

# Grade 4 / Case Study 2

ELA \* SMARTER BALANCED PERFORMANCE TASK

## Research Question 1

ITEM #2664

Source #1 discusses what some animals do to survive in their environment. Explain how the information in Source #2 adds to the reader's understanding of what some animals do to survive in their environment. Give **two** details from Source #2 to support your explanation.

## Student Response

ITEM #2664

### Source #1

In source #1, it tells the reader what animals do to survive in the environment they live in. In source #2 it describes how animals build structures, their designs and what they look like. For example, termites build 20 foot- high mounds for their survival. These mounds are made of dirt and their saliva. Another example is a beaver, the beavers build lodges. The lodges are in ponds and lakes. The lodges are always at the bottom, underwater so predators don't see them come and go. In conclusion, each animal has its own way of building structures.

## Analysis

ITEM #2664

This response receives a score of 1 point out of 2 possible points. The student provides two pieces of evidence from the specified source that support the idea, but does not provide a sufficient explanation of how each detail supports each idea. The student unevenly makes the connection between the information in Source #2 and animals surviving. The student expresses the connection explicitly when discussing the termites and hints at it with the reference to predators when discussing beavers. Without the explicit explanation, though, it's harder to tell whether the student is veering from the focus of the question or not explaining it clearly enough. The student may benefit from instruction related to maintaining focus and clearly responding to the prompt.

**Research  
Question 2**

ITEM #2665

Which source would **most likely** be the most helpful in understanding how plants and animals work and live together to allow the place where they live to continue to grow? Explain why this source is **most likely** the most helpful. Use **two** details from the source to support your explanation.

**Student  
Response**

ITEM #2665

In source 3, you learn that plants and animals depend on each other so they can live and survive. For instance, the coral reef is home to many fish and plants, fish come to eat or hide in the plants and the plants have a home in the reef. Also, an oak tree out in the forest is home to bugs and squirrels, the bugs have a home in the tree and so do the squirrels. Referring to the oak tree, deer and mice also depend on the tree because acorns fall to the ground and many animals eat acorns. The most likely source to see how animals live together, work together and let their ecosystem grow is source 3.

**Analysis**

ITEM #2665

The student's response receives a score of 2 out of 2 possible points. The response identifies the correct source (Source #3), presents two details that support an evidence-based explanation and includes an explanation for each piece of evidence.

Although the student provides clear examples of how the coral reef is a home for fish and an oak tree is a home to bugs and squirrels, and the explanation is sufficient to receive full credit on this question, the explanation addresses primarily how students live and work together, but not how they "allow the place where they live to continue to grow." The student may benefit from instruction related to dissecting a prompt and writing a focused explanation that addresses each part of a prompt.

### Research Question 3

ITEM #2666

Click on the boxes to match each source with the idea or ideas that it supports. Some ideas may have more than one source selected.

### Student Response

ITEM #2666

**KEY**

X = student response  
✓ = correct response

	SOURCE #1 It's a Cold (Hot, Dry, Dark) Cruel World!	SOURCE #2 Animal Architects	SOURCE #3 Don't Step in that Ecosystem!
Some animals have developed special body features that help them survive in the place where they live.	X ✓		
Animals and plants living together is important for their survival.	X		X ✓
Animals create environments where they are protected from the weather and kept safe and comfortable.		X ✓	

### Analysis

ITEM #2666

Because the student marked two answer choices for the second main idea, the response earns zero points. To earn one point, the student must provide three correct answers. It is worth noting that while the student did not earn a point on item, the student did identify the correct main idea for two sources (Sources 2 and 3) and that one of the choices for the main idea is correct. The fact that the student chose Source #1 and #3 for the second main idea could mean that the student did not understand the directions for the matrix. It could also mean that the student did not comprehend the information in that source. This student may benefit from instruction related to following task directions as well as instruction on main ideas.

**Full Write \*** ITEM #2667**Full Write –  
Student  
Response**

ITEM #2667

**Where Animals Live**

Animals interact with their surroundings in many interesting and unique ways. Their climate, habitat, relationships with plants, and the ecosystems they live in all play a role in their survival.

First, animals survive in all different kinds of climate. For example, in source number one, it explains that the desert can be extremely hot and dry. Owls build nests in cacti so they have access to water. Water near the South Pole is ice cold. Ice fish have a special substance in their blood that keeps ice crystals from forming inside their bodies.

Next, animals live in all different kinds of habitat. In source number three it describes that coral provides a place for fish to live and eat. In source number two, it clearly explains that bald eagles build nests high up in tall trees. This helps protect them from enemies. In addition, animals build structures to protect themselves from enemies.

Plants and animals depend on each other for survival. For example, in source number three, an oak tree out in the forest is home to bugs, birds and squirrels. The bugs and other animals depend on the tree so they have a home. Another example, in source number two, it tells the reader that a beaver and a tree depend on each other. The beaver depends on the tree so he or she can build a home with the wood. Here are a few ways plants and animals depend on one another.

In conclusion, animals interact with their surroundings in many ways. You now know that their habitat, climate, relationships, and ecosystems are a huge part in their life. These all play a role in their survival.

## Analysis of Full Write

ITEM #2667

This student makes an excellent attempt to address the assignment prompt and write a full informational article on animals and where they live.

### Organization and Purpose: Score 3

The student outlines various topics from the provided sources, and the focus, while organized, is somewhat broad. ("Their climate, habitat, relationships with plants, and the ecosystems they live in all play a role in their survival.") There is an adequate use of transitional strategies demonstrating an understanding of sequencing of ideas to clarify relationships ("First...", "Next...", "In Conclusion..."). However, the student does not always connect the progression of ideas within the paragraphs. The student uses "For example..." to introduce each piece of supporting evidence, as if making a list of examples. The introduction and conclusion provide adequate summary of the content of the response, but do not effectively tie the ideas together. As the student attempts to provide examples to support evidence gathered from the sources, the connections between and among ideas is adequate, but lack strong connections. For example, in the second paragraph, the student moves abruptly from owls to fish in a discussion of how animals survive in different climates without linking these ideas effectively. These subtle differences earn the student a score of 3 on the Organization and Purpose dimension of the analytic rubric rather than a 4.

### Evidence and Elaboration: Score 3

The student also earned a 3 on the Evidence and Elaboration dimension of the informational rubric. Here the student summarizes the sources and integrates source material that is relevant, but the writer does not provide much elaboration, and the elaboration can best be described as listed rather than nested ("For example, in source number one, it explains that the desert can be extremely hot and dry. Owls build nests..."; "Ice fish have a special substance..."). This can also be seen in the student's responses to the first two constructed response items. Sources are adequately cited, although, the student does not demonstrate a command of various ways to cite sources such as using quotation marks. A generally appropriate style is evident and vocabulary is appropriate for the purpose and audience.

### Conventions: Score 2

The student demonstrates an adequate command of writing conventions. The errors consist of spelling mistakes, but even so, the proportion of errors to the amount of writing is low. Sentence formation, punctuation, capitalization, and grammar usage are adequate with little to no errors in the piece.

## Overview of Student's Performance

The three constructed response items are intended to provide scaffolding for the student to complete the full write. In this case study, the first constructed response item helped the students to identify what animals do to survive and to pull evidence from sources to support a claim. Although the required two details were not given, this student was able to correctly choose the source and support that claim with some evidence. The second constructed response item requires the student to evaluate sources and identify evidence for a specific purpose, which can later be drawn on in the full write. The first two sources focused on where animals live, but the third source expanded this basic idea by discussing the interdependency between plants and animals. This allowed the student a broader area to think and write about. The third constructed response item provides the best example of scaffolding as it helped remind the writer that there were three sources and each had a main idea. Despite not earning a point on this item, this student did a nice job of identifying those main ideas that helped to contribute to the success and organization of the full write.

## Next Steps

Overall, this fourth grader adequately demonstrates a basic understanding of the foundational skills to write a multi-paragraph essay in response to a prompt. In addition, the student grasps the idea of making a claim and citing evidence. However, the student would benefit from instruction on more complex ways to attribute sources. Also, the student could be taught to elaborate further once evidence has been cited, bringing in a personal story or anecdote.

The student can continue to work on developing engaging introductions that immediately catch the reader's attention as well as conclusions that elaborate on lessons learned or next steps that should be developed.

Mini lessons on identifying and categorizing transition words would be helpful as well. Exposure to various forms of transition words and their various purposes will create fluency between ideas.

In addition, instruction on author's tone, style, and purpose can be learned through examination of other's writing samples or reading materials. This will help the student move away from a formulaic response and toward developing one's own voice as an author.

Peer editing of student work allows for the identification of correct or incorrect conventions. This process of peer editing can reinforce spelling and grammar rules as they are integrated into the writing process.