

Strategies for Success on the SAT® Essay

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It seems like everybody has a different opinion about how to do well on the SAT essay. Some people say you should write a strict five-paragraph essay, with an introduction, a conclusion, and three specific examples. Some people say you should read well-known books like *The Great Gatsby* or *The Scarlet Letter* and refer to them as often as you can. Some people say that the real key is to write as much as humanly possible. Some say you should do all of these at once!

We want students to know that there are no shortcuts to success on the SAT essay. The high school and college teachers who will score your essay have seen it all before. These teachers are not going to give high scores to an essay just because it is long, or has five paragraphs, or uses literary examples. The scorers are experts at identifying truly good writing—essays that insightfully develop a point of view with appropriate reasons and examples and use language skillfully.

So what can you do to write a successful SAT essay? Here are some strategies the College Board would like you to consider:

Read the entire assignment. It's all there to help you. Every essay assignment contains a short paragraph about the issue, usually from a specific author or book. Don't ignore this important information in your rush to answer the question. Imagine that you are talking to the author of the paragraph about the issue. What would you say to him or her? Would you argue or agree? What other ideas or examples would you bring up? Answering these questions will help you develop your own point of view.

Don't oversimplify. Developing your point of view doesn't mean coming up with as many examples as you can. Sometimes students cut a great example short to move on to something else, and end up oversimplifying. Take the time to really explain an example; that's the best way to fully develop your point of view. An essay with one or two thoughtful, well-developed reasons or examples is more likely to get a high score than an essay with three short, simplistic examples.

There's nothing wrong with "I." You are asked to develop your point of view on the issue, not give a straight report of the facts. This is your opinion, so feel free to use "I" and give examples that are meaningful to you, even ones from your personal life or experiences. Of course you need to support your ideas appropriately, and show that you can use language well, but remember: the essay is an opportunity for you to say what you think about an important issue that's relevant to your life. So relax and be yourself, and you will do just fine.

Source: College Counseling Sourcebook, 4th Edition