

Animal Architects

Key Terms

structure — something that has been built.

lodge — a home built by a beaver.

colony — a large group of animals living together.

Humans are not the only ones who build homes. Many animals are great builders too. They use materials they find in nature to make a safe place to live. These **structures** help animals stay safe from weather and other animals. They also provide a warm place to raise their young.



Beavers: The Dam Builders

Beavers are famous for building in the water. First, they use their sharp teeth to cut down trees. They use the logs and branches to build a dam across a stream. The dam stops the water and creates a pond. In the middle of the pond, beavers build a home called a **lodge**. They use sticks and thick mud to make the walls. The mud dries and becomes very hard. This keeps the inside of the lodge dry and safe from hungry wolves.



Weaver Birds: The Master Knotters

Weaver birds live in Africa and Asia. They are named for the way they build their nests. A male weaver bird uses his beak to tie knots in long pieces of grass. He weaves the grass together to make a

round nest that hangs from a tree branch. The nest has a small opening at the bottom. This makes it hard for snakes to get inside. The bird uses soft grass and feathers to line the inside so the chicks stay warm.

Termites: The Mound Makers

Termites are tiny insects, but they build giant homes. A large **colony** of termites works together to build a mound. They use soil, spit, and wood to make a material that is as strong as a brick. Some termite mounds are taller than a person! These mounds have special tunnels inside. The tunnels act like air vents to keep the home cool in the hot sun. The queen termite lives deep inside the mound where it is safest.

Check Your Understanding

1. According to the text, why do beavers use mud when building their lodges?

2. How does the shape of a weaver bird's nest help protect the young chicks?

3. What material do termites use to make their mounds as strong as bricks?

Circle the correct answer.

- A) Logs and large branches
- B) Sticks and thick mud
- C) Soil, spit, and wood
- D) Long pieces of grass

4. Explain one way that termite mounds stay cool in the hot sun.

Part 2: Informational Writing Task

Writing Prompt

Animals are amazing builders. You have read the text "Animal Architects" about how beavers, weaver birds, and termites build their homes.

Write an informational essay explaining how these animals use different materials and techniques to build their homes. Use facts and details from the text to support your explanation.

Student Directions

To write a great essay, remember to:

- Write an **introduction** that tells the reader what your essay is about.
- Use **body paragraphs** to explain the different materials and techniques each animal uses.
- Include **evidence** (facts and details) from the "Animal Architects" text.
- Use **linking words** to connect your ideas.
- Write a **conclusion** that wraps up your essay.
- Check your work for correct spelling, capitals, and punctuation.

Write your informational essay in the space below.

Handwriting practice area with 20 sets of three horizontal lines (top, middle, bottom) for letter formation.

Part 3: Scoring Exemplars (Scores 2 and 4)

Below are two examples of student writing based on the "Animal Architects" task. These exemplars show different levels of writing quality. Review these examples to understand how the CAASPP rubric is used to score informational essays.

Scoring Guide

These exemplars are scored on a **10-point holistic scale**:

- **Organization and Purpose** (4 points)
- **Evidence and Elaboration** (4 points)
- **Conventions** (2 points)

Exemplar 1: Score 2

This response is very brief. It lacks a clear introduction and conclusion. It has very little evidence from the text and many errors that make it hard to read.

Student Response: Score 2

animals build homes. bever use mud. birds use grass. it is for baby. termites build big mounds. they are strong like brick. i like animals.

Exemplar 2: Score 4

This response shows a basic attempt to organize ideas, but it is uneven. It includes some facts but does not explain them well. There are several errors in grammar and spelling.

Student Response: Score 4

Animals are good builders. They use stuff from nature to stay safe. Beavers build in the water. They use logs and mud to make a lodge. The mud gets hard so wolves cant get in. Weaver birds live in Africa. They tie knots in grass to make a nest. It hangs from a tree. Termites make mounds. They use spit and wood. The mounds have tunnels to stay cool. This is how animals build homes for there young.

Check Your Understanding

1. Look at the Score 4 exemplar. What is one specific detail the student included about beavers that was NOT in the Score 2 exemplar?

2. Which of the following is a convention error found in the Score 4 exemplar?

Circle the correct answer.

- A) Writing "there young" instead of "their young."
- B) Capitalizing the word "Beavers."
- C) Using the word "nature."
- D) Using the word "tunnels."

3. Why does the Score 2 exemplar receive a lower score for Evidence and Elaboration compared to the Score 4 exemplar?

Scoring Exemplars: Informational Writing

Student Reference

These exemplars show two different levels of writing based on the **Animal Architects** source text. Use these to see how to organize your ideas, use evidence, and check your grammar.

Score 8 Exemplar: Strong Grade-Level Response

Have you ever seen a house built by an animal? The text "Animal Architects" tells us that many animals are great builders. Beavers, weaver birds, and termites all use materials from nature to make safe homes for their families.

Beavers are very famous for building in the water. First, they use their sharp teeth to cut down trees.

They build a dam to make a pond. Then they build a lodge in the middle of the pond. They use sticks and thick mud for the walls. The mud dries and gets hard so wolves cannot get inside. This keeps the beavers safe and dry.

Weaver birds also build amazing homes. The male bird uses his beak to tie knots in grass. He weaves the grass into a round nest that hangs from a tree. The opening is at the bottom so snakes cannot get in. They also use soft feathers inside to keep the chicks warm.

Termites are tiny but they build giant mounds. They use soil, spit, and wood to make the mound strong like a brick. The mounds have tunnels that act like air vents to keep it cool. The queen lives deep inside where it is safe.

In conclusion, animals use many different materials like mud, grass, and spit to build. These structures help them stay safe from the weather and other animals.



Score 10 Exemplar: Superior Response

Imagine building a home without using any tools or trips to the hardware store. In the text "Animal Architects," we learn that animals are master builders that use natural materials to create complex structures. Beavers, weaver birds, and termites each use unique techniques to protect their young and survive in the wild.



Beavers are skilled at water construction. According to the text, they use their sharp teeth to fell trees for a dam. This dam creates a calm pond where they build a lodge. By using a combination of sticks and thick mud, beavers create walls that dry into a hard shell. This clever technique keeps the inside dry and protects the family from predators like hungry wolves.

Another impressive builder is the weaver bird. These birds are named for their ability to weave long pieces of grass together. The male bird actually ties knots with his beak to secure the nest to a tree branch. A unique feature of this nest is the small opening at the bottom, which serves as a security measure against snakes. Inside, the bird adds soft grass and feathers to ensure the chicks stay warm and comfortable.

Finally, termites show how teamwork can create giant structures. Even though they are tiny, a colony works together using soil, spit, and wood. This mixture creates a material as strong as a brick. To survive the hot sun, termites build special tunnels that act as air vents to circulate cool air. This keeps the queen termite safe deep inside the mound.

Whether it is a lodge, a nest, or a mound, animal architects use incredible materials and techniques. These natural structures are perfect for keeping animals safe, cool, and protected.

Analyze the Exemplars

1. Look at the Score 10 exemplar. How does the writer use specific evidence from the text to explain how termites stay cool?

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2. Compare the introductions of the Score 8 and Score 10 exemplars. What is one difference you notice in the vocabulary or sentence structure?

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Teacher Scoring Guide: Animal Architects Performance

Task

This guide provides the rationale for the scores assigned to the four student exemplars. Scores are based on the CAASPP 3–5 Informational Writing Rubric, which evaluates **Organization/Purpose (4 pts)**, **Evidence/Elaboration (4 pts)**, and **Conventions (2 pts)** for a total of 10 points.

Rationale for Exemplar 1 (Score 2)

Total Score: 2/10

- **Organization/Purpose (Score 1):** The response lacks an introduction and conclusion. There is no clear organizational structure; it is a list of simple sentences with little focus.
- **Evidence/Elaboration (Score 1):** The student provides minimal elaboration. While they mention mud and grass, there is no integration of specific details from the text (e.g., how the mud is used or why the grass is tied).
- **Conventions (Score 0):** There is little or no command of conventions. The student fails to capitalize proper nouns ("bever"), misspells words ("bever"), and uses inconsistent capitalization at the start of sentences.

Common Student Error: Students at this level often list facts they remember without connecting them to the prompt's requirement to explain *how* and *why* animals build.

Rationale for Exemplar 2 (Score 4)

Total Score: 4/10

- **Organization/Purpose (Score 2):** There is a basic attempt at organization with a simple introduction and conclusion. However, the progression of ideas is uneven and feels like a list of facts rather than a cohesive essay.
- **Evidence/Elaboration (Score 1):** Elaboration is cursory and simplistic. The student mentions "spit and wood" for termites but does not explain the purpose of the tunnels or the strength of the mound in detail.

- **Conventions (Score 1):** The response shows a partial command of conventions. There are errors in usage ("there" vs "their") and missing apostrophes ("cant"), but the meaning is generally clear.

Common Student Error: Students often provide the "what" (materials) but miss the "how" (techniques like tying knots or weaving) found in the source text.

Rationale for Exemplar 3 (Score 8)

Total Score: 8/10

- **Organization/Purpose (Score 3):** The response has an evident organizational structure and a sense of completeness. It includes an adequate introduction, body paragraphs grouped by animal, and a conclusion.
- **Evidence/Elaboration (Score 3):** The student provides adequate elaboration using source material. They include specific details like "sharp teeth," "opening at the bottom," and "air vents."
- **Conventions (Score 2):** The response demonstrates an adequate command of conventions. Sentence formation and spelling are largely correct, with only minor errors that do not interfere with meaning.

Rationale for Exemplar 4 (Score 10)

Total Score: 10/10

- **Organization/Purpose (Score 4):** The response is clearly focused and well-organized. The introduction is sophisticated, using a hook to engage the reader. Transitions between paragraphs are effective.
- **Evidence/Elaboration (Score 4):** The student provides thorough elaboration. They integrate specific evidence (e.g., "male bird actually ties knots," "material as strong as a brick") and use precise vocabulary from the text.
- **Conventions (Score 2):** The response demonstrates a strong command of conventions with varied sentence structures and near-perfect grammar, capitalization, and punctuation.

Answer Key for Student Activities

Scoring Exemplars: Scores 2 and 4

1. **Short Answer:** The Score 4 exemplar mentions that the mud on a beaver lodge gets hard so wolves cannot get in, and that beavers build in the water. The Score 2 exemplar only says "beaver use mud."
2. **Multiple Choice:** A) Writing "there young" instead of "their young." (Rationale: This is a homophone error, which is a common convention mistake at this grade level.)
3. **Short Answer:** The Score 2 exemplar is too brief and lacks specific details or explanations from the text. It only lists materials without explaining the techniques or purposes described in the source.

Scoring Exemplars: Scores 8 and 10

1. **Short Answer:** The writer explains that termites build special tunnels that act as air vents to circulate cool air, which keeps the queen safe and the mound from getting too hot.
2. **Short Answer:** The Score 10 introduction is more sophisticated; it uses a "hook" (imagining building without tools) and uses more precise vocabulary like "complex structures" and "unique techniques," whereas the Score 8 intro uses a simpler question and basic phrasing like "great builders."