

## PART IV

### You Be The Ump: Essays For Evaluation

---

- SAT Essay Readers: What They Do and How They Do It
- Essay Scores: What the Numbers Tell You
- Sample SAT Essay Questions and Student Responses
- Essay Topics for Practice

#### How Essays Are Judged and Graded

Your essay will be evaluated on a scale of 6 (best) to 1 (worst). Evaluators are trained to read the essays quickly, or holistically. That is, they'll avoid the "Gotcha! Syndrome"—hunting down every little error. Rather, they'll read for an overall impression of your writing. Knowing that your essay has been composed in under half an hour, they won't hold minor mistakes against you and won't deduct a certain amount for every error in grammar, spelling, and punctuation.

Naturally, an essay that's mostly correct will make a better impression than one that's full of mistakes. Like other readers, evaluators enjoy good writing and delight in thoughtful, neatly phrased ideas. They abhor empty platitudes and know in an instant when a writer is throwing the bull.



#### TIP

SAT readers won't hold minor mistakes against you.

Evaluators will approach your essay with a positive mind set, prepared to reward you for what you've done well. When reading your essay, they'll compare it to other essays written on the same topic at the same time. Your essay, in other words, won't be competing against some ideal essay written by a professional author.

Handwriting is not supposed to count in the evaluation. But think about this: If readers have trouble deciphering your penmanship, several things can happen. Frustration may cause them to be unfavorably disposed toward the essay. They won't give you the benefit of the doubt about spelling or grammar if the letters are malformed or difficult to read. When readers are forced to stop regularly to puzzle out the words, your flow of ideas will be interrupted—with adverse effects.

Unreadable essays will be given no credit at all. At this stage in your life, it may be difficult to change your penmanship. But if you know that teachers and others have a

problem interpreting your script, try to slow down as you form the letters, or as a last resort, print clearly. For most people printing is slower than cursive writing, but with practice you can increase your speed.

## GUIDELINES FOR EVALUATION

Essays are scored on a scale of 6 to 1.

Performance Categories	Score
Outstanding	6
Very Good	5
Good	4
Fair	3
Poor	2
Very Poor	1

Scores of 4, 5, and 6 reflect a level of proficiency in writing appropriate for first-year college students. Essays rated 1, 2, or 3 suggest a need for remediation. (A blank paper or a paper submitted on a topic unrelated to the prompt will be rated *zero*.)

No list of standards can include everything that SAT readers consider when they evaluate an essay, but the following descriptions list the main criteria. Readers are human. They try to be objective, but they must still make judgments. An essay assigned a score of 5 by one reader, therefore, may not be vastly superior to an essay given a 4 by another.

### Scoring Guidelines

<b>6 Outstanding</b>	An <i>outstanding</i> essay is a well-conceived, orderly, and insightful treatment of the assigned task. The writer has fashioned a convincing main idea, amply supported by appropriate and specific details. The point of view, word choice, and use of sentences demonstrate an ability to control a wide range of elements of composition. Any errors that occur are inconsequential. Overall, the work is a model of clarity and sophistication.
<b>5 Very Good</b>	A <i>very good</i> essay demonstrates the writer's firm grasp of the assignment. It develops the main idea with purpose and conviction but may be somewhat less thorough and insightful than the best essays. It also may fall short of the mastery, sophistication, and control of composition exemplified by an outstanding essay. Nevertheless, its organization is sensible, its language and usage are appropriate, and its overall intent is clear and consistent.

<b>4 Good</b>	A <i>good</i> essay deals with the topic competently. It uses conventional language and sentence structure and provides some appropriate specific examples to support the main idea. It gives evidence of the writer's acquaintance with essay organization, coherence, and paragraph development. Some errors in word choice and awkward expression may exist, but no error seriously interferes with meaning.
<b>3 Fair</b>	A <i>fair</i> essay suggests mediocrity in writing. It may adequately respond to the prompt but gives evidence of an inconsistent control of the elements of composition. Although the essay has a recognizable structure, the organization may be confusing or not fully realized. Inaccuracies or lapses in logic may weaken the essay's overall effect. Occasional mechanical errors may detract from the essay's meaning although they don't necessarily obliterate communication.
<b>2 Poor</b>	A <i>poor</i> essay indicates a superficial or weak grasp of the prompt. The essay's development is meager, and its treatment of the subject is imprecise and unconvincing. The point of the essay may be perceptible, but the presentation of ideas is characterized by faulty word choice, flawed sentences, and incoherent or confused organization.
<b>1 Very Poor</b>	A <i>very poor</i> essay reveals the writer's inability to interpret the prompt. It may wander off the topic or include irrelevant or simplistic ideas. It may also be excessively brief or undeveloped. The prose may lack organization, coherence, and meaning. The writer shows little evidence of control of sentence structure or the rules of usage and grammar.

## ESSAYS FOR EVALUATION

As you prepare to write an essay, read the following responses that other students wrote on SAT essay topics. Then review the explanations of how scores were determined.

The essays were completed in twenty-five minutes in a testing situation. They are unedited and typed exactly as written. Read them quickly, spending no more than three or four minutes on each. Then you be the ump. Make a call on each of them using the SAT scale of 1 to 6. Write your observations in the space provided for comments. Then compare your views with those of the SAT readers who actually scored the same essay. Because no two people are likely to agree on every detail, your evaluation will probably differ from those of the pros. Nevertheless, your observations may be equally valid and perceptive. What counts more than the similarity between your comments and those of SAT readers is the overall impression left by each piece and the score you gave it. If your scores differ greatly from the scores assigned by SAT readers, carefully examine what trained readers

look for in an essay. Then keep those criteria in mind as you plan and write essays of your own.

### Prompt for Essay #1

*Think about the views expressed in the following passage:*

“WANT TO GET AHEAD? TRY LYING,” says a headline, with the idea that by always telling the truth, or by telling too much truth, we put ourselves at a disadvantage.

Stephen Lim tells the following story: “Working my way through school, I delivered special delivery mail for the U.S. Postal Service. Each morning the dispatcher handed drivers a pile of letters and packages. Before starting our route, we recorded the number of stops we had to make. While the other drivers padded their figures, I didn’t. This made me look bad in comparison, lowering the supervisor’s opinion of my performance.”

Stephen paid a minor penalty for telling the truth. But others can suffer more serious consequences for being honest. Consider a few: Because they don’t cheat on assignments and tests to boost their grades, some students fail to get into the college of their choice. Job applicants don’t succeed in getting a coveted position because they refuse to pad their résumés.

“In a nutshell, it’s harder and harder to be an honest person in today’s society,” says Stephen Lim. “After a while, you feel like a jerk when other people are getting ahead by taking shortcuts.”

Adapted from Stephen Lim, “Telling the Truth—Does It Pay?”  
*Plain Truth*, May/June, 2001

**Assignment:** If everyone else cheats or lies to get ahead, is it foolish or shortsighted to be totally honest? Plan and write an essay that discusses your point of view on the issue. Support your position with evidence and reasoning drawn from your studies, reading, experience, or observation.

### Wanda’s Essay

Many people fall prey to lying mainly because it is so easy to do. It involves no physical labor, no strenuous activity, no expenses, and no special skills. All you have to do is open your mouth and let the words fall out.

Lying is a major part of getting a job you are not totally qualified for. You write up a nice little résumé with all the details of your life, most of which don’t pertain to the

job at all, such as, for instance, your marital status or that you won the Noble Serf Award in eleventh grade, an award that you invent right on the spot. Just in case you are asked during the interview what the award was for, you prepare a lie ahead of time, maybe something like it's an award for integrity, for being an extremely honest and trustworthy person. Also, you might not have quite enough experience for the job you are trying to get. So you fabricate a little more to show that you are used to hard work and responsibility. After all, what's the harm in shading the truth a little?

While it's true that your lies will have no immediate effect, what will happen if your employer checks on you, when he or she finds out that there is no such thing as the Noble Serf Award, and that you were not the assistant manager of the supermarket at all but just a lackey who retrieved shopping carts from the parking lot? This is when you must face the consequences of your "harmless" little lies. If you are caught lying, after your face goes back to its normal color, you will most likely be looking for another job.

Does that mean it's okay to lie as long as you don't get caught? Nothing could be farther from the truth because the effects of lying can be more serious. If you claim credit for something that is not yours and you hurt somebody, then you have crossed over the line. You have become not only a liar but a thief, and you have lost your integrity. Or even worse if someone causes pain to others because he or she believes in a lie you've told, the consequences can be very severe. Recently there was a male nurse who lied his way into jobs in several hospitals, and wherever he went the death rate of patients rose dramatically. For a long time no one noticed the correlation between him and the death rate, but by the time it was discovered, he had left a trail of dozens of innocent victims.

While this may be an extreme case, it still illustrates that lying, even though it may be as easy as breathing, can lead to very harmful results.

*Your observations:* \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

*The first reader commented: "This essay combines a serious message with a bit of sophisticated humor. The light touch is a tribute to the writer's level of maturity. The examples she uses to support the thesis are well-written and sufficiently detailed. The overall presentation is lively, interesting, and virtually error-free."*

*Score: 6*

*The second reader commented: "A thoughtful and insightful piece of writing, this essay deserves the highest rating. The sequence of paragraphs is particularly apt: The first two paragraphs show that lying is prevalent because "it is so easy." Just how easy is wittily illustrated in the story of the fabricated résumé. The third paragraph discusses minor pitfalls of lying, but the fourth takes up its potential for disastrous, life-altering consequences. After presenting an example of compelling evidence—a homicidal nurse—in the last paragraph the writer draws the only possible conclusion: Lying "can lead to very harmful results."*

*"Throughout the essay, the writer maintains a consistent tone, demonstrates skill in the use of interesting, lively language, and proves her mastery of the elements of composition."*

*Score: 6*

### Vinnie's Essay

I recently note a bumper sticker that stated, "Want to get ahead? Try Lying." I assumed this message was that people who always tell the truth are like handicapped because the truth is against them and they are doomed to fail. I pondered the idea for awhile and realized how ridiculous the statement is.

While I think back on my own life, I realized that every time I have tried to lie I got caught. Once, one morning I was very young I told my parents that I was too sick to go to school when the truth was that I was afraid of a bully in the grade ahead of me who threatened to beat me up. I now realize that they knew I was lying. My father wanted me to go to the doctor to get checked, I told him that I better not go, or the doctor would catch my illness. My father and mother began to laugh and proceeded to dress me for school.

Another time, I was in 8th grade I told my parents that I was going over to my friend Sam's house on a Friday night when I actually wanted to go bowling with some friends that my parents didn't approve of. Lying about it could enable me to stay out later. The next day my parents found out that I had lied, I think they met Sam's parents at the movies where they had a puzzled look about my being over at their house. When the truth came out, I was grounded for a month.

There are many other times when my attempts at lying backfired in my face. It's not always possible to tell the whole truth, but whenever I tell little white lies or shade the truth, I think of that bumper sticker and wonder if the person who wrote it had ever lied in his life.

*Your observations:* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

*The first reader commented: "This essay is lively and quite readable. Two examples that develop the main idea are pertinent but they don't prove the writer's assertion that he got caught "every time" he told a lie. The piece is unified in theme and tone, and its reference to a bumper sticker at the end cleverly reminds the reader where the essay began. Lapses in verb tense and in expression keep the essay from earning a better rating."*

*Score: 4*

*The second reader commented: "The writer of this adequate essay takes the position that it is "ridiculous" to depend on lies to get ahead in life. Citing two personal experiences from his earlier life, he shows that lies "backfired in my face," a well-meant but awkwardly expressed image.*

*"The essay is organized into coherent paragraphs. Word choice is appropriate and the sentence structure is sufficiently varied, except for the first paragraph, in which every sentence begins with the same subject ("I"). A few sentence errors such as comma splices and run-ons detract from the overall quality of the essay. A few minor corrections might have lifted the score to a 4, but as is, the essay doesn't quite make it."*

*Score: 3*

### Marylou's Essay

"Want to get ahead? Try lying" is described as a true statement in our society today. Usually good things happen when people don't lie, but today it is more likely that good things will happen to people who refrain from telling the truth.

For example, in our society insider trading tips in the stock market can make an investor pay off faster than another investor who is playing by the rules. Another example of how this statement is correct is when a person is applying for a job. He usually tries to exaggerate, in other words, lying, on their résumé so that he will be a more enticing employee. If he told the truth he might not be hired as readily.

Lying may get a person ahead, but they must also live with a conscious. Perhaps in the long run it isn't worth it because he will have to face the fact that the reason he is "ahead" is because he lied. He did not "get ahead" based on skills or knowledge but on the lie.

Severe lying is considered a psychological disease, like addiction, they even lie when there is no reason. Dependency on lying can be cured by therapy.

*Your observations:* \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

*The first reader commented: "In this essay the main idea is developed somewhat haphazardly. In general, the writing is inept—crowded with usage errors. The third paragraph contradicts the earlier statement that "good things happen to people who refrain from telling the truth." Although the essay shows evidence of an ample vocabulary, its expression is awkward, and the last paragraph seems totally irrelevant."*



*Score: 2*

*The second reader commented: "This piece suggests only a limited mastery of composition. Starting with a puzzling and pointless assertion that the quotation "is described as a true statement in our society" (by whom? one wonders), the writer generalizes that "good things will happen to people" who lie. In support of this generalization, the writer offers two weak, underdeveloped examples of people whose lies paid off. Then, the third paragraph undercuts the essay's main idea with a brief discussion of liar's guilt. Still more of a puzzle is the last paragraph, which contains matters unrelated to anything that came before."*

*Score: 2*

## **Prompt for Essay #2**

*Think carefully about the issue presented in the following statement:*

Fatalists believe that we must accept things as they are, that nothing can be done to change the world for the better. Martin Luther King had such people in mind when he remarked, "The hottest place in Hell is reserved for those who remain neutral in times of great moral conflict." Maya Angelou added, "If you don't like something, change it." And Phyllis Diller, putting it still another way, said, "Never go to bed mad. Stay up and fight."

**Assignment:** The first step in making things better is to recognize that a problem exists. Please plan and write an essay in which you identify a school, local, national, or world condition or flaw that, in your opinion, needs to be corrected, and explain why you chose it.

Max's Essay

A trend these days is to speak up about the world's mistreatment of the environment. I am not just a tree hugger by saying that without improvement in environmental conditions, my generation and the future generations will suffer in ways too awful to even imagine. At the end of the day you can say the survival of mankind is "hanging in the balance."

Many countries exploit the Earth's resources. In some countries, millions of acres of rainforest are being destroyed every year to make room for farmland or to cut lumber to export. Not only does this destroy the habitats of many animals, but kills species of trees and plants that may someday be found to cure cancer, AIDS, MS, or other diseases. In addition, rainforests produce the majority of the oxygen that we

need to live. The bottom line is that by clear-cutting rainforests, we are beginning to suffocate ourselves to death.

Other nations exploit the oceans. By dumping garbage, sewage and other hazardous waste into the oceans, they pollute the water. Eventually, the garbage washes back on shore, making the beaches filthy and swimming dangerous. The pollutants also kill and taint the fish in the ocean with toxic materials. Then we end up eating these fish, and the toxins enter our bodies. Many people I know have given up eating tuna fish for the reason they don't want to put poisonous mercury into their bodies.

Another way the environment is abused is the treatment of the atmosphere. Until the famous Kyoto Treaty, most countries had no laws controlling the amount of harmful gases released by cars and trucks that causes global warming. Some countries still don't have such laws, and in 2001 under the Bush administration, the United States withdrew from the Kyoto agreements. I think that governments around the world, including the US of A needs to force the corporations to reduce their burning of fossil fuels in order to clean the atmosphere and stop the trend to global warming.

These are just a few ways which the world abuses the environment. When all is said and done, all people must do their part to leave the world a better place for their children and grandchildren.

*Your observations:*

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

*The first reader commented: "Max's essay is very well focused, admirably organized, and clearly presented. He develops examples of environmental issues fully and appropriately. While not always gracefully expressed, Max's presentation is consistently informative and detailed. It reveals a high level of proficiency and solid control of the essay-writing process."*

*Score: 6*

*The second reader commented: "Although this conventional five-paragraph "formula" essay is competently written, it is not terribly inspired. The writer is well-informed on the subject, but he rarely transcends the environmental movement's customary talking points. Indeed, the impact of the essay is considerably diluted by the writer's reliance on clichés such as "hanging in the balance," "at the end of the day," "the bottom line," and others. Nevertheless, the essay is mostly error-free, and its organization and varied sentence structure demonstrate reasonably consistent mastery of the art of writing."*

*Score: 5*

Tracy's Essay

The world is an imperfect place with many, many problems to solve. If I could help solve one of them, I would focus on my high school. There are countless improvements to be made because FHS does not meet the needs of everyone who goes here.

One thing wrong with this school is that there is not enough leeway for us to take all the classes that we want. For example, if someone is taking a music class and also wants to take art it is impossible without dropping a required course, such as Physical Education. Gym takes up so much of our school week. Physical exercise is important but there should be a better scheduling of classes so we can study the things we really want to.

Another criticism I have about this school is the way certain classes operate. There are many unnecessary rules, and many teachers treat students like infants which need basic instructions. They spend too much time on inane things like handing in homework on time, getting to class on time, a neat notebook, and a cover on your textbooks instead of concentrating on the more important issues such as making sure that students get the information and the experience they need for a good education and for college. If teachers could make the rules as a given, and trust the students, they might be able to get a better attitude back.

Students go to high school one time in there lives. There success depends on getting the best possible education that FHS does not provide.

Your observations: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

***The first reader commented:** "The first paragraph clearly states the essay's purpose. The writer then chooses two excellent examples to illustrate problems at her high school. But these problems are only loosely tied to the main idea that the school fails to meet everyone's needs. The development of ideas is detailed, the highlight being Tracy's description in the third paragraph of teachers' preoccupation with "inane" matters that waste instructional time. The third paragraph of the essay refers to the students' attitude toward their teachers. Unfortunately, either because she ran out of time or forgot to explain, the reference leaves the reader in the lurch, wishing to know why Tracy mentioned it. Tracy's use of language is rarely interesting and almost consistently awkward. Minor lapses in grammar and usage weaken the effort. In all, the essay shows modest evidence of Tracy's promise as a writer."*

**Score: 4**

***The second reader commented:** "Although the writer claims that her school fails to "meet needs of everyone," the essay hardly deals with the school's failure to satisfy a diverse student population. Instead, the writer uses the essay to air gripes about her own experience. The second paragraph seems to grow out of disappointment over her choice of classes, and the third paragraph is used to complain about an overabundance of trivial rules in "certain" unidentified classes. In effect, then, the bulk of the essay fails to live up to its promise."*

**Score: 3**

Ilana's Essay

The way I would make things better is in divorce. Even though you can't taste, touch or smell divorce, you can still feel it. Divorce is a condition which many children

have been made to understand by bitter experience, divorce has forced the progeny of broken marriages to suffer. "The hottest places in Hell" that Dr. King talks about should be reserved for parents who abandon their children so they can be divorced.

Why do people get married and repeat vows such as "until death us do part," if they end up ending their relationship? Where's the logic in this? not to mention their children suffering. While many of their friends are entering the three legged contest at family picnics, they end up sharing chicken pot pie with one of their parents. This may sound extreme for all divorces don't end up this way. However there are more that do.

Institutions such as churches and synagogues shouldn't allow people to be "joined in matrimony" If the people don't seem right for each other. Can't the Lord give the priest or rabi a sign? If it is against antireligion to separate from your mate, why does the Lord allow such things? Doesn't the divine being know whether a man and a woman would remain married or not?

Divorce is almost as difficult as marriage. The fusion of two people may seem to be one of success, however when the "lawfully wedded" couple splits, the fission is one of disaster.

*Your observations:* \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

*The first reader commented: "There's a good deal of passion in this essay, a quality that makes the essay quite readable, but the writer's deep feelings tend to interfere with the clarity of its message. The second paragraph, for instance, suffers from disjointedness, in particular it's allusion to a "three-legged race." The third paragraph includes questions about the nature of a supreme being that seem out of place in what is meant to be a discussion of problems related to divorce.*

*“The essay is soundly organized, and although the meaning of some ideas is fuzzy, a bit of the language—the fission/fusion dichotomy, for example—reveals a creative flair.*

*Despite these merits, the flaws in the essay outweigh its strengths.”*

**Score: 3**

**The second reader commented:** *“This piece demonstrates marginal mastery of the essay-writing process. Iliana opens with a direct, although somewhat awkward, statement of intent: “The way I would make things better is in divorce,” but she fails to offer evidence in support of this idea. Instead, she uses the essay to lament the consequences of divorce, quite possibly stemming from her own experience as a child of divorce, although she doesn’t say so.*

*“Iliana raises worthwhile issues about marriage and divorce in the second paragraph, and in the third paragraph asks profound questions about the role of religion in marriage. But her progression of ideas lacks consistency. Instead, she employs a kind of stream of consciousness, apparently spilling onto the page ideas as they occur to her.”*

**Score: 3**

### **Prompt for Essay #3**

*Think carefully about the issue presented in the following passage:*

*The moon belongs to everyone*

*The best things in life are free,*

*The stars belong to everyone*

*They gleam there for you and me.*

*The flowers in Spring,*

*The robins that sing,*

*The sunbeams that shine*

*They’re yours,*

*They're mine!*

*And love can come to everyone,*

*The best things in life are free.*

"The Best Things in Life Are Free," song and lyrics by B. G. DeSylva, Lew Brown, and Ray Henderson for the musical *Good News*.

**Assignment.** Please plan and write an essay in which you discuss the validity of the sentiment expressed by the lyrics of the song, "The Best Things in Life Are Free." Support your position with evidence and reasoning drawn from your studies, reading, experience, or observation.

Tucker's Essay

The idea that "the best things in life are free" is nothing except sentimental garbage, okay for a musical show but just a fantasy or a self-delusion in reality. Now almost everything costs money, and even if you don't have to take out your Visa card and pay for it then and there, there are hidden costs that can't really be calculated.

Take, for example, an ordinary walk in the park with a favorite girl, guy, or dog. Sure it's free to enter the park and stroll along. No out-of-pocket expenses there, but think of all that it costs to have that walk. For one thing, there is clothes and footwear. There is the need for transportation to the park and home again, and the need to be able to contact a friend by phone or email to arrange the walk. Just living in a place that has a park to walk in also costs money—in taxes, rent, mortgages, and the regular expenses of maintaining a decent lifestyle.

Okay, walking in the park may be a trivial example. How about something more profound? What most people value above all else is freedom—not just the freedoms granted in the Bill of Rights but the freedom to be what we can be, the freedom to love and associate with who we please, the freedom to live in a safe environment, free from violence and harm, freedom to go to school or go anywhere at any time without worrying about the government watching or breathing down your neck, and even the freedom to help others gain their freedom like the U.S. has been attempting in Afghanistan and Iraq at the cost of billions and billions of dollars, not to speak of the expense of death and human suffering.

It would be nice to believe that the best things in life are free, but only the blissfully ignorant could really believe it. Whoever said there's no such thing as a free lunch knew what they were talking about.

Your observations: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

***The first reader commented:** "Tucker's opening statement hooks the reader instantly and clearly articulates the essay's insight that everything has "hidden costs that can't really be calculated." The paragraphs that follow amplify and explain the costs, first of something mundane and ordinary like a walk in the park, and then something abstract, namely the price of freedom. The paragraph about freedom, however, fails to discuss the costs other than those incurred by helping other countries achieve a measure of freedom.*

*"In spite of this lapse, the progression of ideas testifies to a high level of critical thinking. Tucker also provides evidence of his mastery of writing with varied sentences, some colorful word choices, and a distinctive, natural style. The essay isn't perfect, but it creates the impression that Tucker is a highly gifted writer."*

**Score: 6**

***The second reader commented:** "This is an exemplary essay, not totally free of flaws, but close enough to rate as a first-rate piece of writing. The piece is extremely well focused on the issue, admirably organized, and very clearly presented in interesting and readable prose. The tone is slightly glib but nevertheless appealing and effective. All in all, the essay demonstrates not only the writer's maturity but also his control of written language."*

**Score: 6**

Emily's Essay

I totally disagree with the statement "The best things in life are free" because hobbies of mine which I feel are "the best", are far from free.



I enjoy vacationing in warm climates which is costly. First you must worry about transportation, air fare. Then once you get to your destination you will need a place to stay. Food and entertainment isn't free and if you literally have expensive taste, you must spend money, and lots of it.

Shopping, which can be done almost anywhere, is often times expensive. If you need new bras and underwear, forget about clothes, you are talking a lot of money. Bathing suits can cost you about \$150 a suit and everyone likes new suits, especially after the old ones become sun-bleached. If you need presents for special friends, jewelry will cost you especially if you want to buy sterling silver or 14K gold or precious and semiprecious stones.

Scuba diving is probably one of the most incredible things I have ever done in my life time. The whole experience is phenomenal. Image yourself in a giant room filled with water and you are just hanging out in the center of the room. You are suspended in water and you can breathe. This sport isn't cheap, its not like kicking a ball around a field.

Materialistically the best things in life are not free. Its true that money doesn't buy happiness but some of the things that I think are great are expensive.

*Your observations:* \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

*The first reader commented: "If one overlooks this essay's abundant sentence errors and errors in mechanics, the piece has considerable clout, created in large measure by the spirited voice of the writer. Inadvertently or not, Emily comes across as a strong, decisive character who knows what she likes and has no trouble articulating her beliefs."*

*"The essay reveals that Emily is a relatively undisciplined writer. Yet, she has produced a standard five-paragraph essay with a clear introduction, three paragraphs of development, and a reasonable conclusion. To give the essay greater*

*coherence, however, some transitional material might have linked the paragraphs more firmly."*

*"In spite of its flaws, the essay demonstrates adequate mastery."*

**Score: 4**

**The second reader commented:** *"Demonstrating evidence of skill in critical thinking, the writer has chosen three "hobbies" to argue against the views expressed in the song lyrics. She is aware of the freebies mentioned in the song, but she has little interest in sunbeams and love. As she observes in her final paragraph, "Materialistically the best things in life are not free.""*

*"The essay is generally well-organized, although the sequence of vacationing, shopping, and scuba-diving are not precisely parallel. Taking vacations is a more general activity than the other two, and although vacations are expensive, they merely provide Emily with opportunities to shop and scuba-dive. Also, the paragraph about scuba-diving deals mostly with the nature of the underwater experience rather than with the expense, which is the focus of the other paragraphs and of the essay as a whole."*

**Score: 4**

#### Josephine's Essay

I agree with this sentiment that truly the best things in life are free. "To each his own" as they say, to me the best things in life are love, happiness, peace, and freedom. To obtain these things in ones life depends on the individual. You can find love with your parent, friend or even pet dog—this love can be unconditional, and costing only effort. Happiness you make, a smile, a laugh even a tear can make anyone happy. By doing a favor or even helping someone at your own expense can cost absolutely nothing except a cramp in your smile! Peace and freedom come along in life, it may be something you earn or deserve, it's like a stamp that's sealed in you at birth "I'm a free individual—in a free world, free to do what I want"! Peace comes from love and freedom you can give it or receive it, and it might not affect your bank account! To the individual it's opinionated as to what the "things" are in life that are free. It also depends what you want to buy in life these things that I stated before and things that won't last forever!

Your observations: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

***The first reader commented:** “After clearly stating the essay’s purpose—to show why “the best things in life are free,” the writer presents a series of related but largely incoherent reasons. The formlessness of the argument may spring from the writer’s intent to discuss “love, happiness, peace, and freedom” in one short essay. This is a monumental undertaking even for a seasoned writer. In the hands of Josephine, the essay turns into a potpourri of generalizations, clichés, and miscellaneous observations that in the end prove nothing except that the writer’s reach far exceeded her grasp.”*

***Score: 1***

***The second reader commented:** “This abbreviated essay demonstrates very little mastery of the art of writing. It proposes a main idea (“I agree with this sentiment that truly the best things in life are free”), but incoherent supporting material obscures meaning. Indeed, one idea (“helping someone at your own expense can cost absolutely nothing”) seems to contradict not only itself but the essay’s alleged purpose. Errors in sentence structure constitute but one of several writing problems in this writer’s seriously flawed prose.”*

***Score: 1***

### **Essay Topics for Practice**

In case you’ve just gotten to this point without having read Parts III and IV, follow these directions for writing practice essays:

Time: 25 minutes

Plan and write an essay in response to the assigned topic. Use the essay as an opportunity to show how clearly and effectively you can express and develop ideas.

Present your thoughts logically and precisely. Include specific evidence or examples to support your point of view. A plain, natural writing style is probably best. The number of words is up to you, but quantity is less important than quality.

Limit your essay to two sides of lined paper. You'll have enough space if you write on every line and avoid wide margins. Write or print legibly because handwriting that's hard or impossible to read will decrease your score.

If you finish in less than twenty-five minutes, check your work.

The ten prompts that follow are suggested for essay-writing practice. Because it's virtually impossible to write the same essay twice, try writing on the same prompt over and over, each time choosing another point of view. Then compare the results.

SAT prompts typically begin with a short passage or quotation followed by a related question, which you are to answer in your essay. **Always support your answer with reasoning and examples taken from your observations, experience, studies, or reading.**

1. The familiar admonition to “put your money where your mouth is” suggests that it's far easier to speak up for a principle than to live up to it. That's why most of us, whether we intend to or not, say one thing but often do another. It's just part of human nature.

**Assignment:** Is the common tendency to often say one thing but do another built into our nature, or is it something that experience teaches us to do?

2. “If you are like most people, your sadness over losing, say, \$1,000, would be twice as great as your happiness at winning \$1,000. That all-too-human tendency to feel pain of a loss more deeply than the joy of a gain is called ‘loss aversion.’”

From an editorial in *The New York Times*, January 16, 2005

**Assignment:** Are negative emotions stronger than positive ones?

3. After rescuing a dozen men and women from a burning office building, Jim Smith, a New York City fire fighter, commented, “Courage is just a matter of luck—of being in the right place at the right time.”

**Assignment:** Is Jim Smith correct—that courage is a widespread human trait that most people never have a chance to use or demonstrate?

4. "While walking in her neighborhood, a friend saw a man who had tied a fishing line around a turtle's throat and was letting his kids drag it up and down the path. Feeling that a direct approach would lead to a confrontation, my friend said: 'I am a biologist with So-and-So University. Turtles are toxic; they secrete poison that may make your kids horribly sick.' The guy had his kids stop tormenting the turtle right away. Was this lie justified?"

From a letter by David Weinrich, published  
in "The Ethicist" by Randy Cohen, *New York Times Magazine*, January 16, 2005

**Assignment:** Is lying acceptable or even obligatory at times?

5. An old English proverb says, "What you don't know can't hurt you."

**Assignment:** Can ignorance ever be better than knowledge?

6. "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 believe that the choices we make, rather than our abilities and talents, show who we truly are?

7. "Suppose we were able to share meanings freely without a compulsive urge to impose our view or conform to those of others and without distortion and self-deception. Would this not constitute a real revolution in culture?"

David Bohm

**Assignment:** If we were to become completely open and honest with ourselves and with others, would society be better off?

8. "Every problem has a gift for you in its hands."

Richard Bach

**Assignment:** Is there always a gain from experiencing hardship?

9. "They may forget what you said, but they'll never forget how you made them feel."

Carl W. Beuchner

*Assignment:* Are human emotions more powerful, enduring, and meaningful than our intellect? Or to put it another way, does the heart matter more than the brain in our lives?

10. "I cannot believe the purpose of life is to be happy. I think that the purpose of life is to be useful, to be responsible, to be compassionate. It is, above all, to matter, to count, to stand for something, to have made a difference that you lived at all."

Leo Rosten

*Assignment:* Do happiness and contentment depend mainly on serving others and making a difference in their lives?

Before you evaluate your essay, reread how SAT essays are scored. Then complete the following checklist for each of the essays you've written. Because SAT readers will give you credit for what you've done well, try to focus on your essay's strengths. But don't ignore weaknesses. If you happen to find any, turn to the appropriate section of this book for a quick fix on how to remedy the problem.

	Yes!	Pretty Much	Only a Little	No
Have you analyzed the prompt?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does your essay respond to the prompt?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have you narrowed your supporting evidence?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does your essay focus on a single main idea?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Can you explain how you've arranged your ideas?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does your essay include an introduction?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is each paragraph related to the essay's main idea?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does each paragraph have a topic sentence?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do transitions tie paragraphs together and link sentences to each other?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do specific details support and develop general ideas?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does your essay sound natural?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have you used plain and precise words?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are sentences varied in length and structure?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does the essay have a conclusion?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is each sentence accurately worded?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have you used active verbs?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have you trimmed needless words?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you show more than tell?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is your essay free of errors in punctuation, capitalization, and spelling?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Identify the three greatest strengths of your essay:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

Name three specific things you can do to improve your essay:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_