From Vague to Useful

Use precise details and evidence to strengthen a proposal.

11.W.3.A "Revise writing for clarity of content, accuracy, and depth of information."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline details that make a claim clear or measurable, and circle words or phrases that are too general to guide action. Use your marks to notice how precise information adds accuracy and depth.

Cooling a City Block

1 On a July afternoon, a city block can feel much hotter than a nearby park. Dark roofs and pavement absorb sunlight, then release heat slowly after sunset. This pattern is called the urban heat island effect. It can raise nighttime temperatures, which matters because warm nights give bodies less time to cool. Trees can help. Their leaves shade sidewalks, and water released from leaves cools the surrounding air. For residents without air conditioning, that difference can affect sleep and health, especially older adults during heat waves.

2 City planners often plant trees, but the work is not simple. A young tree needs regular watering while its roots become established, and its survival depends on species, soil, and maintenance. In some neighborhoods, streets have little open soil for roots, while utility lines limit where tall trees can grow. A plan that merely promises more trees leaves important questions unanswered. It should identify locations, species, watering responsibility, and measures of success, such as canopy cover or lower surface temperatures measured on hot afternoons each summer.

3 One approach is to begin with a pilot project on several blocks with scarce shade. Before planting, crews could map pavement, existing trees, bus stops, and available planting spaces. They could then select species suited to the local climate and the space beneath power lines. Over several summers, the city could compare tree survival, canopy growth, and surface temperatures at planted and unplanted sites. This evidence would show whether the project should expand and what changes would make it more effective in other neighborhoods later.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. In paragraph 2, which phrase states an unclear goal? List the four details the paragraph says a plan should identify to make that goal clearer.

2. What two details in paragraph 1 explain how trees can cool a city block?

3. What three types of evidence would the city compare in paragraph 3 to evaluate the pilot project?

4. Rewrite the final sentence of paragraph 3 as one clear sentence that names at least two measures the city would use to guide its decision.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Revise this vague proposal into one 90 to 120 word paragraph: "A town should make its riverfront better because it is not very nice and people need places to go. The project will help everyone." Include at least three specific details and one measurable way to evaluate the project. Avoid unsupported claims.

ANSWER KEY

From Vague to Useful

GRADE 11 · 11.W.3.A

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline details that make a claim clear or measurable, and circle words or phrases that are too general to guide action. Use your marks to notice how precise information adds accuracy and depth. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	In paragraph 2, which phrase states an unclear goal? List the four details the paragraph says a plan should identify to make that goal clearer.	**The unclear phrase is "more trees." The plan should identify locations, species, watering responsibility, and measures of success.**
2	What two details in paragraph 1 explain how trees can cool a city block?	**Leaves shade sidewalks, and water released from leaves cools the surrounding air.**
3	What three types of evidence would the city compare in paragraph 3 to evaluate the pilot project?	**The city would compare tree survival, canopy growth, and surface temperatures at planted and unplanted sites.**
4	Rewrite the final sentence of paragraph 3 as one clear sentence that names at least two measures the city would use to guide its decision.	**The city would use differences in tree survival, canopy growth, and surface temperatures at planted and unplanted sites to decide whether to expand or improve the project.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The town should convert the unused gravel lot beside the library into a riverfront gathering space with six shaded benches, a paved walking path, and native grasses that can tolerate seasonal flooding. Before construction, planners should ask nearby residents, library visitors, and wheelchair users about needed features, then publish the results. To judge whether the project serves the public, staff could count visitors at three times each day, record maintenance costs for one year, and compare survey responses before and after the space opens. These details would let the council revise the design using evidence rather than a general promise that the riverfront will improve.

Accept equivalent wording when students identify the passage details accurately. For the open response, accept varied proposals that meet the word range, replace vague claims with concrete information, and include a measurable evaluation method.