READ the information in the box below.

In the movie *The Wizard of Oz*, Dorothy says, “There’s no place like home.”

THINK about a place that is special to you.

WRITE about your favorite place to spend time. Describe the place and explain what makes it special.

Be sure to —

- clearly state your central idea
- organize your writing
- develop your writing in detail
- choose your words carefully
- use correct spelling, capitalization, punctuation, grammar, and sentences
STAAR Grade 4 Expository

Score Point 1

The essay represents a very limited writing performance.

Organization/Progression

- The organizing structure of the essay is inappropriate to the purpose or the specific demands of the prompt. The writer uses organizational strategies that are only marginally suited to the explanatory task, or they are inappropriate or not evident at all. The absence of a functional organizational structure causes the essay to lack clarity and direction.

- Most ideas are generally related to the topic specified in the prompt, but the central idea is missing, unclear, or illogical. The writer may fail to maintain focus on the topic, may include extraneous information, or may shift abruptly from idea to idea, weakening the coherence of the essay.

- The writer's progression of ideas is weak. Repetition or wordiness sometimes causes serious disruptions in the flow of the essay. At other times the lack of transitions and sentence-to-sentence connections causes the writer to present ideas in a random or illogical way, making one or more parts of the essay unclear or difficult to follow.

Development of Ideas

- The development of ideas is weak. The essay is ineffective because the writer uses details and examples that are inappropriate, vague, or insufficient.

- The essay is insubstantial because the writer’s response to the prompt is vague or confused. In some cases, the essay as a whole is only weakly linked to the prompt. In other cases, the writer develops the essay in a manner that demonstrates a lack of understanding of the expository writing task.

Use of Language/Conventions

- The writer’s word choice may be vague or limited. It reflects little or no awareness of the expository purpose and does not establish a tone appropriate to the task. The word choice may impede the quality and clarity of the essay.

- Sentences are simplistic, awkward, or uncontrolled, significantly limiting the effectiveness of the essay.

- The writer has little or no command of sentence boundaries and age-appropriate spelling, capitalization, punctuation, grammar, and usage conventions. Serious and persistent errors create disruptions in the fluency of the writing and sometimes interfere with meaning.
What is a special place to you? Mine is Texas. There are things that make it special. There are places that make it special. How is it special for me? Texas is a place that is special. There are things that make Texas special for me. One thing that makes it special for me is my friends. Another thing that makes it special for me is my relatives that live in Texas. The school that I go to make it special for me. There are some things that make it special for me.

Texas is special to me. There are things that make it special to me. There are places that make it special to me. How is special to me. What is a special place to you?

Score Point 1
The writer of this response identifies Texas as the special place to spend time. Although the writer maintains an appropriate expository form, wordiness and repetition of the idea that Texas is special weaken the progression and cause serious disruptions in the flow of the essay. The writer presents three reasons why Texas is special, but these reasons are simply listed and left undeveloped. In addition, the writer demonstrates a limited word choice. Overall, repetition and weak development cause the writing performance to be very limited.
Do you have a special place? I do have one special place and let me tell you it’s the most exciting place you have ever heard about.

It was a Saturday morning we are going to San Antonio and my aunt was coming with us to San Antonio. Then when she got to our house we left and we got there at 10:30 A.M. and we got to go to splash town. It was the thrilling days of my life and there was so many rides to get on.

Then me and my aunt went to a tunnel and we got on it and it was going very fast and we where screaming like crazies. Then we got off and went with my sister on a ride and it was very fun because fell off a tube.

When we finished that we gather up the family and wished to get on the rides. That was my special place to go on the weekend or any day and it is very fun to do all year long to go to Splash town.

Score Point 1
The writer of this response identifies Splashtown as the special place to spend time. However, instead of explaining why this place is special, the writer develops most of the response with a narrative about one Saturday when the family went to the water park. Since most of the writing is not in an expository form, the development is inappropriate to the specific demands of the prompt. Although the writer attempts to explain why the rides are fun, the details included are ineffective because they are vague and insufficient. Confusion about the writing task results in a very limited writing performance.
My favorite place is not a cool or dimsome place it's a fun place where my family goes to every summer. At my uncle barn it's a fun place and my favorite place.

At my uncle barn he has six cows one of them is a calf that's black. Don't ever wait red at my uncle barn or he bull will get you.

I just love going to my uncle barn I just wish I could cam to uncle barn every day.

One time one of the cows got out of the gate. My mom and dad come her down.

What I learned is one favorite place is where you friends and family is.
My home is very special to me because it is where I live. I can do cool stuff. I can also play games and have fun with my brother. I can also play in the backyard.

My home means a lot to me. I can ride my bike, take naps, sing or dance and more cool stuff. Sometimes it is quiet but sometimes it isn’t very nice and peaceful. But I still like my home.

I Love my home very much!

It is Awesome!

Score Point 1
In this response the writer identifies her home as her special place. Although most ideas are generally related to the topic, the reasons she gives for liking home (doing cool stuff, playing games, having fun with her brother, riding her bike, taking naps, singing, dancing) are presented as a random list, with abrupt shifts from reason to reason. The lack of coherence and insufficient development result in a very limited writing performance.
Score Point 2

The essay represents a basic writing performance.

Organization/Progression

- The organizing structure of the essay is evident but may not always be appropriate to the purpose or the specific demands of the prompt. The essay is not always clear because the writer uses organizational strategies that are only somewhat suited to the expository task.

- Most ideas are generally related to the topic specified in the prompt, but the writer’s central idea is weak or somewhat unclear. The lack of an effective central idea or the writer’s inclusion of irrelevant information interferes with the focus and coherence of the essay.

- The writer’s progression of ideas is not always logical and controlled. Sometimes repetition or wordiness causes minor disruptions in the flow of the essay. At other times transitions and sentence-to-sentence connections are too perfunctory or weak to support the flow of the essay or show the relationships among ideas.

Development of Ideas

- The development of ideas is minimal. The essay is superficial because the writer uses details and examples that are not always appropriate or are too briefly or partially presented.

- The essay reflects little or no thoughtfulness. The writer’s response to the prompt is sometimes formulaic. The writer develops the essay in a manner that demonstrates only a limited understanding of the expository writing task.

Use of Language/Conventions

- The writer’s word choice may be general or imprecise. It reflects a basic awareness of the expository purpose but does little to establish a tone appropriate to the task. The word choice may not contribute to the quality and clarity of the essay.

- Sentences are awkward or only somewhat controlled, weakening the effectiveness of the essay.

- The writer demonstrates a partial command of sentence boundaries and age-appropriate spelling, capitalization, punctuation, grammar, and usage conventions. Some distracting errors may be evident, at times creating minor disruptions in the fluency or meaning of the writing.
My special place is Disney World. It has comfy beds and a TV for entertainment inside. At night it has fireworks that light up the night sky, but that's just the beginning. There are rides that go fast, slow, and that get you wet. The food is the best part because it makes your stomach feel like it ate a rainbow. It has five great places to play and two places to put your swim stuff on and swim. The reason I like it is because I get to spend time with my mom, dad, and little sister. Disney World is a great place to go do things with your family. I hope when you go you will feel the same way and that is why my special place has to be Disney World.

Score Point 2
In this basic writing performance, the writer selects Disney World as the special place to spend time. Although the writer maintains an appropriate expository form, the progression of ideas is not always controlled due to the lack of transitions from one theme park feature to the next (comfy beds, fireworks, rides, food, time spent with family). In addition, the development is superficial because the details are too briefly and partially presented. Overall, these weaknesses reflect the writer's limited understanding of the expository writing task.
“There’s no place like home,” said Dorothy in The Wizard of Oz. Dorothy’s special place is her home. Everyone has a special place. Mine, for example, is the Spy Museum.

The Spy Museum is a small building in Washington, D.C. If you were to walk past it, you might not notice it is a place to learn about spies of all kinds.

In the Spy Museum, you might find facts about spies from different countries and what they might have used to help them on their missions. You might also find movie props from movies about spies.

After writing this report about the Spy Museum, I asked myself why the Spy Museum is special to me. The reason is that I always admired spies when I was little.

Score Point 2
The writer selects the Spy Museum in Washington, D.C., as the special place to spend time. Although the writer establishes an appropriate informative tone and logically organizes his ideas, some of the ideas are irrelevant to the explanation. For example, the description of the museum in paragraph two familiarizes the reader with the appearance of the museum but does not help to explain why the museum is the writer’s special place. Other ideas are more directly related to the appeal of the museum but are too briefly and partially developed. The writer’s word choice and control of conventions are adequate, but the development is minimal, resulting in a basic writing performance.
MY favorite Place to Spend time is school. I like school because you learn and you get to see your friends. My favorite subject in school is science. In science we are learning about African Dwarf frogs. Did you know that the frogs have to stay in the water or else they will not survive? I also like social studies. We are learning about the Texas cattle drives. Before we got the frogs I absolutely didn’t know anything about them except that they hop and have long tongues. Now I know a bunch of stuff about frogs. Frogs lay their eggs in a bunch. I think frogs are cool. I think school is cool and fun too! I think some teachers get to school at about 6:30 A.M. Just to get the day ready for the students. Do you know what I can’t believe is that I don’t think my sister likes school. I love school!

Score Point 2
In this basic writing performance, the writer identifies school as her favorite place to spend time. Although the writer maintains an appropriate expository form, the progression of ideas is not always logical. The writer attempts to develop the response by focusing on lessons learned in school, but the abrupt shifts from African dwarf frogs to social studies lessons and then back to frogs weaken the organization and flow of the essay. The inclusion of irrelevant information toward the conclusion (teachers get to school at about 6:30 A.M.; I don’t think my sister likes school) also interferes with the focus and coherence of the essay. Overall, the writer demonstrates only a limited understanding of the expository writing task.
A place that is special to me and that I like to spend time is my kitchen. I love my kitchen because of a lot of things. I love it because I love to make desserts, and I get to spend time with my awesome mom.

The first reason I love to spend time in my kitchen is I love to make desserts. I like to make desserts better than lunch and dinner food because lunch and dinner food is boring. Recipe Book — put the chicken in the pan, pour sause over and heat on high at 350° for 45 min. But on desserts you get to go crazy!! When I make OREO milk snakes I go crazy with the OREO’s. I put like 15 in. So then’s an example of how you can go crazy!!

The last reason I love my kitchen is because I get to spend time with my mom. And all kids need to spend time with their parents. So this is just another way I get to spend time with my mom.

I love spending time in my kitchen.

Score Point 2
The writer selects her kitchen as the special place to spend time. The writer attempts to develop the essay with two reasons explaining why the kitchen is special, but her approach is somewhat formulaic due to paragraph preview statements in the introduction and perfunctory transitions at the beginning of each body paragraph. The first reason is developed more than the second, but the essay remains superficial due to wordiness and repetition about “going crazy” and “spending time with Mom.” The flow of the essay is disrupted because the progression of ideas—especially from paragraph to paragraph—is not always controlled. The weak progression and minimal development result in a basic writing performance.
Score Point 3

The essay represents a satisfactory writing performance.

Organization/Progression

- The organizing structure of the essay is, for the most part, appropriate to the purpose and responsive to the specific demands of the prompt. The essay is clear because the writer uses organizational strategies that are adequately suited to the expository task.

- The writer establishes a clear central idea. Most ideas are related to the central idea and are focused on the topic specified in the prompt. The essay is coherent, though it may not always be unified due to minor lapses in focus.

- The writer’s progression of ideas is generally logical and controlled. For the most part, transitions are meaningful, and sentence-to-sentence connections are sufficient to support the flow of the essay and show the relationships among ideas.

Development of Ideas

- The development of ideas is sufficient because the writer uses details and examples that are specific and appropriate, adding some substance to the essay.

- The essay reflects some thoughtfulness. The writer’s response to the prompt is original rather than formulaic. The writer develops the essay in a manner that demonstrates a good understanding of the expository writing task.

Use of Language/Conventions

- The writer’s word choice is, for the most part, clear and specific. It reflects an awareness of the expository purpose and establishes a tone appropriate to the task. The word choice usually contributes to the quality and clarity of the essay.

- Sentences are varied and adequately controlled, for the most part contributing to the effectiveness of the essay.

- The writer demonstrates an adequate command of sentence boundaries and age-appropriate spelling, capitalization, punctuation, grammar, and usage conventions. Although some errors may be evident, they create few (if any) disruptions in the fluency of the writing, and they do not affect the clarity of the essay.
My favorite place to be is the beach. The first thing I need to say is the beach is so relaxing if you just lay with your body tanges the sun you will feel like your in paradise. Then doze off and you will hear the crasing of the waves and the laughing of everyone having fun and with your toes covered in sand. Thats the first thing I would ever want to do. Why the beach is the funniest. There we can boogie board. Its especially fun when there are big waves! You can camp, but remember you have to have a life jacket on! We can swim, play games, and fish are rods out. And you might find fish or crabs and jellyfish but maybe just maybe a dolphin. In the night we go on crab hunts too. We light up Lanterns and head out we find big, medium, and small seashells. We catch crabs and jump on sand dunes. Sometimes if we wake up early enough we will catch the sunrise in the blue sky but what I like the most is the paradise place... the beach.

Score Point 3
In this satisfactory writing performance, the writer selects the beach as his favorite place to spend time. In supporting the central idea, the writer first sets the scene by describing the relaxation one feels when lying on the sand and then focuses on the numerous activities he enjoys at the beach. Although the imprecise use of “funniest” instead of “funnest” creates an awkward transition, the flow of ideas is generally logical and controlled as the writer explains how his family has fun in and out of the water. Minor spelling errors are evident, but the specific details about different aspects of his family’s trips to the beach add some substance to the essay and reflect a good understanding of the expository writing task.
My favorite place is the stables because there are tons and tons of horses! Every Saturday, I go to have horse riding lessons. Normally when I arrive to have a lesson, I am always filled with joy and unlimited boisterousness. I still clearly remember the first time I sat upon the back of a horse. As soon as I was seated on the saddle, becoming one with the horse, I knew this was the place for me. Even knowing there were some wide turns in my life, I still wanted to go no matter what. At the stables there is a horse named Wilson, who is really nice, a horse named Cancun who is HUGE! And a pony named Snickers that gets into trouble, and many others with wonderful personalities. The stable also has 3 arenas, 4 barns and one cleaning barn! Now you know why I love this place so much, and nothing could replace it, ever. I always wonder, “What would it be like if I lived here?” If I did, I would place a fuzzy rug in the stable that says, “Home sweet home.”

Score Point 3
The writer of this satisfactory essay selects the horse stables as her favorite place to spend time. To support the central idea, the writer introduces a personal anecdote about her first time riding a horse and then describes the different buildings and horses at the stables. These details add some substance to the essay by communicating why the stables are special. The writer’s clear, specific word choice and enthusiastic, informative tone contribute to the thoughtfulness of the essay.
I'm going to tell you about my favorite place to spend time at. My favorite is my grandma's house. When you are there you are greeted with a warm hug and offered something. My grandma's house has a big yard with animals. She has goats, dogs, cats, and insects. When you are outside you have so many things to do like jump on a trampoline or ride bikes, swing on swings, and even go hiking. My grandma doesn't have any game systems so we are usually outside. Sometimes outside we look for bugs like spiders, scorpions, worms, ants, and lots more. We barbque outside and make a bonfire. Sometimes we go climb the mountain. We have a lot of people with us when we climb. We collect things like arrow heads, rocks, and maybe fossils. After a long day at my grandma's we go and eat and enjoy talking. That's not the end. When it's night it is the best part because we catch cool bugs that are called fireflies. That is why my grandma's house is my favorite place to spend time at.

Score Point 3
In this satisfactory writing performance, the writer selects Grandma’s house as his favorite place to spend time. The writer focuses on the traditional outdoor activities available at Grandma’s house to explain why being there is so fun and special. The writer's details and examples add some substance to the essay, although some ideas (hunting for bugs, hiking up the mountain) are more developed than others (barbecuing, making a bonfire). Although the writer uses a single paragraph to develop his ideas, the sentence-to-sentence connections are sufficient to support the flow of the essay and show the relationships among ideas. The writer's specific word choice reflects an awareness of the expository purpose and contributes to the quality and clarity of the essay.
Do you know a place you like to spend time at? Well I do! It's the library. Let me tell you all about it.

I like to spend time at the library because I love to read. The library has lots of shelves with a lot of books in them. There is nonfiction, fiction, poetry, fairytales, science, and biography books in the library. The second best place to learn something is in the library because the books have different facts and adventures to tell you about.

The library is a quiet place. It is so quiet that you can hear a pen drop. Clink! The library is special to me because it helps me learn what teachers don't teach me. I can also go to the library when I have nothing to do. That way I never get bored.

Some libraries are a house full of books but others have movies in them too! You can have libraries in your school. A library is not just a place where you can check a book out and read it and then check it back in. It is a place where you can enjoy and always go to.

Score Point 3
In this satisfactory writing performance, the writer selects the library as her favorite place to spend time. The writer presents a clear central idea and maintains an appropriate expository form. The progression of ideas is generally logical and controlled as the writer focuses on a few reasons that explain why the library is special: it gives her access to different types of books, a quiet place to spend time, a place to learn on her own, and something to do so that she’s not bored. These ideas add some insight and substance to the response, even though they are not uniformly developed. Although the introduction is formulaic, the writer’s overall response to the prompt is original. In addition, word choice is clear and specific, sentences are varied and adequately controlled, and conventions are good.
Score Point 4

The essay represents an accomplished writing performance.

Organization/Progression

- The organizing structure of the essay is clearly appropriate to the purpose and responsive to the specific demands of the prompt. The essay is skillfully crafted because the writer uses organizational strategies that are particularly well suited to the expository task.

- The writer establishes a clear central idea. All ideas are strongly related to the central idea and are focused on the topic specified in the prompt. By sustaining this focus, the writer is able to create an essay that is unified and coherent.

- The writer’s progression of ideas is logical and well controlled. Meaningful transitions and strong sentence-to-sentence connections enhance the flow of the essay by clearly showing the relationships among ideas, making the writer’s train of thought easy to follow.

Development of Ideas

- The development of ideas is effective because the writer uses details and examples that are specific and well chosen, adding substance to the essay.

- The essay is thoughtful and engaging. The writer may choose to use his/her unique experiences or view of the world as a basis for writing or to connect ideas in interesting ways. The writer develops the essay in a manner that demonstrates a thorough understanding of the expository writing task.

Use of Language/Conventions

- The writer’s word choice is purposeful and precise. It reflects a keen awareness of the expository purpose and maintains a tone appropriate to the task. The word choice strongly contributes to the quality and clarity of the essay.

- Sentences are purposeful, varied, and well controlled, enhancing the effectiveness of the essay.

- The writer demonstrates a consistent command of sentence boundaries and age-appropriate spelling, capitalization, punctuation, grammar, and usage conventions. Although minor errors may be evident, they do not detract from the fluency of the writing or the clarity of the essay. The overall strength of the conventions contributes to the effectiveness of the essay.
“Wow! I am going to get a tree house!”

Thanks dad for getting such a huge present for my birthday. A few weeks later my own tree house was ready.

Before it was ready I imagined it peaceful, relaxing, and also full of adventures. When I got out of school I went straight to the tree house to do my homework. For the first time I didn’t struggle or feel annoyed by my little brother.

The tree house was brown with ladders stuck to the trunk. It also had pictures that I drew for it to look homely. There were pillows, two chairs, and one tiny table. It was crowded with supplies. Another thing that it had was some plants that my grandpa gave me to decorate the tree house. “This place is amazing,” I thought to myself. From the point of view of the tree house I could see grass, buildings, the park and other places.

When I am bored I go to the tree house to draw pictures or just read a good book. I can also hear music, do homework, or just sit there to think about things. When my brother wants to climb I see him like an ant from all the way to the top of the tree. Sometimes I just feel so happy that I think my heart is going to pop out with excitement and joy. “This is a really special place for me,” I thought.

I never thought that a simple tree house would mean so much to me. Spending time at the tree house means an amazing special time to me.

Score Point 4

In this accomplished writing performance, the writer identifies his tree house as his most special place. The writer uses an anecdotal introduction to explain his anticipation about having a place all his own to spend time. The progression of ideas is logical and controlled as the writer identifies the personal touches he has used to decorate the tree house and explains how he spends his time up there. The moments when the writer reveals his inner thoughts and describes his joyful emotional state while in the tree house add insight and substance to the response. The writer’s ability to use his unique experience as the basis for writing makes the essay engaging.
I have a lot of fun at a lot of places, but my favorite is The Magic Time Machine. I always have a blast there. There is a man that can draw the best cartoon people. They look amazing and I’m not just saying that because I have two of his pictures. Upstairs there is an arcade filled with all sorts of games like Pac-man and air hockey. There is also a jail that you can write your name on the wall, just don’t sit down because the seats are not soft or comfortable. The fun isn’t over yet. Did you know that your waitstaff is dressed like characters from games and movies? Some like Ivy and Batman, Mario and Luigi, Cinderella and the Tooth Fairy, and Indiana Jones and Jack Sparrow. The best part is that there are more people and you can get autographs from them. The place is also decorated in so many places I doubt the manager knows all of them! There is a Crayola Crayon Box, Tiki hut, Winter wonderland, Presidents room, and an Old ship. A few times a week there is a Magic show that is put on upstairs. The food is amazing, but the potion drink bubbles and fizzies and smokes like crazy! Kids can have it because it’s sprite and juice. I recommend going there next time when it’s dinner out. There will be so much fun and excitement. It is a fun filled blast for everyone to enjoy!
Do you have a special place that you like to spend time at? Well I sure do. It's my best friend Olivia's house. There’s tons of things to do.

If we are bored, we usually talk about things like school, stories we hear on the news, and stuff like that. One of the best places to do that is in Olivia’s room. We usually sit on her bed, lean back on her comfy pillows, and start up a conversation. That is, we do that if we’re tired or don’t have a lot of energy.

If we do have energy, the Frampoline is the place to go. Quick as a flash, we’re out the door and into the back yard. If Olivia’s mom lets us, we get the hose and have a water fight. After a while, we are soaking wet and laughing out our hearts out. Another one of our favorite things to do is shoot hoops in the front yard. Olivia plays on a basketball team, so she teaches me tips and tricks on how to be a basketball star. All that hard work definitely has paid off. Now, I’m almost as good as her!

As you can see, and I always have something to do at her house. We have so much fun together! That is why I love to spend time at her awesome house.

Score Point 4
The writer establishes the clear central idea that her best friend Olivia’s house is the special place to spend time. The writer effectively develops the response by explaining why being at Olivia’s house is so much fun, with paragraph two focused on their wide-ranging conversations in Olivia’s room and paragraph three focused on their friendly, high-spirited activities outside. The writer uses contrasting phrases (“if we’re tired or don’t have a lot of energy”; “If we do have energy”) to seamlessly transition from the first setting to the second, making the writer’s train of thought easy to follow. Well-chosen, specific details about the various ways in which the writer and Olivia enjoy themselves at the house clearly convey why it is the writer’s favorite place. In addition, purposeful word choice, well-controlled sentences, and strong conventions further contribute to the effectiveness of the explanation. This essay represents an accomplished writing performance.
What's my favorite place you ask? That's easy! The dock at my Grandma and Grandpa's house. You can fish, think, or grab a chair and your family and watch the sunset. To most people, it's just a plain old dock. To me, it's the opposite.

Although you may get splinters just sitting down and dangling your feet in the water, to me, it is like paradise. The moment the water touches your toes, you'll never want to leave. To the point where the rainbow-like sunset comes into sight, it's like an alarm clock. Fish start swimming and more fish come appearing directly above the water. I feel so blessed that I can experience such a delightful sight!

An activity I very much enjoy doing at the dock is net fishing. After you catch the fish in the net, you put them in a bucket of sea water and watch them swim around. Their sparkly silver scales shine in the sunlight which makes it even more interesting to watch.

The best time of the year to be on the dock is the 4th of July. The bright-colored fireworks have a mirror affect on the water. It looks like flashes of color dancing in all directions, taking all the dull colors somewhere else. As the loud claps of more fireworks are in action, no fish are in sight. Just the colors, sounds, and peacefulness is all you think about. It is truly wonderful.

The worst part is having to leave. It's like the water knows you're leaving, and all of a sudden, fish start jumping and seagulls glide over the water as a goodbye show. That's what puts a smile on my face.

The best part is that you know you can come back tomorrow!

Score Point 4
In this accomplished essay, the writer identifies the dock at his grandparents’ house as his favorite place to spend time. The essay is skillfully crafted; the writer thoroughly explains the dock’s appeal by using sophisticated descriptions of the sights and his own reactions to these sights. The writer’s perceptive insights into why the fish and fireworks are so interesting and wonderful add further substance to the essay. The precise word choice and engaging, informative tone convey the writer’s keen awareness of the expository writing task. In addition, purposeful, well-controlled sentences and strong conventions enhance the effectiveness of the essay.