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
✓ **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.
✓ **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.
✓ **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.
✓ **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.
✓ **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.
✓ **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).
✓ **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
✓ **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.
✓ **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.
✓ **Basic, Repetitive Transitions** ○ Uses simple transitions like "Also," "However," "Although…" without signaling 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.

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
✓ **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."
✓ **Speculation and Opinion Dominate Sections** ○ Predicts futures ("could end up bad"), comments on societal "risks," and mentions potential disasters without evidence.
✓ **Audience Awareness Lacks Precision** ○ Writes as though explaining personal beliefs rather than presenting researched, sourced information to an academic audience.
✓ **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.

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
✓ **Some Technical Vocabulary Used** ○ "Biofuel," "hybrid cars," "harvest," "crop production."
✓ **Frequent Generalizations and Vague Terms** ○ "May have economic implications," "harmful," "boom or bust," "a major impact," "cheaper alternative."
✓ **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.
✓ **Speculative or Emotional Phrasing** ○ "Major risk," "may end up being a problem," "catastrophic storms"—these terms lack source grounding.
✓ **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
✓ **Readable but Unpolished Sentences** ○ Several sentences stack multiple clauses, reducing clarity.
✓ **Repetitive Sentence Beginnings** ○ Many sentences begin with "This," "Sunflower oil," or "It," creating monotony.
✓ **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.
✓ **Limited Internal Transitions** ○ Few linking words that clarify the relationship between ideas (cause/effect, clarification).

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
✓ **Minor Sentence Boundary Errors** ○ Occasional run-ons and fused ideas within long sentences.
✓ **Punctuation Issues** ○ Missing commas in complex sentences and improperly placed conjunctions.
✓ **Spelling and Word Form Issues** ○ "Due too," "may end of being" (likely "end up"), "there fore" (spacing error).
✓ **General Clarity Maintained** ○ Errors do not obscure meaning, but they reduce professionalism.

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
✓ **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).
✓ **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.
✓ **Lack of Explicit Attribution** ○ No clear phrases such as "According to Source __."
✓ **Hypothetical Economic Claims** ○ "More workers means more money needed," "could be a major boom or bust"—not grounded in evidence.