

# The SAT Essay

**A Guide to Writing  
an Outstanding Composition**

An essay that earns a score of 6 demonstrates *clear and consistent mastery*, although it may have a few minor errors. A typical essay:

- effectively and insightfully develops a **point of view** on the issue and demonstrates outstanding **critical thinking**, using clearly appropriate examples, reasons, and other **evidence** to support its position;
- is well **organized** and clearly focused, demonstrating clear coherence and smooth progression of ideas;
- exhibits skillful **use of language**, employing a varied, accurate, and apt vocabulary; demonstrates meaningful variety in sentence structure; and is generally free of errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics.

# Point of View

- The SAT prompts are designed to enable students to offer multiple points of view, not just one or two.
- Move away from a clear “yes” or “no” position.
- Engage the complexity of the issue directly; acknowledge the paradox inherent in the prompt.
- If you support one of the two dichotomous sides, do so insightfully and provide strong evidence.

# Critical Thinking

- Abstract reasoning or reference to great philosophers is not a requirement of outstanding critical thinking.
- Engage the complexity of the issue rather than simplifying it for the sake of clarity.
- Insightfully select and interpret different types of examples.
- Provide or apply new contexts, terms, or frames of reference to the issue.

# Types of Evidence

- Turn to history, current events, literature, and science to support your position.
- Clearly apt personal experience can be effective.
- Reasons and personal observations must be logical and well supported.
- Your ability to develop an example in a useful way is much more important than the type of evidence you choose.

# Organization

- Move beyond the popular five-paragraph, three-example model.
- Organization needs to fit your ideas and position.
- Including only one example or two related examples may help ensure that examples are fully developed.
- Consider using internal organization, such as sequential or chronological presentation of events in a narrative.
- You do not need to write a formal concluding paragraph.

# Use of Language

- Use accurate and apt vocabulary as well as meaningful variety in sentence structure.
- You can enhance your essay by employing metaphors and other figurative language.
- Language can be formal or informal; your choice must fit your topic and position.
- Your voice and tone need to be appropriate for the essay.