic claim supported by the sources.
✓ **Some Accurate Use of Source Information (Mostly Source #2)** ○ Correctly describes the biodiesel process from Source #2: ▪ "pressing them for their oil to create biodiesel… that could help run hybrid cars." ○ Also references dual uses (cooking + fuel) from Source #1, though inaccurately phrased: ▪ "cheaper and healthier than olive oil" does not appear in the source.	➢ **Use Accurate, Source-Based Details** ○ Include information from Source #3 about pellet fuel production and facility-scale cost efficiency. ○ Integrate Source #4 explanations of community and agricultural benefits.
✓ **Significant Misunderstandings or Unsupported Claims** ○ Claims sunflower oil reduces pollution more than traditional fuels—this is not stated in the sources. ○ Asserts environmental dangers (fires, rain destroying crops) as "economic implications," but these risks are not discussed in sources. ○ Suggests biofuel "will, in the end, be cheaper than fuel," but no such cost comparison exists in the sources.	➢ **Replace Unsupported Claims With Text-Based Reasoning** ○ Remove statements about pollution, cooking oil comparisons, and disaster scenarios unless grounded in the sources.

Evidence from Student Work: Ideas and Content	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Ideas and Content
✓ **Economic Reasoning Lacks Accuracy and Depth** ○ States "more workers means more money needed," which is true but not based on any source evidence. ○ Economic implications are almost entirely hypothetical rather than text-based.	➢ **Develop Economic Reasoning More Deeply** ○ Explain how sunflower biofuel affects production costs, electricity generation, or local economies using Evidence from Source #3.
✓ **Mixes Explanatory Purpose With Opinion and Speculation** ○ Writes things like biofuel "could be a major boom, or a major bust," but does not ground this in source material. ○ Suggests society "must take the risk," which aligns more with argumentative writing than explanatory.	➢ **Maintain Explanatory, Not Argumentative, Purpose** ○ Replace judgment phrases ("major boom or bust," "risk that must be taken") with neutral explanatory language.
✓ **Limited Synthesis Across Sources** ○ Uses mainly Source #2 and a partial detail from Source #1. ○ Does not integrate Source #3 (industrial biofuel process/energy outputs) or Source #4 (phytoremediation, community benefits).	➢ **Strengthen Synthesis Across Sources** ○ Connect the biodiesel process (Source #2) to industrial-scale applications (Source #3) and community examples (Source #4).
✓ **Some Relevant Ideas but Generalized or Repetitive** ○ Many sentences repeat the idea that sunflower biofuel "could save money" without explaining how.	➢

Organization: 3

The essay has a recognizable structure with an introduction, body paragraphs, and conclusion. Ideas generally move from biofuel explanation to economic considerations. However, paragraphing is uneven, transitions are basic, and the essay shifts between speculative economic worries and source-based biofuel processes without a clear organizational frame. Some paragraphs blend unrelated ideas, weakening coherence.

Evidence from Student Work: Organization	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Organization
✓ **Introduction Restates Task but Lacks Preview of Key Points** ○ The first paragraph announces both components of the task but does not identify the main ideas or structure.	➢ **Include a Clear Preview in the Introduction** ○ Identify the main categories of explanation: biofuel process, economic effects, and real-world examples.
✓ **Body Paragraphs Are Present but Loosely Focused** ○ The paragraph about sunflower biodiesel effectively uses Source #2, but the following paragraph mixes environmental and economic claims without connecting them logically. ○ The "economic implications" paragraph combines multiple unrelated concerns (fires, hurricane damage, rising costs) without tying them to sources.	➢ **Organize Paragraphs by Conceptual Groups** ○ Separate production explanation, economic implications, and community examples.

Evidence from Student Work: Organization	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Organization
✓ **Basic, Repetitive Transitions** ○ Uses simple transitions like "Also," "However," "Although…" without signaling relationships among ideas.	➢ **Use Purposeful Transitions** ○ Add cause-and-effect, contrast, or sequence transitions to clarify relationships among ideas.
✓ **Ideas Sometimes Appear Out of Order** ○ Mentions "the seeds' dual purpose" (cooking oil) abruptly and without reference to any source. ○ Speculative negative outcomes are placed before the explanation of potential benefits.	➢
✓ **Conclusion Restates but Does Not Synthesize** ○ Ends by saying sunflower biofuel "can help us in the long run," but does not unify the biofuel and economic points.	➢ **Revise Conclusion to Show Synthesis** ○ Summarize how sunflower biofuel production connects to economic opportunities and challenges using source evidence.

Voice: 3

The voice is sincere and shows engagement with the topic, but tone shifts between explanatory, opinionated, and speculative. Some statements exaggerate claims or rely on emotional reasoning rather than evidence. Audience awareness is inconsistent, which weakens the authority of the explanation.

Evidence from Student Work: Voice	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Voice
✓ **Engaged Tone** ○ Shows curiosity and concern about environmental issues and the future.	➢
✓ **Inconsistent Expository Voice** ○ Uses subjective phrasing such as "this could be a major boom, or a major bust" and "Oil leaks are harmful… but sunflower oil is less harmful."	➢ **Maintain Consistent Expository Purpose** ○ Keep focus on explaining processes and economic implications, not personal concerns.
✓ **Speculation and Opinion Dominate Sections** ○ Predicts futures ("could end up bad"), comments on societal "risks," and mentions potential disasters without evidence.	➢ **Anchor Statements in Evidence** ○ Avoid speculative language unless supported by sources.
✓ **Audience Awareness Lacks Precision** ○ Writes as though explaining personal beliefs rather than presenting researched, sourced information to an academic audience.	➢ **Use an Academic, Informational Tone** ○ Replace conversational comments with precise, evidence-driven analysis.
✓ **Informal or Conversational Phrasing** ○ "Do we risk using sunflower oil that may end up being a problem in the future?" ○ Rhetorical questions shift tone to argumentative or persuasive.	➢ **Remove Rhetorical Questions and Opinion Statements** ○ Shift toward objective, factual explanation based on sources.

Word Choice: 3

Word choice is understandable but often vague, repetitive, or speculative. Some scientific terms are used, but inaccurate or overgeneralized language weakens clarity. Emotional phrases and loosely used vocabulary reduce precision and credibility.

Evidence from Student Work: Word Choice	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Word Choice
✓ **Some Technical Vocabulary Used** ○ "Biofuel," "hybrid cars," "harvest," "crop production."	➢ **Use Precise Economic Vocabulary** ○ Replace general terms with "operational cost savings," "fuel-production efficiency," or "local economic impact."
✓ **Frequent Generalizations and Vague Terms** ○ "May have economic implications," "harmful," "boom or bust," "a major impact," "cheaper alternative."	➢ **Expand Academic Vocabulary** ○ Pull terminology directly from the sources for accuracy and credibility.
✓ **Inaccurate or Unsupported Terms** ○ Claims sunflower oil is "healthier and cheaper than olive oil," which is not in the sources. ○ "Solve pollution issues," "destroyed crops from rain" ▪ speculative and inaccurate.	➢ **Correct Inaccurate Language** ○ Remove claims comparing sunflower oil with olive oil or predicting weather disasters.
✓ **Speculative or Emotional Phrasing** ○ "Major risk," "may end up being a problem," "catastrophic storms"—these terms lack source grounding.	➢ **Avoid Emotional Language** ○ Replace subjective terms with neutral, factual wording.
✓ **Repetitive Word Use** ○ Repeated use of "economic implications" and "cheaper" without deeper vocabulary.	➢

Sentence Fluency: 3

Sentences are generally readable but lack variety, contain awkward phrasing, and sometimes combine multiple ideas without clear structure. Some transitions are abrupt, and pacing is uneven.

Evidence from Student Work: Sentence Fluency	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Sentence Fluency
✓ **Readable but Unpolished Sentences** ○ Several sentences stack multiple clauses, reducing clarity.	➢ **Break Long Sentences Into Smaller Units** ○ Separate ideas to improve clarity.
✓ **Repetitive Sentence Beginnings** ○ Many sentences begin with "This," "Sunflower oil," or "It," creating monotony.	➢ **Vary Sentence Openings** ○ Use introductory phrases and clauses.
✓ **Awkward or Unclear Constructions** ○ "May help run hybrid cars, but also may be ineffective," which creates unclear meaning. ○ "More workers means more money needed" is simplistic and abrupt.	➢ **Revise awkward or unclear phrasing** ○ Rework sentences containing stacked clauses.
✓ **Limited Internal Transitions** ○ Few linking words that clarify the relationship between ideas (cause/effect, clarification).	➢ **Improve Internal Transitions** ○ Add transition words to clarify explanatory relationships.

Conventions: 3

Conventions are inconsistent but do not significantly obstruct meaning. Errors appear in punctuation, grammar, word form, and capitalization. While readable, the draft would benefit from targeted editing.

Evidence from Student Work: Conventions	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Conventions
✓ **Minor Sentence Boundary Errors** ○ Occasional run-ons and fused ideas within long sentences.	➢ **Address Run-On Sentences** ○ Break long sentences into shorter, clearer ones.
✓ **Punctuation Issues** ○ Missing commas in complex sentences and improperly placed conjunctions.	➢ **Check Punctuation in Complex Sentences** ○ Add commas after introductory elements and before conjunctions.
✓ **Spelling and Word Form Issues** ○ "Due too," "may end of being" (likely "end up"), "there fore" (spacing error).	➢ **Correct Word Form Errors** ○ Edit phrases like "end of being" to standard English.
✓ **General Clarity Maintained** ○ Errors do not obscure meaning, but they reduce professionalism.	➢ **Proofread Carefully** ○ Review for spelling and spacing issues.

Use of Sources: 3

The writer uses at least two sources (primarily Source #2 and some partial reference to Source #1), but integration is inconsistent, and other sources (especially #3 and #4) are missing entirely. Some evidence is paraphrased inaccurately, and attribution is weak. Economic implications are largely hypothetical rather than supported by source evidence.

Evidence from Student Work: Use of Sources	Student Recommendations for Improvement: Use of Sources
✓ **Correct But Limited Use of Sources** ○ Uses Source #2 accurately when discussing hybrid cars and biodiesel. ○ References dual-purpose sunflowers (food + oil), loosely connected to Source #1.	➢
✓ **Missing Key Sources** ○ No meaningful use of Source #3 (industrial pellet gasifier system). ○ No integration of Source #4 (phytoremediation, community/economic context).	➢ **Use Additional Sources (3 and 4)** ○ Integrate information about pellet fuel production and community benefits.
✓ **Inaccurate Paraphrasing** ○ Claims sunflower oil is "healthier and cheaper than olive oil" (not stated in sources). ○ Unrealistic or speculative statements about biofuel effectiveness or cost.	➢ **Correct Paraphrasing Errors** ○ Revisit sources to ensure claims accurately reflect the text.
✓ **Lack of Explicit Attribution** ○ No clear phrases such as "According to Source __."	➢ **Increase Explicit Attribution** ○ Use attribution phrases consistently to identify source support.
✓ **Hypothetical Economic Claims** ○ "More workers means more money needed," "could be a major boom or bust"—not grounded in evidence.	➢ **Base Economic Claims on Source Evidence** ○ Replace speculative statements with cost-saving examples from Source #3 or production incentives from Source #1.

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-Evidence Mapping Routine

- Have students match claims with text lines to prevent speculative or inaccurate reasoning.

Economic Reasoning Mini-Lesson

- Teach how to explain cost efficiency, production investment, and resource substitution using source evidence.

Expository vs. Argumentative Comparison Lesson

- Use side-by-side examples to help students maintain an explanatory purpose.

Source Synthesis Organizer

- Scaffold synthesis by requiring students to combine at least two sources per paragraph.

Organization:

Expository Paragraphing Activity

- Have students map which sentences support which component of the task to reorganize accordingly.

Transition Function Mini-Lesson

- Teach transitions grouped by purpose (cause/effect, elaboration, contrast).

Conclusion Synthesis Model

- Provide examples of conclusions that unify the “how it works” + “why it matters” dimensions.

Voice:

Tone Calibration Using Mentor Texts

- Compare this draft with high-quality informational articles to refine voice.

Purpose Clarification Routine

- Have students identify sentences that drift from explanation to opinion and revise.

Audience Lens Revision

- Students rewrite sections aiming for a scientific or policy-making audience.

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 Refinement Workshop

- Students revise vague or speculative words into precise academic terms.

Source Vocabulary Integration

- Create word banks from the texts for students to use in revisions.

Precision and Accuracy Mini-Lesson

- Teach how generalized language weakens explanatory writing.

Sentence Fluency:

Sentence Variety Exercises

- Practice rewriting sentences using different openings and structures.

Combining & Splitting Workshops

- Teach students how to control pacing and clarity through sentence boundaries.

Read-Aloud Fluency Routine

- Students read drafts aloud to identify choppy or overloaded sentences.

Conventions:

Editing Stations

- Rotations focusing on punctuation, capitalization, verb forms, and sentence boundaries.

Sentence Boundary Mini-Lessons

- Identify and correct run-ons and fragments.

Proofreading Tools

- Provide checklists and guided editing steps.

Use of Sources:

Source Accuracy Alignment Routine

- Students match each claim in their draft to specific lines in sources.

Attribution Sentence Frame Instruction

- Teach signal phrases appropriate for high school expository writing.

Synthesis Practice Across Multiple Sources

- Help students integrate multiple sources within a single paragraph for deeper explanation.