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Thought You Should Know:

Next Step Magazine

Your SAT Essay Outline

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The essay portion of the new SAT is a welcome change in the eyes of colleges, but a scary uncertainty in the eyes of students and parents. No one wants to be a guinea pig, but the Class of 2006 has been given that task. Students are doubly nervous because this essay can also be viewed by admissions officers during the application review.

SAT takers will now have 25 minutes to read a prompt, formulate an opinion, create an outline and write a coherent, astute three- to five-paragraph essay. Graders (most of them are high school English teachers) will have only two to three minutes to evaluate and score each essay.

College reps like the essay because it allows them to see how quickly students can think on their feet and write persuasive drafts, similar to what they could be asked to do in a college classroom.

Prompts for the essays will be vague statements, such as, "There has always been a great passion to bring about change," or "Freedom is never free." Because graders have only a few minutes per essay, you need to immediately impress the reader in a style that is almost as formulaic as the Pythagorean theorem.

Because literature and history are so important to this essay and the topics are vague, remember four classic books and four wars/moments in history to use. If you are presented with either of the aforementioned prompts, discussing the Revolutionary War, the Civil War or Martin Luther King Jr. would garner high marks. Literary works such as *The Catcher in the Rye*, *1984*, *Fahrenheit 451* and *To Kill a Mockingbird* would suffice to support your stance and impress a reader.

The essay is scored on a scale of one to six by two readers and accounts for almost 40 percent of the total writing score. If you want to score a four or higher, plan on citing sources to validate your position. Students who don't know these guidelines will spend time discussing their personal beliefs—good for an assignment in English class, but it will cost you on the SAT.

Follow these tips to secure a good score on the new SAT writing section.

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Paragraph one

You should immediately take a definitive stand, either agreeing or disagreeing with the prompt. (Your personal feeling about the prompt is irrelevant. Instead, decide which side of the argument could produce a better essay.) To score well, you must cite literature and history to back up your stance. This is the single most important part of writing the essay. You should briefly describe two examples that support your position, and be ready to discuss them in the next paragraph.

Paragraph two

In the second paragraph, discuss in great detail the literary work that backs up your point of view. Address the title, author, main character and how the plot relates to the prompt.

Paragraph three

In this paragraph, describe the historical event that supports your position. Be as descriptive as possible and include names, dates and how the event proves the prompt correct or incorrect.

Paragraph four

Your conclusion should be a short paragraph (one to two sentences) that restates your opinion.

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