





A large rectangular box containing 30 horizontal lines for writing.

## Explanations and Scoring

Assessing your essay response is not as easy as scoring the multiple-choice questions. There are no right and wrong answers, just successful and not-so-successful responses. Your essay responses will be evaluated by two readers. Each reader will have been trained to use a 6-point Scoring Guide. Their scores will then be added together to give your response a grade from 1–12. You will learn more about this assessment and what the readers will be looking for in the Essay preparation section of this book in Chapter 1. For now, just take a look at the 6 point *Essay Scoring Guide* that follows.

### Essay Scoring Guide

- 6** This score is reserved for *outstanding* essay responses. A student earning a 6 response has effectively and insightfully developed a point of view on the issue and demonstrates exceptional critical thinking, using appropriate examples and reasons within the response. These essays are well organized, clearly focused, and exceptionally coherent. This level of essay demonstrates skillful use of language, apt vocabulary, and a variety of sentence structure. Although not without flaws, a 6 response is relatively free of most errors of usage, mechanics, and grammar.
- 5** This score reflects an effective essay; it demonstrates *reasonable mastery* of composition skills. It may have occasional lapses in quality; overall it is a very successful response. A student earning a 5 response has effectively developed a point of view on the topic or issue, has demonstrated strong critical thinking skills, and generally has used appropriate examples to develop his or her point of view. The organization is focused, showing good coherence and progression of ideas. This essay will exhibit facility in the use of language and appropriate vocabulary for the task. A variety of sentence structure is present with a minimum of mechanical and grammatical errors.
- 4** This score reflects a *competent response*, which demonstrates adequate mastery, although it will have lapses, in contrast to the quality of the 5 and 6 responses. A student earning a 4 response has developed a point of view and demonstrates critical thinking on the issue. However, the examples and development of ideas are less strong or less consistent than 5 or 6 responses. General organization is evident, and progression and coherence is present, although not always consistent. Language and vocabulary skills may be more limited or less appropriate. Some sentence structure variety is used, although grammar, punctuation, and mechanical skills may be less evident.
- 3** This score reflects an *inadequate response* to the essay question. It does, however, demonstrate a developing mastery of composition skills. The point of view will be evident, along with critical thinking, but it may be inconsistent. Examples and support are often weak or inadequate to make the writer’s point. Organization, coherence, and focus are less well developed, and lapses may be found in sentence structure and/or flow of ideas. Vocabulary may be limited. Grammar, usage, and mechanical errors are present.
- 2** This score reflects a *seriously limited* essay response, which demonstrates little mastery. The point of view is present but limited due to vagueness, weak critical thinking, or inappropriate or insufficient examples, reasons, or other evidence to support the writer’s position. The essay is poorly organized; it has little coherence, and it displays little facility in the use of language. Sentence structure is not varied, and errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics are serious enough to obscure meaning.
- 1** This score reflects an essay that is *fundamentally lacking*. No mastery is evident as demonstrated by a lack of a viable point and/or little or no evidence to back a position. The essay is disorganized and/or unfocused, resulting in an incoherent response. Vocabulary is limited; sentence structure displays serious flaws; mechanical, grammatical, and usage errors are pervasive, seriously interfering with the meaning.

The following two essays are student responses to the previous SAT essay prompt. Following each essay is a short discussion about the student response—what is done well, what could be done better, and what kind of score readers would be likely to award it. After studying the Scoring Guide closely, compare your response to these responses. Try to be objective when you do this. What score do you think you would receive for what you've written? If possible, try to find an adult, preferably one of your teachers, to give you his/her opinion. However, even your friends can help you determine your score.

## Suemee's Response

*What is the "right" way? Many people learn this over their lifetime and are tested continuously in many challenging situations. Although people learn the correct and moral way, people can interpret it differently and use it in totally opposite ways.*

*One thing we can be sure of, however, is that the right way is definitely not always the cool and popular way. When a person or group of people stands for something, it is because they believe in it, not anyone else. Of course there are some people who choose to follow the views of friends because of fear of what would happen if they were to oppose, but most people will choose to stand for what they believe in if it means anything to them. Even though a person may stand alone on a moral topic, there are surely those who will follow that person's idea because they feel sympathy for the brave individual or because they just needed someone else to take the first step.*

*I strongly agree that standing for the right when it is unpopular is a true test of moral character because for a person to do that, he or she must have a lot of courage and stay strong on what he/she stands for. I think people like Martin Luther King Jr. and Rosa Parks are great examples of sustaining what they believed in morally because I, for one, do not believe that people should be separated by color or by race, and neither did they. King spent time in jail standing up for what he thought was right and fair. He showed strong leadership at a time that the United States needed such strong direction. And Rosa Parks, an everyday woman, not a political leader, not anyone in the limelight, decided one day to defy the system, and she took a seat at the front of the bus. What courage and conviction she demonstrated on the bus that day. Because of people like Martin Luther King Jr. and Rosa Parks, many people followed and others, who had been afraid to speak up before, began to voice their ideas and beliefs.*

*It is important for an individual not to be a moral coward. Standing up for what you believe is not always easy, but it can pay off as it did for Martin Luther King Jr. and Rosa Parks. We must be strong in our convictions, even when the majority disagrees with us. Who knows, some of them may just be afraid to speak up for themselves and only need for someone else like you or me to take the first step.*

## Commentary on Suemee’s Essay

This is an *effective essay* and would most likely garner at least a 5 from each reader. Look again at what constitutes the score of a 5. This response most effectively develops a point of view on the issue and moves forward reasonably and smoothly to support what she says. The essay is well organized and coherent. This student seems comfortable with the language; vocabulary is appropriate to the response. Sentence structure varies, and there are a minimum of minor errors.

The slight jumble of the second paragraph is what keeps this paper in the 5 range. Although we understand what this student is saying, she could be more clear. We should not have to read between the lines to pinpoint her focus. The third paragraph is the strongest, and if a reader were to award this response a 6, it would probably be because of this and the last paragraph. This essay gains strength as it goes along. Martin Luther King Jr. and Rosa Parks are good examples of moral bravery, and they aren’t just mentioned, but several sentences tie them into the whole. Finally, the last paragraph brings fine closure to the piece, and the brief mention of King and Parks once more is a nice touch. This student has done a first-rate job.

## John’s Response

*“The right way is not always the popular and easy way” I believe, is a very true statement. What is right to one person may not be what’s right for the next. Morals consist of what you believe is the right thing to do in different situations. If you do truly believe in your morals than it should not be that hard to make decisions on what’s right or wrong. Unfortunately it is not that easy for most people. Most people lack, what Margaret Chase referred to as, “moral courage.”*

*Take for example the topic of drugs and teenagers. Now days it seems as if all of the so-called “cool” or “popular” kids are into some sort of drug, and every day they influence the more “unpopular” kids into using drugs whether consciously or not. These kids are then put into a test of their moral courage. Do they, or do they not use drugs?*

*I know first had how hard it can be to stand up for what’s right. I believe it’s wrong to harm your body. Today at lunch, for instance, some of my so-called “friends” asked me if I wanted to get drunk this weekend. Morally for me that would be wrong, so I said “No.” At first I was afraid they would think I was totally weird, and maybe they did, but by sticking to what I believe, I felt good, and I do not regret my decision.*

*Slavery was practiced at one time in the US and it was a nearly a unanimously supported idea. But the few people who were against it were put out to a harsh test of morality. Abolitionists then knew that protesting slavery could get them into serious trouble, or could even get them killed. Yet because of their strong belief and moral courage, they opposed slavery because it was wrong.*

*In conclusion, standing up for the unpopular may not be what you want to do, but if you truly have faith in your convictions, you will always make the right decision.*

## Commentary on John’s Response

This essay demonstrates competence in writing. It would be assessed as a 4. The thinking is fine, and the examples are suitable albeit a bit trite. There is good organization and focus. The presentation of ideas is competent, but it could flow together better. Construction and presentation of this essay lacks the smoothness and flow that we see in Suemee’s essay. The introduction is well done, especially mentioning the author of the original quotation. The topic of drugs and teenagers, unfortunately, has been overdone. Although there is nothing wrong with this topic, it is rather stale. Perhaps something less tired would have produced a more dynamic response.

Each paragraph is okay on its own, but together they don’t flow well. Paragraphs 2 and 3 certainly fit together, although the student has implied the link rather than worked it into his writing. The fourth paragraph, on slavery, seems, at first misplaced. This paragraph needs a better topic sentence that will link the ideas of this historic paragraph to the preceding, more contemporary paragraphs. Although there are several mechanical errors, overall they do not detract from the essence of the response. The conclusion seems tacked on. Perhaps this was due to the time limitation. However, in contrast to Suemee’s response, you can see that it lacks the finesse of the earlier response. Nevertheless, this student has demonstrated proficiency in responding to Margaret Chase’s challenging quotation.

## You Finished the Diagnostic—Now What?

---

This Diagnostic Test offers you several things:

- An overview of the Writing Section of the SAT Exam
- The “flavor” of the types of multiple-choice questions in the Writing Section of the SAT Exam
- Practice in answering these multiple-choice questions
- A sneak peak at the newest addition to the SAT Exam—the essay itself
- An idea of the type of essay you will be expected to write
- An early opportunity to write your own essay
- Familiarity with the Scoring Guide for the essay
- The opportunity to compare your response to others’ responses

You should now be able to determine better your strengths and weaknesses regarding the Writing Section of the SAT Exam. From here you need to take a closer look at the essay, the sentence correction questions, sentence improvement questions, and paragraph improvement questions. You will find all kinds of suggestions and discussions on writing successful essays and learning strategies, skills, and information that will enable you to conquer the multiple-choice questions. Let’s do it!