Grade 4 – Informational Writing Work Sample: Approaching

Task: Your class is studying about different ecosystems and animal habitats. You are given three sources about various animals and the habitats they live within.

Read the sources carefully to **write an informational article** on animals and their habitats. Using more than one source, develop a main idea about animals and their surroundings. Choose the most important information from the sources to support your main idea.

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

Ideas and Content: 4

The paper demonstrates an adequate understanding of the task and includes clear main ideas supported by accurate details from multiple sources. The writer describes how animals survive in different environments—cold regions, deserts, and oceans—with examples that align with the provided texts. However, ideas are mostly listed rather than explained, limiting depth and synthesis.

Evidence from Student Work: Ideas and Content
✓ **Clear Main Idea:** ○ The introduction ("Animals are very special creatures... all they need is a little help from nature") establishes the main purpose of explaining how animals survive in extreme environments.
✓ **Accurate Use of Source Details:** ○ Mentions of icefish having a special protein, penguins huddling for warmth, and polar bears digging dens accurately reflect *Source #1*. The reference to elf owls living in cactus plants and desert animals staying underground at night also align with the text evidence.
✓ **Limited Elaboration:** ○ Details are factual but mostly listed: "Ice Fish have a special protein… Penguins have blubber… Whales flee from cold water." The writing rarely explains why these traits help survival. This limits the sophistication of the ideas.
✓ **Some Redundancy and Minor Inaccuracy:** ○ Occasional repetition ("warm and toasty") and broad generalizations ("crabs live in the ocean too") weaken precision. The ideas would benefit from a clearer link back to the main idea.

Organization: 4

The paper demonstrates adequate organization and is generally easy to follow. Information is grouped by environment (cold regions, deserts, and the ocean), and the sequence makes logical sense. The introduction identifies the topic, and the conclusion provides closure, though transitions between sections are basic and repetitive.

Evidence from Student Work: Organization
✓ **Clear Structure:** ○ The writer uses a consistent pattern—each paragraph focuses on a different environment. The sequence from cold → hot → ocean gives the piece logical flow and supports understanding.
✓ **Introduction and Conclusion Present:** ○ The opening paragraph introduces the topic of animal survival in different environments. The conclusion ("Now you should understand how special animals are...") ties back to the main idea and signals an ending, though it mostly restates earlier points without deeper reflection.

Evidence from Student Work: Organization
✓ **Basic Transitions:** ○ Transitions such as "But," "Then," and "Deserts are a different story" show some attempt at linking ideas, but they are repetitive and don't show clear relationships between sections (e.g., comparison or contrast).
✓ **Paragraph Cohesion:** ○ Each paragraph sticks to its topic but could use stronger linking sentences and clearer topic sentences to guide readers through the shift in environments.

Voice: 4

The writing shows the writer's genuine interest in animals and presents information in an engaging, conversational tone. While enthusiasm is clear, the voice sometimes becomes too casual or repetitive, reducing the sense of authority expected in informational writing.

Evidence from Student Work: Voice
✓ **Engaging Tone:** ○ The introduction ("Animals are very special creatures…") immediately shows enthusiasm for the topic. Expressions such as "warm and toasty" and "they still have some more tricks up their blubber and fat" create energy and personality, keeping the reader interested.
✓ **Sincere Interest:** ○ The writer's excitement about animal survival comes through consistently, suggesting personal curiosity about the topic and effort to connect with readers.
✓ **Occasional Over-Casual Style:** ○ Informal language ("penguin buddys," "tricks up their blubber") adds liveliness but shifts tone away from informational purpose. A more formal, confident voice would strengthen credibility.
✓ **Limited Audience Awareness:** ○ While friendly and readable, the piece lacks direct signals to the audience's needs for clarity and accuracy (e.g., defining terms like *blubber* or *adaptation*).

Word Choice: 4

The writing uses a variety of words that generally communicate meaning clearly. The vocabulary shows understanding of the topic and includes some precise and content-specific terms (e.g., *protein, blubber, cactus*). However, some repetition and overuse of everyday language limit sophistication.

Evidence from Student Work: Word Choice
✓ **Appropriate Content Vocabulary:** ○ The paper uses accurate scientific words related to animal survival such as *protein*, *fat*, *blubber*, and *cactus*. These choices show that the writer drew vocabulary directly from the sources.
✓ **Variety and Clarity:** ○ Most words clearly express ideas. Phrases like "cold freezing place," "burning hot deserts," and "deep and dark ocean" demonstrate an attempt to use vivid language for contrast among habitats.
✓ **Some Repetition and Redundancy:** ○ Frequent repetition of words such as *warm*, *cold*, and *toasty* limits variety. The word "different" appears multiple times without precise alternatives, and phrases like "a big group hug with a few other penguin buddys" could be revised for accuracy and tone.

Evidence from Student Work: Word Choice
✓ **Limited Precision:** ○ Some general or conversational word choices ("tricks up their blubber and fat," "really tough place to live in") weaken the clarity expected in an informational piece. More exact language could strengthen reader understanding.

Sentence Fluency: 3

The writing shows some sentence variety and reads smoothly in places, but several sentences are long, run together, or begin the same way. Occasional choppy or repetitive phrasing interrupts flow and makes the piece harder to read aloud naturally.

Evidence from Student Work: Sentence Fluency
✓ **Some Sentence Variety:** ○ The writer includes a mix of short and long sentences, such as: "Ice Fish have a special protein in their bodies which keeps them from freezing and keeps ice crystals from forming in their bodies." This shows developing control over complex sentence structure.
✓ **Repetitive Beginnings:** ○ Many sentences start with similar words—often "But," "They," or "Animals." For example, "But Polar Bears, Penguins, and Whales have a diffrent survival tactic" and "But the ocean is the exact opposite of the desert." This repetition makes the rhythm predictable.
✓ **Run-On and Overloaded Sentences:** ○ Some sentences string multiple ideas together without proper breaks or transitions: "For us, humans, to survive in burning hot deserts, and freezing cold snow, and the deep and dark ocean, it would be almost impossible without tools." These need punctuation or division for clarity.
✓ **Readable but Uneven Flow:** ○ While the piece can be followed when read aloud, pacing varies. The rhythm improves when shorter sentences are used intentionally but falters during lists or when conjunctions pile up.

Conventions: 3

The paper shows progress toward grade-level control of spelling, punctuation, and grammar. Sentences are mostly complete, and capitalization is generally correct. However, frequent spelling errors, inconsistent punctuation, and occasional run-ons distract the reader and require noticeable editing.

Evidence from Student Work: Conventions
✓ **Spelling Errors:** ○ Several high-frequency or easily checked words are misspelled: *diffrent, multipule, buddys, enviorment, schorching.* These errors occur often enough to draw attention and reduce polish.
✓ **Punctuation and Sentence Boundaries:** ○ Most sentences end correctly, but some are overly long or joined with commas or conjunctions instead of proper punctuation: ○ Example: "For us, humans, to survive in burning hot deserts, and freezing cold snow, and the deep and dark ocean, it would be almost impossible without tools." This could be revised into shorter, clearer sentences.
✓ **Capitalization and Grammar:** ○ Capitalization is correct for sentence beginnings and proper nouns. Grammar is generally sound, though plural and possessive forms are inconsistent (*penguin buddys → penguin buddies*).

Evidence from Student Work: Conventions
✓ **Editing Need:** ○ Errors do not make the writing unreadable but require multiple corrections for a final draft.

Use of Sources: 4

The writer uses information accurately from multiple sources, selecting relevant facts to explain how animals survive in different environments. While the paper does not include formal citations or quotations, details are clearly drawn from at least two texts and paraphrased in the writer's own words.

Evidence from Student Work: Use of Sources
✓ **Multiple Sources Used:** ○ Information about icefish antifreeze proteins, penguins huddling, polar bears' dens, desert animals' nocturnal behavior, and the elf owl's cactus home all reflect content from *Source #1: It's a Cold (Hot, Dry, Dark) Cruel World!* and *Source #2: Animal Architects.*
✓ **Accurate Paraphrasing:** ○ Facts are restated in the student's own words rather than copied directly from the texts. For example, "Ice Fish have a special protein in their bodies which keeps them from freezing" captures the idea of natural antifreeze accurately.
✓ **No Formal Citation or Integration:** ○ The writer does not identify which source each detail came from or include a list of sources. While not expected in full academic form at this grade level, some signal phrases ("According to one article…" or "The text explains…") would strengthen attribution.
✓ **Coverage Across Texts:** ○ The essay integrates examples from at least two sources but misses opportunities to connect information conceptually (e.g., comparing how animals in different environments use physical vs. behavioral adaptations).