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
✓ **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.
✓ **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.
✓ **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.
✓ **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.

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
✓ **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.
✓ **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.
✓ **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.
✓ **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.

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
✓ **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.
✓ **Limited Awareness of Informational Audience** ○ Gives personal opinions instead of focusing on evidence-based explanation.
✓ **Purpose Drift** ○ Focus changes from memory strategies to general brain facts, to students being bilingual, without maintaining tone appropriate to informational writing.
✓ **Minimal Authoritative or Academic Tone** ○ Does not use scientific vocabulary or objective phrasing expected in expository writing.

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
✓ **General and Vague Vocabulary** ○ Uses broad, nonspecific terms (“tips,” “bad things,” “impact memorization”). ○ Lacks detail needed for scientific clarity.
✓ **Inaccurate or Misused Terms** ○ Incorrectly states bilingual students “have a bigger memory,” which misapplies vocabulary. ○ Misuses “memory stored properly” to explain divided attention.
✓ **Missing Domain-Specific Terms** ○ Does not use memory-related vocabulary such as “encoding,” “retrieval,” “short-term load,” “association,” or “visualization.”
✓ **Informal Phrasing Weakens Explanation** ○ Statements like “the brain is an amazing thing” and “that’s a lot of words” do not contribute to 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
✓ **Repetitive Sentence Starters** ○ Many sentences begin similarly (“There are…,” “The brain…,” “This can…”).
✓ **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.
✓ **Sentence Fragments and Short, Choppy Lines** ○ “That’s a lot of words.” ○ “The brain is an amazing thing.”
✓ **Uneven Rhythm** ○ Mixes fragments, long run-ons, and simple sentences, creating awkward pacing.

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
✓ **Spelling Errors Throughout** ○ Examples: “retreive,” “hischoool,” “vocabualy,” “are body,” “retreived,” “corectly.”
✓ **Punctuation Issues** ○ Missing commas in complex sentences; inconsistent end punctuation. ○ Run-on sentences lack appropriate separation.

Evidence from Student Work: Conventions
✓ **Capitalization Mistakes** ○ "are body" should be "our body," and several sentence starts are lowercase.
✓ **Grammar Errors Affect Readability** ○ Incorrect subject-verb agreements and word forms reduce clarity.

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
✓ **Some Attempt to Use Sources** ○ Uses PAO strategy accurately in structure ("for each number 00 to 99"), showing partial understanding of Source 2.
✓ **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.
✓ **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.
✓ **Minimal Explanation of Source Material** ○ Strategies are named but not explained using the scientific reasoning found in the sources.