

In Common: Effective Writing for All Students
Collection of All Student Work Samples, K-12

By The Vermont Writing Collaborative, with Student Achievement Partners and CCSSO

Seventh Grade
Range of Writing Informative / Explanatory
Writing Samples

File Name: I7R To Build a Fire

Informative/Explanatory

Grade 7

Range of Writing

To Build a Fire

One of the most important things in life is to know how to build a successful fire. For ages fire has been a critical part of our lives. Fire provides heat, and this is what it is mainly used for. Heat cooks food. This is also critical because some uncooked foods can cause some very nasty, unmentionable diseases. And, of course, there is aesthetics. Could one be more cheerful than roasting chesnuts over an open fire?

So, now that you're all convinced that fire is the greatest thing in the world, you probably should know how to make a successful fire. Well, I agree wholeheartedly to teaching you. So, let us go through the steps one by one.

First you need to decide where you are going to build the fire, whether it be in a woodstove, in a fireplace, or out in the open. They are all relatively the same in terms of process, but materials used can differ. The basic process is as follows.

First you need to find some newspaper, or other easily burnt materials such as birch bark, office papers, old report cards, etc. Crumple up enough of the paper to cover the bottom of your fire area (if you are using birch bark just lay a few strips down). Next you need kindling. Kindling usually is best in the form of split boards, but split wood is also fine as long as the wood is dry and not green (not in color but if wood has been cut recently it is usually referred to as "green"). About four to eight pieces should be laid on top of the paper in a criss-cross design in order to allow the fire air. See Figure 1. Note: Fire will not burn without oxygen! Do not smother it!

Introduces the topic / focus clearly, previewing what is to follow: The writer provides background information about the importance of fire, leading into an explanation of how to build a fire.

Organizes ideas, concepts, and information using sequence: The writer explains the process of building a fire in a step-by-step fashion

Develops the topic with appropriate accurate, facts and concrete details about the materials and steps needed to build a fire.

Uses precise, domain-specific vocabulary to explain and analyze.

Establishes and maintains a formal style.



Figure 1

Uses graphic to aid comprehension

Then you need a small piece of firewood, preferably not green. This should be laid diagonally across the top of the kindling.

Well, that's the hard part. Now you just need a match. Light the paper (or bark) in a few places and watch the fire blaze. Note: The wood will need to be replenished now and then. Just lay a piece of firewood across the top of the currently burning log and it will soon start blazing Enjoy your wonderful fire wherever you are!

Uses appropriate transitions to create cohesion and clarify relationships among ideas and concepts

I hope that if you survive your first fire you will continue to use this wonderful power of nature safely so that all can enjoy it. And remember, 'only YOU can prevent forest fires!'

Provides a concluding section that follows from and supports the explanation presented

In this assignment, from a language arts class, students were asked to explain a concrete procedure. This writer gives some background information about fire in the introduction and then states his purpose (to explain how to build a fire), thereby previewing the sequential steps to follow.

The writer organizes the essay sequentially, explaining each step carefully. Within each chunk, the writer uses precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to name and accurately explain the steps in building a fire. He uses appropriate transitions to clarify relationships among ideas and concepts, and to create cohesion. To make the steps easier for a reader to follow, he includes a graphic. This makes the writer's thinking and understanding easy to follow.

Except for a few lapses ("*only you can prevent forest fires*"), the tone of the essay is objective and the style formal—both appropriate for procedural writing. The conclusion follows from and supports the information given.

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File Name: I7R Question 1**Informative/Explanatory****Grade 7****Range of Writing****Question 1**

Jean Baptiste de Lamarck and Charles Darwin were both naturalists that had theories about organisms getting helpful variations. Lamarck's theory was called the theory of acquired characteristics and Darwin's was called the theory of evolution by natural selection. Lamarck and Darwin's theories are the same and different in some ways.

Darwin and Lamarck's theories were very different. Darwin theory said that organisms get helpful variation before changes in the environment. He thought they got the variation by chance at birth. He explained that the reason giraffes had long necks was because some giraffes had a variation which was a longer neck. The giraffes with short necks could only get food on the ground so they had to compete for it so they died. The giraffes with the long necks did not have to compete because they could get the food up high and they survived and passed the long necks onto their young. Lamarck theory said that organisms got helpful variation after a change in the environment. He said that giraffes got long necks when the food on the ground ran out. The giraffes needed to eat food and there was food up high so they stretched out their necks. They then passed it on to their young. Their theories are different because Lamarck thought that organisms changed out of need and after a change in the environment and Darwin thought organisms changed by chance when they were born and before there was a change in the environment.

Darwin and Lamarck's theories were very different but they were also very similar. They both thought that organisms changed. They thought these changes could be very useful and could help them survive. The changes could then get passed down to the young. That is how Lamarck and Darwin's theories are similar.

Introduces the topic clearly, previewing what is to follow: The writer gives provides general context, background information about the theories of evolution of Lamarck and Darwin, states the main point, and signals that similarities and differences in the theories will be the essay's focus.

Organizes ideas, concepts, and information using comparison/contrast. This paragraph discusses differences between the two theories, first describing Darwin's theory and then Lamarck's.

Develops topic with appropriate, accurate facts and concrete details about theories of evolution; **provides analysis of content**

Uses precise and domain-specific vocabulary and a formal style.

Uses appropriate transitions to clarify relationships among ideas and concepts

Lamarck and Darwin's theories are both the same and different in some ways.

Provides a concluding statement, which follows from the information provided

For this summative assessment from a seventh-grade science unit, students were asked to explain the differences and similarities in Lamarck's and Darwin's theories of evolution, respectively. This writer provides some background information about Lamarck's and Darwin's theories in the introduction and then establishes his focus on similarities and differences in Darwin's and Lamarck's theories, which serves also to preview his compare/contrast organizational structure.

The writer organizes his essay by first discussing differences between the two theories and then the similarities. He uses appropriate transitions to clarify relationships among ideas and concepts. Within each chunk, the writer uses precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to characterize the theories and analyze them. This makes the writer's thinking and understanding easy to follow.

The tone of the essay is objective and the style formal—both appropriate for science writing. The conclusion follows from the information given. Though it is a simple restatement, this is appropriate for a content assessment.

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