

# SAT Reasoning Test™ Writing Summary

## The Writing Section

In March, May, and June 2005, nearly 1.4 million students took the new SAT®, which included the new writing section.

The SAT writing section measures a student’s ability to develop and express ideas clearly and effectively. It consists of multiple-choice questions and a student-written essay. The multiple-choice section counts for approximately 70 percent and the essay counts for approximately 30 percent of the total raw score, which is used to calculate the 200-to-800 score for the writing section.

The multiple-choice section measures students’ ability to use language in a clear, consistent manner, and to improve a piece of writing through revision and editing. Questions ask students to recognize sentence errors, to choose the best version of a piece of writing, and to improve paragraphs. The essay measures a student’s skill in developing a point of view on an issue.

## The SAT Writing Prompt

### Sample Essay Prompt

On the SAT, students are presented with an essay prompt, such as the example below. Students must first think critically about the issue presented in the prompt and write an original first draft in which they develop their point of view on the issue.

Think carefully about the issue presented in the following excerpt and the assignment below.

The media not only transmit information and culture, they also decide what information is important. In that way, they help to shape culture and values.

Adapted from Alison Bernstein, “Artists Thrive on Freedom and Freedom Thrives on the Arts”

**Assignment:** Do newspapers, magazines, television, radio, movies, the Internet, and other media determine what is important to most people? Plan and write an essay in which you develop your point of view on this issue. Support your position with reasoning and examples taken from your reading, studies, experience, or observations.

## SAT Prompt Development

SAT essay prompts are developed according to the following guidelines:

- They should be accessible to the general test-taking population, including ESL/ELL students.
- They should be relevant to a wide range of fields and interests, and neither require specialized knowledge nor advantage students who have completed a specific course of study.
- They should engage high-school age students while stimulating critical reflection about important topics.
- They should be free of figurative or technical language or specific literary references.
- They should give the students the opportunity to use a broad spectrum of experiences, learning, and ideas to support their points of view.

## Scoring

### Scoring the Essay

The essay is scored holistically, for the total impression it makes. Holistic scoring recognizes that the real merit of a piece of writing cannot be determined simply by adding together values assigned to separate factors such as development, word choice, organization, and adherence to the conventions of written English. It is how these separate factors blend into and become the whole that is important.

- The essay is scored by two readers who independently review and score each essay on a scale of 1 to 6.
- The two scores are added together for a total score of 2 to 12.
- If the readers' scores vary by more than one point, a third reader, who is a scoring leader, scores the essay.

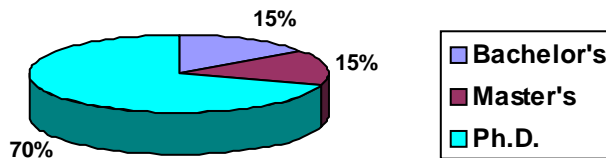
### Essay Length and Scores

While there is a high correlation between essay length and score (such a correlation is to be expected when students are evaluated on their ability to develop a point of view on an issue and support it with evidence) *quantity* does not necessarily mean *quality*.

- Training essays that received a score of 6 were typically longer than essays at other score points, but they were also more skillfully written across the entire range of criteria than essays at other score points.
- Some shorter essays will still effectively and insightfully develop a point of view on an issue, while some longer essays will exhibit weakness such as limited vocabulary, poor organization, or inappropriate word choice.

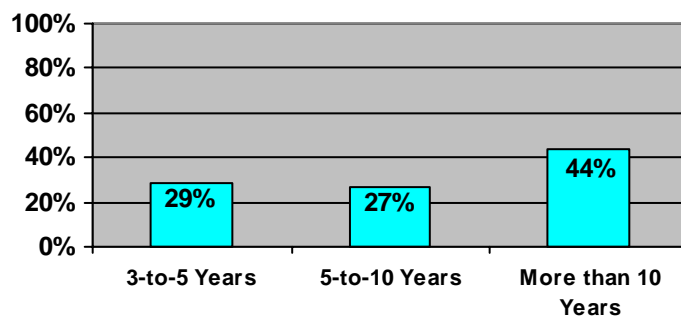
## Who is Scoring the Essays?

Essay Scorers' Educational Qualifications



To qualify to score the SAT essay, an applicant must hold a bachelor's degree or higher, and currently teach, or have recently taught, a high school or college level course that requires a substantial amount of writing. All readers complete a rigorous online training course that familiarizes them with the principles of holistic scoring and teaches them to evaluate essays according to agreed-upon standards.

Essay Scorers' Years of Teaching Experience



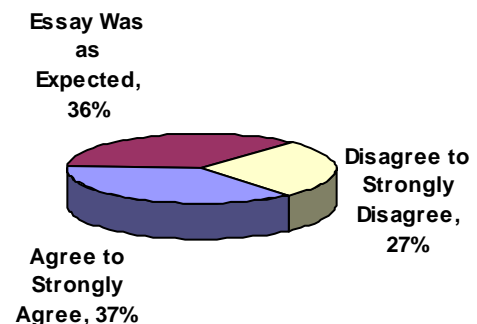
For the 2005 March through June administrations, 85 percent of this group of scorers hold an advanced degree, and 71 percent of this group have taught for 5 years or more.

## What Students Thought of the Essay

After the first several administrations of the new SAT, the SAT Program surveyed students about their testing experience.

When asked if the essay “was easier to write than anticipated,” 73 percent of students agreed or felt that the essay was as they expected. This indicates overall that students were ready for the essay.

The Essay Was Easier to Write than Anticipated



## Strategies for Success on the SAT Essay

How can students write a successful SAT essay? Here is a short article giving some strategies that can be shared with students.

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 short cuts 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.