

SAT Essay Writing Process

This process is an effective way to organize your thoughts and write a response that closely imitates known high-scoring essays. Feel free to use it or adapt it to fit the situation—but make sure any adaptations you make are still in line with the [rules for the SAT essay](#) in this Guide.

1. Watch the clock from the beginning.

You only have 25 minutes to plan and write an essay. If you kill just 5 minutes day-dreaming or panicking, you've wasted twenty percent of your time! Do NOT let time get away from you here. This is crucial.

2. Develop a one-word response to the question.

Before you can write this essay, you have to know what you're going to be saying. It sounds simplistic, but you need to focus yourself before you can make effective, efficient use of your time.

This one-word answer will often simply be “yes,” “no,” or “maybe,” but it could just as easily be anything else. Remember that there is no correct answer to an essay question—you can't get this step wrong. The point is simply to focus your mind on the point you're trying to make in your essay.

3. Make up three personal experiences that illustrate your position.

Remember that the SAT scorers don't care whether the examples that illustrate your position are real or not. All they care about is whether you can put together ANY example at all that would support your point.

Since you're going to be making up these examples out of thin air, make sure the relationship between the examples and the answer you've chosen to the prompt is CLEAR and DIRECT. Don't invent an example that's only vaguely related to your answer. This is a blank check—come up with something really good. It will make your score higher, and make the rest of your writing easier.

Also, make sure your examples take the form of a story that happened to you. This will make them easier to relate to your reader.

4. Begin your essay with a one-sentence statement of your answer to the prompt.

The SAT scorers aren't big on subtlety. Start your essay with a flat statement of the point you intend to prove. (For examples of top-scoring essays that did this, see pages 123 and 200 of *The Official SAT Study Guide For The New SAT*.) Refer to your one-word answer in Step 2 if you've forgotten what you were trying to say.

5. Write a “Though” sentence to modify your opening sentence.

The second sentence in your essay should start out by contradicting your first sentence with the word *though*, and then finish the sentence with a comma and a re-affirmation of the idea in the first sentence. That might sound a little complicated, so let's try an example. If the first sentence is

The police are a positive and protective force in American society.

then the second sentence is

Though some may criticize the police forces in major cities for being too quick to resort to violence, without the police there would be violence everywhere.

See how that works? The first sentence says *X*. Then the second sentence starts with the word *though* and introduces an idea that contradicts *X*; the second sentence finishes with a comma and then an idea that restates *X*. (The reason for using the word *though* in this way is that it guarantees you'll have a sentence with an interesting structure, something common to all high-scoring essays.)

6. Finish the first paragraph with a sentence that gives a strong introduction to your examples

Make the last sentence in the first paragraph a simple transitional sentence that introduces the two examples you thought of in Step 3. To finish the imaginary first paragraph that we started in Step 6, we might write a sentence like

Three episodes from my personal experience serve as compelling examples of this fact.

See? Nothing too fancy. At this point, you're finished with the first paragraph—the groundwork has been done, and the hardest part of the essay is behind you!

7. Begin the second paragraph with a general statement that introduces your first example.

This first sentence of the second paragraph serves to introduce your first example. Make it something general. See the sample essay on page 200 of the College Board Publication *The Official SAT Study Guide For The New SAT* for an example—there the first sentence of the second paragraph is *Sometimes deception occurs in the form of white lies*, and then the rest of the first paragraph is a (probably made-up) example from the author's life in which deception took the form of a white lie.

8. In 3-5 sentences, tell the story that goes with your first example.

In the middle of the second paragraph you'll insert the story that goes with your first example. Don't draw any lessons or anything at this point—just set the stage and explain what happened. Take your time here—remember that you can't score high if you don't put some detail in your examples.

9. In this first story, say that someone or something was like something else.

This is your chance to use a simile, which is a figure of speech in which you compare two things using the word *like*. For an example, see page 200 of *The Official SAT Study Guide For The New SAT*, where the writer says a dress was a like a bunch of cabbages.