

# Tactics for Successful SAT Essay Writing

For years you have been writing compositions and school essays—in English classes as well as your other classes. The skills that you have learned over the years will facilitate your success in writing the SAT essay. Most of the skills you have developed will serve you well. However, in the following pages, you will find specific suggestions for the SAT essay as well as gain ideas for your school writings.

## General Writing Skills

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The following are general skill areas that add to *all* of your writing needs:

- Appropriate organization according to the needs of the essay requirement
- A thesis that is clearly conceived and well-supported
- Detail that demonstrates a balance between general ideas and specific points
- Diction that is precise and suitable to the task
- Syntax that is effective and appropriate
- A comfortable presentation of conventional American English grammar, spelling, and punctuation

You have been honing all of these skills for years. If you have successfully mastered them, they will serve you well when you write your SAT essay. This book will help you brush up on any composition skills you may have forgotten.

## Specific Information about the SAT Essay

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The SAT essay requires you to write under timed conditions. You probably are used to more of a processed approach to writing—brainstorming, prewriting, drafting, and so on—all the steps that you take to produce a final product. Now, however, you are being asked to write an essay, from beginning to end, within 25 minutes! Ouch! This is a different kind of challenge. Let's make sure you are up to it.

One of the reasons that the SAT Exam has added the essay is to evaluate just how successfully students can organize their ideas, quickly focus their attention on the fundamentals of composition (central idea, adequate support, clear and coherent order), and consequently express them in words. In particular, students are expected to show their thinking and communication skills as they are presented under timed conditions.

One other difference you need to realize is that your writing on the SAT essay will be assessed differently than what you may be used to in your high school classes. This essay will be calculated holistically. That is, your essay as a whole is evaluated, not its individual parts. Readers read your essay, take *all* aspects of it into account, and then decide on a score. You saw the basic scoring guide in the evaluation of the essay in the diagnostic test. Later in this chapter is a more thorough breakdown of *all* that readers consider in a holistic evaluation. Readers are trained to evaluate essays on what the student has done well, not to deduct points for minor errors in composition. SAT essay readers are aware that these essays are unrevised, first drafts. They also acknowledge that students are writing these compositions under great pressure. Consequently, you need not worry about cross outs and marginal editing.

The length of your answer is no guarantee of quality. Readers are looking for evidence of your critical thinking as well as your ability to communicate your ideas successfully on paper.

Finally, strive for good penmanship. Many of you do your best “writing” on the computer. Well, for this exam, you have to express yourself in writing. If readers cannot read what you've written, they cannot score it. If your handwriting is bad, print. Also, your essays will be scanned into the computer so readers can access them from remote sites. Any faults in your handwriting do tend to look worse when your paper is scanned.

Mechanical difficulties reduce the score only if they hamper communication. However, something *very* badly written can only be scored as a lower half response, that is a response that earns a 3 or less.

## The SAT Essay Prompt (Question)

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The first thing to remember is that thousands of students will be taking the SAT Exam. Consequently, the question(s) you are asked to answer will be generic, open to a large cross-section of test takers. In other words, you can expect a very approachable topic, something on which most students will have an opinion. This is a plus for you. The one thing you can count on, however, is that the question (prompt) will require you to present some sort of opinion or require you to take a stand on some conflicting viewpoint.

## Developing Your Essay

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When you write under timed conditions, such as for the SAT essay, you need to focus your attention on the fundamentals of composition: a central idea, support backed by evidence, and a clear, coherent order. Now let's take a look at writing a successful SAT essay.

### Introduction

Avoid long, extended introductions for this essay. You want to introduce the topic of your essay and then leave the introduction and move on to the body of your composition. Let's look back at the two successful essays used as example responses in the Diagnostic Test.

### Suemee's Response

*What is the "right" way? Many people learn this over their lifetimes 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.*

### 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 then 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."*

As you can see, neither of these introductions is long or protracted by words or time-consuming filler that take up space but say nothing. Both introductions get right to the point. Suemee's response may seem a bit vague, but it is focused enough to urge the reader to continue reading, and when you look at it with the rest of the essay, it works very well. John's response is a bit more focused. It specifically mentions concepts from the prompt as well as refers to the author of the original quotation by Margaret Chase. You cannot spend (nor waste) time on lengthy, purposeless introductions. Plan your essay quickly. Don't hesitate to jot down a few notes right on the test booklet. Then, state your intentions, make your point(s), and go on to the body paragraph(s) of your essay. If you feel like you are "stuck," or if you get that "blank" feeling, don't spend more than about 3–4 minutes thinking about what you are going to say. By the time four

minutes have passed, start writing—something. Worse-case scenario, use the prompt (the essay question) to get you started. You may have to leave some room at the beginning of your essay, write the body of your essay, and write the introduction at the end. Just do whatever works for you within the 25-minute time limit.

## Body Paragraphs

You will want to spend most of your time on the body of the essay. If you take 4–5 minutes to plan your essay and another 3–4 minutes to write your introduction, you have no more than 12 minutes left to write the body of your essay. This leaves you with only a couple minutes for a conclusion and a minute or two to skim over your essay and tidy up the most obvious problems. Now you see how important it is for you to plan what you are going to say.

You might wonder just how long the body of this essay should be. You need to write *at least* one well-developed paragraph for the body of the essay. Two body paragraphs would be better. This will then produce a 3–4 paragraph response. You are probably used to writing longer essays than this, but remember, you only have 25 minutes total.

Be sure that each paragraph has a unifying topic sentence. Each paragraph needs a focus, and this focus should be in direct support of the intention of the essay as a whole, which you have stated in your introduction. Support your points with specific evidence—from your observations, experience, or your reading. The prompt of the SAT essay will be somewhat controversial in nature. You will be asked to take a position and support it, and that is precisely what you need to do.

Sometimes students say they cannot write about a topic for which they have little or no feeling or interest. The answer to that problem is simple: **Get over it!** Like it or not, that’s the topic you are “stuck” with, and for 25 minutes, it has to become the most interesting and important topic you’ve ever considered in your life. No kidding; suck up your dislike or your disinterest and attack the topic like you mean it.

You can support your points with examples and illustrations. Or, perhaps, you might choose to develop your ideas using narration or by providing an anecdote that supports your point of view. Other approaches you can take are using description or comparing and contrasting your ideas with other ideas. Whatever method(s) you choose, just make sure that your ideas are clearly linked. Your details, facts, and examples must all tie into the topic of your essay.

If you have more than one body paragraph (and you should try to have at least two), be sure these paragraphs are linked in some manner. Using appropriate transition words within and between paragraphs is very helpful in keeping your essay organized and coherent. Also, like the paragraphs that follow, the first uses a general approach, and the second echoes this with a more specific approach, using illustrations and examples to enhance the ideas.

Let’s look again at Suemee’s Diagnostic Test essay response, focusing on the body paragraphs.

**Introduction** → *What is the “right” way? Many people learn this over their lifetimes 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.*

**Body Paragraph One** → *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.*

**Body  
Paragraph Two** →

*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.*

Quickly review the introduction. This student introduces the idea of learning the “right (moral) way” and living this way in one’s lifetime, no matter what one faces.

The first body paragraph then takes this idea to a personal level, saying that the right way is often not the cool or popular way. This is then developed, using generalized references to people who follow and those who lead. Although this is not a dynamic paragraph by itself, it is a good lead-in to the much fuller body paragraph that follows.

It is the second body paragraph that gives this composition its strength. It opens with an idea continued from the prior paragraph. Then she uses both Martin Luther King Jr. and Rosa Parks to further develop and support her main idea. These very specific examples illustrate her point, the idea of others following those who have moral courage. The last sentence specifically demonstrates this idea, “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.” This strongly enhances what she stated in the earlier paragraph, “. . .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.”

Notice how these two body paragraphs complement each other. They are strongly linked with their ideas as well as their words. These paragraphs are well organized, and the ideas presented are coherent and well supported.

## Conclusion

Because of the time restriction under which you must write the SAT essay, the conclusion should be brief and to the point. In fact, your last body paragraph should bring the essay to enough of a closure that if you were to run out of time and be unable to add a conclusion, you will have already stated the essence of what you intended to say.

Basically, your conclusion should echo the main idea, without dully repeating it. The best conclusions interestingly wrap up ideas that are introduced in the beginning of the essay and developed in the body of the essay.

Let’s look one last time at Suemee’s diagnostic test essay response, focusing on the conclusion. You have just reread the introduction and body paragraphs, so you can see how nicely the conclusion pulls everything together.

*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 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.*



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## Assessing Your Response

Do you remember the 6-point scoring guide that was used for assessing the diagnostic essays? Let's look at that again before we look at some sample responses.

### 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.



## Rachel's Response

*People want others to give them their honest opinions, but they also want that opinion to be good. When one person asks another's opinion on something, it is for one of two reasons: he wants the truth or he wants a compliment. There is always a line of importance that distinguishes the two, and it is this line that we must be careful about.*

*If someone asks for someone's opinion about how he looks, there are times when the response is expected to be positive. For example, if a woman asks her husband if she still looks as good as when he met her, she is not looking for the truth. She is asking for reassurance. She is asking her husband to say that he doesn't care about looks, and he still loves her just as much as when they met. There are also times when the response should be truthful. For example, if a model asks her manager how she looks before a fashion show, she is expecting an honest answer, so she knows what she needs to do to look better. The manager's opinion is important because her career (and maybe the manager's as well) depends on how she looks. Colin Powell was correct when he said that loyalty meant giving him the truth, because he was Secretary of State, and any opinion he needs has to fall on the positive side of the truth line.*

*Another reason that someone might want a truthful opinion is if he/she is trying to learn more about the person. Political candidates are constantly questioned about their opinions on certain topics, and their answers are expected to be truthful. Of course, whether they are truthful, is another discussion altogether.*

*In conclusion, people want to hear the truth under certain circumstances, and don't under other circumstances.*

**Rachel's Response** is a very adequate essay that does a good job reacting to the quotation by Colin Powell. It is not, however, without its flaws. It falls somewhere in the high four or low five assessment range.

The introduction to this essay is good. She opens well and makes her point: There are two sides to the idea of people really wanting the truth.

The first (and main) body paragraph says it all. First she talks about the times when people don't really want the actual truth. In fact, they often have an entirely different agenda in mind when asking for the truth. The wife seeking her husband's reassurance is a good example of this. The next part of this body paragraph deals with times when the actual truth is needed and/or expected. This is also well illustrated with the situation of the model seeking her manager's opinion.

Actually this lengthy body paragraph could easily become two paragraphs—each one dealing with one side of the truth line. In fact, the response would be improved if this were done. Each paragraph might offer another example or more support for each side of the so-called truth line. Then, the third body paragraph, the one about politicians could, and probably should, be eliminated. As the paragraph stands now, it is too brief, and it just seems to be stuck in the essay without much success.

Finally, this essay's conclusion is most brief. However, what needed to be said had already been said. Its single sentence is more of a signal to the reader that the writer has said all that is going to be said at this time.

## Kyle's Response

*Most people in the world, if asked, will say that they want an honest opinion from their friends and coworkers. Is this really true? There are many things people do or say in their everyday lives that contradict this supposed desire for honesty.*

*The thing that most people are guilty of is asking a question and expecting a specific response. For example, if I wrote this paper and asked my teacher if it was any good, I might expect her to say yes. Not necessarily because it really is a good paper, but because I don't want to get my feelings hurt if she tells me no. Why, then, do people ask these questions? To receive some sort of encouragement, regardless of whether it is an honest response or not.*

*Perhaps another thing that gives this away is the asking of a question that cannot be answered correctly. One of the most popular examples of this is when a woman asks someone if she looks fat in whatever she is wearing. It may seem like a simple, harmless question, but there is, in fact, no right way to answer this question, especially if it is a significant other who must give the response. If the reply is yes, the woman will surely get angry and upset because now she thinks she's fat. However, if the reply is no, she will surely accuse the responder of lying. In situations like these, it may be best to just not answer at all. I know that's my father's philosophy when my mother poses such questions.*

*In these instances such as these, more people show that they, in fact do not want honest opinions, but to hear what they want to hear. However, this does not mean that they are not loyal friends or that they do not have loyal friends. A loyal friend will probably tell you the truth when you need to hear it. But what is perhaps more important to many people is that a loyal friend also knows just how and when to lie.*

**Kyle's Response** is a very successful response to the quotation by Colin Powell. The use of the rhetorical question in the introduction is really the focus of the essay. Do people really seek such truth? Or is there a contradiction here?

The first body paragraph discusses the idea that when some people ask for the truth, they already have a preconceived response of choice. This paragraph goes on to describe the idea, not unlike the first student's response, that such questions sometimes have very little to do with attaining a true response and more to do with reassurance and encouragement.

The next body paragraph very successfully explores the question that can *not* be answered correctly. The example of the woman asking whether she is fat, though a somewhat trite illustration, is cleverly presented, and Kyle's personal touch in the last sentence of this paragraph is amusing.

The conclusion on this essay is very well done. It continues the discussion a bit further. Then the description of being and having a loyal friends and the best test of a loyal friend who knows just how and when to lie brings this essay to a clever end.

What a nicely written essay. Some might say this is a six; no one would argue that it deserves less than a five.

## Your Response

The readers of this exam will be using a single, six-point scoring guide, similar to the one presented earlier. However, the following chart is an itemization of the many writing skills that the SAT essay readers are assessing—Overall

Impression; Language and Word Choice; Sentence Structure; Development of Viewpoint and Critical Thinking; Organization of Ideas; and Grammar, Usage, and Mechanics.

<b>SAT Scoring Guide Itemization</b>						
	<b><i>Overall Impression</i></b>	<b><i>Development of Viewpoint &amp; Critical Thinking</i></b>	<b><i>Organization of Ideas</i></b>	<b><i>Language and Word Choice</i></b>	<b><i>Sentence Structure</i></b>	<b><i>Grammar, Usage, and Mechanics</i></b>
<b>6</b>	Outstanding and consistent, clear and competent. Very insightful; minimum mechanical/usage errors.	Fully developed, using clear and appropriate supporting evidence. Shows high level of critical thinking.	Extremely well-organized. Support evidence is presented in a logical and effective manner.	Effective and expert use of language. Accurate and appropriate use of vocabulary.	Sentence structure demonstrates clever and engaging thinking.	Nearly error free.
<b>5</b>	Reasonably consistent, clear and logical. Minimal errors or lapses in quality.	Generally adequate, using apt examples/reasons/evidence. Good support of main idea, shows critical thinking.	Overall well organized and reasonably focused. Generally coherent and sensibly presented.	Competence of language skills is clearly demonstrated. Appropriate vocabulary use.	Sufficiently varied sentence structure.	Some minor errors, but generally well written.
<b>4</b>	Adequately competent. Some errors, but still clear and providing fair evidence.	Partially develops main idea with mostly adequate examples and reasons. Shows some evidence of critical thinking.	Reasonably organized, showing some evidence of thoughtful development of ideas.	Adequate but inconsistent use of appropriate language. Vocabulary is acceptable, but not outstanding.	Some evidence of sentence variation.	Some minor errors and possibly one or two major errors.
<b>3</b>	Generally inadequate but demonstrates some potential; may contain inconsistencies.	Weak expansion of main idea with evidence that is hardly appropriate as solid support material.	Limited evidence of organization. Focus is not clear; some confusion in presentation of thoughts.	Some minor errors in expression. Vocabulary is weak and/or limited.	Minimal sentence variation, minor sentence errors.	Accumulation of major and minor errors.
<b>2</b>	Seriously limited due to weak quality or lack of clarity or coherence.	Lack of focus or development of main idea. Critical thinking is superficial with little or inappropriate evidence.	Vaguely recognizable organization; lacks coherence; serious problems with sequential thinking.	Frequent errors of language expression, limited vocabulary, inaccurate word choices.	Frequent sentence errors.	Frequent errors, mostly major, that often interfere with essay meaning.
<b>1</b>	Fundamentally incompetent; contains serious flaws, underdeveloped and/or confusing.	Fails to express a feasible point of view. Provides minimal or no evidence of understanding of the prompt.	No apparent organization, sequence of ideas incoherent and/or confusing.	Seriously deficient use of language; meaning somewhat obscured by inappropriate word choice.	Considerable errors in sentences; meaning is obscured due to faulty structure.	Errors are overwhelming; seriously interfere with the meaning.

How did you do? Is your essay better than the one you wrote for the Diagnostic Test? If you are unsure of what score your essay should get, perhaps a teacher or a friend can help you out by reading and assessing it as well.

One More Time

Everyone has heard the old phrase, “Practice makes perfect.” Well, perfection is a rather noble goal. However, practice will certainly make you better. Here is one more Practice SAT essay for you to try. This time you are given two quotes to consider. It is conceivable that the SAT essay question (prompt) might have two opinions for you to consider for your essay.

Think carefully about the ideas presented in the following quotations.

William Penn said, “Avoid popularity; it has many snares, and no real benefit.”

A century later, Abraham Lincoln said: “Avoid popularity if you would have peace.”

Do you agree or disagree that popularity is best not pursued since it has no benefits nor gives a person peace?



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## Eric's Response

*I wholeheartedly agree with President Lincoln's statement, but I only partly agree with William Penn's. Being popular does press on a person's personal space and freedom. While popularity does have many snares, it does have some real benefit.*

*Whenever you go shopping or to the grocery store, almost always there will be a magazine news stand by the checkout lane. It's usually full of tabloids and pop magazines that feature the latest craze and what all the hit stars have been up to. A recent movie called "Paparazzi" (sp?) is about an action star who is constantly harassed by photographers who follow his every footstep. While the movie may not be entirely accurate, it does bring to light at least some of the power and freedom the press has. Stars are followed everywhere. Reporters know a star's favorite restaurant, favorite store and even their favorite color. Granted, none of these things seem very intrusive, but thousands possibly millions of people know them. The star has very little if any privacy. It is there that Lincoln's statement holds truth.*

*William Penn mentioned snares and no real benefit. Yes, there are many snares that come with popularity. Peer pressure is a major one. All across the country kids dress, talk, and act a certain way to try to be popular. Kids feel like they can't be accepted as they are. They have to change themselves to how magazines, movies, or their friends tell them they should look or act. Kids have turned into imperfect clones of their favorite movie star or singer instead of being accepted for who they are.*

*Another snare of popularity is coping with it and the attention it draws (to use the example of stars again). Many stars have died or been in rehab for drug or alcohol abuse. The popularity and the benefits it brings weren't brought on in a way as to learn how to cope. Mel Gibson, for instance, was a severe alcoholic for many years and then went to rehab. Elvis and many others have died of drug overdoses.*

*Despite its many snares and problems, popularity can bring benefits. Popularity can bring job opportunities that might be available otherwise. Michael Jordan switched from a pro-basketball player to a pro-baseball player. To be totally honest, he was pretty bad. That would not have been available to him had people not know him, had he not been popular. Likewise, many singers and/or comedians have transferred into acting careers, not all of them very successful.*

*Popularity does have many negative sides and effects to it. However, it does have some positives. I personally enjoy my obscurity, but that's a thing everyone needs to accept.*

**Eric's Response** is an unusually long essay considering the short 25 minutes Eric had to write this response. The introduction makes reference to both of the quotations as well as their sources. The first body paragraph is mainly about Lincoln's point of view. The second body paragraph shifts smoothly to the William Penn quotation.

The next body paragraph has to do with the downside of popularity and how it has been the ruin of many people, mentioning specific people to emphasize the point. Ideas in this paragraph are then contrasted in the final body paragraph. The transition word “Despite” tells us that a differing point of view is about to be discussed. Body paragraphs three and four demonstrate how the writer has moved beyond the immediacy of the two quotations and can apply them to several specific situations.

The very brief conclusion, although not critical to the essay, mentions again the idea of positive and negative benefits of popularity. This coincides with the two angles on popularity that are discussed in the response. Finally, the essay closes on a personal note, revealing Eric’s voice.

This essay is smooth, well organized, and well developed. It flows gracefully from point to point, and the writer has used ample support for all the major points that he makes. The essay demonstrates good critical thinking and apt vocabulary. This SAT essay response falls at the top of the scoring guide. Few would argue that it deserves less than a score of six.

## Lauren’s Response

*Based on their testimony, it can be inferred that Lincoln and Penn do not think highly of the state of being that is “popularity.” Penn, however, states that the concept of popularity has no benefits, while Lincoln states that a lack of popularity brings about peace. I agree with both men on this stance against popularity because of the responsibility, lack of peace, and fickle friendship that come with the title.*

*When one becomes popular for whatever reason, one has the responsibility to maintain the quality that brought about his/her popularity. This can prove to be quite difficult as people often change with popularity into more mechanistic versions of themselves. Needless to say, this sudden change in temperament can bring about a quick and bruising fall from fame and may possibly leave the subject in a worse state than originally. It is human nature to have the desire to be in the state of relaxation from time to time. As Lincoln says, however, with popularity comes a lack of peace. When deprived of peace and quiet, it is not uncommon for people to become irritable and/or anxious, among other things. In this instance, as in the aforementioned instance, an unpleasant disposition can quickly bring about unpopularity and discontent.*

*Some may say that popularity brings about friendship and love. To the newly popular, a sudden increase in friends and admirers must surely be welcome. However, the majority of the time, these friends are vapid and merely drawn to the person du jour, like flies migrating to each day’s fresh roadkill. And as flies do to many a stripped carcass, they will eventually leave the formerly popular person behind. Surely, when William Penn spoke of the lack of benefits of popularity he had in mind the throngs of vapid “friends” who quickly become fickle, seeking the next person du jour.*

**Lauren’s Response** is a strong response, probably a score of about a five. The introduction establishes the belief that neither Lincoln nor Penn thought highly of popularity, and this student agrees with both.

As Lauren explains the pessimism of the two men’s quotations, she, too, places a fairly negative spin on the idea of popularity. Her own critical thinking echoes the negative interpretation she has given to the quotations.



Each body paragraph deals with one of the quotations. The development of her ideas is particularly well done. Perhaps some readers may find the mention of road kill to be too graphic, but it aptly supports the idea of fickle friends in search of the person *du jour*. The juxtaposition of *du jour* having connotations of mealtime and the dead creatures in the road being meals to flies and other carrion is cleverly done.

Lauren's essay has good organization, interesting support material, and vocabulary and syntax appropriate to upper scoring essays. The response does, however, lack a concluding paragraph. This is a good example of how what was meant to be said had already been said, and the missing conclusion is not crucial. Possibly lack of time prevented her from tying things together with a few succinct final sentences. Nevertheless, this essay works well.

## How Did You Do?

Review your response against the Scoring Guide and the SAT Scoring Guide Itemization, attempting to find where your skills line up with the scores. Did you get a six, a one, or fall somewhere in between?

Enough practice for now. You can try your hand at essay writing later, when you take the Practice SAT Exams at the end of this book.

## What to Write, What Not to Write, and How to Write It Better

Of course, most of you realize that writing does not just happen by itself. Sometimes it can be a painstaking process. Most professional writers will agree. A part of successful writing is instinctively knowing the little tricks that make writing seem easy. Of course proper grammar, usage, and mechanics skills are a must. In addition, you need to be aware of how transition words and phrases help to make your writing flow. Knowing the proper homonym and idiom and avoiding trite expressions and redundancies are important as well. The following pages cover all of these “little things” that make the chore of writing look and seem easy.

## Transition Words and Phrases

If you look at the top scores on the Scoring Guide, you will find that characteristics of successful SAT essays include strong organization and good coherence. Appropriate use of transition words or phrases will help establish good organization in your writing. Transition words are great clues—from you, the writer, to the reader. In reading, we rely on transition words to verify sequence, direction, contradiction, and so on. For instance, we recognize the word “however” as a word of concession; “beyond that” helps us understand direction; “therefore” gives us a sense of cause and effect.

We need to stay alert to transitions for clues within our reading. It helps give substance to what we read on the printed page. In writing, transition words and phrases are invaluable. The more cues you can give your reader as to the sequence and/or attitude toward your topic, the better. There are literally hundreds of these terms. In the table that follows, you should be able to find a few “keepers” to help make your writing more clear. You also need a basic understanding of these transition words for a few of the multiple-choice questions later in the test.

<i>To indicate more information</i>	<i>To compare and contrast</i>
Besides	Although
Furthermore	However
Indeed	In contrast
Moreover	On the other hand
In fact	Similarly
Second, third, and so on	Whereas

<b><i>To indicate an example</i></b>	<b><i>To indicate a particular time</i></b>
For instance	After
In particular	Before
Particularly	During
Specifically	Eventually
To illustrate	Meanwhile
	Simultaneously
<b><i>To indicate a cause or reason</i></b>	<b><i>To summarize</i></b>
As	Briefly
Because	Overall
Due to	Summing up
For	To put it briefly
Since	To summarize
<b><i>To indicate a result or an effect</i></b>	<b><i>To conclude</i></b>
Accordingly	Given these facts
Finally	Hence
Consequently	In conclusion
Hence	So
So	Therefore
Therefore	Thus
Thus	To conclude

Now that you have this list of transition words, start using them in your writing. They will help you in organizing your SAT essay as well as in your English class(es). These transitions make your writing flow, aid in reasoning, and demonstrate that you are most capable of expressing yourself on paper.

The following is an example of a paragraph demonstrating the use of transitions:

*Although* many of us talk about being environmentally responsible and believing in saving our planet, the reality is, *however*, that most people are not as ecologically concerned as they ought to be. *For instance*, we say we recycle, and we might separate out newspapers and Coke cans from our regular garbage; *nevertheless*, how many so-called recyclers are aware that much of our recycling goes into the regular garbage landfill? *And*, if we are aware of this, do we do anything about it? *In addition*, do we bring used grocery bags to the store with us to put our groceries in, or is it just too much

trouble to do so? *Finally*, how many people really make an effort to carpool? *Granted* people's schedules vary, and we don't like to be kept waiting; *however*, a few minutes' wait for a couple colleagues could make a carpool instead of each driving home alone in his or her own gas-guzzling SUV.

As you can see, this very short paragraph has several transitional words. It starts out with an *although* countered with a *however*. These transition words set up the argument for the writer. *For instance* is a cue for an example to follow. *Nevertheless* indicates a mild contrast; it is a cue to pay attention to what is being said. *And* and *In addition* are indicators of more information. *Finally* lets the reader know that things are winding down. *Granted* and *however* set up the last contrasting idea.

Of course, when we read we do not analyze these transitions thoroughly, but as a writer, you need to use them as a tool to help your writing move along and to provide cues to the reader.

## Trite Expressions

Trite expressions or clichés are *old as dirt*, come a *dime a dozen*, and are *easy as pie* to eliminate from your writing. They are old sayings that are used and heard so often that they do nothing for your writing. Readers' and listeners' brains just switch off when they read/hear them. It is best to avoid these in your writing; they will only detract from the power of your essay. Following are just a few examples:

Beat around the bush	Playing with fire	Good people
Hard data	Cutting edge	Pushing the envelope
More than happy	I wish to state	Bite the bullet
Scratch the surface	Goes without saying	Since the dawn of time
Contrary to popular opinion	Due to the fact that	Acid test
Easier said than done	Few and far between	Words cannot express
Better late than never	Last but not least	Rich and varied (experience)

Can you spot (or identify) the trite expressions in the following sentences? There are 12 in all.

1. From the beginning of time, man has been busy as a beaver perfecting exploration and technology for the good of our country.
2. Franco learned his lesson the hard way; the principal did not beat around the bush when he expelled him from school for three days.
3. That, in a nutshell, is the sad but true story of the late, great Ray Charles.
4. Her little brother, frisky as a puppy, was as destructive as a bull in a china shop.
5. Sadder but wiser, Ahmad realized that he had truly learned that experience is often a hard lesson to learn.

(Answers: 1. From the beginning of time; busy as a beaver; for the good of our country. 2. learned his lesson the hard way; beat around the bush. 3. in a nutshell; sad but true; the late, great. 4. frisky as a puppy; a bull in a china shop. 5. Sadder but wiser; experience is often a hard lesson to learn.)

You get the idea. Not much imagination in these sentences is there? You can easily see why it is best to avoid trite expressions: They weaken your writing and make you sound boring.

You will want to avoid these trite expressions in your writing as well as be on the lookout for them in any of the multiple-choice questions.