

THE WRITING SAMPLE

WHAT SMART TEST-TAKERS KNOW

Planning Comes First

Allow yourself 2 to 3 minutes for planning.

Do not even think about beginning to write until you have carefully read the essay topic and have answered these questions for yourself:

- *What* must I prove?
- *How many* things am I being asked to do?
- *How many paragraphs* will I need for this?

If you are asked to discuss advantages and disadvantages, you must represent both sides.

If you are asked for your opinion, you must state it clearly and must support your position with good reasons.

If you are asked to support your statements with a specific number of examples from your own experience, from history, or from literature, you must provide the requested number of examples from the appropriate sources.

Jot down your ideas on the topic. Think of what you want to say, and sketch out your points and supporting statements. As good descriptive words or phrases pop into your head, write them down on the same scratch paper. Don't let any thoughts get away. You'll want to refer to your list of ideas as you write so that you don't have to squeeze ideas between the lines after you have written your essay.

Outlines Are Important

Spend 3 to 5 minutes drafting your outline.

No matter how little time you have, an outline will save you time in the end. The outline is a framework for your essay to hang on. Your outline consists of specific details in the order in which you would like them to appear in the essay. Your outline will not be sent to the schools, so you do not need to be concerned with complete sentences, with spelling and punctuation, nor with legibility for anyone but yourself.

The following is a typical outline plan, but you may use any format that works well for you. Include as many paragraph outlines as you need to cover the points you must make in your essay.

- I. Introductory paragraph
 - A. Topic sentence (rephrase or state your position on the question)
 - B. Sentence that introduces second paragraph
 - C. Sentence that introduces third paragraph
 - D. Optional sentence leading into second paragraph

II. The first point you have to make

- A. Topic sentence
- B. First idea that supports this point
 - 1. Detail or illustration—experience, citing of example
 - 2. Detail or illustration
- C. Second idea supporting first point
 - 1. Detail or illustration
 - 2. Detail or illustration

Finish your essay with a summary statement.

Topic Sentences Are a Must

Thoughtful topic sentences will keep your writing on target and help you prove your points.

A Well-Targeted Topic Sentence Is Crucial

Remember: A topic sentence has an idea that can be fully proven in one paragraph. For example, the sentence “You can learn a lot about human nature just by observing people” is so broad that it cannot be proven in one single paragraph. But if we write:

“You can learn a lot about human nature by watching people at a bus station”

or

“You can learn a lot about human nature by watching people at the beach,”
we have a topic that we can prove in one paragraph.

Another way to look at topic sentences is through the controlling idea. This is a key word or group of words that expresses the basic idea of the sentence. When the controlling idea is clear, the entire sentence will be specific and clear.

Example: An encyclopedia is a handy book for students.

“Handy” is the controlling idea. In the paragraph that follows, you will explain *how* the encyclopedia is handy.

Example: Traveling by train has several advantages over traveling by car.

“Several advantages” is the controlling idea. The paragraph will detail these advantages.

Example: Good English is clear, appropriate, and vivid.

“Clear, appropriate, and vivid” is the controlling idea. The paragraph will offer illustrations of clear, appropriate, and vivid English.

Descriptive Words Make Writing Interesting

To prove your point and make your writing interesting, you have to use specific words and phrases:

His face was _____ with fright.

colorless scarlet chalky pale

“Chalky” is the best word for in addition to color—a pale, dry white—it implies a texture—dry and lifeless. “Scarlet” is incorrect because your face does not become scarlet (red) when you are afraid. “Colorless” and “pale” are too vague. “Chalky” is the most descriptive word and the one that makes this sentence most effective.

The sun is high and hot, the air is sultry; it is _____ time.

siesta sleep nap rest

“Siesta” describes a nap that is taken when it is very warm during the middle of the day and is thus the most precise word. Then would come:

nap (a short sleep)

sleep (a type of rest)

rest (any sitting down and relaxing)

Proofreading Will Improve Your Essay

Writing your essay should take you about 15 minutes. Allow at least 3 minutes to proofread and make corrections. Check for the following:

- Did I answer the question?
- Did I provide good, specific details to support my ideas?
- Did I organize my answer in the best possible way to make my point clearly?
- Did I make any errors in spelling, grammar, punctuation, or word use?

Proofreading time is time well spent. Check over what you said, being sure to read what is really there and not what you think is there. Do not read too quickly or you may miss obvious errors. If you find that a sentence might be improved by different phrasing or that a line is illegible, rewrite more clearly at the bottom of the page, cross out the offending portion neatly, and indicate by arrows where the substitution should be inserted.

TIP

Keep your handwriting legible. If they can't read it, it won't count.