

SAT PREP: (Optional) Essay

From: *Up Your Score, The Underground Guide to Outsmarting "the Test"*

Essay: The essay will require the student to respond to one (1) prompt based on a passage (usually a primary source) of 650-750 words in **50 minutes**. Rather than interpreting that passage, students must analyze how the author makes his/her argument and will receive 2-8 points in each of three (3) categories, **Reading, Analysis, Writing**, for a possible score of 6-24 points. Skills emphasized will include comprehension, evaluation of evidence, thesis construction, complex sentence construction, and use of standardized English. Again, "your job is to describe *how* the argument is built, *how* the evidence is used in the service of the argument, and *how* rhetorical devices make the writing more persuasive."

The essay will require you to focus on *evidence* and *analysis*. The readers do not care if you can explain what the passage is about, nor do they care whether or not you agree with the prompt.

- 1. Reasoning** is the *argument* of the passage.
- 2. Evidence** is those *facts, figures, and anecdotes* used to support or strengthen the argument.
- 3. Rhetoric** "refers to the *specific words and sentences* used to deliver the argument."

Essay Template: While there are many approaches to writing this essay, the following example is quick and easy.

1. Introduction

- Context statement (You know I like this, but if it slows you down you can skip it. Yes...I said that.)
- State your thesis in 2-3 sentences.

2. First Paragraph

- Write about the beginning of the passage (first couple of paragraphs).
- Summarize the argument.
- Point out the evidence and how it was used.
- Analyze how a few rhetorical choices help deliver the argument.
- Write 6 sentences total.

3. Second Paragraph

- Write about the middle paragraphs of the passage.
- Summarize the argument.
- Point out the evidence and how it was used.
- Analyze how a few rhetorical choices help deliver the argument.
- Write 6 sentences total.

4. Third Paragraph

- Write about the end of the passage.
- Summarize the argument.
- Point out the evidence and how it was used.
- Analyze how a few rhetorical choices help deliver the argument.

- Write 6 sentences total.

5. Conclusion

- Restate your thesis (I know...I hate this and please don't do this in a college paper, but if the College Board will take it, it sure will make your life easier.)
- Write 2-3 sentences total.

Steps for Writing

1. Read the Passage (5 minutes)

- **Instructions:** There will be thorough instructions which will direct you to consider how the author uses:
 - Evidence, such as facts or examples, to support the claim.
 - Reasoning to develop the ideas in the passage and build an argument.
 - Stylistic or persuasive elements (word choice, cadence, or appeals to emotion) to express ideas.
- The first time you read the passage, just read for understanding...get a "feel" for the writing.

2. Plan the Essay (20 minutes)

- **Plan, do not begin writing right away!**
- **Answer the question**, "What is the argument and what points does the author make?"
- Go back to the paragraph and determine what **evidence** is used to make each point.
- Analyze the author's **rhetoric** or manner of expression.
- These are some of the most common rhetorical devices:
 - **Allusion:** referring to an outside text (often literary), story, or legend. [*Example:* "Like a modern-day Jay Gatsby, my two-year-old seemed discontented at his own party."]
 - **Repetition/Amplification:** a word or phrase repeated for emphasis [*Example:* "Did I flinch? I never flinch. I'm not a flincher."]
 - **Parallelism:** parallel structure or word choice that often emphasizes a similarity or difference [*Example:* "On Sundays, my habit was to wake up at seven for a morning run. My brother's habit was to wake up at two p.m. for an afternoon snack."]
 - **Hyperbole:** exaggerated language [*Example:* "When Daria told her dad about the date, his head exploded."]
 - **Understatement:** the opposite of hyperbole [*Example:* "The baby two rows down cried miserably and loudly throughout the flight from New York to Paris. It was noticeable."]
 - **Metaphor:** using one thing to describe another [*Example:* "His rage was an avalanche obliterating everything in its path."]
 - **Simile:** a metaphor that uses the words *like* or *as* [*Example:* "Your kisses are like the state fair: occasional and underwhelming."]

- **Personification:** attributing human characteristics to a non-human or object [*Example:* “The car had not been used in years and complained bitterly when Sam tried to start it.”]
- **Irony:** when you express yourself using language that usually suggests the opposite of your true meaning [*Example:* “I overslept, I broke my heel, I burned my thumb, and then I got dumped. Overall, it was a triumphant day.” **Or,** “Mr. Harrison, with his greasy shirt, sauce-stained pants, and mismatched shoes, was the very essence of gentility and dash.”]
- Take the time to complete this step thoroughly. The quality of your organization and reasoning is more important than writing a “polished” essay.

3. Write the Essay (25 minutes)

- Be clear.
- Do not waste time trying to be clever or using vocabulary you really do not understand.
- Impress the reader with your ability to analyze, reason, and organize.

4. Polish, Edit (5 minutes)

- You may find that your conclusion sounds much better than your introduction. This is because you have developed your arguments at that point and are more confident in your writing.
- You may want to strengthen the introduction and focus more clearly on the conclusion.

Scoring (2-8 points on each of the following categories; Total of 6-24 points)

1. **Reading:** Evaluates your ability to understand the meaning of the passage.
2. **Analysis:** Evaluates your understanding of the argument, the use of supporting evidence, and the stylistic techniques used to persuade or guide the reader.
3. **Writing:** Evaluates your writing ability through the orderly progression of ideas throughout the paragraph and the essay, precise word choice, and a variety of sentence structures.

Good Writing

1. **Be Specific.**
2. **Vary your sentence structure.**
3. **Vary your language, but do not try to impress by using words inappropriately.**

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