



Institute for Excellence in Writing
presents

High School Essay Intensive

focusing on

SAT Essay (Prompt-Response) Preparation
and the
College Application (Personal) Essay

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Part One: Practice for the SAT Essay (Responding to a Prompt)

- Initial prompt exercise
- The Six-Point rubric
- Analysis of scored essays, discussion
- How to Practice and Prepare for the SAT Essay
- Outlining Strategies
- Stylistic considerations
- Second prompt exercise
- Plan for preparation, homework

Part Two: Planning for the College Application Personal Essay

- Overview of what colleges want
- Analysis of samples
- The Common Application
- Organizational strategies
- Stylistic considerations
- Writing a notable essay
- Planning a draft exercise

Practice Exercise One

Goal: To acquire a sense of the task, a general idea of possible length and stamina required, to create a sample essay for self-evaluation.

Instructions:

The essay gives you an opportunity to show how effectively you can develop and express ideas. You should, therefore, take care to develop your point of view, present your ideas logically and clearly, and use language precisely.

Your essay must be written on the lines provided on your answer sheet - you will receive no other paper on which to write. You will have enough space if you write on every line, avoid wide margins, and keep your handwriting to a reasonable size. Remember that people who are not familiar with your handwriting will read what you write. Try to write or print so that what you are writing is legible to those readers.

You have twenty-five minutes to write an essay on the topic assigned below. DO NOT WRITE ON ANOTHER TOPIC. AN OFF-TOPIC ESSAY WILL RECEIVE A SCORE OF ZERO.

Think carefully about the issue presented in the following excerpt and assignment below:

Tyler Durden, protagonist of the movie *Fight Club*, Postulated, “The things you own end up owning you.” Jennifer Lopez, on the other hand, espouses the theory, “Don’t be fooled by the rocks that I got/ I’m still, I’m still Jenny from the Block.”

Assignment: What is your view on whether your possessions and education define who you are? Plan and write an essay in which you develop your point of view on this issue. Support your position with reasoning and examples taken from your reading, studies, experience, or observations.

Sources: http://www.collegeboard.com/student/testing/sat/prep_one/essay/pracStart.html
<http://testprep.princetonreview.com> (accessed 11/10/2004)

The Grading Rubric

According to the College Board and The Princeton Review, SAT essays will be graded on a scale of 1-6, judged by the following criteria:

6 demonstrates:

- an insightful point of view
- outstanding critical thinking skills
- supportive and relevant reasoning, examples or evidence
- superb, sharp and smooth organization and focus
- skillful and dynamic language & vocabulary
- meaningful variety in sentence structure
- free of errors in grammar, usage and mechanics

5 demonstrates:

- an effective point of view
- strong critical thinking skills
- fitting and suitable reasoning, examples or evidence
- competent organization and focus
- expressive language and vocabulary
- variety in sentence structure
- few lapses in grammar, usage & mechanics

4 demonstrates:

- a developed point of view
- competent critical thinking skills
- adequate reasoning, examples or evidence
- passable organization and focus
- acceptable language and vocabulary
- some variety in sentence structure
- some errors in grammar, usage and mechanics

3 demonstrates:

- an underdeveloped point of view
- some critical thinking skills
- sketchy or incomplete reasoning, examples or evidence
- limited organization and focus
- weak and ineffective language and vocabulary
- lack of variety and problems with sentence structure
- numerous errors in grammar, usage and mechanics

2 demonstrates:

- a vague point of view
- weak critical thinking skills
- inappropriate or insufficient reasoning, examples or evidence
- poor organization and focus
- limited or incorrect language and vocabulary
- frequent problems with sentence structure
- serious errors in grammar, usage and mechanics

1 demonstrates:

- no point of view
- lack of critical thinking skills
- little or no reasoning, examples or evidence
- loss of organization and focus
- basic problems with language and vocabulary
- severe flaws in sentence structure
- persistent errors in grammar, usage and mechanics

0 demonstrates:

- an essay that does not address the given topic, merely copies the topic, is illegible, or left completely blank.

Part One: Prompt-Response

On a chart, the rubric would look somewhat like this:

| | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 |
|-------------------------------|--------------------|------------|--------------|-------------------|----------------|
| Point of View | insightful | effective | developed | underdeveloped | vague |
| Critical Thinking Skills | outstanding | strong | competent | some | weak |
| Reasoning, Examples, Evidence | relevant | suitable | adequate | sketchy, inc. | insufficient |
| Organization & Focus | sharp, smooth | competent | passable | limited | poor |
| Language & Vocabulary | skillful, dynamic | expressive | acceptable | weak, ineffective | limited |
| Sentence Structure | meaningful variety | variety | some variety | lack variety | problems |
| Grammar, Usage, Mechanics | free of errors | few lapses | some errors | numerous error | serious errors |

Discussion of Criteria

Critical Thinking Skills

Reasoning, Examples, Evidence

Organization & Focus

Language & Vocabulary

Sentence Structure

1-

2-

3-

4-

5-

6-

Grammar:

Usage:

Mechanics:

Part One: Prompt-Response

“-ly adverbs”

| | | |
|---------------|--------------|-----------------|
| entirely | completely | rapidly |
| significantly | presumably | frequently |
| fundamentally | predictably | continuously |
| substantially | probably | increasingly |
| essentially | undeniably | occasionally |
| primarily | normally | repeatedly |
| absolutely | tentatively | regularly |
| relatively | willingly | consistently |
| seriously | assuredly | constantly |
| distinctly | strictly | slowly |
| utterly | possibly | confidently |
| notably | obviously | gradually |
| typically | evidently | usually |
| surely | steadily | partially |
| initially | originally | previously |
| eventually | effectively | progressively |
| ultimately | finally | consequently |
| easily | ecstatically | un/fortunately |
| conveniently | forlornly | in/conveniently |
| virtually | tragically | proudly |
| suddenly | stubbornly | carefully |
| simply | eagerly | hopefully |
| silently | wistfully | mournfully |

Prepositions:

| | | | |
|--------------|------------|----------|------------|
| aboard | behind | inside | through |
| about | below | instead | throughout |
| above | beneath | into | to |
| according to | beside | like | toward |
| across | between | minus | under |
| after | beyond | near | underneath |
| against | by | of | unlike |
| along | concerning | off | until |
| amid | despite | on | up |
| among | down | opposite | upon |
| around | during | out | with |
| aside | except | outside | within |
| at | for | over | without |
| because of | from | past | |
| before | in | since | |

Evaluating Sample Papers

Sample #1

Possessions and education define who a person is. People can be snotty and still know what they are talking about while there can be really nice people who get along with who they are talking to and need help to understand the conversation. There are both kinds of people in the world go around much better.

People who know things does not always have to be nice but they don't always have to be mean, all they have to be is themselves. If a person is themselves then things are probably going to go better than if they acted somebody out. So if people acted one way and was being themselves another way how would you discover if they were acting out or being themselves? It is hard to tell.

If people acted snobby because they were rich and had everything they want they would probably think "who case about education?" and the question really is 'who really cares about education when you are rich because of family?' In general people who are rich are really snotty and are very rude. While the poor people are really nice because they have an understanding of what it is like to be poor while others don't.

I think that people should have an understanding of the other side before getting into an argument with them because they might have a good cause. Having a good reason to do everything is better than going with your instincts.

Scoring:

| | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 |
|-------------------------------|--------------------|------------|--------------|-------------------|----------------|
| Point of View | insightful | effective | developed | underdeveloped | vague |
| Critical Thinking Skills | outstanding | strong | competent | some | weak |
| Reasoning, Examples, Evidence | relevant | suitable | adequate | sketchy, inc. | insufficient |
| Organization & Focus | sharp, smooth | competent | passable | limited | poor |
| Language & Vocabulary | skillful, dynamic | expressive | acceptable | weak, ineffective | limited |
| Sentence Structure | meaningful variety | variety | some variety | lack variety | problems |
| Grammar, Usage, Mechanics | free of errors | few lapses | some errors | numerous error | serious errors |

Total for each category, divided by seven = _____ (Princeton Review Score: _____)

Discussion Notes:

Part One: Prompt-Response

Sample #2

Many of those that have everything and all the money they need say it is lonely at the top. I am a perfect example of how possessions and education can't defined a person.

For example, growing up I lived in a beautiful home right by the water, to those on the outside everything looked like I was living a sugar coated life, but what they didn't know was that life inside our home was falling apart.

My mom was battling an aggressive form of breast cancer, utilities were shut off at times because my dad had gambled all our money away even for food there wasn't enough money. Yes looks can be deceiving I was living in this beautiful home next to the water but really that was all I had. I know first hand that possessions don't make a person.

Today my mom is cancer free, we live in an apartment and we never go hungry. I have learned the meaning of life and that it isn't about the people that love you and take care of you. I am young to have learned this. I just celebrated my 16th birthday and already I know the meaning of true life.

So many of my friends life is all about what car they are driving and what cell phone they are using. I don't have either and I have noticed that eventhough I don't have these things that other typical teenages have I am happy. Many have asked me do I miss not having these things. I think back to the life that I once lived. That life with the cell phone and house and think that no I am not missing those things because I know how unhappy those day's were and happness is what life is about. Things can't bring happyness and friends forever. You must make the effort in life and then the reward is what you decided to do with what you have earned.

I wouldn't take back a day of my life for the lessons that I have learned. I believe that the value of what I have taken away from life is far greater then any possession I could ever own. I know who I am. And noone can ever steal or take that away from me like possessions can.

In the end life is about people and like they say no one was ever able to take there bank account and possessions with them when they die. It is about the people that you made a difference with when you were going through your life and what wisdom or time you gave them.

Scoring:

| | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 |
|-------------------------------|--------------------|------------|--------------|-------------------|----------------|
| Point of View | insightful | effective | developed | underdeveloped | vague |
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Total for each category, divided by seven = _____ (Princeton Review Score: _____)

Discussion Notes:

Part One: Prompt-Response

Sample #3

The possessions that a person may have, and the education they receive will define them. Although, even if someone does have a lot of money, they may not fit the stereotype. However, stereotypes exist and possessions and education give others an image of who you are, whether they are correct or not.

If someone has an expensive car, a lot of money and nice cloths, people on the street will show them more respect than someone with an old junky car, and cloths that do not fit right. An educated person, when in debate, will come across smart and confident, and will therefore be noticed above others. These first impressions are what people define others as.

In the 1700's, during the Revolutionary War, the British thought that the Colonists could not win the war because they were uneducated, unorganized, and had no money. Fortunately, the Colonists proved them wrong by winning the war and establishing a new government and country. Although uneducated, the colonists were extrememely powerful, because of their beliefs. The British misread the Colonists' and therefore lost the war. The appearance of a person or persons is what most people look at, and are often incorrect.

An image is hard to break. Most people think of others with a lot of money and a good education as stuck up or full of themselves. On the contrary, someone who is poor, is thought of as lazy and uneducated. Therefore possessions and education will define you.

Scoring:

| | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 |
|-------------------------------|--------------------|------------|--------------|-------------------|----------------|
| Point of View | insightful | effective | developed | underdeveloped | vague |
| Critical Thinking Skills | outstanding | strong | competent | some | weak |
| Reasoning, Examples, Evidence | relevant | suitable | adequate | sketchy, inc. | insufficient |
| Organization & Focus | sharp, smooth | competent | passable | limited | poor |
| Language & Vocabulary | skillful, dynamic | expressive | acceptable | weak, ineffective | limited |
| Sentence Structure | meaningful variety | variety | some variety | lack variety | problems |
| Grammar, Usage, Mechanics | free of errors | few lapses | some errors | numerous error | serious errors |

Total for each category, divided by seven = _____ (Princeton Review Score: _____)

Discussion Notes:

Part One: Prompt-Response

Real Comments from SAT Test Scorers:

Content:

- Read the prompt carefully—make sure you address the topic you are asked to write about.
- Good job in clearly stating your opinion on the prompt
- It is important to convey to the reader whether you agree or disagree with the prompt, and I am very glad you stated that clearly. However, besides simply stating your position, don't forget that the assignment asks you to support it "with reasons and examples."
- Avoid making generalizations or arguments without reinforcing them with facts and analysis.
- Just by saying that something is true doesn't make it true. Specific examples are almost always better than general blanket statements.

Organization:

- Write a complete essay with an introduction, body paragraphs with a topic and supporting example, and a conclusion. Don't state the obvious.
- Also, including in your introduction the specific examples that you are going to discuss will make reading your essay easier.
- Make your introduction more interesting than just a reference to or restatement of the quote. Draw your reader in. State your position strongly and briefly provide the reader with a taste of your supporting evidence.
- Work on writing a strong conclusion: one that does not only restate the facts but also effectively and convincingly conveys your point.

Examples:

- Your examples are appropriate for the topic
- Use real, not hypothetical examples
- Providing more detail for your examples will make your argument more compelling
- The examples you use are good, but what could strengthen your essay is including more details and/or an additional example. This would also lengthen your essay.
- Keep in mind that if you can incorporate current events, history, or literature into your examples, then you have not only strengthened your argument, but also you have impressed the reader with your vast range of outside knowledge
- You have thought out the issue thoroughly, and justified it with fairly sound analysis. To punctuate your arguments and make them more relevant to the reader, however, avoid using hypothetical arguments. Examples that are grounded in current events, history or classic literature will always be more forceful than those that are not.

Length & Usage:

- You need greater length in your essay. It's hard to show your depth of understanding without writing more.
- A good rule of thumb is to write two full pages
- Watch your spelling—a few errors are okay, but too many of them will give a bad overall impression.
- Using more varied vocabulary will allow you to express your ideas more precisely.

How to Practice and Prepare for the Essay Portion of the SAT

- I. Write a lot! The more writing (on paper) you do during the next year, the better.
- A. Stamina – length matters (MIT Professor’s analysis)
 - B. Work for Speed—length matters.
 - C. Legibility – practice can improve it
 - D. Spelling – find your personal “spelling demons”
- II. Work with Prompts (see accompanying booklet *Essays on Demand* by P. Brekke)
- A. Study Brekke’s “Tips to Tackling the Timed Essay” & memorize Seven Simple Steps:
 1. Read the question carefully
 2. Underline important words or phrases you can use
 3. Quickly determine your thesis – a point of view
 4. Outline: 2 reasons with examples from knowledge or experience for each
 5. Outline conclusion by recapping the most important reason for your point of view.
 6. Write your essay by following your outline
 7. Proofread
 - B. Discuss various Themes in Prompts with friends, parents, teachers
 - C. Practice both outlining strategies (traditional and stick/branch—see *Essays on Demand*)
 - C. Acquire a stock of general purpose quotations from recognizable names:
(Mark Twain, Winston Churchill, Mick Jagger, etc.)
- III. Learn your audience (Markers are mostly High School English teachers).
- A. Visit appropriate websites, read their advice, samples, strategies (see *Essays on Demand*)
 - B. Note: Your essay opinion doesn’t actually have to be your own personal opinion.
(Try writing an essay supporting an opinion that is opposite yours!)
 - C. Your examples from real life don’t have to be entirely truthful, but be careful.
(This is a writing evaluation, not a personal history. Be imaginative, but not absurd.)
- IV. Read a lot during the next year. Classics, current events, and history
- A. Builds your vocabulary, syntax and idea database.
 - B. Builds your repertoire of examples; keep notebook of most interesting things.