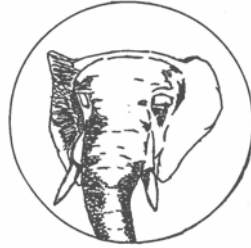


Grammatix, Inc.



presents

how to attack

SAT Essay Writing

like a natural test-taker

This Question-Type Guide will take all the mystery out of writing a top-scoring essay for the SAT. You'll learn what the SAT graders really look for (instead of what they claim to look for), and you'll see a "perfect" SAT essay put together right in front of you.

General Overview of the SAT Essay

The essay on the SAT is supposed to evaluate your ability to produce “good writing.” The College Board’s intention here is commendable, but the essay test it has come up with is an awful tool for measuring writing ability. In other words, while a good writer should score well on this writing exercise, it’s very possible to score well without being a good writer at all.

All you have to do is imitate (almost copy) the high-scoring sample essays from the College Board publication *The Official SAT Study Guide For the New SAT*. In the coming pages, you’ll see exactly what sets apart a high-scoring essay, and exactly how to construct one of your very own.



While you should do your best to imitate high-scoring sample essays and copy their techniques, you should NEVER plagiarize ANYTHING, ever. We’re not suggesting that you recycle any passage from anyone else’s work as your own. For one thing, since SAT essay topics aren’t repeated, it’s unlikely that an exact passage from a high-scoring sample essay will help you much; more importantly, though, passing off another person’s work as your own is one of the most reprehensible things anyone can do. So don’t do it.

The Rules for the SAT Essay

Believe it or not, even essay tests have rules. You have to learn them if you want to do well. But be careful! The SAT Scoring Guide that appears on page 105 of the College Board Publication *The Official SAT Study Guide For the New SAT* isn't very useful if you're trying to figure out exactly what to do on the test.

It might sound strange to say this, but most of the College Board's advice on how to write the SAT essay is very, very bad. Instead of following the rules that the College Board states explicitly, we'll do something much smarter—we'll figure out the rules that are implicitly revealed in the high- and low-scoring sample responses provided by the College Board in *The Official SAT Study Guide For the New SAT*. Here they are.



Remember that these are the rules revealed by actual high- and low-scoring sample essays released by the College Board. As such, they may be very different from the stated rules that you'll find on page 105, and elsewhere, in *The Official SAT Study Guide For the New SAT*.

SAT Essay Rule 1: Open-Ended Prompts

The prompts that appear on the SAT Writing Test are all open-ended and fairly vague about what they want you to write. This gives you a wide degree of latitude in deciding what to write, which can be a good thing if you don't let it overwhelm you.

SAT Essay Rule 2: Talk About Whatever You Want

When you plan your answer, you don't have to worry about being politically correct or trying not to offend your reader. Don't believe me? Take a look at page 197 of the College Board publication *The Official SAT Study Guide For The New SAT*. You'll see a top-scoring essay that talks favorably about how the Confederate Army was "defending its way of life" during the Civil War.

Now, nobody is suggesting that you go out of your way to discuss something controversial or offensive. All we're trying to point out is that there's no need to be worried that you might say the wrong thing. As the essay on page 197 demonstrates, the graders are interested in how well you develop an argument that relates to the prompt—they don't really care what the argument actually is.

SAT Essay Rule 3: Make Up Any Proof You Want

When you're looking for examples to support your argument, the SAT allows you to draw from anything at all. Some of the high-scoring essay writers choose to draw examples from history and literature, but some of them draw examples from their own lives. In fact, the high-scoring essay on page 200 of *The Official SAT Study Guide for the New SAT* uses two personal examples that are almost certainly made up.

SAT Essay Rule 4: Some Imperfect Grammar Is Okay

The high-scoring essays that appear in *The Official SAT Study Guide For The New SAT* are full of mistakes that would qualify as errors for the [Identifying Sentence Errors](#) portion of the Writing Section. For example, the high-scoring essay on page 120 of the College Board's book improperly shifts from the present tense to the past tense, uses the word *alright*, and starts a sentence with the conjunction *however*. So you can get away with a few grammatical mistakes and still score a perfect 6.

SAT Essay Rule 5: The Longer, The Better

All the high-scoring sample essays included in *The Official SAT Study Guide For The New SAT* are fairly long and well-developed, while the low-scoring sample essays are much shorter. But be careful—an essay's score seems to correlate with its length, but that doesn't mean that writing garbage just to fill up space is a good idea. What it means is that if you've written a short essay, your chances of scoring high seem to be just about zero.

SAT Essay Rule 6: Vocabulary Isn't That Important

On page 105 of *The Official SAT Study Guide For The New SAT*, the College Board says it looks for a "varied, accurate, and apt vocabulary" in high-scoring essays. But the essays that receive the highest possible scores demonstrate very little in the way of vocabulary skills. The biggest word in the sample high-scoring essay on page 120 is *dumbfounded*, and, as already mentioned, that essay also uses the word *alright*. The other high-scoring essays have similarly unimpressive vocabularies.

SAT Essay Rule 7: No Set Format

The high-scoring essays in *The Official SAT Study Guide For The New SAT* use a variety of formats. Some seem to use variations on the standard five-paragraph essay; all of them use an opening paragraph and a closing paragraph, both of varying lengths.

SAT Essay Rule 8: Details, Details

The high-scoring essays in *The Official SAT Study Guide For The New SAT* all use detailed examples to support their claims.

SAT Essay Writing Process

This process is an effective way to organize your thoughts and write a response that closely imitates known high-scoring essays. Feel free to use it or adapt it to fit the situation—but make sure any adaptations you make are still in line with the [rules for the SAT essay](#) in this Guide.

1. Watch the clock from the beginning.

You only have 25 minutes to plan and write an essay. If you kill just 5 minutes day-dreaming or panicking, you've wasted twenty percent of your time! Do NOT let time get away from you here. This is crucial.

2. Develop a one-word response to the question.

Before you can write this essay, you have to know what you're going to be saying. It sounds simplistic, but you need to focus yourself before you can make effective, efficient use of your time.

This one-word answer will often simply be “yes,” “no,” or “maybe,” but it could just as easily be anything else. Remember that there is no correct answer to an essay question—you can't get this step wrong. The point is simply to focus your mind on the point you're trying to make in your essay.

3. Make up three personal experiences that illustrate your position.

Remember that the SAT scorers don't care whether the examples that illustrate your position are real or not. All they care about is whether you can put together ANY example at all that would support your point.

Since you're going to be making up these examples out of thin air, make sure the relationship between the examples and the answer you've chosen to the prompt is CLEAR and DIRECT. Don't invent an example that's only vaguely related to your answer. This is a blank check—come up with something really good. It will make your score higher, and make the rest of your writing easier.

Also, make sure your examples take the form of a story that happened to you. This will make them easier to relate to your reader.

4. Begin your essay with a one-sentence statement of your answer to the prompt.

The SAT scorers aren't big on subtlety. Start your essay with a flat statement of the point you intend to prove. (For examples of top-scoring essays that did this, see pages 123 and 200 of *The Official SAT Study Guide For The New SAT*.) Refer to your one-word answer in Step 2 if you've forgotten what you were trying to say.

5. Write a “Though” sentence to modify your opening sentence.

The second sentence in your essay should start out by contradicting your first sentence with the word *though*, and then finish the sentence with a comma and a re-affirmation of the idea in the first sentence. That might sound a little complicated, so let's try an example. If the first sentence is

The police are a positive and protective force in American society.

then the second sentence is

Though some may criticize the police forces in major cities for being too quick to resort to violence, without the police there would be violence everywhere.

See how that works? The first sentence says *X*. Then the second sentence starts with the word *though* and introduces an idea that contradicts *X*; the second sentence finishes with a comma and then an idea that restates *X*. (The reason for using the word *though* in this way is that it guarantees you'll have a sentence with an interesting structure, something common to all high-scoring essays.)

6. Finish the first paragraph with a sentence that gives a strong introduction to your examples

Make the last sentence in the first paragraph a simple transitional sentence that introduces the two examples you thought of in Step 3. To finish the imaginary first paragraph that we started in Step 6, we might write a sentence like

Three episodes from my personal experience serve as compelling examples of this fact.

See? Nothing too fancy. At this point, you're finished with the first paragraph—the groundwork has been done, and the hardest part of the essay is behind you!

7. Begin the second paragraph with a general statement that introduces your first example.

This first sentence of the second paragraph serves to introduce your first example. Make it something general. See the sample essay on page 200 of the College Board Publication *The Official SAT Study Guide For The New SAT* for an example—there the first sentence of the second paragraph is *Sometimes deception occurs in the form of white lies*, and then the rest of the first paragraph is a (probably made-up) example from the author's life in which deception took the form of a white lie.

8. In 3-5 sentences, tell the story that goes with your first example.

In the middle of the second paragraph you'll insert the story that goes with your first example. Don't draw any lessons or anything at this point—just set the stage and explain what happened. Take your time here—remember that you can't score high if you don't put some detail in your examples.

9. In this first story, say that someone or something was like something else.

This is your chance to use a simile, which is a figure of speech in which you compare two things using the word *like*. For an example, see page 200 of *The Official SAT Study Guide For The New SAT*, where the writer says a dress was a like a bunch of cabbages.

Why do you do this? Because it makes the scorer think you have a good command of the English language.

10. Use a sentence or two to relate the story to the first sentence in the essay.

Now that you've told the story you made up, you need to re-connect it to the first sentence you wrote so you can close out this paragraph and move on. So write one or two sentences in which you point out the lesson you learned from the story—and make sure it really relates to the first sentence in your essay!

11. Repeat steps 7, 8, and 10 for the third paragraph with your second example.

The first example is out of the way. Now you'll just go through the second example in the same way, and that will provide your third paragraph. Notice that we leave out the simile from Step 9 in the second example—this saves time and keeps the essay from looking too formulaic to the reader.

12. Repeat steps 7, 8, and 10 for the fourth paragraph with your third example.

Remember, we're just cranking out paragraphs that illustrate our main point. Don't forget to add the details and relate everything back to the main point at the end.

13. Begin the final paragraph with a sentence that relates all of your examples back to the first sentence in your essay.

At this point you're starting to close the essay, so you want to wrap everything up. The first sentence of your last paragraph is going to put your three examples back into the context of the main point you're trying to make.

14. Finish the essay with a sentence that rephrases the first sentence in the essay.

The last thing that remains is to cap off your essay with a sentence that re-establishes the main point of your essay. Of course, you don't want to use the exact same wording that you used in Step 4, but you do want to make roughly the same point with this sentence that you made in Step 4.

SAT Essay Writing Process Conclusion

Believe it or not, this simple 14-step process will help you crank out winning essays with just a little bit of practice. You'll notice that it doesn't give you much room to be creative, but creativity isn't the point—all we want is a reliable, predictable way to get a top score every time.

You've probably also noticed that this formula is very repetitive—it restates the main point of the essay at least four times. Don't let that bother you. The readers go through your essays so quickly that they won't even notice you banging them over the head with the same point. And besides, as the sample essays in the College Board

publication *The Official SAT Study Guide For The New SAT* demonstrate, this is the way the SAT wants you to write its essays anyway.

Using The SAT Essay Writing Process

To prove that the SAT Essay Writing Process works, we'll show it to you in action against the essay question from the first sample test in the College Board publication *The Official SAT Study Guide For The New SAT*, which appears on page 389. We'll also use the College Board's own online essay-scoring service to grade the result.

To show you how made-up your essay examples can be, I've concocted completely ridiculous illustrations. Don't actually be that extreme on test day!

Please note that the essay below contains lots of bad grammar and misused words. I did this to show you the relatively low standards of the SAT Essay.

Sample "Perfect Score" Essay

[The essay response below was written for the prompt on page 389 of the College Board publication *The Official SAT Study Guide For The New SAT*. It was scored with the College Board's [automated online essay-scoring service](#), and received a perfect score.]

Necessity motivates people to change. Though we might like to believe that we change of our own free will to become better human beings, the fact is that the desire to change must come from an outside force. Three personal experiences from my recent time as Chief Counsel of the Zlotga tribe on the planet Meep serve to illustrate this point very clearly.

Some changes are brought about for survival. For instance, the flute-berry pickers of the Zlotga found that flies were infesting their crop. This was a serious threat; the Zlotga depend on their berry harvest for survival, but a sting from one of these flies is like getting hit in the eyeball with a trebuchet. Because it was my duty as Chief Counsel to find solutions to problems, I suggested that the pickers wear gloves. Unfortunately, berry-picking is sacred to the Zlotga and they didn't want gloves to come between their hands and the berries. They continued to pick the berries without gloves, enduring the stings of the flies. Finally, though, the stinging became so painful that the Zlotga could no longer bear it. They had to choose between starving to death and wearing their gloves, and they chose the gloves. The Zlotga changed their sacred ways only in order to stay alive.

Other changes happen because greedy people want to get ahead. When the Zlotga first offered me the position of Chief Counsel, I knew it would mean a big pay raise and a chance to wear the special Flying Robe of Kussel. There was a problem, though. In order to receive the position of Chief Counsel, I had to increase my weight to the traditional seven hundred and seventy-seven pounds. Although it required me to consume tons of berries and lie on the floor for several months, I willingly made this change because it was necessary if I wanted to attain the position of Chief Counsel. I chose to change because my situation required it.

There are still other changes that can be brought about by fashion. Last month, all of Meep was talking about the purple elbow-dye worn by the Vilks, the rival tribe of the Zlotga. This elbow dye was so beautiful that tourists were going to visit the Vilks instead of staying with the Zlotga, and our tribe was losing its tourism money. The tribal leaders asked for my help. I made elbow-dye mandatory for all Zlotga, and also required its use on the knee-caps. This brilliant decision made the Zlotga the most beautiful Meepians of all. Tourists came back to Zlotgaland. They would never have agreed to the change if not for the pressure that was put on them by the Vilks.

Whether we are changing out of a survival necessity, out of personal necessity, or because of a trend, all changes are motivated by a necessity of some sort. People never change unless they have to.

Conclusion

As you can see, the essay portion of the SAT can be beaten fairly easily if we learn to approach it systematically, imitating the high-scoring sample essays provided by the College Board. If you use the approach in this Question-Type Guide in your practice sessions, you'll find you get the hang of it in no time. Good luck!