PART III

How To Write An Essay In 1,500 Seconds

- An Essay-Writing Process That Gets Results
- Prewriting: Getting Set to Write
- Choosing a Main Idea
- Arranging Ideas Purposefully
- Composing: Putting Words on Paper
- Developing a Thoughtful, Coherent Essay
- Writing Introductions and Conclusions
- Using a Writing Style That Works
- Polishing Your Essay for a Top Score

Don't be misled by the title of this chapter. It's more of a come-on than a promise. For one thing, writing an essay in 1,500 seconds, or twenty-five minutes, may be a contradiction in terms. An essay is basically the product of an author's thinking. It expresses a point of view arrived at after reflection, analysis, or interpretation of a subject or issue. When given the topic less than half an hour before the paper is due, you can't expect to pore over the assignment. If you think too deeply, you'll run out of time before you know it.

Another reason that the heading is illusory is that you don't learn to write very well by reading about how to do it. You learn to write by writing, by messing around with ideas and words, by experimenting, by practicing, and by doing what seasoned practitioners do when they face a sheet of blank paper or an empty computer screen: they write!

PREWRITING: GETTING SET TO WRITE

Steps for Writing the Perfect Essay

You won't have time to invent a process when you write your SAT essay. So, it pays to have a process in mind ahead of time, one that helps you work rapidly and efficiently. Try to map out ahead of time the steps to take during each stage of the writing process. The plan that follows is a place to start. Use it while writing a few practice essays, but alter it in any way that helps you produce the best essay you can.

First Stage: Prewriting

Prewriting consists of the planning that needs to be done before you actually start writing the essay:

• Reading and analyzing the question.

• Choosing a main idea, or thesis, for your essay.

• Gathering and arranging supporting ideas.

Second Stage: Composing

• Introducing the main idea.

• Developing paragraphs.

• Choosing the best words for expressing your thoughts.

• Structuring sentences for variety and coherence.

• Writing a conclusion.

Third Stage: Editing and Proofreading

• Editing for clarity.

• Editing to create interest.

• Checking for standard English usage and for mechanical errors, including spelling, punctuation, and capitalization.

How Long Does Each Stage Last?

The truth is that the three stages overlap and blend. Writers compose, revise, and proofread simultaneously. They jot down sentences during prewriting, and even late in the process weave new ideas into their text. In fact, no stage really ends until the final period of the last sentence is put in place, or until your proctor at the SAT site calls “Time!”

No book can tell you exactly how much time to devote to each stage. What works for you may be different from what works for others. But most students get good results by devoting more than half the time—about thirteen to eighteen minutes—to composing and no more than five minutes each on prewriting and editing/ proofreading.

TIP 

The three best ways to prepare:

1. practice

2. practice

3. practice some more.

How to Prepare

The three best ways for anybody to prepare are 1) to practice, 2) to practice, and 3) to practice some more. During the weeks before the SAT, or even sooner, pick same sample essay topics. Following the instructions, write an essay a day for several days in a row, until you get the feel of twenty-five minutes' writing time. Pace yourself and keep track of how much time you spend thinking about the topic, how many minutes you devote to composing the essay, and how long it takes you to proofread and edit.

To make every second count, don't waste time inventing an essay title (your essay doesn't need one). Don't count words, and don't expect to recopy your first draft. Because readers understand that SAT essays are first drafts, feel free to cross out, insert words using carets (^), and move blocks of text—as though you were cutting and pasting—with neatly drawn arrows. If necessary, number the sentences to make clear the order in which they are to be read. You won't be penalized for a sloppy-looking paper. Just make sure that the essay is readable.

Because of the time limit, don't plan to write a long essay. Essays of more than 400 words are unnecessary. It doesn't take even that many words to demonstrate your writing ability. In fact, less can be more, for a shorter essay of, say, 250 to 300 words can focus sharply on a limited subject. It can also be written more quickly, leaving time for revising and polishing your work. But don't be satisfied with an abbreviated one-paragraph essay that could suggest a shortage of thinking ability. Just keep in mind that quantity counts less than quality.

Reading and Analyzing the Topic Carefully

At the risk of stating the obvious, begin by reading the assigned essay topic, or prompt. Read it very carefully. Read it twice or three times, or until you are absolutely sure of what you have been asked to do.

SAT essay prompts usually begin with a quotation or a short passage meant to draw you into an issue. Their intention is to provoke thought and suggest an idea or two to discuss in your essay. When writing your essay, you may wish to refer to the quotation or passage, but you don"t have to. Weave it into your essay if you wish, but only if it"s appropriate and advantageous to do so.

The prompt may not turn you on right away, but once you begin to think about it, you may begin bursting with good ideas. Consider your essay as a kind of contract or agreement between you and readers who"ll be spending time with your words. They"ll want something that will engage their minds and hearts. As the writer, you are being challenged to write something so riveting that readers will resist the temptation of moving their eyes off of the page or letting their minds wander. In a way, writing an essay is a lot like giving a gift to a friend. You think about what they"d like. You try to please them by choosing it carefully and presenting it as stylishly as you can. If all goes well, you get a reward for your efforts.

Practice in Analyzing Topics

Directions: Read the following pair of typical SAT essay topics. Underline the key words that define the task to be performed. Then, in the blank spaces, write the steps that you would take to respond to the topic.

Topic A

Think carefully about the issue presented in the following statement and the assignment below.

Failure should be our teacher, not our undertaker. Failure is delay, not defeat. It is a temporary detour, not a dead end. Failure is something we can avoid only by saying nothing, doing nothing, and being nothing.

Denis Waitley, Seeds of Greatness

Assignment: Is failure a temporary setback resulting from inaction or indifference? Plan and write an essay in which you explain and develop your view on this issue. Support your position with reasoning and evidence drawn from your reading, studies, experience, or observation.

Required task:

Explanation: Do you agree with Denis Waitley"s definition of failure—that failure is a temporary condition that stems from apathy and indifference? Or do you think that failure is like an unavoidable chronic disease over which we have no real control? Or do you stand somewhere between those two extremes?

The essay you are asked to write should discuss your opinion. The position you take is less crucial than your ability to support your ideas with specific examples from your knowledge, background, or observation. Examples may come from books, from your studies, from personal experience, or from what you know about the lives of others.

An interesting and readable response to the question might be based on your own life. If you agree with the prompt, you might write about a failure you experienced in school, a personal relationship that turned sour, or a difficult task that bombed. Briefly describe the failure and explain its cause. Did it stem from your own apathy or inaction? Were you slow to act or perhaps misinformed? Maybe you were distracted or not thinking straight. Explain how your lack of success may have taught you a valuable lesson.

On the other hand, through no fault of your own, you may have experienced a failure that altered your life. In that case, your essay might show that the prompt is dead wrong.

Obviously, there are at least two sides to the issue. Regardless of your position, however, be sure to include more than one example. An argument that relies on a single example will often fall flat on its face.

Topic B

Think carefully about the issue presented in the following quotation and the assignment below.

Ask yourself whether you are happy, and you cease to be.

John Stuart Mill (1806–1873)

Assignment: Does the need to question or evaluate your happiness mean that you are not as happy as you think? Plan and write an essay in which you state and develop your point of view on this issue. Support your position with evidence drawn from your reading, studies, experience, or observation.

Required task:

Explanation: What you write depends largely on your interpretation of the word happiness. If you take it to mean a state of blissful well-being and unexamined contentment, then you might agree with the prompt. Questioning your own happiness may indeed lead you to the startling discovery that you are less happy than you thought. Such an event may call to mind the fate of Adam and Eve. Once they tasted of the Tree of Knowledge, they lost their paradise forever. But if you think of happiness as a complex emotion requiring scrutiny from time to time, then your essay would take issue with the prompt. Think of Socrates" famous saying, "The unexamined life is not worth living."

Or you might take another, more circumspect, point of view. May be you believe that absolute statements about happiness are foolish because happiness comes in so

many forms. Happiness experienced over a lifetime, for instance, differs greatly from short-lived merriment at a party on Friday night.

Narrowing the Topic

A well-focused essay on a limited topic is always better than an essay that tries to cover too much ground in just a few paragraphs. That"s why narrowing the topic is one of the crucial steps in planning your SAT essay. The sharper your focus, the better.

TIP

Narrow your topic by thinking small.

If you are a fast writer, you might scribble 350 well-chosen words onto the page in twenty-five minutes. (That"s about the number of words on a double-spaced typed page using 12-point type.) If the topic is too broad, you are likely to state a few obvious generalities, resort to hackneyed ideas, and maybe even throw the bull a little bit. In short, your essay would be vague, superficial, too empty of substance to show how deeply you can think. On the other hand, if you"ve narrowed the topic sufficiently, you stand a far better chance of saying something sensible, scintillating, meaningful, provocative, and interesting. And never doubt that an interesting essay won"t work on your behalf.

It"s impossible to predict the topic you"ll be asked to write on. Because a multiethnic, multicultural, and multitalented cohort of students takes the SAT, the topic is bound to be extremely broad. Your first task, therefore, is to think small—to reduce the topic to a size snug enough to fit into a short essay.

Megan"s Story

Megan, an eleventh grader, recently took the SAT and recounted the experience of writing her essay. Here is what she said about narrowing her topic:

I was a little nervous at the beginning when I opened my test booklet to find an essay topic on conformity in groups of people. At first, I wasn"t exactly sure what that meant. But the prompt cleared it up for me. It said that the degree of conformity in a group influences how decisions are made. It also determines who the group leader is going to be and the amount of freedom that members will have. Then the prompt pointed out that dissent and disagreement are sometimes a good thing because they can help a group make better decisions.

The instructions told me to answer the following question in my essay: **"Do groups that encourage nonconformity and disagreement function better than those that discourage it?"**

Luckily, during the previous few weeks I"d written a few SAT essays for practice and knew that I needed to back up my opinion with evidence from my studies, reading, observation, or experience.

At the outset, I was sort of inclined to agree that dissent in a group leads to better decision making. So, off the top of my head I began to jot down the names of groups in the margin of my test booklet—names like Chinese-Americans, airline employees, Netflix subscribers, and graduates of Penn State University.

Whoa! I suddenly said to myself, these groups are way too big. Besides, I realized that in each group there would be many people who probably had little in common with each other and wouldn"t share a unanimous view on the need for group conformity.

So, I X"ed out my first list and wrote a new one:

A. debate club

B. the President"s advisers

C. platoon of U.S. Marines

D. basketball team

E. school faculty

F. community school board

That"s better, I thought, but my list is too long. There was no way could I cover all these groups in a short essay. I had only twenty-five minutes total and already used up a couple of minutes getting my thoughts together. So, I pruned my list after thinking for a few more seconds about each group.

I decided that A and B probably thrived on controversy. A debate club wouldn"t be a debate club if its members always agreed. Likewise, a circle of White House advisers needed to offer conflicting views on every issue to help a president make sound decisions.

Suddenly I felt confident that my initial idea was correct. I"d have no trouble answering yes to the essay question.

But after appraising C and D, I wasn"t so sure. Neither of those groups would be able to tolerate dissent if it expected to function. On battlefields and basketball courts, I asked myself, wouldn"t success depend on strict adherence to the group"s values and goals? I realized, that a yes answer might not work after all.

Then I turned to group E and decided that a school ought to encourage dissent and nonconformity among its faculty. It would be so depressing to go to a school where every teacher was the same and every class was run in exactly the same way. But I also realized that total anarchy in a school would be even worse. The ideal would probably be a faculty that embraced a set of guiding principles but also valued a school climate that promoted reasonable dissent and individuality.

As for group F, I assumed that a school board would function best when its members united behind quality education but would listen to dissenting voices and weigh several alternatives before making a policy.

…All these thoughts sped through my mind in a fraction of the time it takes to read them. In the end, I decided that my essay couldn"t contain an either-or answer to the question. Instead, my main idea would take a middle-of-the-road position, like: A group"s purpose and goals determine whether dissent is a help or a hindrance.

Because I couldn"t discuss all six groups in my essay I picked just two—the basketball team and the president"s advisers—to support my main idea. As I began to write, I reminded myself that somewhere in my essay I ought to talk briefly about groups with other types of goals, such as the faculty and the school board where they had to let circumstances determine when dissent is helpful and when it"s not. I thought that by including that idea I"d be showing the SAT readers that I could think deeply about an issue and maybe even get extra credit.

I came to the end of the essay with about three minutes to spare and used the time to proofread my essay and change a few words to make it sound more mature.

…I"m hoping for at least a 4 or 5 on my essay, but a 6 would be awesome.

While planning what to say in your essay, take Megan"s story to heart. Let it help you resist the temptation to incorporate too much material into your SAT essay. Don"t let yourself be deluged with ideas. Remember that you can write only so much in twenty-five minutes.

P.S. One reader gave Megan"s SAT essay a 5, the other a 6, for a total score of 11.

Some writers find that a more efficient way to narrow a topic is to begin writing. If the essay strikes them as dull or disappointing after a few sentences, they may realize that their approach is too vague, too broad, too boring (and if the writer is

bored, imagine what the essay will do to prospective readers). Because they"ve written themselves into a cul-de-sac, they must grit their teeth and start again. Time restraints on the SAT won"t give you more than one chance to start over. That minute you devote to narrowing the topic, therefore, may prove to be the most important sixty seconds of the exam.

Choosing a Main Idea

Once you"ve narrowed the topic, it"s time to decide what to say about the topic. That is, you need to devise an idea that will become the purpose, or point, of the essay. An essay shouldn"t simply be "about," say, hard work, heroism, beauty, or any other topic. What counts in an essay is the statement you make about hard work, heroism, or beauty—in short, its main idea. Essays may be written with beautiful words, contain profound thoughts, and make readers laugh or weep. But without a main idea, an essay remains just words in search of a meaning. You don"t want readers coming to the end of your essay scratching their heads and asking, "Huh? What"s the point?"

Every bit of your essay from start to finish should contribute to its main idea. (Some people prefer to use the word thesis instead of main idea.) Any material that wanders from the main idea should be discarded. It not only wastes words but detracts from the impact of your essay. Naturally, the main idea of your essay will depend on your response to the particular issue presented by the prompt. It will be a statement of your opinion.

Let"s say the issue relates to the fundamental rights of high school students. So, you think about the issue and narrow the topic by focusing on high school dress codes. Your main idea might be any of the following:

1. Yes, a high school may implement a dress code without violating a student"s basic rights.

2. No, a high school should not be permitted to violate its students" rights by instituting a dress code.

3. High schools should be allowed to impose dress codes but only on students under age 16.

4. High school dress codes not only destroy students" rights but also imply that students lack good judgment.

5. Dress codes improve a school"s environment, thereby enhancing students" rights to a good education.

6. A strict dress code teaches students about living in a repressive society.

7. A strict dress code encourages students to appreciate the rights that they enjoy as citizens in a free society.

Using one of these main ideas as its starting point, the essay would then discuss the validity of your opinion.

Another SAT question may ask you to address an issue related to teenage drivers. Let"s say, for instance, you are asked to write about seat belt laws that require everyone in a car—driver and all passengers front and back—to buckle up. Your main point might be that seat belt laws infringe on a driver"s freedom of choice. Or the essay"s point might be that safety laws supercede a person"s right to choose whether to wear a seat belt. Or you might use the essay to prove that driving without seat belts is not a real issue because to do so is dangerous and stupid.

CHOOSING A MAIN IDEA FOR YOUR SAT ESSAY

Topic: The prompt gives you an issue to write about.

Main Idea: The main idea is a statement of your opinion on the issue.

Purpose: The essay gives you an opportunity to develop support for your opinion using reasoning and examples taken from your reading, studies, experience, or observation.

If possible, choose a main idea that matters to you personally. SAT readers won"t find fault with opinions with which they disagree. If you give your readers only what you think they might want, you"re being dishonest, posing as someone you are not. Likewise, because you don"t want to sound pompous or pretentious, avoid picking a main idea solely to show off intellectual superiority or political correctness. An essay that is truthful and comes from the heart will serve you best.

At the same time, however, steer clear of main ideas that are clichés and platitudes. Consider your readers. As they plod through scores of SAT essays on the same topic, they"ll appreciate and reward those that contain fresh ideas. Try, therefore, to devise a main idea that will set you apart from other students. Not that your main idea should be off the wall. Creativity helps but it"s not essential. You"ll never be penalized for a clearly written, sober essay that demonstrates insightful thinking and beliefs.

The SAT will probably ask a question you can respond to without much strain. But what if you hate to write and don"t care for the given topic? Is it possible to write a decent essay on a topic that makes you yawn?

The answer is a resounding YES! because you have no choice. You may be bored, and writing an essay on demand may rub you the wrong way. But raising a stink about it won"t get you far. Instead, accept the challenge, and create the illusion that you care deeply about the issue. Show your resilience—a quality that college admissions officials value and admire. Regardless of the topic, psych yourself to write the essay of your life.

Practice in Choosing a Main Idea

Directions: Respond to each of the following prompts by writing three or more sentences that could serve as main ideas for an essay.

1. "Whether you think you can, or that you can"t, you are usually right."

Henry Ford, 1863–1947

Assignment: Does attitude determine success and failure in an endeavor? Plan and write an essay that develops and supports your views on this issue.

A. _____

B. _____

C. _____

2. There"s an old proverb, "Spare the rod and spoil the child."

Assignment: Which is a more effective way to teach children to behave—to promise rewards or to instill a fear of punishment?

A. _____

B. _____

C. _____

3. Advertisements for the New York State Lottery say "All you need is a dollar and a dream," a slogan that encourages the fantasy that a big win will solve all of life"s problems. Yet, many lottery winners have suffered unexpected negative consequences. Their dreams have often turned into nightmares, and their lives are worse than they were before.

Assignment: Should state and local governments sponsor lotteries that can leave both winners and losers worse off than before? Plan and write an essay that develops and supports your views on this issue.

A. _____

B. _____

C. _____

4. “There is nothing like returning to a place that remains unchanged to find the ways in which you yourself have altered.”

Nelson Mandela, A Long Walk to Freedom

Assignment: Do we need to understand our past in order to understand ourselves? Plan and write an essay that develops and supports your views on this issue.

A. _____

B. _____

C. _____

5. “Destiny is not a matter of chance. It is a matter of choice. It is not a thing to be waited for, it is a thing to be achieved.”

William Jennings Bryan (1860–1925)

Assignment: Do you think that a destiny achieved by the decisions and choices you have made is preferable to a destiny that comes from chance or luck? Plan and write an essay that develops and supports your views on this issue.

A. _____

B. _____

C. _____

Suggested answers

Gathering and Arranging Ideas Purposefully

Unless you are blessed with a digital mind that instantly processes information and draws insightful conclusions, spend a few moments gathering and arranging specific ideas, arguments, anecdotes, examples—whatever you can think of to support and develop your essay”s main idea. List your thoughts on paper—just a word or two for each idea. These jottings can be the working outline of your essay. Then draw circles around key words, connect related ideas with arrows, or just underline the thoughts you”ll definitely use in your essay.

No single technique for gathering ideas excels any other, provided it helps you identify what you”re going to write. While you plan, one idea may trigger a flood of

others. Maybe you”ll end up with more brilliant ideas than you can use. (Everyone should have such a problem!) Your task then would be to pick out and develop only the best of the best.

With materials assembled, decide what should come first, second, third. The best order is the clearest, the order your reader can follow with the least effort. But, just as a highway map may show several routes from one place to another, there is no single way to get from the beginning to the end of an essay. The route you plan depends on the purpose of the trip.

Each purpose will have its own best order. In storytelling, the events are usually placed in the sequence in which they occur. To explain a childhood memory or define an abstract term takes another organization. An essay that compares and contrasts two books or two people may deal with each subject separately or discuss the features of each point by point. No plan is superior to another provided there”s a valid reason for using it.

TIP

Rank your ideas in order of importance.

The plan that fails is the aimless one, the one in which ideas are presented solely according to how they popped into your head. To guard against aimlessness, rank your ideas in order of importance. Then work toward your best point, not away from it. Giving away your pièce de résistance at the start is self-defeating. Therefore, if you”ve come up with, say, three good ideas to support your thesis, save the strongest for last. Launch the essay with your second best, and sandwich your least favorite between the other two. A solid opening draws readers into the essay and creates that all-important first impression, but a memorable ending is even more important. Coming last, it is what readers have fresh in their minds when they assign the essay a grade.

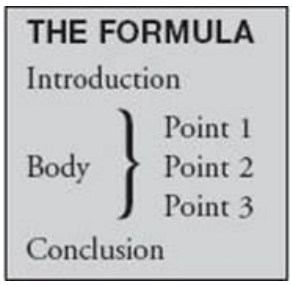
The following guideline won”t apply to every essay, but a body consisting of three sections is just about right. Why three? Mainly because three is a number that works. Three pieces of solid evidence in support of your main idea creates the impression that you know what you”re talking about. One is insufficient, and two only slightly better. But three indicates thoughtfulness. Psychologically, three also creates a sense of rhetorical wholeness, like “blood, sweat, and tears,” and “of the people, by the people, and for the people.”

It shouldn”t be hard to divide a main idea into three secondary ideas. A narrative essay, for instance, breaks naturally into a beginning, middle, and end. A process is likely to have at least three steps. In an essay of comparison and contrast, you should be able to find at least three similarities and differences to write about. And a similar division into thirds applies to an essay of argumentation—the kind expected on the SAT.

Each of three ideas may not demand an equal amount of emphasis, however. You might dispose of the weakest idea in just a couple of sentences, while each of the others requires a whole paragraph. But whatever you emphasize, be sure that each idea is separate and distinct. That is, the third idea mustn”t simply rehash the first or second disguised as something new.

The Formula

The five-paragraph essay formula is a simple, all-purpose plan for arranging ideas into a clear, easy-to-follow order. It”s a technique you can rely on any time you need to set ideas in order. Its greatest virtue is clarity. Each part has its place and purpose.



You needn”t follow the formula to the letter. In fact, a professionally written essay organized according to this five-paragraph arrangement is a rarity. Yet many essay writers, even those who take a circuitous path between the beginning and end, use some version of it. Their introduction tells readers what they plan to say.
The body says it, and the conclusion tells readers what they”ve been told. Because every essay is different, however, the steps contain endless, often surprising, variations.

Practice in Gathering and Arranging Ideas

Directions: For the following essay topics, write three different and distinct ideas that could be used to support each one. Think of each idea as the main point of a paragraph. Then rank them in order of importance.

A. Topic: The advantages (or disadvantages) of requiring all students to take gym every semester

1. _____

_____

2. _____

_____

3. _____

_____

B. Topic: The pros (or cons) of video games

1. _____

_____

2. _____

_____

3. _____

_____

C. Topic: For (or against) an honor code in your school

1. _____

_____

2. _____

_____

3. _____

_____

D. Topic: Agree (or disagree): “There never was a good war, or a bad peace.” Benjamin Franklin

1. _____

_____

2. _____

_____

3. _____

_____

COMPOSING: PUTTING WORDS ON PAPER

Writing a Gripping Introduction

Introductions let readers know what they”re in for. But avoid making a formal announcement of your plan, as in:

This discussion will show the significance of television as an influence on the learning of children from ages 3 to 12. Distinctions will be made between early childhood (ages 3–7) and middle childhood (8–12).

Such an intro may be useful in a section or chapter of a textbook but in a short essay it”s out of place. Rather, just state your point. The reader will recognize the topic soon enough, even without a separate statement of your intention.

Jill B began her essay on the rights of high school students this way:

On Monday morning, October 20, I arrived in school to find every locker door in my corridor standing ajar. Over the weekend, school officials had searched through students” lockers for drugs and alcohol. I believe that this illegal action was a violation of both my civil rights and the civil rights of every other student in the school.

This opening sets the essay”s boundaries. Because she can”t cover all there is to say about students” rights in one or two pages, Jill focuses on one issue raised by her personal experience on a particular Monday morning.

Good SAT essays often begin with something simple and relatively brief that will grab and hold the readers” interest. Jill”s opening is effective because it tells an informative anecdote that leads directly to her essay”s main idea—that locker searches violate students” civil rights.

Here is the opening of Tom M”s essay on the topic of drug and alcohol abuse:

Drugs and alcohol are a problem for many young people in today”s society. Many teenagers smoke weed or do other drugs. Many more participate in underage drinking. Society is working on the problem but has not found an effective solution.

If that introduction made you yawn, you”re not alone. Why? Because nothing in that four-sentence paragraph says anything that you don”t already know. In a word, it”s dull. Not only that, the topic being introduced is far too broad for a short essay.

Compare it to this one:

When sixth-graders get drunk and thirteen-year-olds smoke weed every Friday night, society"s got a problem. And it"s a problem that won"t go away until someone figures out how to get kids to just say NO!

This introduction uses a compelling image of young children out of control. It provokes curiosity, leaving readers hungry to know more about the problem of abuse and how it can be solved.

Here is another example of a dull opening:

Photography is one of the most popular hobbies in the world.

No reader except maybe an avid photographer would be moved to continue reading the essay. A more lively opening evokes a different response:

I took my brand-new digital camera on spring break, but when I came home the box was still unopened.

Aha! That"s a sentence that leaves readers wondering what happened during Spring Break. It implies that the writer is about to tell a story that explains why he took no photos.

Here"s one more example:

Dull: Most predictions that George Orwell made in his novel of the future, 1984, did not happen.

Sharp: Why did the brilliant author George Orwell goof?

The first opening, written as a nondescript statement of fact, won"t interest anyone unfamiliar with 1984, but the second one, a pithy question, is more powerful. It"s intriguing that Orwell, a great intellectual author, had "goofed." The very idea entices readers to find out what happened.

By now the message should be clear: Openings should not only reveal the subject matter and main idea of the essay but also compel readers to go on to the next paragraph.

As you write practice essays, try using the following five common techniques, each illustrated with an example from an essay by a high school student.

1. Start with brief account of an incident—real or invented:

By lunch period, Megan, a senior at Brookdale High School, had already traded text messages with her brother in college, with her dad at work, and with a friend who was absent from school that day. Although every form of communication has

drawbacks, texting, like nothing since the invention of the telephone, has opened up the world to teenagers.

Lisa N.

With one sentence, Lisa has whetted her readers" curiosity about what comes next. Her list of text messages suggests that the essay will be about the effects of staying constantly in touch with others, or about some other aspect of communication.

2. State a provocative idea in an ordinary way or an ordinary idea in a provocative way. Either one will ignite reader interest.

As any football hero will tell you, on-the-field brains count for more than brawn.

Ollie G.

This unusual idea may cause readers to question Ollie"s sanity or maybe to analyze their own images of football players. Either way, Ollie has aroused his readers" interest with a provocative idea that presumably will be explained in the rest of the essay.

3. Use a quotation—not necessarily a famous one—from Shakespeare, a popular song, or your grandmother. Whatever the source, its sentiment must relate to the essay"s topic.

"You can take people out of the country, but you can"t take the country out of the people."

Gary F.

With this opening, Gary accomplishes a great deal. He gives a clever new twist to a common adage and with a few words has introduced his main idea—the futility of changing people"s basic characteristics or core values.

4. Refute a commonly held assumption or define a word in a new and surprising way.

Even though she"s never written a rhyme or verse, my boss at Safeway is just as much a poet as Shelley or Keats.

Rebecca V.

Rebecca hints at a new and perhaps unusual definition of the word "poet." How can someone who has written neither rhymes nor verses be called a poet? That the label "poet" applies to her boss is intriguing because most poets don"t work as

supermarket managers. In short, this intro quickens our interest in reading the rest of the essay.

5. Ask an interesting question or two that you will answer in your essay.

Why are stories of crime so fascinating?

Doug T.

TIP

State your essay"s main idea plainly and clearly.

Doug"s opening has wide appeal because most of us read the police blotter in the newspaper, tune to news channels that hype crime stories, talk about the latest murder, or watch CSI on the tube. In other words, Doug"s essay invites us to explore our fascination with crime, both real and fictional.

Although an effective introduction always helps to draw readers into an essay, you needn"t feel obligated to contrive a super-catchy opening. A direct, clearly worded statement of the essay"s main idea could serve just as well. Because there"s no time to dawdle during the twenty-five minutes allotted for the essay, a plain statement conveying the topic and main idea of your essay may be all you need. For example, here are three ordinary openings written in response to the following prompt:

Love your children with all your hearts, love them enough to discipline them before it is too late…. Praise them for important things, even if you have to stretch them a bit. Praise them a lot. They live on it like bread and butter and they need it more than bread and butter.

Lavina Christensen Fugal, Mother of the Year, 1955

Assignment: Is it a good idea to praise children even when they don"t really deserve it?

1. The statement that children should be praised, "even if you have to stretch them a bit" makes good sense for at least three reasons.

2. Is it a good idea to praise children even when they don"t really deserve it? I don"t think so. Sometimes it may be useful, but there are several circumstances when undeserved praise can hurt more than it can help.

3. Because praise is vital in the life of a child as well as in the lives of adults, I completely agree with Lavina Christensen Fugal.

None of these openings will win a prize for originality, but they all do the job—introducing the topic and stating the essay"s main idea. Openings 1 and 2 also suggest a plan for the essay. The first essay is likely to discuss three reasons for agreeing with the prompt. The second will show how children can sometimes be helped and sometimes be hurt by undeserved praise.

Another virtue of these sample openings is that they are short. Long-winded openings can work against you on the SAT. An opening that comprises, say, more than a quarter of your essay reflects poorly on your sense of proportion.

If you can"t think of an adequate opening right away, don"t put off writing the body of the essay. A good idea may strike you at any time. In fact, many writers, needing time to warm up, begin with material they fully expect to delete. Once they hit their stride, they figure out the point of their essays and work on openings sure to hook their readers. As you practice, you might try a similar tactic. Delete your first paragraph unless it contains ideas you can"t live without.

Practice in Writing an Appealing Opening

Directions: Here is a list of general essay topics. Try to write an appealing opening for each.

1. The courage of one"s convictions

2. Deadlines

3. "Keep it! You may need it someday."

4. The wrong time in the wrong place

5. Responsibility

Building an Essay with Paragraphs

The inventor of the paragraph devised a simple way to steer readers through a piece of writing. Each new paragraph alerts readers to get ready for a shift of some kind, just as your car"s directional blinker tells other drivers that you"re about to turn.

Yet, not every new paragraph signals a drastic change. The writer may simply want to nudge the discussion ahead to the next step. Some paragraphs spring directly from those that preceded them. The paragraph you are now reading, for instance, is linked to the one before by the connecting word Yet. The connection was meant to alert you to a change in thought, but it was also intended to remind you that the two

paragraphs are related. Abrupt starts may be useful from time to time to keep readers on their toes. But good writers avoid a string of sudden turns that can transform surprise into confusion.

In an essay, paragraphs usually play a primary role and one or more secondary roles. An introductory paragraph, for instance, launches the essay and makes the intent of the essay clear to the reader. The concluding paragraph leaves the reader with a thought to remember and provides a sense of closure. The majority of paragraphs, however, are developmental. They carry forward the main point of the essay by performing any number of functions, among them:

• Adding new ideas to the preceding discussion

• Continuing or explaining in more detail an idea presented earlier

• Reiterating a previously stated idea

• Citing an example of a previously stated idea

• Evaluating an opinion stated earlier

• Refuting previously stated ideas

• Providing a new or contrasting point of view

• Describing the relationship between ideas presented earlier

• Providing background material

• Raising a hypothetical or rhetorical question about the topic

Whatever its functions, a paragraph should contribute to the essay”s overall growth. A paragraph that fails to amplify the main idea of the essay should be revised or deleted. Similarly, any idea within a paragraph that doesn”t contribute to the development of the paragraph”s topic needs to be changed or eliminated.

TOPIC AND SUPPORTING SENTENCES

Whether readers skim your paragraphs or slog doggedly through every word, they need to find sentences now and then that, like landmarks, help them to know where they are. Such guiding sentences differ from others because they define the paragraph”s main topic; hence the name topic sentence.

Most, but not all, paragraphs contain topic sentences. The topic of some paragraphs is so obvious that to state it would be redundant. Then, too, groups of paragraphs can be so closely knit that one topic sentence states the most important idea for all of them.

TIP 

Use topic sentences to guide readers through your essay.

Topic sentences come in a variety of forms. What they all have in common is their helpfulness. Consider them landmarks. To drive from your home to school, for example, you turn left at the stop sign, take a half right under the railroad trestle, and a right at the Exxon station. Each landmark tells you where to turn. Similarly, in a piece of writing, a topic sentence often marks a turning point that tells readers the direction they"ll be going for a while.

Most topic sentences come first in a paragraph, but they can be located anywhere. And some paragraphs don"t even need a topic sentence. Instead, the main idea can be strongly implied by an accumulation of details and ideas. For instance, a description of a fast-food restaurant might detail the crowd, the noise, the overflowing garbage cans, the smell of cooking oil, the lines of people, the crumb-strewn tables, and so on. A reader would certainly get the picture. To state explicitly "It was a busy day at Burger King" would serve no purpose.

Practice in Developing Topic Sentences

PART A

Directions: The following paragraphs have been taken from longer essays. Highlight the topic sentence in each. Some paragraphs may have an implied topic sentence.

1. [1] My family has moved so often I sometimes feel like a gypsy. [2] The first time we moved I was only four years old, and it didn"t bother me. [3] It seemed as though we just got settled, though, when my father announced a new transfer—to California, where I got to start school and where we stayed for three years. [4] But then we heard it was time to move on, and we settled in Minnesota. [5] Just as I began to make friends and get used to the Midwest, the company sent us to Georgia. [6] From there it was two years in England and a year in Washington, D.C. [7] We"ve been in Massachusetts for almost six months now, and my main problem is answering that question, "Where are you from?"

2. [1] Another difficulty is that a person with a police record may have a hard time getting or renewing a driver"s license. [2] A conviction for a felony can prevent a person from being able to enter a profession such as medicine, law, or teaching. [3] It can also make it difficult to get a responsible position in business or industry. [4] Special hearings are required before an ex-convict can hold a government job.

3. [1] Music blasts from twenty boom boxes. [2] Children screech while splashing their friends at the edge of the sea. [3] Teenagers throw frisbees at each other. [4] The waves rush up the sand, gurgle a bit, stop, and retreat. [5] A single-engine plane, trailing a long sign—EAT PIZZA AT SAL"S—buzzes overhead. [6] A vendor shouts, "Hey, cold drinks here, getcha cold drinks." [7] During the summer the beach is a noisy place.

4. [1] Clothing designers create new styles every year. [2] Therefore, consumers rush out and buy the new styles and cast away last year"s designs even before the clothes are worn out. [3] Forgotten styles hang in closets gathering dust. [4] They"ll never be worn again. [5] People fall in love with new cars and sell their old models long before they are obsolete. [6] Just for the sake of flashy style and shiny good looks, they scrimp and save their money or go deeply into debt. [7] And for what? [8] Just to look good. [9] All the money goes into the pockets of the manufacturers. [10] If people would get in the habit of buying goods only when they need replacement, waste would become an exception in America instead of a way of life.

5. [1] Perhaps it"s true that "all the world"s a stage," as Shakespeare said, because I have noticed that I act one way with one group of people and another way with a different group. [2] With one person I may act like a little kid. [3] I may act very shy or silly. [4] It"s as though I can"t control what I"m doing. [5] The circumstances just make me act that way. [6] Then, at another time with different people, I am the life of the party. [7] I won"t stop talking, and people think I am about 20 years old. [8] I feel that I can pretend so realistically that I sometimes convince myself that I really am what I"m pretending to be. [9] That"s a very scary thought.

6. [1] During these years, my family has had about sixty foster children come into our house to live. [2] We have had children from all backgrounds, races, and religions. [3] Each child brought to our door brings a different tale of misfortune. [4] These stories have gradually grown worse over the years. [5] When we first started, the parents of the child usually wanted him or her but were temporarily unable or unprepared to care for their son or daughter. [6] Now, it is not unusual for the mother to be sixteen years old, a drug addict, or a convict. [7] Most of the time the mother is a combination of those. [8] Right now, we have two children living with us. [9] Three of their four parents are in jail, and one of the fathers is unknown. [10] Truly, as time goes on, caring for foster children has become more challenging.

7. [1] True totalitarianism champions the idea that everyone should be subservient to the state. [2] All personal goals and desires should be thrown aside unless they coincide with the common good of society. [3] Freedom for the individual is sacrificed so that the level of freedom for all can be raised. [4] With this philosophy,

drastic improvements may be made in a relatively short time. [5] Almost by edict from the head of the society, education and literacy rates can be improved, and unemployment and crime rates may decrease.

8. [1] During adolescence the most obvious change that occurs is physical. [2] Childlike boys and girls suddenly blossom into young men and women. [3] Besides undergoing physical changes, though, this period is usually the time when personal values are explored and molded. [4] Decisions need to be made about what is important and what is not. [5] A struggle takes place within the mind of every adolescent to form a moral and intellectual code that determines the quality of the lives they will have in both the immediate and long-range future.

9. [1] The story by Stephen Crane raises the question whether a soldier who runs away from inevitable death in battle must be considered less of a man than one who stays and dies. [2] To answer the question, one must first define "man." [3] Consider the stereotypical options. [4] There is the Arnold Schwarzenegger type who solves all of life"s problems with physical strength and advanced weapons. [5] Then there is the Howard Roark type, a character from The Fountainhead, who climbs to the top by using his brilliant mind and integrity. [6] Finally, there is the Willy Loman type, a character in Death of a Salesman, who struggles his whole life pursuing an illusion. [7] At the end, he realizes that he has fought a hopeless battle, but at least he has fought.

10. [1] In World War II, the United States dropped two atomic bombs, one on Hiroshima and one on Nagasaki, in order to defeat the Japanese. [2] American history textbooks justify the bombings as something that needed to be done in order to prevent even more deaths during a longer war. [3] Our history books also say that the death toll was about 50,000, while the Japanese claim the bombs took almost twice that many lives. [4] If the United States had lost the war, then the bombings would have been thought to be criminal actions. [5] But since we won, the judgment of history is that the end justifies the means. [6] In fact, throughout history, the war crimes of the victors have repeatedly been justified.

PART B

Directions: Topic sentences have been deleted from the following paragraphs. After reading each paragraph, write an appropriate topic sentence. Omit a topic sentence if none is needed.

1.

My mother"s nature is very outgoing, emotional, and impulsive. She enjoys dancing, going to parties, being with lots of people, and spending money freely. My father, on the other hand, is quiet, reserved, and controlled. He looks at things logically and practically, not giving in to his emotions. He feels more comfortable with only one or two friends, if any, and is content reading a book or going on a solitary walk for recreation.

2.

This was especially true in track and field. As other countries learned American techniques of training, however, their runners improved. Now athletes from all over the world win as many as or even more medals than American track and field athletes.

3.

One example of a self-destructive monopoly was the auto industry in the twentieth century. In order to maintain their grip on the domestic market, Chrysler, General Motors, and Ford squelched the competition. Inventions that might have helped them in the long run were ignored. Automobiles were changed very little from year to year. Millions of dollars more were budgeted for advertising than for improving either the cars themselves or the process of building them.

4.

An angry crowd thrust its way into the palace courtyard. Hundreds of people wielding sticks and knives and pastry rollers screamed at the figure who emerged on the balcony. “We need bread,” they shouted, “we need bread!” The aristocratic figure

above straightened her perfumed hair, wrapped her ermine shawl more tightly around her shoulders, and with a lift of her chin, turned and muttered to one of her ladies in waiting, “Let them eat cake.”

5.

From the first page to the last, I couldn”t put it down. The author must have lived with the family in the book because she describes the members in lifelike detail. She tells what they ate, how they felt about religion, housing, politics, and sex. By the end, you know them as though they were your own brothers and sisters.

6.

One day I was smoking in the boys” bathroom when a teacher walked in. He took me down to the principal”s office, where I was given a three-day suspension. My mom grounded me for a month, and I didn”t get the loan my dad had promised me to buy my friend”s used car.

7.

Probably the most important part of this new life is learning to get along with your roommates, the people you see most often. Finding the perfect roommate may be impossible. The person should be a nonsmoker and have similar interests to mine. She (it must be a she) should be considerate, courteous, generous, thoughtful, studious when I want to study, fun-loving when I want to party, respectful of privacy and personal property, and finally, she should have a great sense of humor. In a nutshell, she should be like me.

8.

In childhood I never hesitated to take chances, to jump over wide cracks in the rocks. Sometimes I made it across with no problems; at other times I was not so lucky. I scraped my knees, bled a little, but came back daring to try again. But now that I"m older, I increasingly find myself shying away, afraid to fail, fearful of getting hurt. I live a style of life in which being in control and on top of things is paramount, where being the best and being perfect is what I yearn for. I am afraid to make mistakes, afraid to bleed, and afraid of being powerless. I take fewer chances.

9.

He knew that he grew irritable more frequently. Why shouldn"t he, when nurses spoke to him as though he was seven years old, pronouncing their words deliberately and slowly. They must have thought he was hard of hearing or didn"t understand. They constantly forced medicine on him and did everything for him as though he was incapable of helping himself. Sometimes he grew angry about the way he was ignored after he asked for something. His words were nothing to them, just as he was nothing.

10.

They did not have written language, but by 1000 A.D., they had built preplanned apartment houses four and five stories high. The foot-thick walls of oven-baked adobe brick, plastered over smoothly with clay, kept the occupants warm in winter and cool in summer. But by far their greatest architectural achievement was the intricate system of canals and reservoirs that irrigated their fields and brought water for miles across the desert directly into their homes.

PART C

Directions: What follows is a three-paragraph excerpt from the journal of a visitor to the South Pole. On separate blank pages, write a topic sentence that is suitable for each paragraph.

Antarctic Adventure

Bellies flattened on the snow, they pant and claw their way across miles and miles of frozen landscape. On downhills, they have to be braked and kept under control by winding ropes around the runners of the sleds. After a day"s run, the dogs eat supper and sleep soundly. The next morning, they bark and yip cheerfully, as though to shame their weary masters.

The scale is unreal, almost as if it were a landscape from another planet. Away from the coast, no life exists, and therefore, no bacteria, no disease, no pests, no human interference. It is antiseptic and can only be compared with life under the ocean or in space.

Although snow offers shelter, insulation, drink, building material, and a highway, its friendliness is a dangerous illusion. Ice blocks and sinister piles of snow tell a tale of avalanches tumbling regularly from the mountains all around. A person on skis could suddenly disappear in a cavern of deep, glistening powder. On foot, sunk to the hips in snow, you might cover less than a mile before dropping from exhaustion. Sudden snow squalls will blind you, cause you to lose your bearings and balance, trapping you hopelessly inside a drift that may ultimately be your burial mound.

PART D

Directions: Print out or photocopy an essay you"ve written recently. On one copy underline all the topic sentences. Let a friend do the same on the second copy. Then compare your answers. If you agree, you can be pretty sure that your topic sentences are doing what they are supposed to do.

Paragraph Development

Like an essay, a paragraph should have a discernible organization. Ideas can be arranged from general to specific, or vice versa. Chronological and spatial arrangements make sense for narrative and descriptive paragraphs. In a cause-and-effect paragraph, logic dictates that the cause precedes the effect, but the opposite may sometimes be preferable. As always, clarity and intent should govern the sequence of ideas.

TIP 

Develop your ideas with more than one sentence or single example.

In general, a paragraph of only one or two sentences may be too scanty. Most of the time, thorough development of an idea calls for several sentences. Journalists, however, often write paragraphs consisting of one or two sentences. But the bulk of contemporary nonfiction consists of paragraphs of four to eight sentences.

In a coherent paragraph each sentence has its place and purpose. Disjointed paragraphs, on the other hand, consist of sentences arranged in random order. Or they contain ideas vaguely related or irrelevant to the main idea. Meaning serves as the primary glue that holds a coherent paragraph together, but transitional words and phrases such as for example, also, but, and on the other hand also help. In the following paragraph, notice how the italicized words and phrases tie sentences to each other.

[1] Tom Joad, the protagonist of John Steinbeck"s Grapes of Wrath, faces a dilemma after his release on parole from an Oklahoma state penitentiary. [2] Five years earlier, he had killed a man in a fight when the man accosted him with a knife. [3] Although he claimed self-defense at his trial, Tom was found guilty. [4] Upon his release, he intends to follow the provisions of his parole, including the requirement to remain inside the state of Oklahoma. [5] When he finally catches up with his family, however, they are en route to California. [6] Consequently, he must decide whether to obey the law or help his family start a new life in the West.

Sentence 1 expresses the paragraph"s most general idea and serves as the topic sentence. The pronoun he throughout the passage ties every other sentence to Tom Joad, the subject of the topic sentence. Five years earlier, in sentence 2, explains what had occurred before the events in the first sentence. In sentence 3, although signals that a new but contrasting idea is on the way. Upon his release, in sentence 4, adds still another link to the topic sentence. The word however in sentence 5 refers to the dilemma alluded to in sentence 1 and explained in sentences 2–5. And in sentence 6,Consequently introduces the precise nature of Tom"s dilemma. Because of these linking elements, the six sentences cannot be arranged in any other way without destroying the paragraph"s coherence.

Practice in Developing Paragraphs

Directions: The sentences in each of the following groups make up a coherent paragraph. They are not in order, however. Rearrange sentences logically. On separate pieces of paper, write the number that represents the position of each sentence in the paragraph.

1. ___ a. A particular worker, for example, may lack the skill to do a certain job.

____ b. Another important variable is inclement weather, which can set a project back for days on end.

____ c. In spite of the best laid plans and preparation, building projects sometimes work out badly.

____ d. The main reason is that the foreman can”t always predict what the workers will do.

____ e. Then, the project can”t proceed until another worker is found.

2. ____ a. They also tend toward an unhealthy lifestyle, according to a study of 374 college undergraduates at Carleton University.

____ b. Here is some bad news for students who put off studying.

____ c. In addition, student procrastinators are more likely to eat poorly, smoke more, and sleep less than students who keep up with their schoolwork.

____ d. Their overall college experience, as a result, is far less satisfying than the experience of students who do their homework promptly.

____ e. Procrastinators get more cold and flu symptoms and have more digestive problems than their punctual classmates.

3. ____ a. College students swipe IDs to open doors, buy tickets to athletic events, operate ATMs, do their laundry, and even indicate their presence in a lecture hall.

____ b. It also identified students when they took books from the library.

____ c. Most colleges issue ID cards to students.

____ d. But magnetic strips and wireless chips have converted this modest piece of plastic into an essential, multiuse appendage.

____ e. At one time, a student ID was just a laminated card good for gaining access to campus buildings.

4. ____ a. In addition, a college official can often tell from an essay whether the applicant is eligible for a particular kind of scholarship or other type of financial aid.

____ b. At some colleges the essay counts heavily in admissions decisions and is used to place students in the proper academic programs.

____ c. College admissions officials read application essays with great care.

____ d. One reason is that the essays help colleges see each applicant more clearly and personally.

____ e. For example, an essay may explain why a bright student earned mediocre grades in high school.

5. ____ a. Soon thereafter, some colleges began to ask applicants whether they received professional help in completing their application essays.

____ b. They also found that teachers, counselors, and other adults were giving more than casual lessons in essay writing.

____ c. Wondering what caused the change, admissions officials soon discovered that many high schools had made instruction in writing an application essay a part of the curriculum.

____ d. In recent years, students from certain parts of the country started sending in polished college application essays in large numbers.

____ e. For up to $250 an hour, some "consultants" were all but composing essays for anxious students.

For additional practice in arranging sentences, turn to Part V.

Practice in Identifying Paragraph Unity and Coherence

Directions: The following paragraphs may suffer from either lack of unity, lack of coherence, or both. Identify the problem in each, and write a comment that offers an effective remedy. Some paragraphs may not need revision.

1. [1] Lord of the Flies is about a group of English schoolboys stranded on a remote island after an airplane crash. [2] When they arrive, they divide into groups. [3] There are groups at this high school, too. [4] On the island, Piggy is the leader of the group consisting of the most intelligent and rational boys. [5] He is a thinker, but he gets killed by another group, the savages, led by Jack. [6] A third group on the island is led by Ralph, who wants law and order and a set of rules. [7] The different groups in the novel are amazingly similar to groups in this school, known as the nerds, the jocks, and the preps.

Comment: _____

_____

2. [1] Under the present law, doing illegal drugs can have serious consequences for young people. [2] They may find their education interrupted and the future put in doubt by having a police record. [3] An arrest or conviction for a felony can complicate their lives and plans. [4] A police record causes embarrassment to a

person"s family. [5] Parents like to brag about their children"s accomplishments. [6] Can you imagine a mother who would be proud of her daughter"s experience in the courts and in prison?

Comment: _____

_____

3. [1] Today there is general agreement that we are experiencing unprecedented change. [2] Established institutions are crumbling. [3] The majority of people no longer live in traditional families that consist of two natural parents and their children. [4] Old moralities are being questioned. [5] The United States has an increasingly diverse population. [6] At an early age, ghetto children may learn the thrills offered by drugs, crime, and gang warfare. [7] Children at all social and economic levels learn to expect that lying, cheating, and stealing are rampant in business, politics, and almost every other endeavor. [8] Even churches are not exempt from corruption.

Comment: _____

_____

4. [1] Rival political parties make elections meaningful by allowing voters to choose among candidates with contrasting views and interests. [2] Most parties try to unite divided interests within their ranks in order to appeal to the widest number of voters. [3] In the United States and Great Britain, a two-party system has long been effective in uniting various interests. [4] In dictatorships, criticism of the party in power may be regarded as treason. [5] Often, only a single, controlling party is permitted to exist. [6] Elections mean little in such countries, for the people have no real choice among the candidates. [7] Nor do they have the freedom to openly criticize their government.

Comment: _____

_____

5. [1] Department stores, unless they are like general stores that still function in some small towns, usually hire employees by the hundreds for different jobs. [2] A large number of workers engage in buying, pricing, and selling merchandise. [3] A sales staff promotes sales by advertising and by designing attractive displays of goods to be sold. [4] In recent years, mail-order buying on the Internet has forced

many department stores to go out of business. [5] In addition, the store"s comptroller handles financial affairs, such as billing, credit, and payroll. [6] The personnel department hires employees and deals with employment problems.

Comment: _____

_____

6. [1] The porpoise, or bottlenose dolphin, is one of the most intelligent animals. [2] It can imitate the sounds of human speech and communicate with its fellow porpoises using barks, clicks, and whistles. [3] Scientists rate their intelligence between that of the chimpanzee, long held as the most intelligent nonhuman animal, and the dog. [4] Porpoises can be trained to leap high in the air, jump through hoops, catch a ball, fetch a stick, and even to participate in underwater work by serving as messengers between divers and surface ships.

Comment: _____

_____

7. [1] Robinson Crusoe is a memorable adventure story about a man marooned on a desert island and was written by the British author Daniel Defoe. [2] Defoe was born in London in 1660 and started writing only after he went bankrupt in a business career. [3] He wrote about politics, religion, economics, and geography in addition to writing poetry and novels. [4] Today, he is best known for Robinson Crusoe, which is but a tiny fraction of his work.

Comment: _____

_____

8. [1] Aristotle made valuable contributions to the study of logic. [2] Plato, the teacher of Aristotle and Socrates" star pupil, believed that understanding the nature of perfect forms such as the circle and the square leads to understanding of ideal forms in all areas of life. [3] Socrates fought the Sophists all his life because he believed in truth, and the Sophists denied the existence of truth. [4] They said that everything was relative, including knowledge and morality. [5] The period of ancient philosophy reached its climax in Greece in 600–500 B.C.

Comment: _____

_____

9. [1] The American pioneers made simple farm implements and household tools. [2] They made pitchforks, for example, by attaching long handles to deer antlers. [3] Brooms were made by fastening together ten or twenty small tree branches. [4] They whittled wooden spoons, bowls, platters, and used gourds and the horns of sheep and other animals for drinking cups. [5] They made graters by punching holes into a piece of sheet iron. [6] Then they would rub kernels of corn across the jagged surface to make cornmeal.

Comment: _____

_____

10. [1] You can"t find Potter"s Field on a map. [2] It is not a real place. [3] Rather, it is the name given to any plot of land reserved for the burial of unidentified and destitute people. [4] The name was first used in the New Testament of the Bible. [5] After Judas betrayed Christ for thirty pieces of silver, the priests used the money to buy "the potter"s field to bury strangers in." [6] Today, in many urban areas, potter"s fields have disappeared. [7] Land is too valuable to use for burying unknown and unclaimed corpses. [8] For a fraction of the cost, bodies are cremated and ashes thrown into common graves.

Comment: _____

_____

Transitions

Consider your readers as tourists in a foreign land and your essay as a journey they take from one place to another. Because you can"t expect strangers to find their own way, you must lead them. As their guide, you must tell them where they are going (the introduction) and remind them of the progress they"re making (the body of the essay).

In long essays, readers need more reminders than in short ones. To keep readers well informed, you needn"t repeat what you"ve already written but rather plant key ideas, slightly rephrased, as milestones along the way. (The sentence you just read contains just such a marker. The phrase "To keep readers well informed" cues you to keep in mind the topic of this paragraph—helping readers find their way.) By regularly alluding to the main idea of paragraphs, you"ll keep readers focused and hold their attention from start to finish.

TIP

English is crowded with transitional words and phrases. Use them!

You can help readers along, too, by choosing words that set up relationships between one thought and the next. This can be done with such words as *this*, which actually ties the sentence you are now reading to the previous one. The word *too* in the first sentence of this paragraph serves the same function; it acts as a link between this paragraph and the one before. Fortunately, the English language is brimming with transitional words and phrases for tying sentences and ideas together.

What follows is a collection of common transitional words and phrases grouped according to their customary use. With a bit of thought, you could probably add to the list.

When you ADD ideas: *moreover, in addition, further, besides, also, and then, then too, again, next, secondly, equally important*

When you make a CONTRAST: *however, conversely, in contrast, on the other hand, on the contrary, but, nevertheless, and yet, still, even so*

When you COMPARE or draw a PARALLEL: *similarly, likewise, in comparison, in like manner, at the same time, in the same vein*

When you cite an EXAMPLE: *for example, for instance, as when, as illustrated by*

When you show RESULTS: *as a result, in consequence, consequently, accordingly, therefore, thus, hence*

When you REINFORCE an idea: *indeed, in fact, as a matter of fact, to be sure, of course, in any event, by all means*

When you express SEQUENCE or the passing of TIME: *soon after, then, previously, not long after, meanwhile, in the meantime, later, simultaneously, at the same time, immediately, next, at length, thereafter*

When you show PLACES: *here, nearby, at this spot, near at hand, in proximity, on the opposite side, across from, adjacent to, underneath*

When you CONCLUDE: *finally, in short, in other words, in a word, to sum up, in conclusion, in the end, when all is said and done*

You don"t need a specific transitional word or phrase to bind every sentence to another. Ideas themselves can create strong links. Notice in the following paired sentences that underlined words in the second sentences echo an idea expressed in the first.

[1] As a kind of universal language, music unites people from age eight to eighty. [2] No matter how old they are, people can lose themselves in melodies, rhythms, tempos, and endless varieties of sound.

[1] At the heart of *Romeo and Juliet* is a long-standing feud between the Capulets and the Montagues. [2] As enemies, the two families always fight in the streets of Verona.

[1] To drive nails into very hard wood without bending them, first dip the points into grease or soap. [2] You can accomplish the same end by moistening the points of the nails in your mouth or in a can of water.

One of your goals on the SAT is to assure readers a smooth trip through your essay. Without your help—that is, without transitions—readers may find themselves lurching from one idea to another. Before long, they"ll give up or get lost like travelers on an unmarked road. Even though not every sentence needs a specific transition, three or four successive sentences without a link of some kind can leave readers wondering whether the trip through your essay is worth taking.

Practice in Using Transitions

Directions: Use as many transitions as you can while writing paragraphs on the following suggested topics.

1. Write a paragraph on how to do something—drive a car from home to school, pull a practical joke, avoid doing homework, burn a CD, get on the good side of a teacher, give your cat/dog a bath. Use as many SEQUENCE/TIME transitions as possible, but don"t overdo it.

2. Write a paragraph detailing a cause and its effect: the cause and effect of good teaching, of a new fad, of stress in high school students, of taking risks, of lying, of a close friendship. Use as many RESULT transitions as you can, but don"t go overboard.

3. Write a paragraph that compares and contrasts one of the following: the way people respond to pressure, groups in your school, two athletes, then and now, boredom and laziness, two books, a friend who turned into an enemy, an enemy who became a friend. Use as manyCOMPARISON/CONTRAST transitions as you can, but don"t get carried away.

4. Write a paragraph in which you argue for or against an issue—electronic eavesdropping, school dress codes, educational vouchers, privileges for senior citizens, censoring the Internet, dieting, restrictions on smoking. Use as many ADDITION transitions as you can, but only where they make sense.

Using Plain and Precise Language

The SAT Writing Test is not a place to show off your vocabulary. To write clearly, use plain words. Use an elegant word only when it"s the best and only word that expresses what you want to say. Why? Because an elegant word used merely to use an elegant word is bombastic…er…big-sounding and artificial. Besides, simple ideas dressed up in ornate words often obscure meaning. Or worse, they make writers sound phony if not foolish. For instance, under ordinary circumstances you"d never utter the words, "Let"s go to our domiciles" at the end of a day at school. Nor would you call your teachers *pedagogues* or your dog a *canine*. Yet, the following overblown sentence appeared in a student"s essay:

Although my history pedagogue insisted that I labor in my domicile immediately upon arrival, I was obliged to air my canine before commencing.

How much clearer and more direct it would have been to write:

I had to walk the dog before starting my history homework.

Fortunately, English is loaded with simple words that can express the most profound ideas. A sign that says STOP! conveys its message more clearly than CEASE AND DESIST. When a dentist pokes at your teeth, it *hurts*, even if dentists call it "experiencing discomfort." Simple doesn"t necessarily mean short, however. It"s true that plain words tend to be the short ones, but not always. The word *fid* is short, but it"s not plain unless you are a sailor, in which case you"d know that a fid supports the mast on your boat or is an instrument used to pry open a tight knot in your lines. On the other hand, *spontaneously* is five syllables long. Yet it is a plain and simple word because of its frequent use.

Simple ideas dressed up in ornate words not only obscure meaning but make writers sound pretentious:

Fancy:	The more I recalled her degradation of me, the more inexorable I became.
Plain:	The more I thought of her insults, the more determined I grew.
Fancy:	Lester has a proclivity toward prevarication.
Plain:	Lester is a liar.

Fancy:	The coterie of harriers gleaned the salience of synergy in competitive racing engagements.
Plain:	The runners learned that teamwork pays off in races.

Ernest Hemingway called a writer"s greatest gift a "built-in, shock-proof crap detector." Hemingway"s own detector worked well. He produced about the leanest, plainest writing in the English language—not that you should try to emulate Hemingway. (That"s already been done by countless imitators.) But an efficient crap detector of your own will encourage you to choose words only because they express exactly what you mean.

Euphemisms

Of course there are occasions when the plainest words won"t do. Fortunately, our language provides countless euphemisms—words and phrases that express unsavory or objectionable ideas more delicately. In some contexts—a funeral service, for instance—the verb *die* may be too coarse or painful. In its place, a euphemism such as *pass away*, *pass on*, *be deceased*, *rest*, *expire*, *meet one"s maker* may be more suitable. Think also of *toilet*, a word almost never posted on a public bathroom door. Instead, you"ll find such labels as *W.C.*, *lounge*, *powder room*, *washroom*, *comfort station*, and, probably the most euphemistic usage of all—*ladies* and *men*.

Euphemisms unquestionably have their place and function. In essay writing, however, use them only when you have a valid reason for doing so.

Don"t interpret this admonition to use plain words as a reason to use the language of blogging, IMs, or texting in your SAT essay. Everyday language brims with colorful words and expressions like *hulk out, cop some z"s, awesome, and total babe*, has its place, but its place is not your SAT essay unless you definitely need the latest lingo to create an effect that you can"t produce in any other way. If you insist on using slang, that"s okay, but don"t use quotation marks to draw attention to the fact that you can"t think of standard or more original words. If, to make a point, you overload your essay with slang, be sure to demonstrate your mastery of standard English in at least part of the piece. After all, colleges want to know that you can write good, standard prose.

For the SAT, a plain, conversational style will always be appropriate. The language should sound like you. In formal essays, custom requires you to remove yourself from stage center and focus on the subject matter. But SAT essays encourage more casual responses in which references to yourself are perfectly acceptable. It"s not essential to use the first-person singular pronoun, but using *I* is often preferable to using the more impersonal *one*, as in "When *one* is writing an SAT essay, *one* sometimes writes funny," or *you*, as in "Sometimes *you* feel like a dope," or by avoiding pronouns

altogether. But an essay that expresses the writer"s personal opinion will sound most natural when cast in first-person singular.

The point is, don"t be phony! SAT essay readers are old hands at spotting pretense in students" writing. Let your genuine voice ring out, although the way you speak is not necessarily the way you should write. Spoken language is often vague, clumsy, repetitive, confused, and wordy. Consider writing as the everyday speech of someone who speaks exceedingly well—grammatically correct and free of pop expressions and clichés. Think of it as the kind of mature speech expected of you in serious conversation, say, with a panel of parents concerned about your school"s curriculum. Or maybe even the way this paragraph sounds. You could do a lot worse!

Precise Language

Precise words are memorable, but hazy, hard-to-grasp words fade quickly away. Tell your garage mechanic vaguely, "This car is broken," and he"ll ask for more information. Say precisely "My car won"t start in freezing weather," and he"ll raise the engine hood and go to work. If a patient in the E.R. says, "I feel pain," a surgeon might at least like to know exactly where it hurts before pulling out her scalpels. In other words, precise language is more informative, more functional, and thus more desirable.

In the first draft of an essay, Jeff S. used the following to illustrate what happened on a day he"d like to forget:

It was an awful day outside. Everything was going wrong. I felt terrible. Things weren"t going well in school. I got a below-par grade on a paper, and I was sure that I had failed my science quiz. I also had lots of things to do at home and no time to do them. My mother was in a bad mood, too. She yelled at me for all kinds of things. Then Penny called, and we got into a disagreement. I had trouble with the speakers on my laptop, and I couldn"t pay for repairs. I went to bed early, hoping that tomorrow would be better.

Reviewing this paragraph a few days later, Jeff realized the writing begged for more precise language. Yes, the day had been dreadful, but his account needed details to prove it. The next draft took care of that:

On a cold and rainy November day, my life was as miserable as the weather. I felt chills all day, and my throat was sore. In school I got a D on a history paper about the Bubonic Plague, and I was sure that I had failed the chemistry quiz. The homework was piling up: two lab reports, more than 150 pages to read in *Wuthering Heights*, a chapter in the history text, and about a hundred new vocabulary words in Spanish. I didn"t have time or energy to do it all, especially when my mother started to pick at

me about my messy room and the thank you letters I"m supposed to write to my grandparents. Just as she was reminding me that my SAT registration was overdue, Penny called to say that she couldn"t come for Thanksgiving after all, so we argued about loyalty and trust and keeping promises. When I tried to watch *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows Part 2*again, the sound was distorted. Human voices sounded like chattering chipmunks. On the phone the repairman said he would charge $100 just to look at the damn thing, but I don"t have that kind of money. By 9:00 P.M. I was in bed, hoping that tomorrow would be better.

In this version Jeff included many precise details that vividly illustrate the wretchedness of that miserable day. Not every paragraph of every essay calls for such detail. But an essay consisting solely of abstractions will leave readers at sea.

Surely, vague, shadowy words are easier to think of. But they often cover up a lack of clear and rigorous thinking. For example, it"s easy to pass judgment on a book by calling it "good" or "interesting." But what readers should be told is precisely why you think so. How simple to call someone an "old man" without bothering to show the reader a "stooped white-haired gentleman shuffling along the sidewalk." A student who calls her teacher "ugly" sends a different image of ugliness to each reader. But if the teacher is a "shifty-eyed tyrant who spits when she talks," then say it. Or if the teacher"s personality is ugly, show her ill-temper, arrogance, and cruelty as she curses her hapless students.

Good writers understand that their words must appeal to a reader"s senses. To write precisely is to write with pictures, sounds, and actions that are as vivid on paper as they are in reality. Exact words leave distinct marks; abstract ones, blurry impressions. As the following pairs of sentences illustrate, precise writers turn hazy notions into vivid images:

Hazy:	Skiing is a fun sport. The mountains are pretty, and it takes skill.
Precise:	On the ski slope, I marvel at the snow-decked pines and brilliant sky and thrill to the challenge of weaving gracefully down steep mountains.
Hazy:	Rather violently, Carolyn expressed her anger at the other team"s player.
Precise:	Carolyn snarled, "Get out of my face" as she punched the Tigers" goalie in the nose.
Hazy:	My parents were happy when I got accepted in college.
Precise:	The letter thrilled my parents. Their worried looks suddenly disappeared, they stopped nagging me about homework, and because the question had been answered, they never again asked what would become of me.

Clearly, the precisely worded sentences are richer than the hazy ones. But they are also much longer. In fact, it"s not always desirable or necessary to define every

abstraction with precise details. Each time you mention *dinner*, for instance, you don"t have to recite the menu. When you use an abstract word in an essay, ask yourself what is more important—to give readers a more detailed account of your idea or to push on to other, more important, matters. Context determines how abstract your essay should be. Just remember that nobody likes reading essays that fail to deal concretely with anything.

Practice in Using Precise Wording

Directions: The next ten sentences desperately need more precise wording. Please provide the verbal antidote to their vagueness.

1. The barn was old and run-down.

2. She did not take it lightly when the accusation was leveled against her.

3. Winning the overwhelming approval of the people gave the candidate great satisfaction.

4. She tried diligently to study, but one could see that it made no difference.

5. The atmosphere at the graduation party was intense.

6. One must do many things to earn a place on the roster of an athletic team.

7. It"s rewarding to visit places where customs are different because unusual customs are always interesting.

8. She met with little success during her high school career.

9. The family was very poor.

10. In a perilous situation, Rod showed that he was brave.

Fresh Language and Surprises

Dull language has three main qualities: (1) boring, (2) boring, and (3) boring. So, do your SAT readers a favor by giving them a verbal surprise. After reading hundreds of predictable essays on the same topic, readers will do cartwheels for something fresh and new. (Ha! SAT readers doing cartwheels—that"s kind of a surprise, isn"t it?) It takes courage and imagination to use fresh language, but here"s a guarantee: A verbal surprise may not turn SAT readers into acrobats, but it will unquestionably give your essay a boost.

What is a verbal surprise? Nothing more than an interesting image or choice of words. That doesn"t mean use odd words like *twit* or *fop.* Even ordinary words, used deftly, can dazzle readers. Moreover they"ll sound more natural. For example:

Ordinary:	I was ten before I saw my first pigeon.
Surprising:	I was ten before I met my first pigeon.

Because we don"t normally "meet" pigeons, the unanticipated change from *saw* to *met* is mildly surprising.

Ordinary:	The shark bit the swimmers.
Surprising:	The shark dined on the swimmers.

Changing the verb makes a common sentence surprising because *dined* suggests gentility and good manners, qualities that most sharks lack.

Ordinary:	The gunshot frightened the pigeons, which flew away.
Surprising:	The gunshot filled the sky with frightened pigeons.

The ordinary sentence states literally that the sound of the gunshot scared the pigeons. In the revision, the shot becomes a vital force with the power to fill the sky. Both the pigeons and the sentence have sprung to life.

Words can also surprise readers by suggesting certain sounds. The word *bombard*, for instance, has a heavy explosive sound. *Yawn* has a wide-open sound that can be stretched out indefinitely. *Slogging* is slow, just like the action it names, and *choke* sticks in your throat. *Murmuring streams* evokes the sound of—what else?

Readers find unexpected pleasure, too, from the repetition of sounds—both consonants and vowels, as in *the dark, dank day smelled of death; the machine sucked up sewage from the swamp;* and *the cold wind moaned over the ocean waves.* The appeal of such repetition is evidenced by the countless clichés that crowd our everyday speech and (regrettably) our writing, such as *footloose and fancy free*, *sink or swim*, and *blast from the past*. In short, an occasional treat for the ears will go far to captivate your readers. But don"t repeat sounds too often because they might call attention to themselves and pull the reader away from the meaning of your words.

SURPRISE WITH COMPARISONS

English is filled with wonderful words to describe virtually anything. Yet, occasionally emotions and experiences seem almost beyond words. At such times, you can depend on figures of speech such as metaphors and similes to make meaning clear. How, for

instance, do you show the weird look the bus driver gave you this afternoon, or what a city street sounds like at six o"clock on a summer morning? What about the feel of clean sheets, the taste of a Coke that"s lost its fizz, the smell of a new car, a fear, a frustration?

A uniquely expressed comparison can catch elusive details and fleeting sensations. That bus driver, for instance may have looked at you "as though you were something on the sole of his shoe." The summer morning may have sounded "like an orchestra tuning up to play," and the bedsheets may have felt "like a drink of cold spring water on a sultry August afternoon."

In addition, comparisons are economical. They require fewer words than you might otherwise need to state an idea. To describe elderly men fishing from a pier, for instance, you might mention their lined faces, the folds of papery skin at their throats, the pale and cracked lips, and the white stubble on their chins. But if all those details were superfluous, you could simply compare the men to wooden slats on a weathered fence. Instantly your reader will see the resemblance: Gray men lined up on the pier like boards on a weather-beaten fence.

The limited vocabulary of young children keeps them from expressing all they want to say. By nature, therefore, they make up comparisons: "Daddy, when my foot goes to sleep it feels like ginger ale." "Mommy, this ice cream tastes like chocolate sunshine." As people grow older, they often lose this knack of making colorful comparisons and have to relearn it. But when you start consciously to seek comparisons, you"ll find them sprouting like weeds in a garden—that is, everywhere.

Similes (Tim wrestles *like* a tiger) and metaphors (Tim *is* a tiger) point out likenesses between something familiar (tiger) and something unfamiliar (how Tim wrestles). To convey meaning, one side of a comparison must always be common and recognizable. Therefore, comparing the cry of the Arctic tern to the song of a tree toad won"t enlighten a reader familiar with neither water birds nor tree toads. Because you can expect readers to know the sound of a fiddle, however, a more revealing comparison is *The cry of the Arctic tern sounds like a fiddler searching for a c-sharp.*

Clichés belong in the clichés graveyard, not in your essay.

Make your comparisons fresh and original. Don"t rely on old stand-bys such as "life is like a box of chocolates," or "like a bat out of hell," or "dead as a doornail." Our language is littered with countless comparisons that once may have been vibrant and

fresh but have wilted from overuse. The fact is that every familiar combination of words, such as “I could care less” or “you”ve got to be kidding” or “what a bummer,” was once new, cool, even poetic. But repetition has turned them into clichés.

Let clichés rest in the cliché graveyard. Don”t drag them out for your SAT essay. That is an admonition easier to say that to follow because clichés crowd our conversations, swamp our airwaves, and deluge the media. Like the air we breathe (a cliché), we hardly notice them. In an essay, however, especially one that is supposed to demonstrate your unique cast of mind, you must avoid clichés like the plague. “Like the plague,” in fact, is one you should avoid, along with other secondhand phrases and expressions like *the bottom line; on the ground; how does that sit with you; touch base with; there has been a sea-change in…; off the top of my head; at the end of the day; a point well taken; two sides of the same coin; getting psyched; double-edged sword; go off the deep end; life on the edge; life in the fast lane; for openers; think outside the box; flipped out; a full plate; get a life; get real; super; chief honcho; the big cheese; so amazing; that”s cool; the whole enchilada; no way, José,* and would you believe, *would you believe*? (This list of clichés is far from complete. No doubt you could add many more.)

On the SAT you won”t be penalized for an essay lacking inventive and scintillating expressions, but you”ll pay a price if your writing is overrun with clichés. Get into the habit, then, of purging all trite phrases from your writing vocabulary. *Half the battle*, as they say, is knowing a cliché when you meet one. The other half—expelling them—is still to be fought and won.

Practice in Writing Comparisons

PART A

Directions: Untold numbers of comparisons are waiting to be born. Because you see the world differently from everyone else, you can invent memorable comparisons that no one—not Shakespeare, not Milton, not Whitman, nor any other immortal—ever thought of. Write an original comparison for each of the qualities listed below. Avoid clichés.

1. as comfortable as

2. as tough as

3. as gorgeous as

4. as silly as

5. as serious as

6. as perfect as

7. as wild as

8. as unpredictable as

9. as impetuous as

10. as reliable as

PART B

Directions: Try your hand at writing an extended comparison, in which you expand upon a single metaphor or simile. If you can"t think of one, try one of these:

In what ways is life like a river? A carousel? A hero"s journey?

How does school resemble a zoo? A shopping mall? An airport?

How is music like a clearing in the woods? A chapel? A painting?

(Add paper, if necessary.)

Varying Sentence Structure

When writing an essay, it"s easy to fall into a rut by using the same sentence structure over and over and over. But readers prefer a variety of sentences.

Variety for its own sake is hardly preferable to assembly-line writing—writing in which every sentence follows the same pattern. But variety that clarifies meaning or gives emphasis to selected ideas is something else. For one thing, it adds life to your prose.

TIP

Varied sentences can bring a dull essay to life.

English sentences are structured in three ways: **simple**, **compound**, and **complex**

Simple: Terry fell asleep in math class.

The sentence is **simple** because it contains one grammatical subject (*Terry*) and one verb (*fell*). It also states a single main idea.

Compound : The competition is stiff, but it won"t keep Mark from winning.

The sentence is **compound** because it is made up of two simple sentences joined by the coordinating conjunction *but*. Other coordinating conjunctions used in compound sentences are *and, yet, or, for, nor,* and *so,* as in:

The competition is stiff, *and* Mark is worried about winning.

Mark is worried about winning, *for* he has a bad cold.

Notice that the structure of each of these compound sentences gives roughly equal emphasis to its two main ideas.

Complex: Although he has a bad cold, Mark will win.

The sentence is **complex** because it is made up of two parts—a simple sentence (*Mark will win*) and a clause (*Although he has a bad cold*) that is not a complete sentence in itself but depends on the simple sentence for its meaning. Because the clause begins with a subordinating conjunction (*Although*), it is called a **subordinate clause**. Subordinate clauses contain ideas related to the complete sentence (called the **independent**, or **main**, clause), but they are usually less important. Other common subordinating conjunctions include *because, after, before, though, unless, until, whenever*, and *while.*

Not every simple, compound, and complex sentence is structured in the way just described. In fact, variations abound because English is a remarkably flexible language that can be shaped in countless ways, as you"ll see next.

Most simple sentences start with the grammatical subject followed by the verb, as in:

Cats (subject) *fall* (verb) asleep in about three seconds.
They (subject) *sleep* (verb) best after eating and cleaning themselves.
I (subject) *wish* (verb) to be a cat in my next life.

A string of sentences with this subject–verb pattern resembles the prose in a grade-school primer—a style that just won"t do on an SAT essay. To be sure that you write in a more mature and engaging way, analyze one of your recent essays. If several

sentences begin with grammatical subjects, try shifting the subject elsewhere. Try leading off with a prepositional phrase, or with an adverb, adjective, or some other grammatical unit.

The following pairs of sentences show how a subject can be shifted from its customary position:

Before the shift:	Ms. Bennett is one of the most popular teachers in the school.
After the shift:	In this school, Ms. Bennett is one of the most popular teachers.

After a prepositional phrase was added, the subject (*Ms. Bennett*) has been moved further along in the sentence.

Before:	She taught the novel *The Grapes of Wrath* to our eleventh-grade English class with enthusiasm.
After:	Enthusiastically, she taught the novel *The Grapes of Wrath* to our eleventh-grade English class.

Obviously, the revised sentence begins with an adverb.

Before:	Students were less excited about the book than she was.
After:	Yet, students were less excited about the book than she was.

Well, here the subject (*students*) is stated after an opening connective.

Before:	I loved the book, although it turned out to be an intolerable drag for most of my classmates.
After:	Although the book turned out to be an intolerable drag for most of my classmates, I loved it.

After introducing the sentence with a dependent clause, the writer names the subject, *I*, and then adds the rest of the sentence.

Before:	Ms. Bennett pushed the class to find symbolic meaning in various characters to make the book more meaningful.
After:	To make the book more meaningful, Ms. Bennett pushed the class to find symbolic meaning in various characters.

To revise this sentence the writer begins with a verbal, in this case “to make,” the infinitive form of the verb. (Verbals look and feel much like verbs but serve a different function. Verbals, though, come from verbs, hence their name and their resemblance.)

Before:	I read the book in two days, hoping that it would never end.
After:	Hoping that it would never end, I read the book in two days.

Aiming to diversify sentence openings, the writer starts this sentence with another kind of verbal, known as a participle. The *-ing* ending often indicates that a word is a participle.

Before:	I was awed by the tenacity of the Joad family and absorbed by every soul-stirring syllable of the story.
After:	Awed by the tenacity of the Joad family, I was absorbed by every soul-stirring syllable of the story.

Determined to try something different, the writer begins the sentence with an adjective that happens to sound like a verb because of its *-ed* ending.

Still another variation to try now and then is the sentence constructed from matched ideas set in juxtaposition. President Kennedy used such a sentence to memorable effect in his inaugural speech:

"Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country."

The power of such sentences lies in the balance of parallel clauses. Each clause could stand alone, but together they express the idea more vigorously. Another famous example, from Shakespeare"s *Julius Caesar*:

"Not that I loved Caesar less, but that I loved Rome more."

Emphasis can also come from a reversal of customary word order. Out of context a sentence in which the predicate precedes the subject may seem awkward. But in the right spot an inverted sentence can leave an indelible mark. "Dull the book is not" packs more wallop than "The book is not dull" or "The book is exciting." In the right context, "Perilous was the climb to the top of the cliff" sounds more ominous than "The climb to the top of the cliff was perilous." Inverted sentences should be used sparingly, however. More than once in an essay diminishes the vigor of each occurrence and may sound silly.

No rule of thumb says that a certain percentage of sentences in an essay ought to be different from the usual subject–verb structure. It really depends on the purpose and style of the essay. But if you find yourself repeating the same sentence pattern, restructure some of your sentences. SAT readers are bound to reward you for the effort.

Sentence Types

Our language offers a rich menu of sentence types. Declarative sentences predominate in most essay writing. (Just to refresh your memory, a declarative sentence, such as the one you are now reading, simply makes a statement.) But other types of sentences can create all sorts of fascinating effects. Take interrogative sentences, for example. (Do you remember that interrogative sentences ask questions?) An interrogative sentence appropriately placed in an essay consisting of declarative sentences can change the pace and rhythm of the prose, underscore an idea, and promote the reader"s involvement.

Don"t forget about imperative sentences (Keep in mind that imperative sentences make requests or give commands) and exclamatory sentences (What strong emotion an exclamatory sentence can express!).

Furthermore, you can write sentences interrupted at some point by a dash—although some editors and teachers claim that it"s not proper to do so in formal prose. Direct and indirect quotations are useful, and on occasion you can drive home a point with a single emphatic word. Excellent!

There"s peril, however, in scrambling sentence types for no other reason than to scramble sentence types, for you may end up with a mess on your hands. Be guided by what expresses your ideas most clearly and seems varied enough to interest your readers.

Repetition of Ideas

"Repetition cuts both ways: sometimes good, sometimes not."

"You can say that again!"

"Repetition cuts both ways: some…"

"Okay, okay, you"ve made your point."

Repetition can be annoying, but adroitly used, it adds clout to an idea. When your sweetheart says, "I love you. I love you very much," the repetition intensifies the sentiment. If a coach admonishes his team, "Okay, guys, knock it off. I said knock it off," you know he really means it.

The following paragraph may suggest that the writer has a one-track mind:

In the fall Bethany will be going to college. She is psyched to get out of high school. She is psyched to break away from her small town and live in a big city. She is psyched for meeting new people from all over the country and the world, and she is psyched to get started on a program of studies that she expects will prepare her for law school. But first, she is psyched to take the SAT.

Every sentence but the first uses the same subject–verb combination. Yet, the overall effect is anything but monotonous. What"s memorable is not repetition, but relentlessness. Repeating the verb *psyched* five times emphasizes Bethany"s frame of mind. The point could not have been made as emphatically using a different verb in each sentence.

Or take this passage written by an incorrigible bagel freak.

My taste for bagels knows no bounds. I stop at the bagel shop on my way to school each morning and grab an onion bagel and coffee. Lunch consists of an olive bagel and a couple of veggie bagels smeared with cream cheese. At snack time I"m not picky. Any style bagel will do, but I hate to have dinner without a buttered poppy-seed bagel. Before bed I wash down a plain toasted bagel with a glass of milk, and in case I have insomnia, I stash two or three garlic bagels on my nightstand for a tasty middle-of the-night pick-me-up.

The writer virtually beats you over the head with bagels. But the repetition won"t allow you to forget the point—that the writer has eyes not for pizza, not for burritos, not for onion rings, but only for bagels.

A word of caution: Restatements of a word or phrase can sometimes be distracting. Therefore, stay alert for accidental repetition:

In a corner of the room stood a clock. The clock said four o"clock.

Columbus made three ocean voyages. The voyages took him across the Atlantic Ocean.

Combining such sentences will keep you from ending one sentence and starting the next one with the same words:

The clock in the corner of the room said four.

Columbus made three voyages across the Atlantic.

Sentences can also be marred by words or sounds that draw attention to themselves:

Maybe some people don"t have as much freedom as others; but the freedom they do have is given to them for free. Therefore, freedom is proof enough that the best things in life are free.

The members of the assembly remembered that November was just around the corner.

These writers failed to listen to the sound of their words. Had they read their sentences aloud, they may have noticed that voices were stuck in a groove. In fact, reading your words aloud allows you to step back and examine word sounds. (Hold it! Those two words—*aloud* and *allows*—sound jarring and should not be permitted to stand side by side.) Hearing your written words spoken, you"re more are apt to notice unwanted repetition. Whenever possible, let each of your practice essays cool for a while. Then enlist a friend to read it aloud. Hearing it in another"s voice lends objectivity to the process of self-evaluation.

Short and Long Sentences

Another technique for fending off monotony in an essay is to vary the length of sentences. Long sentences (like this one) demand greater effort from readers because, while stepping from one part of the sentence to the next, they must keep track of more words, modifiers, phrases (not to speak of parenthetical asides), and clauses, without losing the writer"s main thought, which may be buried amid any number of secondary, or less important, thoughts, while short sentences are usually easier to grasp. A brief sentence can make a point sharply because all its words concentrate on a single point. Take, for example, the last sentence in this passage:

For three days, my parents and I sat in our SUV and drove from college to college to college in search of the perfect place for me to spend the next four years. For seventy-two hours we lived as one person, sharing thoughts and dreams, stating opinions about each campus we visited, taking guided tours, interviewing students and admissions officials, asking directions a hundred times, eating together in town after town, and even sleeping in the same motel rooms. But mostly, we fought.

A terse closing sentence following a windy, forty-six-word sentence produces a mild jolt. Indeed, its purpose is to startle the reader. The technique is easily mastered but should be used sparingly. Overuse dilutes its impact.

A series of short sentences can be as tiresome as a succession of long ones. A balance works best. If you have strung together four or five sentences of equal

length, try to reformat them. Here, to illustrate, is an overweight sentence that needs a complete makeover:

In the 1870s, the archaeologist Heinrich Schliemann dug in the correct spot and discovered not only one ancient city of Troy, but nine of them, one lying on top of the other, since every few centuries a new city had been built upon the ruins of the old, causing Schliemann to dig right past the layer containing the ruins of the famous city of the Trojan Horse without realizing he had done so, a mistake not corrected until almost fifty years later by Carl Blegen of the University of Cincinnati, by which time, unfortunately, it was too late for Schliemann because he had been dead for forty years.

The sentence is perfectly grammatical, but it carries a big 108-word load. Cut it down to size. Break it into pieces, rearrange it, add verbs, drop an idea or two, change the emphasis, and delete words. When you"re done, the restyled sentence might sound something like this:

In the 1870s, the archaeologist Heinrich Schliemann dug in the correct spot and discovered not only one ancient city of Troy, but nine of them, one lying on top of the other. He figured out that every few centuries a new city had been built upon the ruins of the old. Without realizing it, he had dug right past the layer he was seeking, the layer containing the ruins of the famous city of the Trojan Horse. His mistake was corrected fifty years later by Carl Blegen of the University of Cincinnati. By then, however, it was too late for Schliemann. He had been dead for forty years.

Likewise, a string of four or five equally long (or short) sentences can be combined to create a more balanced and varied paragraph. Here, for instance, is a paragraph, also about an ancient city, made up of short, choppy sentences:

Pompeii was an ancient city. It belonged to the Roman Empire. It was near the base of Mount Vesuvius. In 79 A.D., the volcano on Vesuvius erupted. Tons of hot, wet ash fell on Pompeii. In less than a day, the city was buried. It just vanished. More than seventeen centuries later, an Italian peasant found Pompeii. His discovery was accidental. He was digging in a field. His shovel struck the top of a wall. That was two hundred years ago. Pompeii is still being excavated two hundred years later. About two-thirds of the city has been unearthed. It must have been a beautiful city.

With repetition eliminated and some ideas subordinated to others, here is what you get:

The ancient Roman city of Pompeii lay near the base of Mt. Vesuvius. In 79 A.D., Vesuvius erupted, burying the city with tons of hot, wet ash. In less than a day, the city vanished. More than seventeen centuries later, an Italian peasant digging in a

field with a shovel accidentally struck the top of a wall. He had found Pompeii. Today, two hundred years later, the city is still being unearthed. The excavation reveals that Pompeii must have been a beautiful city.

For more details and practice in sentence combining, turn to Part V.

Varying Sentences—A Summary

Use a variety of sentence types: simple, compound, and complex.

Create variety by starting sentences with a:

Prepositional phrase: *From the start, In the first place, At the outset*

Adverbs and adverbial phrases: *Originally, At first, Initially*

Dependent clauses: *When you start with this, Because the opening is*

Conjunctions: *And, But, Not only, Either, So, Yet*

Adjectives and adjective phrases: *Fresh from, Introduced with, Headed by*

Verbal infinitives: *To launch, To take the first step, To get going*

Participles: *Leading off, Starting up, Commencing with*

Inversions: *Unique is the writer who embarks…*

Balance long and short sentences.

Combine series of very short sentences.

Dismember very long sentences.

Practice in Varying Sentences

Directions: The following passages need greater balance. Divide some of the long sentences and combine some of the short ones. Try to preserve the original meaning of each passage.

1. Mr. Finn is the teacher. He"s a good teacher. He runs the class like a dictatorship, however. He has no use for "democracy." He knows nothing about freedom. He announced his rules on the first day. He doesn"t allow talking. He forbids gum

chewing. He won"t permit the wearing of hats. At the bell, he locks the classroom door. After-school detention is a consequence of lateness to class. His homework is compulsory. A girl once came without homework. Mr. Finn lowered the boom. The girl turned colors and almost wept. No one dares to come unprepared to class.

2. I have taken numerous science classes. In science classes we mostly talked about experiments. We didn"t do experiments. The equipment was too costly. We had to make do with obsolete equipment. Scientific theories were taught. The theories were not practiced in labs. They were not demonstrated. The science department needs $1 million. With a million dollars it could give students a better education in science.

3. By dumping garbage, sewage, and other hazardous waste products into the sea, many nations are polluting the world"s oceans, and in doing so are making beaches and swimming dangerous, poisoning fish with toxic materials that end up in fish, lobsters, clams, and other sea life that we humans eat, causing the toxins to enter our bodies.

4. The earth has experienced a sharp increase in natural disasters, from about 100 per year in the 1960s to five times that number in the early part of the twenty-first century, the reason being not that earthquakes, droughts, huge storms, and floods are happening more frequently and with greater intensity but that the population of the world has increased and people in greater numbers now occupy areas that are prone to natural disasters, such as flood plains, coastal lands, and cities built on subterranean fault lines. The planet has not changed. Humans have.

5. The American Dream is a popular concept in American life. It has different meanings for different people. It commonly means finding a good job. It also means getting married. Dreams also consist of having a couple of kids and owning a home. The home has a white picket fence and a two-car garage. Some people think that such a dream is shallow. They say that the dream should also include a good education, friends, a feeling of well-being, good health, and above all, the blessings of liberty. By that they mean freedom of speech and freedom of religion. The dream must also have the freedom to choose to be part of an untraditional family made up of same-sex partners or any other combination of adults and children.

Ending Your Essay

TIP

Avoid summary endings.

Because it comes last, the final sentences of your essay should be written with care. Don"t resort to that old stand-by, a summary ending. When an essay is short to begin with, it"s insulting to review for readers what is evident on the page in front of them. Readers are intelligent people. Trust them to remember what your essay says.

An effective conclusion should fit the style and mood of the essay and spring naturally from its contents. A good essay can easily be spoiled by a grating conclusion. A serious essay, for example, shouldn"t end with a joke. Also stay away from endings that are too common or cutesy, such as: *that"s it; so long for now; happy reading; well, I can"t think of anything else; sorry, I"ve run out of time; good-bye and God bless you.* Such trite endings say in effect that you and your imagination have run out of gas.

A short ending is preferable to none at all. A carefully written ending leaves readers satisfied that they have arrived somewhere and may sway them to judge your essay more favorably than otherwise. There are no guarantees, of course, but readers are bound to be touched by a memento of your thinking, your sense of humor, or your vision. Even an ordinary thought, uniquely expressed, will leave an agreeable afterglow.

Here are some common techniques for writing conclusions:

1. Have a little fun; try to put a smile on your reader"s face.

Topic: King of the World, a biography of Muhammad Ali

Purpose of the essay: To criticize David Remnick"s biography of Ali. The writer ends with an apt metaphor that reiterates the essay"s main idea.

Conclusion: With this book, Remnick has dealt Ali"s admirers a cruel blow below the belt.

Topic: Growing old

Purpose of the essay: To show that old people can still act young. The essay concludes with an anecdote about an elderly gray-haired man of about seventy on a crowded city bus.

Conclusion: He carried bundles of packages and almost fell down as the bus lurched to a stop. At one point a young, gum-chewing woman stood up and pointed to the unoccupied seat. "Here, Pops, take this."

He looked at her in amazement. “Cool it, girlie,” he said, “I still run marathons,” and he stood all the way to his stop.

2. End with an apt quotation drawn from the essay itself, from the SAT prompt, or from another source.

Topic: Surviving high school

Purpose of the essay: To describe an incident in which the writer found herself in need of a safe haven.

Conclusion: At that point I knew by instinct, “This is the place.”

Topic: Electronic gizmos

Purpose of the essay: To show that, because many consumers are uninformed, they waste lots of money when purchasing the latest digital devices.

Conclusion: To paraphrase an old saying, “What you don”t know can hurt you.”

3. Finish by clearly restating your essay”s main point but using new words. If appropriate, add a short tag line, a brief sentence that creates a dramatic effect.

Topic: Discrimination

Purpose of the essay: To criticize the male chauvinism that exists in the school administration.

Conclusion: As long as positions of authority are given to sexists, women must be prepared to fight against gender abuse in this institution.

Topic: Modern communication

Purpose of the essay: To explain the value and importance of text messaging to teenagers. The writer concludes with a popular texting symbol.

Conclusion: A day without texting is a day I should have stayed in bed :(

4. Bring your readers up to date or project them into the future. Say something about the months or years ahead.

Topic: Vandalism in school

Purpose of the essay: To condemn the daily carnage of smashed windows, graffiti, and broken ceiling tiles. The essay ends with a few questions about the future.

Conclusion: How long can this go on? How can we turn away meekly? How much longer can we let the vandals make us their victims?

Topic: Helping others

Purpose of the essay: To explain why it is imperative to save the world from global warming.

Conclusion: When the history of the twenty-first century is written, let us hope that global warming will have gone the way of the dinosaurs.

So, what happens if you can"t think of a satisfactory ending or time is called before you finish? For one thing, don"t despair. Although an effective conclusion adds luster to an essay, don"t feel obliged to provide one at all costs. SAT readers will know how well you write long before reaching your essay"s last sentence. Be confident that a good but incomplete piece of writing will be graded according to what you"ve done well, not what you haven"t done at all.

Practice in Writing Conclusions

Directions: Try your hand at writing an appealing ending for each of the essays described here.

1. *Topic:* Language taboos

Our society prohibits or frowns on the use of certain categories of words. In recent years, however, changes have made many language taboos obsolete. After citing several examples, the writer wonders about language usage in the future.

2. *Topic:* The value of school sports

The writer, in comparing athletics in school to life, makes the point that in both endeavors you need to develop a winning strategy.

3. *Topic:* High school vs. junior high

The point of the essay is that while high school is not perfect, it is far better than junior high, where students are treated like inmates, not like human beings.

TIP 

The following pages are meant to be a guide to editing your SAT essay. But keep in mind that the material will also help you answer the multiple-choice questions later in the exam, especially the Identifying Sentence Errors questions.

EDITING AND PROOFREADING: THE FINAL TOUCHES

Once you"ve ended your essay, spend whatever time is left editing and proofreading. You can"t do a complete makeover, but you can do a great deal to improve communication between you and your readers.

Editing for Clarity

Check your essay for clarity by asking yourself whether a reader could misconstrue anything you"ve written. Penny T. wrote her essay about runaway teenagers—those desperate kids who leave home in search of a different life. One of her sentences read "The last thing parents should do is talk to their kids." Coming to that sentence, a reader might well wonder whether Penny means that parents should talk to their kids as a last resort, or, that in a list of what parents ought to do, the final step is talking to their kids.

Later in the essay Penny wrote, "Ellen told her friend Debbie that she had made a serious mistake by running away from home." Penny certainly understood what she intended to say, but a reader can"t tell whether Ellen took a dim view of Debbie"s actions or whether Ellen herself had second thoughts about her own flight. Granted, these sentences have been quoted out of context, but the point remains: What may seem perfectly clear to a writer may send a puzzling message to the reader.

That"s why you should work hard to arrange your words in the clearest order. Watch for grammatical perils that interfere with meaning, especially (1) misplaced modifiers, (2) dangling participles, and (3) lack of parallelism—all discussed in the pages that follow.

MISPLACED MODIFIERS

Modifiers are words, phrases, and clauses that tell something about or limit the meaning of a particular word or statement. For example:

The bedroom had a *broken* window.

The adjective *broken* is a modifier because it tells something about the condition of the *window*. In other words, *broken* "modifies" *window*.

Jessica bought a mouse *that was guaranteed to work with her computer*.

The clause *that was guaranteed to work with her computer* is a modifier because it tells something about the mouse. It modifies the noun *mouse.*

Modifiers must be placed so that they modify the correct words:

Mike only loves Sharon.

Here *only* modifies the verb *loves*. The modifier is appropriate if Mike feels nothing but love for Sharon—no admiration, no awe, no respect, nor any other emotion. If, however, Mike has but one love, and she is Sharon, then *only* is misplaced. Properly placed, *only* should come either before or after *Sharon*:

Mike loves *only* Sharon. or Mike loves Sharon *only*.

Another example:

Naomi decided *when she had finished the essay* to watch TV.

In this sentence, *when she had finished the essay* is the modifier. But it is hard to tell whether it modifies *decided* or *watch*. If it modifies *decided*, Naomi finished her essay and then made a decision to watch TV. If it modifies *watch*, Naomi worked on her essay and decided at some point that she would watch TV when she had completed the work.

When she had finished the essay, Naomi decided to watch TV.
While writing an essay Naomi decided to watch TV when she had finished.

Now the meaning of both sentences is unambiguous.

Obviously, misplaced modifiers can cloud a writer"s intentions. To avoid the problem, place modifiers as close as possible to the words they modify:

Misplaced:	Philip donated his old car to a charity *that no longer ran well*.

The modifier *that no longer ran well* is too far from *car*, the word it modifies.

Clear:	Philip donated to a charity his old car that *no longer ran well*.
Misplaced:	The bowling alley lends out shoes to its customers *of all sizes*.

The modifier *of all sizes* should be closer to *shoes*, the word it modifies.

Clear:	The bowling alley lends out shoes *of all sizes* to its customers.

DANGLING MODIFIERS

In a sentence words must fit together like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. Sometimes, a misplaced word looks as though it fits, but it fails to say what the writer intended.

(1) While running to English class, the bell rang.
(2) Working full time, the summer passed quickly.
(3) When only eight years old, my father warned me about smoking.

The ludicrous meaning of these sentences may not strike you immediately, but look again. Do you see that these sentences describe a surreal world in which bells run to class, summers hold full-time jobs, and youthful fathers dispense advice? The problem is that these sentences try to mate two groups of words that can"t go together. The parts are mismatched. After the comma in sentence 1, you expect to find out who is running, but you are not told. Likewise, after the commas in sentences 2 and 3, you are not told who was working and who is only eight years old. In short, you"re left dangling. Hence, the label **dangling modifier** has been given to this type of construction. To correct the error, add the noun or pronoun to be modified, as in:

While the boys were running to English class, the bell rang.
Because Charlotte worked full-time, her summer flew by.
When I was eight, my father warned me about smoking.

Re-writing the whole sentence is often the best cure for a dangling modifier, as in:

Dangling:	Still sound asleep at noon, my mother thought I might be sick.
Clear:	My mother thought I might be sick because I was still sound asleep at noon.
Dangling:	While talking on the phone, the stew burned in the pot.
Clear:	While I talked on the phone, the stew burned in the pot.

Practice in Identifying Misplaced and Dangling Modifiers

Directions: Revise the following sentences that contain a misplaced or dangling modifier. Some sentences may be corrected by shifting the placement of one or more words. Others need more substantial revision.

1. After completing the chemistry homework, that pizza tasted great.

2. Sound asleep in the hammock, Denise discovered her boyfriend.

3. Used all night to illuminate the steps, I needed new batteries for the flashlight.

4. Driving down the mountain road, a rock hit my windshield and smashed it.

5. Stopping to rest after a long hike, a grizzly bear stood in front of me.

6. After a quick breakfast, the school bus picked me up.

7. A report was submitted about the bank robbery by the police.

8. At the age of ten, Sasha"s family emigrated from Russia.

9. A bone was given to the dog we didn"t want.

10. Left alone in the house, every sound terrified the child.

PARALLELISM

A lack of parallelism in phrases and clauses is not just bad form but can be a source of confusion. Sound parallel structure, in contrast, keeps equivalent ideas in the same grammatical form. Take, for example, a sentence that lists the characteristics of a restaurant in which to have a family birthday party:

We are looking for a place that is private, plenty of space, has a friendly staff, and that people like to look at.

Each element in a series must have the same grammatical structure.

The sentence makes some sense, of course, but it"s awkward because the four qualities of a desirable restaurant are not expressed in parallel form. Instead, they are a mix of an adjective, a phrase, and two clauses. One way to fix the problem is to use only adjectives, as in:

We are looking for a place that is private, spacious, friendly, and attractive.

Or use a series of nouns each preceded by an adjective:

We are looking for a place with total privacy, ample space, a friendly staff, and attractive surroundings.

When you arrange the pieces of a sentence in parallel form, the writing becomes clearer and stronger. It also puts you in the company of some of the world"s greatest stylists. Abraham Lincoln, for example, used parallelism at Gettysburg: "We cannot dedicate, we cannot consecrate, we cannot hallow this ground." And later, "that government of the people, by the people, and for the people shall not perish from the earth."

John F. Kennedy used parallelism in his inaugural speech: "Let every nation know, whether it wishes us good or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe to assure the survival and the success of liberty."

Like Lincoln and Kennedy, good writers everywhere know and apply the following principles of parallel construction.

1. Parallel ideas in a series should be expressed in the same grammatical form. Each idea should be equally important to the meaning and structure of the sentence. Use conjunctions such as *and, but, for, or, yet, so*, and *nor* to join parallel ideas.

Faulty:	Hazel"s parents objected that she played loud music and to the late hours she kept.
Parallel:	Hazel"s parents objected to the loud music she played and to the late hours she kept.

The parallel ideas consist of prepositional phrases followed by a pronoun (*she*) and verbs in the past tense (*played, kept*).

2. When used to compare or contrast, parallel ideas should be grammatical equivalents. In a comparison, for example, an idea expressed in a phrase must be paired with another idea also expressed in a phrase. An idea stated in a clause must be paired with another idea stated in a clause, and so forth.

Faulty:	They are worried more about public opinion than for what the effect of the proposal may be.

The prepositional phrase *about public opinion* may not be paired with the clause *what the effect of the proposal may be.*

Parallel:	They are worried more about public opinion than about the effect of the proposal.

3. Parallel ideas can also be expressed with pairs of words such as *either/or, neither/ nor, whether/or, both/and*, and *not only/but also*. But keep both words close to the parallel ideas.

Poor:	I *either* plan to invite my aunt *or* my uncle to go shopping with me.

The signal word *either* is too far removed from the parallel phrases, *my aunt or my uncle.* Its placement misleads the reader into thinking that the verb *plan* is one of the parallel ideas.

Proper:	I plan to invite *either* my aunt *or* my uncle to go shopping with me.

4. When articles, prepositions, and conjunctions appear before the first in a series of parallel items, they may have to be repeated before the others in the series.

Unclear:	Our mechanic did a better job on my car than his.

Did two mechanics work on the same car or did one mechanic work on two different cars? To clear up the ambiguity, repeat the preposition *on*, as in:

Clear:	Our mechanic did a better job on my car than *on* his.

Sometimes repeating both a preposition and an article is necessary:

Unclear:	Before signing the contract, Tiffany spoke with the president and treasurer of the company.

Did Tiffany speak with one person or with two? Repeating *with the* helps to clarify the meaning:

Clear:	Before signing the contract, Tiffany spoke with the president and *with the* treasurer of the company.

5. Parallel ideas should be logical equivalents.

Absurd:	Terry is six feet tall, kind, and a Texan.

Physical features, traits of character, and place of origin are not logically coordinated.

Less absurd:	Terry, a six-foot Texan, is kind.

It is still not terribly logical, but at least the revision emphasizes only one of Terry"s qualities—his kindness.

Absurd:	On Sunday, Meredith not only painted her toenails but got married.

This sentence is grammatically flawless, but unless it was written to get a laugh, it is ludicrous. Regardless of what you may have been told, painting toenails and getting married are not equivalents.

Less absurd:	Before her wedding on Sunday, Meredith painted her toenails. or On Sunday, after painting her toenails, Meredith got married.

Subordinating one of the ideas restores the logic, however weird.

Practice in Identifying Parallel Structure

Directions: Look for faulty parallelism in the following sentences. Write a correct version of the offending word or phrase in the space provided. Some sentences may be correct.

1. Mr. Phillips is funny, interesting, and inspires his classes to learn history.

2. The talk-show host not only was accused of being a bigot but also too stupid to continue working at the station.

3. Since Jenny started taking AP Math, she has worked harder and fewer parties.

4. Her job consisted mostly of writing and typing letters, reports, and various types of phone calls.

5. Mike likes to go to bed early and getting up early to do his work.

6. Our cat Sylvia was short-haired, affectionate, intelligent, and disappeared for days at a time.

7. Maggie hasn"t yet decided whether to be an art historian or commercial art.

8. The audience at the graduation ceremony both felt pride and satisfaction when the announcement was made.

9. The police officer walked into the courtyard, got caught in a crossfire, and was shot in the chest.

10. Either way, Nat expects to move to the country because he loves nature and live simply because he has little money.

11. The kids had not only scattered their books all over the bus but also the sidewalk.

12. His ideal house would be in a good location, with land around it, and with a view.

13. Joan"s pencil was broken, yellow, and came from this box.

14. His training in design would help him to know how to furnish the house simply and decorating would be simple, too.

15. The landlady told him that he could not have a microwave in his room and showers after 11:00 o"clock.

16. Hearing no car horns and buses and to be miles from friends may cause him to become bored and restless.

17. Either the mouse will find a quick way into the attic or will gnaw at the siding for days.

18. City living is exciting, convenient, and provides plenty of entertainment.

19. After winning the lottery, he"ll have an apartment in town, a house in the country, and find a job in the suburbs.

20. I think that Adam has the ability to win his match, defeat Tom in the sectionals, and he"ll emerge eventually as the best high school wrestler in the state.

Editing for Interest

Your essay will be read by people—real people. Most of them are teachers who know that essays can be lively, scintillating, and a joy to read. Like any readers, they will be put off by writing that is dull. Therefore, one of your goals on the SAT essay is to inject life into your prose by

• Using *active* instead of *passive* verbs

• Writing *active* instead of *passive* sentences

• Omitting needless words

• *Showing* instead of *telling*

USING ACTIVE VERBS

Active verbs differ from being verbs. Because active verbs describe or show movement, they excel all other words in pumping life into your prose. What"s more, they help you write more concisely.

Being verbs, in contrast, have almost no life in them. Their lifelessness is apparent in the common forms of the verb *to be*:

is	are	was
were	am	has been
had been	have been	will be

Used in a sentence, each being verb joins a subject to a predicate. In fact, a being verb functions much like an equal sign in an equation: "Five minus two *is* three" (5 – 2 = 3), or "Samantha *was* happy" (Samantha = happy), or "Your SAT scores are going up" (That = good news!). Because being verbs (and equal signs) show little life, use them sparingly.

TIP 

Whenever possible, replace being verbs with active verbs.

To check whether you rely too heavily on being verbs, check a few of your most recent essays. If more than, say, one out of four sentences uses a form of *to be* as the main verb, try the following revision techniques.

Substitute a new active verb for the being verb:

Being verb:	It *is* not easy for most students to write immortal essays.
Active verb:	Most students *struggle* to write immortal essays.

Extract an active verb from a noun in the sentence:

Being verb:	Monica *was* the winner of the essay contest.
Active verb:	Monica *won* the essay contest.

Extract an active verb from an adjective:

Being verb:	My afternoon at the ballgame *was* enjoyable.
Active verb:	I *enjoyed* my afternoon at the ballgame.

As you delete being verbs, you may observe that some sentences resist change. When that happens, try turning subjects into verbs and verbs into nouns. Try also to eliminate unnecessary phrases. A full-scale revision will often result in sentences that bear little resemblance to the original. At the same time, your verb-swapping efforts may root out excess words and improve your essay"s readability.

You may notice, however, that some nouns limit your options for using active verbs. For instance, you are pretty well stuck with a form of *to be* in any sentence that begins with *The reason*:

The reason that you should practice writing essays _____…

What verb other than *is* can be used to fill the blank? Very few. There are few verb options, too, when the subject of the sentence is *thought, concept, idea, issue, way, cause*, and several other abstract nouns. The same applies to sentences that begin with "There," as in: "*There* is no way for you to do poorly on the SAT essay," and often for sentences that begin with "It," as in "*It* is a foregone conclusion that you"ll do well."

In contrast, nouns that stand for specific places, people, events, and objects invite the use of active verbs. When a sentence contains a subject that can do something—a person, for example—you can never run out of verb choices.

As a bonus, concrete, easy-to-define nouns, when substituted for abstractions, tend to tighten and energize sentences:

Abstract subject:	The *cause* of Sharon"s worry was her lack of tuition money.
Definite subject:	*Sharon* worried about her lack of tuition money.
Abstract subject:	The *issue* behind the strike was the workers" demand for higher wages.
Definite subject:	The *workers* struck for higher wages.

Being verbs are not the only verbs that sap the life out of sentences. They share that distinction with several other verbs, including forms of *to have, to come, to go, to make, to move*, and *to get*—verbs with so many different uses that they creep into sentences virtually unnoticed. *Webster"s International Dictionary* lists sixteen

different meanings for the verb *get* and a dozen more for *make* and *move*. It"s true that we can hardly do without these verbs, but use them only if you can swear that no other words will do. Otherwise, trade them in for more vivid verbs, as in:

Dull:	The line to the box office *moved* very slowly.
Livelier:	The line *crept* (*crawled, inched, poked*) to the box office.

Note that by using a more animated verb, you eliminate the need for "very slowly," which has suddenly become redundant.

Dull:	The police officer *gave* drivers permission to turn left on red.
Livelier:	The police officer *permitted* drivers to turn left on red.

Note that this revision has created not just a more active sentence but one that contains fewer words—always a stylistic plus.

Practice in Using Active Verbs

Directions: Replace the weak, lifeless verbs in these sentences with stronger, active ones.

1. Shock was the feeling of most American people from the attack of 9/11.

2. In New York City, there were nearly three thousand people killed.

3. Afterwards, there was a controversy over who was to blame for America"s vulnerability to terrorism.

4. There was an effort made to strengthen homeland security.

5. Many people were willing to give up some of their rights in order to be secure.

6. The issue of how much freedom to give up for the sake of security is difficult to resolve.

7. The war in Afghanistan was a significant event that was a result of 9/11.

8. Sweatshirts and baggy pants was our manner of dress whenever we went out.

9. There was quite a lot of commotion because of there being an all-American high school basketball player playing in the game.

10. It is obvious that there should be more emphasis on math and science for the average college-bound student.

ACTIVE AND PASSIVE SENTENCES

Active sentences strengthen prose; passive sentences weaken it. In an active sentence the person or thing performing an action is usually mentioned early in a sentence so that readers know right away who or what you are talking about. In some contexts, though, the actor is unknown or irrelevant. That"s when a passive sentence—a sentence structured in the *passive voice*—is more appropriate. For example:

Passive:	The curtain was raised at 8:30 sharp.
Active:	At 8:30 sharp, a stagehand (or Maryanne, the production assistant) raised the curtain.

In the passive version, curtain time is the important fact. Who pulled the rope or pushed the button is beside the point.

Other occasions when a passive-voice sentence may be appropriate, or even preferable, include:

• When the point of the sentence is to reveal the identity of the actor:

Active:	Tommy, an eight-year-old boy, hacked into the agency"s computer system.
Passive:	The agency"s computer system was hacked into by Tommy, an eight-year-old boy.

• When you want to conceal the actor.

Active:	Sorry, I lost the library book.
Passive:	Sorry, the library book has been lost.

• When you want to avoid using gender-based pronouns.

Active:	Every member of the marching band must return his or her uniform.
Passive:	Uniforms must be returned by every member of the marching band.

Transforming a passive sentence to an active one may take a bit of doing:

Six weeks were spent preparing for the spring carnival.

This sentence needs revision because it fails to tell who performed the action—that is, who prepared for the carnival. The following revision clears up the uncertainty:

Six weeks were spent preparing for the spring carnival by the cheerleaders.

This version contains more information than the original, but it still emphasizes the action instead of who performed the action. To make the transformation complete, say something like

The cheerleaders prepared for the spring carnival for six weeks.

In the active voice, this sentence gives the performers of the action top billing.

Why is the active voice better than the passive voice? Mainly because most events in life don"t just occur by themselves. Somebody does something; a person or thing *acts*. After all, burgers don"t just get eaten; people cook and devour them. Marriages don"t just happen; couples deliberately go out and marry each other. Goals don"t score, salmon don"t get caught, and wallets don"t get lost all by themselves. People do these things.

Good essay writers, taking advantage of readers" natural curiosity about others, strive to make the performer of the action the grammatical subject of their sentences:

Passive:	The award was presented to Carrie by the town Rotary Club.
Active:	The town Rotary Club presented an award to Carrie.
Passive:	Annapolis was attended by my brother, my cousin, and three of my uncles.
Active:	My brother, my cousin, and three uncles went to Annapolis.

As you prepare for the SAT, review your essays for passive sentences. Change them to active sentences unless you have a good reason not to.

Practice in Revising Passive Sentences

Directions: Please rewrite the following sentences, putting each in active voice.

1. The backyard was covered by dead leaves.

2. The crisis in the Middle East was discussed by us.

3. Friday"s quiz was failed because I had been at a play rehearsal every night that week.

4. Portland was flown to at the start of our weeklong vacation in Oregon.

5. The great white whale was pursued by Captain Ahab and his crew.

6. The newspaper is fetched by Fido every morning.

7. The decision to go to war was made by the president and his advisors.

8. Dinner was taken out by more than twenty customers on Friday night.

9. Five of Shakespeare"s plays were seen by our group in three days.

10. Normally, the brain is called on by the body before you do something physical.

OMITTING NEEDLESS WORDS

Never use two words when one will do. Tell your readers quickly and directly what you have to say. Brevity works best. Cut out needless words. Readers value economy.

Stop! Have you noticed that the previous paragraph disregards the very advice it dispenses? Do you see repetition and redundancy? Couldn"t the point have been made more briefly and succinctly?

TIP

Sentences should be firm and tight. Omit needless words!

Hold it, again! Look at that last phrase, *briefly and succinctly*. Aha! Another redundancy. The author should have used one, but not both, adverbs.

Here"s a word to the wise:

You should work through all of the sentences you write by examining each one and crossing out all the words you don"t definitely need.

In truth, that"s twenty-four words to the wise—probably more than are needed.

Go through every sentence you write and cross out unnecessary words.

That"s better—eleven words of free advice, but still too many. The sentence could be trimmed still further:

Cut unnecessary words out of every sentence.

This seven-word model is less than a third of the original twenty-four word clunker. But it can be pared even more:

Omit needless words.

Your sentences, like muscles, should be firm and tight. In lean writing, every word counts. To trim fat, wring your sentences through this four-step word trimmer:

1. Look for repetition. Then combine sentences.

Fat:	Elena took Jesse to the movies. Jesse is Elena"s brother. (10 words)
Trimmed:	Elena took her brother Jesse to the movies. (8 words)

Granted, cutting ten words to eight may not seem like much. But consider that it"s a 20 percent reduction, and in a 500-word essay, a 20 percent reduction amounts to 100 words, the equivalent of a whole paragraph.

Fat:	When Maria was sixteen years of age she accepted a position at Wilkens" Fabrics. In this position she learned about fabrics and about how to handle customers. (27)
Trimmed:	At sixteen years old, Maria accepted a position at Wilkens" Fabrics, where she learned about fabrics and handling customers. (19)
Re-trimmed:	Working at Wilkens" Fabrics at age sixteen, Maria learned to handle both fabrics and customers. (15)

2. Look for telltale words like *which, who, that, thing, all*. They often signify the presence of fat.

Fat:	Edison was a man who was obsessed by the wonders of electricity. (12)
Trimmed:	The wonders of electricity obsessed Edison. (6)

Changing the grammatical subject and replacing *was* with an active verb halved the word count.

Fat:	What he most wanted was that the terrorists would release the hostages. (12)
Trimmed:	He most wanted the terrorists to release the hostages. (9)

3. Hunt for phrases that add words but no meaning, such as *the fact that, due to the fact that, at this point in time, at the present time*, and comparable usages.

Fat:	Hamlet returned home as a result of his father"s death. (10)
Trimmed:	Hamlet returned home because his father died. (7).

Fat:	The troops were in danger due the fact that mines had been planted in the field. (16)
Trimmed:	The mine field endangered the troops. (6)

Other Fat Phrases	Trimmed
what I mean is	I mean
on account of, as a result of	because
in the final analysis	finally
few and far between	few
each and every one	each
this is a subject that	this subject
ten in number	ten
at the age of six years old	at age six
most unique	unique
true fact	fact
biography of her life	biography
in regard to, with regard to,	about
in relation to, with respect to	

A rich vocabulary can also help turn flabby sentences into tight ones:

Fat:	Use a tool with a sharp point that pokes holes in leather. (12)
Trimmed:	Use an awl. (3)

Fat:	Sometimes his grandfather had a cheerful and dynamic personality, but at other times he withdrew into himself and became angry and depressed. (22)
Trimmed:	His grandfather suffered from bipolar disorder. (6)

4. Search for redundancies. Innumerable words are wasted on reiteration of what has already been stated, on repeating the obvious, on restating ideas, on saying the same thing again and again and over and over, driving readers to the brink of madness.

Fat:	A cloud of black soot rose up to the sky. (10)

Soot, by definition, is black, and rising clouds can only go up.

Trimmed:	A cloud of soot rose to the sky. (8)
Fat:	He had a smile on his face. (7)

Where else but on a face would a smile appear?

Trimmed:	He wore a smile. (4)
Fat:	After carefully scrutinizing the X-ray, the doctor seemed fully engrossed in her own train of thought. (16)

Scrutinize means "to study carefully," and *engrossed* means "to think fully." Also, *her own train of thought* is nonsensical because no one can think others" thoughts.

Trimmed:	After scrutinizing the X-ray, the doctor seemed engrossed in thought. (10)

After you have pared your sentences to the bone, re-read what remains and discard still more by tracking down little words like *the, a, an, up, down, its*, and *and*. Even though it may hurt to take out what you worked hard to put in, don"t whine. Just grit your teeth and do it!

Practice in Trimming Needless Words

PART A

Directions: Tighten these sentences, but preserve their meaning.

1. The author, a man named Peter Jenkins, wrote a book with the title *A Walk Across America*, about walking across America, which he accomplished after walking twenty-five miles a day in order to prepare for his walk across America.

2. There is no reason for the chairperson of the committee, who is Carolyn Welles, to take offense at my suggestion, which is aimed at trying to make the meetings more productive and useful to the entire student body at large.

3. Molly was elected to be the editor of the yearbook in spite of the fact that her grades in writing in English courses are really not very good at all.

4. Some kinds of criticism are good, but other kinds of criticism do more harm than good. Harmful criticism is criticism that tears a person down instead of helping the person overcome or deal with a problem.

5. Every American should have a good knowledge of our country, and the best way to gain a good knowledge and familiarity with the United States is to visit and see places of historic interest and significance to our country.

PART B

Directions: This wordy paragraph appeared in an essay that advocated gaining weight. Please trim its fat.

Such weight-gaining ideas can be used to good advantage by each and every man, woman, and child who is interested in adding pounds of weight to his or her body. They are the latest, most up-to-date set of procedures available anywhere. Owing to the fact that health experts and authorities believe that it is better to be underweight than it is to be overweight, ideas for putting on weight are generally thought to be jokes not taken seriously, which is the reason why such ideas are kept under wraps and not publicized very widely or broadly. Yet, there are many people of all kinds who need to gain weight for a variety of diverse reasons. Here is a quotation that Slim Snyder, who is a graduate of Stanford University, stated during a speech he gave at a meeting of people gathered together at a health conference recently: "Lean people are victims of discrimination, just as obese people are."

For additional practice in eliminating wordiness, turn to Part V.

SHOWING VS. TELLING

Remember the principle that a picture is worth a thousand words? Whether that"s true is arguable, but the point is not. Words help readers *see*. Therefore, *show* more than you *tell*! Instead of describing your uncle as "absent-minded," *show* him stepping into his morning shower dressed in his pj"s. Rather than telling the reader that your room is "a mess," *show* the pile of wrinkled clothes in the corner and the books and Snickers wrappers scattered on the floor next to your unmade futon. The same principle applies to smells: "Her breath was foul with the stench of stale whiskey." To sounds: "the growl of a chain saw in the distance." To touch: "the feel of cool linen bed sheets." And to tastes: "a cold, sweet drink of spring water on a scorching summer day." In short, showing recreates experience for the reader, ultimately making the prose more interesting.

Telling:	I was happy after my meeting with Mr. Blair.
Showing:	I bolted from Mr. Blair"s office, bounded down the steps four at a time, and shouted into the wind, "Hurray, I did it."
Telling:	My teacher, Mr. Franks, doesn"t care to hear that I don"t have the time to do math homework after school.
Showing:	When I explained to Mr. Franks that I"m kept from math homework by driving my brother Timmy to piano lessons or karate, by yearbook meetings on Tuesdays, by Peer Leaders and Students Against Driving

	Drunk, by French tutoring, and by a part-time job at the florist, he muttered, "That"s *your* problem."

No one expects you to load all your essays with a profusion of striking images that *show* instead of *tell.* The fact is that writers struggle for years to perfect the technique. Moreover, too much detail can be as unproductive as too little. A balance is best. No one can tell you exactly how to achieve that balance. You need time to get the feel of it, like riding a bike or doing a back flip. The context, as well as your judgment of a reader"s need to know, should determine how detailed you need to be. To develop the knack, study a written passage that you admire. Pick out both details and broad statements. For practice, use the passage as a model for writing a paragraph of your own.

Practice in Showing Instead of Telling

Directions: Revise the prose of the telling samples into showing examples.

1. Telling: Mike is very tall.

Showing: _____

_____

2. Telling: After she won, she experienced a wonderful and unique feeling that made her want to win again.

Showing: _____

_____

Showing: _____

_____

3. Telling: The store was a quaint old place.

Showing: _____

_____

Showing: _____

_____

4. Telling: It smelled just the way a beach is supposed to smell.

Showing: _____

_____

Showing: _____

_____

5. Telling: The class is out of control.

Showing: _____

_____

Showing: _____

_____

6. Telling: Pioneers had a hard time.

Showing: _____

_____

Showing: _____

_____

7. Telling: The cabin was really run down.

Showing: _____

_____

Showing: _____

_____

8. Telling: The air pollution was sickening.

Showing: _____

_____

Showing: _____

_____

9. Telling: The speech stirred the crowd.

Showing: _____

_____

Showing: _____

_____

10. Telling: Mary Jane"s mother is obsessed by cleanliness.

Showing: _____

_____

Showing: _____

_____

Checking for Standard Usage and Mechanics

Practice these guidelines to minimize writing errors:

- Write correct sentences
- Use correct verbs

• Use adjectives and adverbs correctly

• Choose correct pronouns

• Correct punctuation and capitalization

WRITE CORRECT SENTENCES

Time won"t permit you to analyze meticulously every sentence in your SAT essay. But if you habitually scrutinize the sentences in your practice essays and in other work you do for school, you"ll soon purge from your writing such errors as **fragments** (incomplete sentences), **run-ons**, which consist of two or more improperly joined sentences, and **comma splices**, formed when a comma separates two complete sentences.

To avoid these common errors, always look for the noun or pronoun that functions as the grammatical subject of the sentence and for the verb that it goes with. Every sentence states its subject except one that gives commands or makes requests (Make it snappy! Sit! Please hurry up.), in which case the subject is understood to be the addressee—you, the dog, a slowpoke…whomever.

For more details and practice in writing correct sentences, turn to Part V.

USE CORRECT VERBS

Of all the parts of speech, verbs are the most apt to be used incorrectly. As you edit your SAT essay, therefore, ask yourself the following three questions:

1. Do all nouns and pronouns agree in number with their verbs?

2. Is every verb in the correct tense?

3. Is every verb in the correct form?

Learn to answer these questions accurately by studying the following sections of Part V: subject–verb agreement; proper use of verb tenses; and correct form of verbs.

USE ADJECTIVES AND ADVERBS CORRECTLY

Errors sometimes occur when an adjective is used where an adverb is required. The reverse—using an adverb in place of an adjective—occurs less often. Check your essay for the proper use of adjectives and adverbs.

For details and practice in adjective/adverb use, turn to Part V.

CHOOSE CORRECT PRONOUNS

Skim your essay for pronoun errors, which turn up most often when pronouns are paired, as in *he and I* and *me and them*. If you can"t depend on your sense of what sounds right and wrong, keep in mind that most common pronouns fall into two groups:

Group 1: *I, he, she, they, we, you, who*
Group 2: *me, him, her, them, us, you, whom*

The pronouns in the first group are **nominative case** pronouns (sometimes called *subjective case* pronouns) and are used in grammatical subjects and predicate nominatives. The second group—**objective case** pronouns—are used everywhere else. Because pairs must come from the same case, problems arise when pronouns from different cases show up in the same phrase, as "*Him* and *I* went to the movies." Any time you need a pair of pronouns, and you know that one of them is correct, pick the other from the same group. If you don"t know either pronoun, here"s a handy rule of thumb to follow: Substitute *I* or *me* for one of them. If *I* seems to fit, choose pronouns from Group 1; if *me* fits better, use Group 2.

For more details and a practice exercise in choosing the case of pronouns, turn to Part V.

As you review your essay, check the reference of all pronouns. That is, be sure also that every pronoun refers clearly to its antecedent—usually a noun or another pronoun. Confusion comes when no clear tie exists, especially when a pronoun seems to refer to more than one antecedent:

The librarian told Sarah that it was *her* responsibility to shelve the books.

Because the pronoun *her* may refer to either the librarian or to Sarah, the sentence needs revision:

The librarian told Sarah that one of her responsibilities as a library clerk was to shelve books.

Also watch for implied references, which often involve the pronouns *it, they*, and *you*, but even more frequently, the relative pronouns *which, that*, and *this*.

Finally, don"t use pronouns to refer to possessives, as in:

In Eminem"s latest hit, he stumbles over several words.

The pronoun *he* obviously refers to Eminem, but the word *Eminem* doesn"t appear in the sentence. Because the possessive noun *Eminem"s* is not a grammatical equivalent to *Eminem*, the revised sentence should be:

In his latest hit, Eminem stumbles over several words.

For more details and an exercise in pronoun reference, turn to Part V.

Stay alert also for shifts in pronoun person within individual sentences, within paragraphs, and within the whole essay. Keep in mind that a sentence or a passage cast in the second person (*you*), for example, should usually remain so from start to finish. Likewise, a sentence or passage written in the first or third person should stay that way throughout.

For more details and an exercise in pronoun person, turn to Part V.

Finally, take a look at the agreement between all the pronouns and their antecedents. Do they agree in gender, number, and person? Problems frequently occur with words like *everyone, anyone*, and *nobody*—singular words that should usually be followed by singular pronouns. Sometimes such words are meant as plurals, however, and should be followed by plural pronouns.

For more details and an exercise in pronoun-antecedent agreement, turn to Part V.

CORRECT PUNCTUATION AND CAPITALIZATION

Because error-free essays tend to earn higher scores, it pays to review your essay for proper punctuation and use of capital letters.

Correct Punctuation

A few basic rules cover 90 percent of everyday punctuation. The hardest thing about the rules is knowing where and when to apply them.

Apostrophes. Apostrophes are used in only three places:

1. In **contractions** such as *won"t, it"s, could"ve*, and *where"s*. Apostrophes mark places where letters have been omitted.

2. In plurals of letters, signs, or numbers, as in *A"s* and *B"s*, the *1960"s,* and *10"s* and *20"s, although* many experts simplify matters by writing *1960s, Ps* and *Qs*, and so forth.

3. In possessive nouns such as the *student"s class* and *women"s room* and in indefinite pronouns such as *anybody"s guess*. When the noun is plural and ends in *s*, put the apostrophe after the *s*, as in *leaves" color* and *horses" stable*. Some possessive forms use both an apostrophe and *of*, as in *a friend of the family"s;* some others that specify time, space, value, or quantity also require apostrophes, as in an *hour"s time, a dollar"s worth, at my wit"s end*.

Commas. Commas divide sentences into parts, clarify meaning, and prevent confusion.

1. Use a comma to signal a pause, as in:

No pause:	After brushing his teeth gleamed.
Pause:	After brushing, his teeth gleamed.

Commas are needed after some introductory words and in forms of address:

Well, you can open it whenever it"s convenient.
The letter will be waiting for you at home, *Jimmy*.

2. Commas set off words that interrupt the flow of a sentence, as in:

Carolyn, *regrettably*, was omitted from the roster.
Jennie, *on the other hand*, was included.

Commas separate information not essential to the meaning of the sentence:

The lost hikers, *who had come from New Jersey*, found shelter in a cave.
The three bikers, *whose map of the course was out of date*, arrived two hours later.

Commas set off appositives:

Samantha, *the defense counsel*, entered the courtroom.
The judge, *Mr. Peterson*, presided at the trial.

3. Commas separate the clauses of a compound sentence:

The competition is stiff, but it won"t keep Miriam from winning.
Pete had better call my mother, or I"ll be in big trouble.

4. Commas separate items in a series:

Rosie"s car needs *new tires, a battery, a muffler, and an oil change*.
It was a wonder that Marv could sit through the *long, boring, infantile, and ridiculous* lecture.

Some writers prefer to skip the comma before the last item in a series, but just in case clarity may suffer, it can"t hurt to put it in.

5. Commas separate parts of addresses, dates, and place names:

Who lives at 627 West 115th Street, New York, NY?
Richard was born on May 27, 1996, the same day as Irene.
Dave has lived in Madison, Wisconsin; Seattle, Washington; and Eugene, Oregon.

Note that, because each item in the last example already contains a comma, semicolons help to avoid confusion.

6. Commas separate quotations from attributions in dialogue.

John said, "Close the window."
"I want it open," protested Ben.

Semicolons. Semicolons may be used between closely related sentences, in effect, shortening the pause that would naturally occur between two separate sentences:

Mother was worried; her daughters never stay out this late.
The momentum was building; she couldn"t be stopped now.

A caution: Because semicolons function like periods, use them only between independent clauses or in a series in which one or more items contains a comma, as in:

On his trek, Norwood met Allen, a carpenter from Maine; Dr. Jones, a pediatrician from St. Louis; Jonathan, an airline pilot; and me, of course.

Quotation Marks. Quotation marks usually surround direct quotations, as in:

Rita said to Bob, "I"m nuts about you."

Quotation marks also enclose the titles of poems, stories, chapter headings, essays, magazine articles, and other short works. Don"t use them for longer works. Novels,

plays, films, and magazine titles should be underlined in handwritten essays and italicized when they appear in print.

Avoid calling attention to clichés, trite expressions, or slang terms by using quotation marks. Rewrite instead, using fresh, original language.

Finally, quotation marks may enclose words that express the silent thoughts of a character, as in:

Carlos glanced at his watch. “I”m going to be late,” he thought.

Periods and commas are placed inside close-quotation marks. Question marks and exclamation points go outside the quotation mark unless they are part of the quote itself.

“When will the seminar start?” asked Regis.
Do you understand the meaning of the concept “The end justifies the means”?

Practice in Using Punctuation

PART A. POSSESSIVES

Directions: Check your mastery of possessives by writing the correct possessive form of the italicized word in the space provided. Some items may be correct.

1. *Pauls* reason was personal.

2. The future of *Americas* foreign policy is being debated.

3. *Teams* from all over the county have gathered at the stadium.

4. Luis isn”t at all interested in *womens* issues.

5. The *girls* locker room is downstairs, but the *boys* is upstairs.

6. We are invited to the *Andersons* house for New *Years* Eve.

7. All of the *Rosses* are going out to eat.

8. Have you seen *Morris* iPod, which he left here yesterday?

9. Both of the *computers* keyboards need repair.

10. He"ll be back in two *months* time.

PART B. COMMAS AND SEMICOLONS

Directions: In the following sentences, insert or remove commas and semicolons as necessary. Some sentences may be correct.

1. While Bill was riding his bike got a flat tire.

2. The mail carrier did not leave the package for Valerie was not at home.

3. After doing his homework Mikey as you might expect talked on his cell phone for an hour.

4. His work criticized many commonly held beliefs however and it was strictly censored.

5. The car, that ran into mine at the intersection, was an SUV.

6. Dad went to the airport to pick up Dave Ellie went to the train station to meet Debbie.

7. The people who live by the water must be prepared for occasional flooding.

8. The boat, was seventy-five feet long and eighteen feet wide, its mast was about eighty feet tall.

9. To anyone interested in flying planes hold endless fascination.

10. Jeff and Steve left alone for the weekend invited all their friends to a party.

11. I need street maps of Boston; and Portland, Maine.

12. Some of the theories dealt with the political social and religious ideas of the time.

13. Students, who want to try out for the chorus, have been asked to report to room 330.

14. Doug for example is both a scholar and an athlete.

15. Monica refused to go, unless Phil went with her.

16. The hero of the book John Coffey rode his bike across the United States.

17. After all she did for him what she could.

18. Starting in Minnesota the Mississippi runs all the way to the Gulf of Mexico.

19. Harold Watkins who comes from Chicago won a full tuition scholarship to Duke.

20. Although the characters are stereotypes they were interesting to read about.

21. Yo-Yo Ma the famous cellist will perform a recital on Saturday night.

22. This test covers Spanish literature culture and history; and it lasts for three hours.

23. Michelle is pretty tall and dark but her older sister Norma is pretty short and light.

24. Sean the twin brother of Ian was struck by a falling tree limb.

25. The window washer dropped by last evening but he didn"t bring his squeegee.

Capitalization

Capitalization isn"t totally standardized, but it"s not a free-for-all either. You won"t go wrong following these guidelines:

1. Capitalize the first words of sentences, direct quotations, and lines of poetry (most of the time). This includes sentences that follow colons, as in:

He had all the symptoms of love: He could think of nothing but Cheryl all day long.

2. Capitalize proper nouns and adjectives derived from proper nouns: *Victoria, Victorian; Shakespeare, Shakespearean; France, French dressing* (but not *french fries*, which has become a generic term).

3. Capitalize place names: *North America, Lake Moosilauke, Yosemite National Park, Gobi Desert, Mount Rushmore, Panama Canal, the Arctic Ocean, Times Square, Route 66.* Don"t capitalize north, east, south, and west unless you are referring to a particular region of the country, as in:

They went camping in the *West*.

Nor should you capitalize the common noun that is not part of the actual place name: the *canal across Panama, the city of Moline,* and *the plains of the Midwest.*

4. Capitalize languages, races, nationalities, and religions: *the Hungarian language, Inuit, Argentinian, Hispanic, Muslim.*

5. Capitalize organizations, institutions, and brand names: *United Nations, Pittsburgh Pirates, Library of Congress, Automobile Club of America, Amtrak, Southwest Airlines, the Internet, Toyota.* Don"t, however, capitalize the common noun associated with the brand name, as in *Crest toothpaste or Starbuck"s coffee*.

6. Capitalize titles of persons that indicate rank, office, profession, when they are used with the person"s name: *Congressman Kelly, Doctor Dolittle, Coach McConnell, Judge Judy, Lieutenant Lawlor.* Also, the titles of high officials when they are used in place of the official"s name, as in *the Secretary General, the Prime Minister, the Secretary of the Treasury*. Don"t capitalize titles when referring generically to the position: *the superintendent of schools, the assistant librarian, the clerk of the highway department.*

7. Capitalize family relationships, but only when they are used with a person"s name: *Uncle Wesley, Grandma Jones, Cousin Dave.*

8. Capitalize titles of books, plays, stories, articles, poems, songs, and other creative works: *The Grapes of Wrath, Hamlet*, *"An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge," "Ode to a Grecian Urn," "Box of Rain."* Note that articles, conjunctions, and prepositions of less than five letters are not capitalized unless they appear as the last or the first words in the title.

9. Capitalize references to the Deity and religious tracts: *God, the Gospel, the Torah, the Koran, the Lord, the Prophet.* Also capitalize pronouns referring to *Him* or *Her*.

10. Capitalize historical names, events, documents, and periods: *Battle of Gettysburg, Alien and Sedition Acts, War of 1812, Bill of Rights, Middle Ages.*

11. Capitalize days of the week, months, holidays: *Monday, May, Mothers" Day*. The seasons are not capitalized unless given an identity such as *Old Man Winter*.

12. Capitalize the names of specific courses and schools: *History 101, Forensic Science, Brookvale High School, Columbia College*. While course names are capitalized, subjects are not. Therefore, you study *history* in *American History 101* and learn *forensics* in *Forensic Science*. Similarly, you attend *high school* at *Brookvale High School* and go to *college* at *Columbia*.

Practice in Applying Capitalization

Directions: Add capital letters where they are needed in the following sentences.

1. on labor day bennington county”s fire department plans to hold a turkey shoot on the field at miller”s pond.

2. the judge gave district attorney lipman a book entitled *the rules of evidence* and instructed her to read it before she ever dared set foot in the court of appeals of the ninth circuit again.

3. the secretary of state greeted the president of austria at the ronald reagan airport in washington, d.c.

4. the shackleton expedition nearly met its doom on georgia island in antarctica.

5. for christmas he got a black & decker table saw from the sears store next to the old bedford courthouse.

6. according to georgetown”s high school principal, eugene griffiths, georgetown high school attracts students from the whole west coast. at georgetown students may major in drawing and painting, design, graphics, or sculpture. mr. griffiths said, “i attended a similar high school in new england just after the vietnam war.”

7. we expect to celebrate new year”s eve again this year by ordering a movie of an old broadway musical from netflix and settling down in front of the dvd player with some pepsi and a box of oreos.

8. after traveling all the way to the pacific, the corps of discovery rode down the missouri river going east on their way back to st. louis.

9. This irish linen tablecloth was bought at k-mart in the emeryville mall off powell street.

10. yellowstone national park is located in the northwestern corner of the state of wyoming.

Review

Here”s the list of the twelve principles of good writing, reproduced to remind you once more that referring to them again and again will work to your advantage as you prepare for the SAT.

Prewriting

✔ Analyze the topic carefully.

✔ Narrow the topic mercilessly.

✔ Choose a main idea that matters.

✔ Gather and arrange ideas purposefully.

Composing

✔ Hook readers with a gripping introduction.

✔ Develop paragraphs coherently.

✔ Use plain and precise words.

✔ Vary the sentence structure.

✔ End the essay memorably.

Editing and Proofreading

✔ Edit for clarity.

✔ Edit for interest.

✔ Check for standard usage and mechanics.

Answer Key to Practice Exercises

Choosing a Main Idea

These are suggestions only. Your answers may be equally or more effective.

1. A. Henry Ford knew more about cars than about people, because talent, ability, and a little bit of luck are the most important ingredients of success.

B. If Henry Ford's statement is correct, the world is filled with self-deluded people.

C. From spelling bees to Nobel Prizes, nobody with a negative attitude has ever been a winner.

2. A. While rats may learn to run through a maze for a food pellet, children are different.

B. Political history shows that if a dictator wants to control his people, he should scare the living daylights out of them.

C. Knowing that acceptance to a good college waits for them, most students willingly go through hell, including the SAT, to get there.

3. A. Those who say “Money is the root of all evil” know what they are talking about.

B. Dreaming of wealth is as American as apple pie—part of the great American dream.

C. Only a ding-a-ling, or someone named Jay Gatsby, would truly believe that money can buy happiness.

4. A. Mandela is partly right and partly wrong because everything keeps changing.

B. Going back to old places that haven’t changed tells you more about what you were than about what you’ve become.

C. After a recent visit to my old elementary school, I could not agree more with Mandela’s observation.

5. A. Bryan is definitely on the right track. Nothing is as personally satisfying as achieving a goal through hard work.

B. Which kind of success do I prefer? Frankly, I’ll take it either way.

C. I’ve heard that people make their own good luck by their decisions and choices. Therefore, it’s simplistic to think that your destiny can be achieved without it.

Gathering and Arranging Ideas

Answers will vary. The order of ideas is strictly a matter of personal preference.

A. Advantages:

1. Many more students would become physically fit.

2. Regular exercise reduces stress and promotes feelings of well-being.

3. Students learn lifelong physical/recreational skills.

Disadvantages:

1. Opportunity to take important elective courses is reduced.

2. Students lose time that can be used to study for tests and quizzes.

3. Tiring physical activity weakens ability to concentrate/focus on academics.

B. Pros:

1. Video games provide pleasure and entertainment.

2. Many interactive games stimulate the mind and foster problem-solving skills.

3. They improve hand-eye coordination.

Cons:

1. Video games tend to be addictive.

2. They glorify violence and destructive behaviors.

3. Their high cost diverts family funds from more worthwhile pursuits.

C. For:

1. Cheating is rampant and something should be done about it.

2. A code will improve the moral climate in the school.

3. Students must learn that there are consequences for cheating.

Against:

1. A code creates an atmosphere of fear and apprehension, like a police state.

2. Students will be reluctant to rat on each other.

3. It discourages students from helping each other learn.

D. Agree:

1. War causes people and nations to abandon the qualities that make them human.

2. Wars cause death, suffering, and destruction.

3. Wars cost money that can and should be used for improving lives, not destroying them.

Disagree:

1. War against terrorism provides security for the people.

2. War to depose tyrants is of benefit to mankind.

3. Wars on poverty, drugs, and other social evils improve the quality of life.

Writing an Appealing Opening

Answers will vary. Be confident that the essay openings you wrote may be no less effective than these samples.

1. Topic: The courage of one's convictions
Most high school kids would rather be caught dead than be considered out of synch with the crowd. An exception to the rule is my best friend, Molly McBride. She would consider herself dead if she couldn't express her individuality and be different from everyone else.

2. Topic: Deadlines
My dad recently bought me a smartphone. At first I thought it was a strange gift for a father to present to his son on his seventeenth birthday. After all, I'm not a businessman or a lawyer or a high-powered boomer who needs to keep tabs on meetings and clients and overseas flights to catch. But Dad said that I'd need a smartphone very soon, and he was right! I'm applying to more than half a dozen colleges, each with its own deadlines to keep track of and meet, and without my smartphone, my life would be even more chaotic than it is.

3. Topic: "Keep it! You may need it someday."
If you've ever seen "The Antiques Road Show" on television, you'd never throw anything away, never hold a garage sale, never pass up an opportunity to buy an old toy, an ashtray from the World's Fair, a miniature Statue of Liberty, or any other piece of junk to fill your shelves and clutter up your closets. The reason is that all these things may be great investments and could someday be worth hundreds, even thousands, of times more than you paid for them.

4. Topic: The wrong time in the wrong place
In 1939, almost a thousand Jews managed to escape from Hitler's Germany by boarding the SS *St. Louis*, an ocean liner bound for safety in Cuba. Once they arrived offshore in Havana, however, Cuban authorities would not let the ship dock. The United States also turned the *St. Louis*away, even though the passengers could see the lights of Miami in the distance. With no place to go, the ship sailed back to Europe. Many of the passengers settled in countries soon to be overrun by the Nazis and perished in the Holocaust.

5. Topic: Responsibility
Why doesn't my mother trust me? Why do I get only $10 a week allowance? Why

must I contact home every two hours when I am out with my friends? Why won't my father ever let me borrow his car? How will I ever learn responsibility if I never have any?

Developing Topic Sentences

PART A

1. Sentence 1

2. None. Implied topic sentence

3. Sentence 7

4. Sentence 10

5. Sentence 1

6. Sentence 1

7. Sentence 1

8. Sentence 3

9. Sentence 2

10. Sentence 6

PART B

Answers may vary.

1. Mother and Father are very different from each other.

2. In the past U.S. athletes dominated the Olympic Games.

3. Monopolies often destroy not only themselves but the incentive of businesses to change and make progress.

4. How little the aristocracy understood the needs of the masses.

5. Vera Simon wrote a gripping and realistic book.

6. Smoking in school is just not worth the trouble it can lead to.

7. But here are my requirements for the perfect roommate.

8. Age and experience have deprived me of courage and spirit.

9. No topic sentence is needed.

10. Although backward in some respects, a so-called primitive culture can be technologically sophisticated.

PART C

Answers will vary. The topic sentences you wrote may be as good as or even better than these examples.

a. Of all the equipment needed to traverse the inhuman land of Antarctica, nothing is more important than a team of well-trained sled dogs.

b. Antarctica takes your breath away.

c. This is not an idle comparison, because at every turn you are putting your health and safety in jeopardy.

Developing Paragraphs

1. a. 3 b. 5 c. 1 d. 2 e. 4	2. a. 3 b. 1 c. 4 d. 5 e. 2	3. a. 5 b. 3 c. 1 d. 4 e. 2
4. a. 5 b. 4 c. 1 d. 2 e. 3	5. a. 5 b. 3 c. 2 d. 1 e. 4	

Identifying Paragraph Unity and Coherence

1. Sentence 3 destroys the coherence of the paragraph. Delete it. There's no reason to save it, because the idea is reiterated in sentence 7.

2. The paragraph lacks unity. It starts by discussing consequences on young people of smoking marijuana and ends by explaining parents' problems. One way to overcome the paragraph's lack of unity is to divide it into two parts. Another is to

expand the topic sentence to include parents, *e.g.*,*Under present law, smoking marijuana can have serious consequences for both young people and their parents*. If this were done, however, the paragraph would need furtherdevelopment.

3. The paragraph is coherent except for sentence 5, which should be deleted. Sentence 2 strongly supports the topic sentence (1). The remaining sentences, except 5, support sentence 2, which is the major supporting sentence in the paragraph.

4. Although the entire paragraph discusses political parties, the discussion is not unified. Sentences 1–3 deal with the two-party system, while sentences 4–7 are about dictatorships. Either divide the paragraph, or add a topic sentence that justifies discussing both topics within a single paragraph.

5. Sentence 1 is the topic sentence. Sentence 4 is unrelated to the topic sentence. Delete it.

6. The paragraph is mostly unified and coherent, although the topic sentence would be more accurate if it mentioned the human qualities of porpoises.

7. Although the opening sentence leads the reader to think that what follows will be all about *Robinson Crusoe*, the paragraph is really about the author Daniel Defoe. To improve the coherence of the paragraph, delete or revise the misleading topic sentence.

8. Although the entire paragraph is about Greek philosophy, it is terribly disjointed. Only sentences 3 and 4 connect with each other. The others are independent thoughts, related in subject matter but not in style. For coherence, add a topic sentence, possibly using material in sentence 5. The fact that Socrates taught Plato, who taught Aristotle might serve as starting point in revising the paragraph.

9. The paragraph is coherent and unified until the last sentence. Delete sentence 6, but if the idea is too good to discard, save it for another place in the essay or revise sentence 1, the topic sentence.

10. The paragraph is unified and coherent. No revision needed.

Using Transitions

These paragraphs only illustrate the use of transitions. Your answers will no doubt be different.

1. To get on the good side of a teacher takes practice, but the technique explained below almost never fails. First you must try to create the impression that you think, say, Ms. Douglas, is the best teacher in the world. You must immediately choose a seat that is near to her in the classroom. Thenyou must pretend to listen intently to her every word and nod your head as though you agree with everything she says. Next, smile at her, laugh at her jokes, and never leave the room right after class. Soon after the bell, ask her a question about the lesson and thank her profusely for taking the time to answer it. After a while, she'll think that you are an intelligent, highly motivated student and with luck will reward you handsomely on your report card.

2. Some people are bored with their lives. As a result, they seek out dangerous situations in order to get a thrill. Accordingly, many movie stuntmen ache to put their lives in jeopardy. As a result, they volunteer to crash through windows, fall down stairs, jump from high places, drive cars into walls and into each other. As a consequence, they often get hurt, but their work is more important to them than their safety and well-being. Hence, it takes a sort of masochist to be a stuntman.

3. Because my father is an optimist and my mother a pessimist, they respond to life in different ways. Unlike my mother, my father is always pretty upbeat, even when he's worried about his job, about money, and about me and my sister. On the other hand, Mom frets about every little thing, from the weather (it's never quite right) to dirt on the living room rug (there's too much of it). In spite of their differences, Dad and Mom get along just fine. Still, I prefer Dad's way because it resembles mine. Nevertheless, I can see where Mom is coming from and love her all the same.

4. It's time to reconsider how the United States squanders billions of dollars every year on probing Mars, Jupiter, and other remote places in outer space. Because money is also wasted on glitzy high-tech telescopes that can bring the edges of the universe into view, the government should reevaluate its entire space program. In addition to being a misuse of money that is sorely needed to solve problems here on the Earth, studying outer space has been less fruitful than predicted. Besides failing to live up to their promise, so-called successes have been either modest or totally irrelevant. What's more, the cost of developing technology required to make worthwhile journeys even to the closest planets or asteroids is, if you'll pardon the pun, "astronomical." Equally important is that, given the choice, the American people would prefer to see tax revenues used to improve their everyday lives.

Using Precise Wording

Answers will vary. The words in your sentences may be as precise as or even more precise than the words in these samples.

1. The barn's rotted walls bulged, its windows wouldn't open, and moss covered the sagging roof.

2. When accused of lying to the jury, the witness turned beet red, burst into tears, and, with eyes turned to heaven, asked, "What in the world is happening to me?"

3. After winning the election by a 3 to 1 margin, the senator grinned from ear to ear and told her supporters that she was ready to work in their behalf.

4. Molly's reward for six hours at her desk studying physics was a big fat F on the quiz.

5. The seniors celebrated their graduation but wept inside, realizing that tonight was the last time they would ever be together.

6. To make it on the swim team, the bowling team, or any other team, there are but three things to do: practice, practice, practice.

7. At the wake, Greg was startled by the joviality of the mourners, who rejoiced over Mr. O'Malley's life instead of lamenting his death.

8. In high school Linda rarely went to class, flunked English and math in summer school, and finally dropped out altogether.

9. Teddy and Joey, the family's twins, never went out at the same time because they shared the same pair of shoes.

10. Although the current had smashed the canoe against the rocks, Rod unhesitatingly leaped into the water to save the drowning child.

Writing Comparisons

The comparisons that you wrote may be as good as or even better than these examples.

A. 1. as comfortable as a baby in its mother's arms

2. as tough as a wrecking ball

3. as gorgeous as gold

4. as silly as putty

5. as serious as 9/11

6. as perfect as a circle

7. as wild as a leaping salmon

8. as unpredictable as the lottery

9. as impetuous as a flash of lightning

10. as reliable as a sheepdog

B. School is like an airport, a place one passes through for the sole purpose of going somewhere else. Just as no one goes to the airport just to be at the airport, who would go to school in order to go to school. Instead, school is a step one takes while preparing for college and for life. One spends a certain amount of time there, follows the rules, does the work, and then escapes like a traveler en route to Aruba, or Italy, or the Far East. Similarly, at the airport, you must obey the rules: check in at the counter, have your photo ID ready, go through security checks, stand in lines. If you fail to follow the prescribed procedure, trouble can follow, delaying your departure. In that sense, it's no different from school, where one must do what is expected in order to graduate on time.

Varying Sentences

These are illustrative answers only. Many other variations are possible.

1. Mr. Finn is a good teacher but he runs the class like a dictatorship. Democracy and freedom have no place in his class. On the first day he announced his rules, among them no talking, no gum chewing, no hats in class, no lateness. If you arrive late, you should expect to find the door locked and to go to detention after school. All homework is compulsory. No one dares to come to class unprepared because a girl who once came to class without her homework turned colors and almost wept after Mr. Finn lowered the boom on her.

2. In the numerous science classes that I have taken, we talked about experiments instead of doing them because the equipment was obsolete and too costly to replace. We learned scientific theories but could not practice them in labs or see them demonstrated. To give students a better education, the science department needs money. About a million dollars would do.

3. By dumping garbage, sewage, and other hazardous waste products into the sea, many nations are polluting the world's oceans. They are making beaches and

swimming dangerous. Toxic pollutants also taint all forms of sea life with materials that humans ingest when eating fish, lobsters, clams, and other seafood.

4. The earth has experienced a sharp increase in natural disasters, from about 100 per year in the 1960s to five times that number in the early part of the twenty-first century. Earthquakes, droughts, huge storms, and floods are not happening more frequently, however. Nor are they occurring with greater intensity. Rather, the population of the world has increased. People in greater numbers now occupy areas that are prone to natural disasters, such as flood plains, coastal lands, and cities built on subterranean fault lines. The planet has not changed but humans have.

5. Although the American Dream is a popular concept, it means different things for different people. Most commonly, it means finding a good job, getting married, having a couple of kids and owning a home with a white picket fence and a two-car garage. Some people, thinking that dream shallow, say that the dream won't be complete without a good education, friends, a feeling of well-being, good health, and above all, the blessings of liberty, including the freedom of speech and religion and the freedom to choose to be part of an untraditional family made up of same-sex partners or any other combination of adults and children.

Writing Conclusions

Because every writer is different from every other, these answers are no more than possibilities for concluding three different essays.

1. In a generation or less, today's profanity may be no different from the everyday language in newspapers, on television, and even in essays like this one.

2. Some people succeed because they are lucky. Others succeed because they are more talented or smarter than the competition. But success comes to the vast majority because they have planned how to succeed. When a split second determines the winner in a race, is it fair to say that the second-place finisher is not as good as the winner? No, but it's a certainty that the winner planned his racing strategy better than the person who lost.

3. If by magic I happened to find myself in junior high again, I wouldn't rest until I'd made my escape.

Identifying Misplaced and Dangling Modifiers

Your answers needn't be identical to these, but your sentences should be free of dangling and misplaced modifiers.

1. The pizza I ate after completing my chemistry homework tasted great.

2. Denise discovered her boyfriend sound asleep in the hammock.

3. Having been used all night to illuminate the steps, the flashlight needed new batteries.

4. While I drove down the mountain road, a rock smashed my windshield.

5. When I stopped to rest after a long hike, a grizzly bear stood in front of me.

6. Before the school bus picked me up, I ate a quick breakfast.

7. The police submitted a report about the bank robbery.

8. His family emigrated from Russia when Sasha was ten.

9. We gave the dog a bone we didn't want.

10. Left alone in the house, the child was terrified by every sound.

Identifying Parallel Structure

These are suggested answers. Other answers may also be correct.

1. and inspirational

2. was accused not only of being a bigot but also of being too stupid

3. and gone to fewer parties

4. preparing reports, and making various types of telephone calls

5. and to get up early

6. and she had a habit of disappearing

7. or a commercial artist

8. felt both pride and satisfaction

9. Correct

10. plans to live simply

11. The kids had scattered their books not only all over the bus but also all over the sidewalk.

12. have a good location, have land around it, and enjoy a view

13. Joan's broken yellow pencil came from this box.

14. how to furnish and decorate the house simply

15. neither have a microwave in his room nor take a shower after 11:00 o'clock

16. and being miles from friends

17. The mouse will either find a quick way into the attic or gnaw at the siding for days.

18. and entertaining

19. and a job in the suburbs

20. that he'll defeat Tom in the sectionals, and that he'll emerge

Using Active Verbs

Although your answers will differ from these, be sure that your sentences, like those here, are free of lifeless verbs.

1. The attack of 9/11 shocked most Americans.

2. Nearly three thousand people died in New York City.

3. Afterwards, a controversy raged over whom to blame for America's vulnerability to terrorism.

4. Efforts to strengthen homeland security began.

5. Some citizens agreed to give up their rights for the sake of security.

6. People struggle with the dilemma of how much freedom to give up for security.

7. The events of 9/11 led to a significant war in Afghanistan.

8. We dressed in sweatshirts and baggy pants whenever we went out.

9. The presence of an all-American high school player stirred up the crowd at the basketball game.

10. Obviously, the average college-bound student needs more training in math and science.

Revising Passive Sentences

Your sentences may differ from these, but be sure you've used the active voice.

1. Dead leaves covered the backyard.

2. We discussed the crisis in the Middle East.

3. I failed Friday's quiz because I had rehearsed for the play every night that week.

4. We began our weeklong vacation in Oregon by flying to Portland.

5. Captain Ahab and his crew pursued the great white whale.

6. Fido fetches the newspaper every morning.

7. The president and his advisors decided to go to war.

8. On Friday night, more than twenty customers took out dinners.

9. In three days, our group saw five Shakespearean plays.

10. Before you do something physical, the body normally calls on the brain.

Trimming Needless Words

PART A

Answers will vary. Be sure that your version of each sentence approximates the meaning of the original.

1. Peter Jenkins wrote *A Walk Across America*, a book about his cross-country walk. To prepare for the trek, he walked twenty-five miles a day.

2. My suggestion for making meetings more productive and relevant to all students needn't offend the chairperson, Carolyn Welles.

3. In spite of low English grades and poor writing skills, Molly was elected to be the editor of the yearbook.

4. Some kinds of criticism help people cope with problems; other kinds tear people down instead of offering help.

5. By visiting historic places, Americans learn what is important to know about their country.

PART B

Avoiding discrimination is but one of many reasons for people to gain weight, according to Stanford University graduate Slim Snyder, who, at a recent conference on health, said "Lean people are victims of discrimination, just as obese people are." Fortunately, many up-to-date weight-gaining procedures are available to everyone. But they are ridiculed and kept well hidden because health experts agree that being lean is preferable to being obese.

Showing Instead of Telling

Answers will vary. Check your sentences for specific details that show rather than tell.

1. Whenever Mike enters a room, he ducks his head to avoid hitting the top of the doorway.

2. Her sense of accomplishment grew with every handshake and pat on the back. As her face ached from grinning so hard, she knew that she'd be back next year to win again.

3. On the sagging floor stood a rusted iron stove, a spinning wheel, and a broken rocking chair.

4. The smell of salt spray, seaweed, and sunblock filled Suzanne's nostrils.

5. During the lesson, four kids in the back played poker, another smoked pot in the corner, while the rest of the class either wisecracked with each other, applied makeup, or put their heads down and snoozed.

6. The pioneers left behind a trail of gravesites where dead children and adults had been hurriedly buried.

7. The cabin was everything that would give most people the creeps: dark, damp, chipped, rotting, full of holes, drafty, leaky and sagging—a celebration of neglect.

8. The air was filled with blue smoke that reddened our eyes and made some of us dizzy and gasping for air.

9. The end of the speech brought the crowd to its feet for fifteen minutes of applause and cheering.

10. Mary Jane's mother insists that visitors entering her house take off their shoes and be checked for fleas.

Using Punctuation

PART A. POSSESSIVES

1. Paul's

2. America's

3. Correct

4. women's

5. girls', boys'

6. Andersons', Year's

7. Correct

8. Morris's

9. computers'

10. months'

PART B. COMMAS AND SEMICOLONS

1. While Bill was riding, his bike got a flat tire.

2. The mail carrier did not leave the package, for Valerie was not at home.

3. After doing his homework Mikey, as you might expect, talked on his cell phone for an hour.

4. His work criticized many commonly held beliefs, however, and it was strictly censored.

5. The car that ran into mine at the intersection was an SUV.

6. Dad went to the airport to pick up Dave; Ellie went to the train station to meet Debbie.

7. Correct

8. The boat was seventy-five feet long and eighteen feet wide; its mast was about eighty feet tall.

9. To anyone interested in flying, planes hold endless fascination.

10. Jeff and Steve, left alone for the weekend, invited all their friends to a party.

11. I need street maps of Boston and Portland, Maine.

12. Some of the theories dealt with the political, social, and religious ideas of the time.

13. Students who want to try out for the chorus have been asked to report to room 330.

14. Doug, for example, is both a scholar and an athlete.

15. Monica refused to go unless Phil went with her.

16. The hero of the book, John Coffey, rode his bike across the United States.

17. After all, she did for him what she could.

18. Starting in Minnesota, the Mississippi runs all the way to the Gulf of Mexico.

19. Harold Watkins, who comes from Chicago, won a full tuition scholarship to Duke.

20. Although the characters are stereotypes, they were interesting to read about.

21. Yo-Yo Ma, the famous cellist, will perform a recital on Saturday night.

22. This test covers Spanish literature, culture, and history, and it lasts for three hours.

23. Michelle is pretty, tall, and dark, but her older sister Norma is pretty, short, and light.

24. Sean, the twin brother of Ian, was struck by a falling tree limb.

25. The window washer dropped by last evening, but he didn't bring his squeegee.

Applying Capitalization

1. On Labor Day Bennington County's fire department plans to hold a turkey shoot on the field at Miller's Pond.

2. The judge gave District Attorney Lipman a book entitled *The Rules of Evidence* and instructed her to read it before she ever dared set foot in the Court of Appeals of the Ninth Circuit again.

3. The secretary of state greeted the president of Austria at the Ronald Reagan Airport in Washington, D.C.

4. The Shackleton expedition nearly met its doom on Georgia Island in Antarctica.

5. For Christmas he got a Black & Decker table saw from the Sears store next to the old Bedford Courthouse.

6. According to Georgetown's high school principal, Eugene Griffiths, Georgetown High School attracts students from the whole west coast. At Georgetown students may major in drawing and painting, design, graphics, or sculpture. Mr. Griffiths said, "I attended a similar high school in New England just after the Vietnam War."

7. We expect to celebrate New Year's Eve again this year by ordering a movie of an old Broadway musical from Netflix and settling down in front of the DVD player with some Pepsi and a box of Oreos.

8. After traveling all the way to the Pacific, the Corps of Discovery rode down the Missouri River going east on their way back to St. Louis.

9. This Irish linen tablecloth was bought at Kmart in the Emeryville Mall off Powell Street.

10. Yellowstone National Park is located in the northwest corner of Wyoming.