

# Mastering the 25-minute SAT Essay

## Time-Management and Writing Strategies

### **Step 1: examining the prompt (minute 1)**

Read the prompt carefully three times, and decide your position on the issue. Choose the way in which you will respond:

1. agree with the prompt
2. agree, but with certain exceptions
3. disagree with the prompt
4. disagree, but with certain exceptions

### **Step 2: producing a word bank (minutes 2-3)**

Locate the key words in the prompt (significant nouns and verbs) and underline them. Create a list of vocabulary you will use in your essay: four synonyms, definitions, or associations for each.

### **Step 3: generating a body outline (minutes 4-7)**

Choose a structure for your essay:

- *argumentative*  
two or three distinct arguments with supporting examples
- *comparison & contrast*  
two body paragraphs (pro & con), each with multiple arguments and examples
- *descriptive*  
sensory detail (sight, sound, touch, taste, smell); organized by order of importance, logical order, spatial order, chronological order, narrative order
- *narrative reflection*  
analyzes experience in context of self, other, and society
- *cause & effect*  
multiple causes leading to single effect OR one cause leading to multiple effects

Choose sources of supporting evidence:

- history
- current events
- literature
- arts
- science & technology
- personal experience

### **Step 4: writing an introduction (minutes 8-10)**

1. *hook*  
Grab the reader's attention with a direct question, a contradiction (paradox or oxymoron), or mild shock/surprise through an inciting incident.
2. *thesis statement*  
Directly address the prompt by stating the topic and your position.

### **Step 5: composing the body (minutes 11-19)**

- Connect with the reader by emphasizing one of the basic human needs: *survival, safety & security, love & belonging, respect & self-esteem, knowledge & understanding, art & religion*, OR *self-expression & self-actualization*.
- Focus on one type of appeal, which affects tone and diction: *logos* (logical appeal), *ethos* (ethical appeal), or *pathos* (emotional appeal).
- Devote each paragraph to a single, unified idea.
- Create transitions between body paragraphs, indicating how your ideas are connected.
- Consider the importance of your writing style: *sentence variety, diction, figurative language*.

### **Step 6: writing the conclusion (minutes 20-23)**

Refer to your thesis, but do not restate it. Broaden your scope and link your ideas to a larger social context. Finish with a clincher that is brief and memorable.

### **Step 7: polishing the essay (minutes 24-25)**

Complete your final checklist. Your essay . . .

- ✓ answers the question.
- ✓ Includes a clear thesis statement.
- ✓ contains an introduction, body, and conclusion.
- ✓ supports the thesis.
- ✓ includes supporting evidence.
- ✓ maintains a consistent appeal.
- ✓ concludes with a broader scope.
- ✓ does not directly restate thesis in conclusion.
- ✓ uses vivid vocabulary and varied sentences.
- ✓ is free of grammatical and spelling errors.