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
✓ **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.
✓ **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.
✓ **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.
✓ **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.

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
✓ **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).
✓ **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.
✓ **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.
✓ **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.

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
✓ **Engaged and Sincere Voice** ○ Uses relatable openings and personal reflections ("Once I tried watching TV while studying…").
✓ **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.
✓ **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.
✓ **Occasional Purpose Drift** ○ The writer shifts into advice-giving instead of explaining the scientific reasons behind strategies.

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
✓ **Some Accurate Content Vocabulary** ○ Uses terms like "information," "attention," and "memory palace."
✓ **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.
✓ **Informal or Opinion-Based Words** ○ Uses casual tone: "trust me," "won't let you down," "crazy things."
✓ **Limited Use of Domain-Specific Words** ○ Omits key cognitive terms such as "encoding," "retrieval," "association," "visualization," or "working 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
✓ **Readable but Repetitive Patterns** ○ Frequent use of "you" to begin sentences creates a predictable rhythm.
✓ **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.
✓ **Abrupt Transitions Between Ideas** ○ Moves from memory palace to listening skills with little connector language.
✓ **Occasional Choppy or Fragmented Sentences** ○ Short standalone comments ("Crazy right?") disrupt fluency and academic tone.

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
✓ **Basic Spelling and Capitalization Are Correct** ○ No major spelling errors; key terms are spelled correctly.
✓ **Run-On or Loosely Structured Sentences** ○ Example: long, multi-clause sentences lacking proper separation.
✓ **Missing Commas After Introductory Phrases** ○ Several instances where introductory words ("Once," "When," "To conclude") lack needed commas.
✓ **Fragments and Conversational Constructions** ○ Short, informal sentences like "Crazy right?" weaken conventions.

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
✓ **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.
✓ **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.
✓ **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").
✓ **Limited Explanation of Evidence** ○ Source details are mentioned but not fully explained in terms of how they support memory improvement.