

Writing for the SAT

LEARN HOW TO TACKLE THE ESSAY WITH CONFIDENCE By Sarah Montante



The biggest change on the new SAT is the addition of an essay. This section is just a shorter version of the SAT II Writing Test, and is designed to gauge your use of standard written English and your ability to craft a convincing argument.

You will be given a topic and asked to write a 500-word persuasive essay in 25 minutes.

> SCORING

Two graders will read your essay and score it independently. Each will assign a grade on a scale of 1-6, with 6 being the highest. Their scores will be added together for a total range of 2-12.

The readers will judge the essay on four criteria: topic, support, organization, and language. The highest-scoring essays must effectively address the topic and provide insightful, relevant examples to support a firm point of view. They must be well organized and the ideas they present must be fully developed. Finally, the writing must conform to standard written English, display a range of vocabulary, and employ varied sentence structures.

> TOPICS

The essay topics will not require any special knowledge or preparation, and you should feel free to draw examples from your personal experience as well as from history, the arts, science, and literature. The test makers will present you with one or two quotations along a similar theme and then ask you a question related to that theme.

> WRITING THE ESSAY

With only 25 minutes, every minute counts, but with only 46 lines in which to write, so does every word. You will have limited space in which to make your argument, and little flexibility to cross out words and start over, so it's important to get it right the first time.

Follow **LC's** three-step method:

1. Plan—7 minutes. On a piece of scrap paper, brainstorm ideas. Try to think of examples that relate to the theme and jot them all down. Weed out the weak ones and keep two or three strong points. Craft a simple thesis sentence and decide in what order you want to introduce your evidence.



2. Write—15 minutes. Write a brief introductory paragraph that presents your thesis. Demonstrate your argument in two or three body paragraphs using your examples. Be sure to develop each example fully because readers are looking for depth of thought. Finish with a short conclusion.

3. Edit—3 minutes. When you're done, read over your essay to make sure that your handwriting is clear and that there are no spelling, punctuation, or grammar mistakes. You won't have time to rework your whole essay, so this step is about fine-tuning.



Example

The following sample essay is a response to this prompt:

If a law is unjust, a man is not only right to disobey it, he is obligated to do so. —Thomas Jefferson

Is it ever right to break a law?

Laws are important guidelines for how we live together in a society. However, when a few powerful people craft laws that favor the few at the expense of the greater majority, these laws are unjust. In this case, breaking the law is a legitimate means of bringing about social change.

American history offers multiple examples of unjust laws that were reformed after people broke them. The laws that made slavery legal and that prevented free people from helping slaves escape from their masters are perhaps the most dramatic examples. Abolitionists who bought and freed slaves or who helped slaves escape through the Underground Railroad were breaking a law, but they were serving a higher moral purpose by honoring the right to freedom of their fellow human beings. The abolitionists challenged the very institution of slavery, and provoked the anger of Southerners who supported it. Tensions rose between the North and South, the Civil War was fought, and eventually slavery was abolished. New laws were created to reflect equality for blacks and whites.

The civil rights movement of the 1960s followed a similar path. The laws of segregation in the South forced blacks into the position of “second-class citizens.” Black people were not permitted to eat at the same lunch counters as whites or to sit in the front of public buses. Martin Luther King Jr. mobilized black people in a nonviolent movement against these unjust laws. They used a technique called civil disobedience, which means deliberately disobeying a law in a peaceful way. They staged sit-ins at lunch counters throughout the South to challenge the validity of the segregation laws. Their actions were initially met with violence as white Southerners and their police forces clung to their position of “superiority.” Eventually, tensions rose to a point that the situation had to be addressed at a higher level in the government, and the segregation laws were abolished.

In both of these instances in American history, unjust laws were challenged and changed by those who dared to break them. Because they broke laws in a peaceful way, the abolitionists and the civil rights activists brought attention to the injustice of the laws themselves. Both examples illustrate that civil disobedience is a powerful tool for social change, which can bring about the creation of new laws that serve the greater good.

SAT ESSAY PRACTICE

Consider the following statements and the question below them, then plan and write an essay that persuasively explains your point of view.

Circumstances rule men; men do not rule circumstances.
—Herodotus

Every man is the architect of his own fortune.
—Appianus Claudius

Can an individual determine the course of his or her life?

