Grade 8 – Expository Writing Work Sample: Exceeds

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: 5

The essay presents a clear and engaging controlling idea focused on practicing memory strategies. It uses highly relevant and accurate details from all three sources and explains each tip with specific examples. While explanations are mostly thorough, some reasoning leans more toward entertainment than analysis. Overall, the writing shows strong comprehension of the sources and communicates information clearly, but it stops just short of the depth and precision expected for a score of 6.

Evidence from Student Work: Ideas and Content
✓ **Clear Controlling Idea and Purpose** ○ Establishes the purpose effectively in the introduction: "If you need to improve your memory, the key is practice, practice, practice." ○ Frames the article as a set of "tips and tricks to help you practice your memory," which aligns well with the prompt. ○ Maintains this purpose throughout each section of the essay.
✓ **Relevant and Accurate Details** ○ Accurately quotes Source 1: "If you keep using your brain the same way over and over again, it shapes how your brain will be organized." ○ Draws correctly from Source 3 about interpreter training: "Much of an interpreter's brain power is devoted to keeping information in short-term memory." ○ Incorporates Source 2 with precision, including "memory palaces," "picture a building you already know," and vivid examples like "marshmallows strung like pearls." ○ Uses the "Person + Action + Object" strategy accurately and invents appropriate sample combinations.
✓ **Development and Elaboration** ○ Explains how each tip works, not just what it is. For example, after describing the interpreter exercise, the writer explains the cognitive task: "You must lock the words in your short-term memory, so practicing this way will help you…" ○ Elaborates with specific applications (e.g., grocery lists, remembering numbers, recalling names). ○ Some elaboration focuses more on humor or creativity (e.g., "milk coming out of your backyard hose") instead of deeper explanation of cognitive mechanisms.
✓ **Focus and Relevance** ○ Stays consistently focused on the question of how to improve memory. ○ Each paragraph contributes a distinct, well-developed strategy. ○ Maintains relevance but occasionally shifts into playful or narrative commentary that adds entertainment but not depth ("You'll never forget a name or face again").

Organization: 5

The essay is clearly structured, beginning with an engaging introduction, followed by logically ordered sections that present distinct memory strategies. Transitions support coherence, and each section maintains internal organization. The conclusion reinforces the main purpose but is slightly repetitive.

Evidence from Student Work: Organization
✓ **Clear and Purposeful Introduction** ○ Opens with a strong hook: "Have you ever had trouble remembering something important?" ○ Introduces the controlling idea and signals the purpose: improving memory through practice.
✓ **Logical Sequencing of Ideas** ○ Organizes information by strategy: interpreter training, memory palace, and the Person + Action + Object method. ○ Each tip is presented in a separate paragraph with its own explanation and examples.
✓ **Transitions Support Flow** ○ Uses transitions such as "To start off," "Another tip," and "One more powerful strategy" to guide the reader. ○ Transitions accurately signal movement between strategies and maintain clarity.
✓ **Conclusion Provides Clear Closure** ○ Summarizes the key message: practicing memory strategies improves retention. ○ Slightly repetitive ("Practice makes perfect"), but still reinforces the purpose effectively.

Voice: 4

The voice is confident, engaging, and accessible for readers. At times, the tone becomes overly conversational or humorous, slightly weakening the informational purpose. However, the overall voice demonstrates clear awareness of audience and purpose.

Evidence from Student Work: Voice
✓ **Engaging and Appropriate for Audience** ○ Uses an inviting tone ("Have you ever had trouble remembering something important?"). ○ Maintains a friendly, readable style that supports understanding.
✓ **Sincere and Controlled Voice** ○ Shows investment in the topic ("Well, here are some tips and tricks…").
✓ **Occasional Conversational or Casual Shifts** ○ Some phrases stray from informational tone, such as "You'll never forget a name or face again," or humorous imagery like "milk coming out of your backyard hose."
✓ **Mostly Consistent Purpose and Point of View** ○ Writes in a consistent, helpful, explanatory voice, with brief lapses into entertainment.

Word Choice: 5

The writing demonstrates clear and effective word choice with domain-specific vocabulary and vivid, memorable examples. While some humorous details may slightly distract from precision, word choice overall contributes significantly to clarity and engagement.

Evidence from Student Work: Word Choice
✓ **Effective Use of Informational Vocabulary** ○ Correctly uses terms such as "short-term memory," "interpreter training," "memory palaces," and "Person + Action + Object."
✓ **Vivid and Original Examples** ○ Examples like imagining "marshmallows strung like pearls" or "milk coming out of your backyard hose" create strong mental images that support the strategy.
✓ **Occasional Imbalance Between Vividness and Precision** ○ Some examples are more humorous than explanatory, making them slightly less suited for academic tone.
✓ **Consistent Clarity and Accuracy** ○ Explanations are easy to understand and well-matched to the sources' technical vocabulary.

Sentence Fluency: 5

Sentences flow smoothly with consistent variation in structure, length, and rhythm. Transitions support coherence, and complex sentences are handled clearly. Minor lapses appear when humorous examples lead to more complex phrasing, but fluency remains strong throughout.

Evidence from Student Work: Sentence Fluency
✓ **Varied Sentence Structures** ○ Mixes short and long sentences effectively to maintain rhythm.
✓ **Fluid and Natural Flow** ○ Sentences like "Much of an interpreter's brain power is devoted to keeping information in short-term memory" demonstrate advanced fluency.
✓ **Effective Transitional Phrasing** ○ Uses transitions such as "To start off," "Another tip," and "One more powerful strategy" to guide readers.
✓ **Occasional Complex Sentence Stretching** ○ Some vivid imagery leads to longer, more complicated sentences, but meaning remains clear.

Conventions: 4

The writing demonstrates strong command of grammar, punctuation, and spelling. A few minor errors do not impede understanding. Sentence boundaries are handled well, and capitalization is correct.

Evidence from Student Work: Conventions
✓ **Accurate Spelling and Grammar** ○ No significant spelling errors; grammar remains consistent throughout.
✓ **Mostly Correct Punctuation** ○ Commas and periods used correctly in complex sentences.
✓ **Occasional Minor Errors** ○ Some sentences could use commas for improved clarity (e.g., after introductory phrases).
✓ **Strong Sentence Boundaries** ○ No run-ons or fragments observed.

Use of Sources: 5

The writer effectively uses information from all three sources, integrating accurate details that directly support each strategy. Explanations follow evidence and show understanding of how each strategy works. Some attribution is implied rather than explicit, but evidence remains accurate and well-chosen.

Evidence from Student Work: Use of Sources
✓ **Use of All Three Sources** ○ Source 1: accurate explanation of brain organization and repeated practice. ○ Source 2: clear use of the memory palace technique, including building familiar imagery. ○ Source 3: correct description of interpreter training and short-term memory tasks.
✓ **Relevant and Well-Matched Evidence** ○ Each example supports the strategy being described, such as the "Person + Action + Object" technique.
✓ **Accurate Paraphrasing and Detail** ○ Information is restated clearly without major distortions.
✓ **Minor Gaps in Attribution** ○ Some examples blend into the prose without explicit citation, but accuracy is preserved.