

PREVIEW

**SAT® Vocabulary:
A New Approach**

Larry Krieger and Erica L. Meltzer

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PREVIEW - SAT VOCABULARY: A NEW APPROACH

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Introduction

A short time ago, in a galaxy not too far away, students just like you took a college admissions exam featuring “obscure” words like *vitriolic*, *sardonic*, and *vituperative*. An organization called ETS tested these words on questions called sentence completions, and teachers and tutors around the world finished each lesson by earnestly urging their students to “study your vocabulary.” Then, something extraordinary occurred. The College Board decided to write the SAT itself and promptly announced that these so-called obscure words and sentence completions would be banished from the SAT. Students cheered and stopped studying long lists of vocabulary words.

These celebrations, however, seem to have been premature. While the College Board did banish all of the sentence completions and traditional vocabulary words, it replaced them with a new set of words—one that was not necessarily less challenging. As we have discovered, many students are uncertain about the meaning of words such as *underpinning* and phrases such as *arrant purposelessness*. And that in turn led us to ask a question: exactly what role does vocabulary play on the new SAT?

This question prompted us to launch an exhaustive (and exhausting) analysis of vocabulary on both the new Reading Test and the new Writing and Language Test. We also took a close look at the new Essay. Our analysis revealed that vocabulary continues to play a significant role on the exam. However, that role is subtler than it was on the old SAT. Instead of being concentrated in 19 sentence completions and a handful of vocabulary-in-context questions, the new SAT vocabulary takes a variety of different forms.

Our findings convinced us that the new SAT requires a new approach to vocabulary. In the past, SAT prep books featured long lists containing hundreds of alphabetized words. This book does not do that. Instead, we have devoted a chapter to the following four specific types of vocabulary questions:

1. Vocabulary-In-Context
2. Passage-Based Vocabulary
3. Commonly Confused Words
4. Transitional Words and Phrases

Each chapter provides carefully sequenced sets of guided and independent practice questions, followed by detailed explanations.

We conclude this book with a special section on the new SAT Essay. Although this part of the test is optional, a majority of students are choosing to write it. In addition to providing a general template for constructing a strong five-paragraph essay, we provide students with specific examples of how to use effective transitions and a strong descriptive vocabulary to achieve a high Writing score. The chapter concludes with a student essay that earned a top score of 24 on an actual exam.

We have written this book with two main goals. First, we strive to present an enjoyable and stimulating course. And second, we strive to teach content and skills that will help all students excel on the SAT.

Good luck on your exam!

Larry Krieger and Erica Meltzer
February 2017

1. Vocabulary in Context

Vocabulary-in-context questions appear on the SAT Reading Test. They are designed to gauge your ability to use contextual clues to determine the meaning of a word or phrase that has multiple definitions, or that is being used in an unusual way within a passage.

You can essentially think of vocabulary-in-context questions as a matching game. The passage will contain key words or phrases that correspond to one of the answers among the choices; your job is to connect those key elements of the passage to the correct answer.

These questions make up a significant portion of the exam—approximately 15%. You can assume that your test will include between seven and nine of them, representing a total of about 50 points on the 800-point scale. Because they appear so often, you must have a clear plan for working through them. We'll go into specific strategies later, but first, let's look at what these questions involve.

The good news is that vocabulary-in-context questions are always phrased the same way:

- As used in line x, “common” most nearly means...

These questions are guided by one major principle: **context determines meaning**.

In some cases, that meaning will be reasonably close to a word's literal or most frequently used definition. In other cases, however, it may be entirely different. As a result, you should be careful not to make too many assumptions based on what a word typically means.

Let's start by considering the meaning of the word *common* in the context of the following sentence:

She didn't see herself as a hero but simply as a **common** citizen.

Since the sentence tells us that the woman didn't see herself as a hero, we are looking for a definition of *common* that means the opposite of “hero.” Within the context of this sentence, *common* means “ordinary”, its usual definition.

Now, consider the meaning of the word *yield* in this short passage:

The launch of a sustained program to develop green alternatives such as wind and solar power will **yield** numerous benefits. It will end our dangerous dependence upon importing oil from nations that are often hostile to our national interests and will spur economic growth by creating new industries and new jobs.

If you're accustomed to encountering the word *yield* in a driving context, your first instinct might be to associate it with letting someone else go ahead of you. However, that meaning doesn't make sense here. Rather, the phrases *numerous benefits* and *spur economic growth* indicate that this word has a much more positive connotation here. It must mean something like “create.”

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Although vocabulary-in-context questions focus on common, everyday words, they can also be surprisingly subtle and tricky. As a result, you should not underestimate them. In some cases, the answer choices may consist of four relatively similar words, in which case you will need to distinguish very carefully among them in order to determine the correct option.

Another challenging aspect of studying for vocabulary-in-context questions is the fact that they tend to be quite random. Unfortunately, there is no set list of words from which questions are repeatedly drawn. (That said, we have included a list of words commonly used in their second meanings at the end of this chapter). The good news is that there are a number of strategies that can help you work through these questions effectively and minimize the chance that you will second-guess yourself.

Recognizing Context Clues

Although it might seem obvious, the “context” aspect of vocabulary-in-context is absolutely key to approaching these questions. More than anything, the ability to identify context clues will help you understand what type of word you are looking for and prevent you from getting sidetracked—either by meanings you normally associate with a word or by plausible-sounding distractors that don’t quite fit the definition required by the passage.

So how do you know what to focus on? Let’s look at some examples.

Example #1

Auto dealers in Hawaii support the transition to renewable energy, but they believe it will take a massive advertising campaign by the state to encourage people to buy vehicles powered by
5 alternative fuels. Hawaii’s residents ranked second in the nation in 2015 with 2.94 electric vehicles for every 1,000 residents, just behind California, according to the U.S. Department of Energy. In contrast, tackling the fossil fuels used in airplanes will
10 have to wait. Hawaii lies nearly 2,500 miles from the continental United States, so air travel is **critical** to the state’s tourism industry; however, long flights require energy in a dense form that is currently only available in fossil fuels.

1

As used in line 11, “critical” most nearly means

The first thing to notice is that this question concerns a word located at the very end of the passage. As a result, you might not be quite sure where to look for clues. After all, the passage contains a fair amount of information, so the information you need could be located almost anywhere, right? Well, actually, probably not.

In reality, **clues to most vocabulary-in-context words will appear fairly close to the word itself: if not in the same sentence, then in the sentence before or after. Those are the sentences you should plan to focus on, regardless of how long a passage is.**

In this case, what do we learn from the sentence in which the word *critical* appears? That Hawaii is nearly 2,500 miles from the continental U.S.

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Further Strategies

In addition to using context clues, there are some additional strategies that can help you narrow down answers and avoid getting distracted either by trick answers or by your pre-existing knowledge.

1) Cross out the word in the passage

If you consistently get distracted by the usual meaning of the word in the passage, you may find it helpful to take your pencil and quickly scratch that word out in your test. Removing it from your line of vision will allow you focus on the meaning in context and override any existing associations.

2) Plug in your own word and then find the answer that matches

This is often a highly effective strategy, one that can help you rapidly zero in on the answer and prevent you from getting fooled by plausible-sounding but not-quite-right distractors.

But a **warning**: in order for this strategy to be effective, you must work quickly. If you need more than a few seconds, you'll probably end up wasting too much time and overthinking things.

The other potential stumbling block is that even if you supply an accurate synonym, the correct answer may be just different enough that you have trouble connecting your word to the right answer. If you are generally a strong reader, however, this should not pose a serious problem.

3) Play positive/negative, then plug in

If you can determine from context whether the word is positive or negative, you can sometimes eliminate an answer or two. You can then plug the remaining answers back into the sentence and see which one makes the most sense. In rare cases, you may even be able to eliminate three options and jump directly to the answer.

This strategy is ideal for a question like Example #1 on p. 7. As we determined from the context (*Hawaii lies nearly 2,500 miles from the continental United States, so air travel is critical to the state's tourism industry*), the word *critical* must mean something like "important." That's clearly a positive word.

Now, let's just reconsider the answer choices on their own:

- A) insecure. (negative)
- B) weak. (negative)
- C) essential. (positive)
- D) resistant. (negative)

The only positive option is *essential*, which is also the answer.

4) Plug each answer choice into the sentence

If playing positive/negative is not helpful way to approach a question, or you are having difficulty plugging in your own word, plugging each word into the passage is another way to prevent yourself from getting stuck. Frequently, you will be able to hear that a particular choice does not sound correct or have the proper meaning within the context of a sentence. The only potential downside is that sometimes, as is true for #1, the right answer is not a word you would think to use. As a result, you might talk yourself out of choosing it because you think it sounds too odd.

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Natural and Social Science Passages

Each science passage describes the aims, methods, and results of a scientific investigation. As a result, these passages and their accompanying questions all employ a distinctive vocabulary that focuses on the language of evidence and experimentation.

In the section below, we define 25 of these key words and illustrate how College Board test-writers use and test them. We will also provide helpful tips that will enable you to save time by going directly to the correct answer.

1. **Hypothesis** – a proposed insight or explanation

A **hypothesis** is a proposed insight that has not been tested or verified. Science passages typically begin with a **hypothesis** that is then revised, challenged, strengthened, and sometimes confirmed. In one passage, for example, chemical ecologists **hypothesized** that enhancing the scent of Texas gourd flowers would attract more desired squash bees while repelling unwanted striped cucumber beetles. To their surprise, squash bees were indifferent to the fragrance-enhanced blossoms. This unexpected finding forced the chemical ecologists to revise their **hypothesis**.

2. **Empirical** – derived from experiment and observation

Empirical evidence is data derived from experiments and observations rather than abstract theories. The chemical ecologists described in the previous example tested their hypothesis by conducting a carefully controlled experiment in which they collected **empirical** data from 168 Texas gourd vines. Scientists are reluctant to accept a hypothesis when **empirical** information is not available. For instance, a passage on the Higgs Boson explains that the scientific community initially rejected Higgs's ideas because they rested on speculation and not **empirical** evidence.

3. **Central claim** – primary assertion

College Board test writers frequently use the phrase **central claim**. This phrase appears often in questions, which may ask you to identify a **central claim** supported by data in a table. Don't let this phrase confuse you. *Central* means "main" or "primary," and a *claim* is an assertion. So a **central claim** = the main argument or hypothesis discussed in a passage.

4. **Counterclaim** – counterargument

A **counterclaim** is a counterargument made to rebut (argue against) a claim discussed previously in the passage. Science passages often include a **counterclaim** posed by a dissenting scientist—that is, a scientist who rejects the main theory discussed in the passage. For example, in a passage about the origins of tectonic plates, one geochemist contended that the rocks studied by other geochemists were too old and deformed to provide reliable data.

5. **Hypothetical** – theoretical, based on speculation

Hypothetical describes an idea or situation that only exists as a theoretical concept. For example, time travel is a **hypothetical** phenomenon: it could exist, but right now it is only possible in science fiction movies. Although they are not real, **hypothetical** situations can challenge scientists to explore new hypotheses about puzzling natural phenomena.

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Characteristics of Correct Answers: Same Idea, Different Words

Identifying correct answers is the only way to earn points on the Reading Test. So what are the characteristics of a correct answer? Let's begin your quest for correct answers with the following paragraph and question:

The efforts by women to gain equality in the scientific workplace began in the early twentieth century. The women who began undertaking careers in science had little support from any part of the society in which they lived. They had to struggle alone against a male-dominated scientific community. Even talented female scientists were forced to accept subordinate roles as assistants in large bureaucratic organizations. As a result, they had little voice in making key decisions.

1

What point does the author make about the status of aspiring female scientists in the early twentieth century?

- A) They were more ambitious than their male counterparts.
- B) They had more rights than their male counterparts.
- C) They depended upon men for their safety and job security.
- D) They were forced to accept subordinate roles as assistants.

Did you have any trouble finding the correct answer? Probably not. Choice D) provides the correct answer by giving you a direct quote from the passage.

Now, reread the paragraph and answer the following question:

The efforts by women to gain equality in the scientific workplace began in the early twentieth century. The women who began undertaking careers in science had little support from any part of the society in which they lived. They had to struggle alone against a male-dominated scientific community. Even talented female scientists were forced to accept subordinate roles as assistants in large bureaucratic organizations. As a result, they had little voice in making key decisions.

1

What point does the author make about the status of aspiring female scientists in the early twentieth century?

- A) They were more ambitious than their male counterparts.
- B) They had more rights than their male counterparts.
- C) They depended upon men for their safety and job security.
- D) They were compelled to accept inferior roles.

As you can see, the question here is identical to the one above, with the exception of Choice D). Although choice D) is worded differently, it is still correct. The phrase *compelled to accept inferior roles* is a restatement of the textual statement *forced to accept subordinate* (see Word #26) *roles as assistants*. *Compelled* = forced, *inferior* = subordinate. Same idea, different words.

The Golden Rule: The Answer is in the Passage

The example above illustrates an extremely important rule: every SAT Reading Test question has just one objective answer that restates relevant ideas or information from the passage. Always remember this golden rule when you are answering passage-based questions: **the answer is the answer because it is supported by the passage**. This support will take the form of key words, phrases, and examples. Never, ever go outside the passage to find support for your answers.

Evidence-Based Pairs: Introduction

The SAT Reading Test now includes a significant number of new combination questions known as Evidence-Based Pairs. The pair begins with a normal question asking you about an aspect of the passage. It is followed by a question that always asks, *Which choice provides the best evidence for the answer to the previous question?* The four answer choices consist of quotations from the passage, one of which will contain the information necessary to answer the first question.

Each Reading Test passage includes one and usually two sets of Evidence-Based Pairs. Our analysis of these questions indicates that they are in fact a subtle and sophisticated way to test your ability to identify and understand the meaning of selected vocabulary words. These paired questions offer you both rewards and risks. If you understand and recognize the key vocabulary words, you can easily add two points to your raw score. However, if you misunderstand the questions you risk losing both points. Don't worry! We have devised a three-step strategy designed to help you master the Evidence-Based Pairs.

Let's look at an example:

Political scientists have carefully studied the impact of Dr. King's life and speeches on public attitudes towards civil rights. The opening of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial in Washington, D.C., on August 22, 2011 provided an excellent opportunity to continue this investigative tradition. Thousands of people visit the memorial each day to pay tribute to Dr. King and to honor his vision of a just society. After admiring the thirty-foot statue of Dr. King, most visitors stand in front of the Inscription Wall and reverently read the inscribed excerpts from his most inspiring sermons and public addresses. Our team of public opinion experts began their research by interviewing a random selection of visitors to gauge how visiting the memorial affected their view of civil rights in America.

1

The passage indicates that visitors approach Dr. King's words with an attitude of

- A) detached indifference.
- B) open disapproval.
- C) quiet skepticism.
- D) great admiration.

2

Which choice provides the best evidence for the answer to the previous question?

- A) Lines 1-3 ("Political...rights")
- B) Lines 3-6 ("The opening...tradition")
- C) Lines 9-13 ("After...addresses")
- D) Lines 13-16 ("Our...America")

Step 1: Begin by carefully determining what the first question is asking. The key word *attitude* tells you what to look for in the passage.

Step 2: Next, read each of the four sentences referenced in the answer choices. As you read each choice, look for a key word or phrase that describes the "attitude" of visitors as they approached Dr. King's famous words. The key word *reverently* clearly describes their attitude.

Step 3: Now match the meaning of *reverently* with one of the answer choices in the first question. As you learned in our list of vocabulary words, *reverently* (see Word #34) means "with great admiration." You have a match! The answers to our two questions are D) and C).

3. Commonly Confused Words

“The difference between the almost right word and the right word is really a large matter. ’tis the difference between the lightning bug and the lightning.”

-Mark Twain

There’s no question that English can be very tricky sometimes. It’s filled with **homophones**—words that have slightly different spellings but that are pronounced similarly or identically. When people speak quickly, as is often the case in everyday conversation, these words can be impossible to tell apart. But while errors can easily be hidden in speech, they are far more apparent in writing.

For example, take a look at the following paragraph:

Before the first transatlantic cables were manufactured, communication between North America and Europe was limited. Accept for ships, which took weeks to cross the ocean, there was no way to relay messages between continents. Making matters worse, severe winter storms could have an averse affect on correspondence, delaying ships for weeks and depriving individuals and companies of excess to family members and business associates. Five attempts to lay a cable were made between 1857 and 1866, but workers were unable to make all of the pieces cohere to the bottom of the ocean; there was always apart that broke away. In 1866, however, a lasting connection was finally achieved. The new cable immediately effected communication times, assuring that people could send a message and receive a response the same day.

Did you notice anything odd as you read this paragraph? It includes a number of commonly confused words tested on recent (P)SATs. Don’t worry if you looked past them—that’s the point!

Now take a look at the corrected version:

Before the first transatlantic cables were manufactured, communication between North America and Europe was limited. **Except** for ships, which took weeks to cross the ocean, there was no way to relay messages between continents. Making matters worse, severe winter storms could have an **adverse effect** on correspondence, delaying ships for weeks and depriving individuals and companies of **access** to family members and business associates. Five attempts to lay a cable were made between 1857 and 1866, but workers were unable to make all of the pieces **adhere** to the bottom of the ocean; there was always **a part** that broke away. In 1866, however, a lasting connection was finally achieved. The new cable immediately **affected** communication times, **ensuring** that people could send a message and receive a response in same day.

The good news is that you’ll never see anything like this example on the (P)SAT. You will encounter no more than two questions testing this concept on the Writing test. More good news: the SAT often tests the same **limited group** of homophones over and over again. If you want to be prepared and not risk losing easy points, however, you must be familiar with the top contenders for this error.

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Affect vs. Effect

Of all the word pairs tested on the SAT, **affect vs. effect** tends to give students the most trouble. So naturally College Board test writers devote a number of questions to this troublesome pair of words. But don't worry! This section will help you ace affect vs. effect questions.

Affect is a verb meaning “to influence or have an impact on something.” For example, the forecast for a big winter storm **affected** the plans of people throughout the entire metropolitan area.

Effect is usually a noun* meaning “the result or consequence of something.” If *a/an/the* appears before the word, the answer is *effect*. *Effect* is often followed by *on* because things have “an effect on” other things. For example, the Boston Tea Party had an immediate **effect on** relations between the colonies and Great Britain; it was **effective** (adjective form of *effect*) in getting the King's attention.

Although these words can be very confusing, you can also use the following mnemonic trick to help you keep them straight. Think **RAVEN**: Remember **A**ffect is a **V**erb and **E**ffect is a **N**oun.

Guided Practice:

Example #1

Incorrect: The accumulation of oxygen in the atmosphere **effects** the amount of sunlight that reaches the ground.

Correct: The accumulation of oxygen in the atmosphere **affects** the amount of sunlight that reaches the ground.

The subject of this sentence is *the accumulation of oxygen*. Note that *affect* is a verb since *the accumulation of oxygen...affects*.

Example #2

Incorrect: The accumulation of oxygen in the atmosphere has **an affect on** the amount of sunlight that reaches the ground.

Correct: The accumulation of oxygen in the atmosphere has **an effect on** the amount of sunlight that reaches the ground.

Effect is correct because *an* must come before a noun, and the word in question is followed by *on*.

Example #3

Classical computers encode information as bits that can be in one of two states: zero or one. In contrast, quantum computers are composed of “qubits” that can be in both states simultaneously. These qubits have the **[effect/affect]** of allowing computers to essentially perform many calculations at once.

Because *the* appears before the word, a noun is required. *Effect* is therefore the only possible answer.

***Note:** There are situations in which *affect* is used as a noun and *effect* as a verb, but the College Board is not interested in testing these exceptions, and they should not be a concern for you here.

4. Transitional Words and Phrases

How many times have you used the words *for example* and *however* in your essays for school? Most writers use these common words on a regular basis. Now let us ask you another question: How many times have you used the words *in fact*, *conversely*, and *consequently* in your essays? You probably use these words a lot less frequently than you use *for example* and *however*.

For example, *however*, *in fact*, *conversely*, and *consequently* are all transitional words. A transition is a change or shift, and that is exactly the function these words perform in a sentence. They signal a change or a shift in an author's presentation of thoughts.

College Board test writers are aware of the important role transitional words play in good writing. That's why the SAT Writing and Language test typically includes 4-6 questions designed to test your understanding of transitional words and phrases.

We have good news and bad news about transitional words. The good news is that the College Board draws its correct answers from a pool of only about 25 words. The bad news is that you must have a precise understanding of what these words mean and how they are used in a sentence.

Dwayne “the Rock” Johnson to the Rescue

Is it possible for Dwayne “the Rock” Johnson to help you deliver a “people’s elbow” to the SAT transitional questions? At first glance, this is an absurd question. After all, Johnson is a former wrestling champion and a current action adventure movie star. Wouldn't a detailed glossary of terms be more helpful than the Rock's “people’s elbow?” Before you dismiss Johnson as an irrelevant distraction, bear with us and read the following passage about him.

Dwayne “The Rock” Johnson is now one of the world's best-known and most highly paid celebrities. He is a former WWE wrestling champion and a star in the hugely successful *Fast and Furious* movie franchise. **In addition**, *People Magazine* named Johnson 2016's “World's Sexiest Man.”

Success has not always come easily to Johnson. As a promising football player at the University of Miami, Johnson hoped to have a professional career playing in the NFL. **However**, an injury ended his dream and left him dejected and impoverished. “I looked in my pocket,” Johnson remembers, “and I had seven bucks to my name.”

Today, Johnson oversees an entertainment company appropriately named Seven Bucks Productions. He is busy writing a second autobiography, preparing new movie projects, and creating a YouTube channel. Johnson's popularity is soaring. He is a charismatic entertainer with a global reach that extends to more than 100 million followers on various platforms. **Accordingly**, Johnson is now shifting his attention to foreign markets because he knows the pivotal role they play in the successful career of a contemporary movie star.

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The short passage on the previous page contains interesting details about Johnson's career. Each paragraph features a key transitional word that directs the flow of ideas. In the first paragraph, the transitional phrase *in addition* continues the paragraph's line of thought by providing another example of why Johnson is one of the world's *best known and most highly paid celebrities*.

The second paragraph also uses a key transitional word. Did you notice how the word *however* signals a reversal in the sequences of events in Johnson's career? It provides a contrast between Johnson's hopes for a professional football career and the disastrous impact of his injury.

And finally, the third paragraph uses the transitional word *accordingly* to logically connect two thoughts. The paragraph begins by describing Johnson's current activities and soaring popularity. We learn that he has over 100 million followers. So how will he use his popularity? The transitional word *accordingly* captures the causal relationship between Johnson's popularity and his goal of reaching an international market.

Types and Importance of Transitional Relationships

The words *in addition*, *however*, and *accordingly* illustrate three basic transitional relationships tested in the SAT Writing and Language section.

- *In addition* and words like *for example* are part of a group of transitional words that signal a **continuation** or extension of a thought.
- *However* and words like *instead* and *conversely* are part of a group of transitional words that signal a **reversal** or contrast between two thoughts.
- *Accordingly* and words like *therefore* and *consequently* are part of a group of transitional words that signal a **cause-and-effect relationship** between two thoughts.

The 4-5 transition questions comprise the largest single cluster of items on the Writing and Language test. Taken together, they are worth about 10% of your Writing and Language score.

The chart on the following page provides a list of common transitions along with their purposes.

5. Key Essay Vocabulary

If you choose to write the SAT Essay, you will be given 50 minutes to read and evaluate a 650-750 word passage from a contemporary non-fiction work. The author or authors will examine a current issue, such as supporting public libraries, providing funding for NASA space projects, or reducing dependence on energy consuming air-conditioners. Your job is neither to agree nor disagree with the author's point of view. Instead, you must analyze how the author uses persuasive devices to build an argument.

Two readers will score your essay. They will award your essay between 1 and 4 points in three categories: Reading, Analysis, and Writing. Each reader can give your essay a score ranging from a low of 3 to a high of 12. The combined score of the two readers will thus range from a minimum of 6 to a maximum of 24.

This chapter is not intended to provide you with a detailed template for how to evaluate the passage or write a complete essay. Instead, our goal is to focus on two key areas that will significantly boost your score. First, we will summarize seven key points about the Essay task. Second, we will provide you with a unique discussion of how to earn the highest possible score on the Writing component.

Write the Essay

The SAT Essay is optional and does not count toward your 1600 score. You can leave after completing the Reading, Writing, and Math sections. So, should you stay or should you go? Some colleges require the Essay, but many do not. If you are absolutely certain the colleges you are applying to do NOT require an Essay score, your decision is straightforward—GO! Similarly, if you are absolutely certain that the colleges you are applying to DO require an Essay score, your decision is also straightforward—STAY!

The problem is that like most students, you will probably apply to a large number of colleges, some of which will most likely require an Essay score. **It is important to know that you cannot take the Essay separately from the rest of the SAT.** Given these facts, we strongly recommend that you write the Essay.

The College Board Gives You the Thesis

The author's central argument is not a secret. In fact, you do not even need to read the passage to identify it! Begin by immediately going to the box at the end of the passage. The first sentence will clearly state the author's main claim. Here is an example: "Write an essay in which you explain how Jimmy Carter builds an argument to persuade his audience that the Artic National Wildlife Refuge should not be developed for industry."

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Identify the Author's Main Persuasive Devices

The College Board chooses passages that employ a number of persuasive devices. The following six devices are the major ways authors build their arguments. While all six may not be presented in a given essay, you can count on finding at least four.

1. Providing Facts and Statistics

- Helps the author define the scope of a problem.
- Grounds the author's argument in reality, thus establishing a firm foundation for the main claim.
- Gives the author credibility and makes him or her seem like an authority.

2. Addressing a Counterargument

- Helps establish the author's credibility as someone who recognizes opposing points of view.
- Demonstrates that the author's central claim is well-thought-out and not one-sided.

3. Recalling a Personal Anecdote

- Demonstrates the author's personal connection to the issue.
- Enables readers to make a vicarious connection to the author's central claim.

4. Citing Respected Authorities

- Demonstrates that the author's argument is well-researched.
- Builds trust in the author's argument.
- Strengthens the author's credibility by showing that s/he is not the only one who advocates a policy position.

5. Appealing to the Reader's Emotions

- Uses emotionally charged words to evoke strong feelings.
- Develops an emotional connection with or sense of pathos toward the author's position.
- Engages the reader by arousing feelings of alarm, guilt, enthusiasm, or patriotism.
- Arouses a feeling of alarm to alert readers to the seriousness of a problem.

6. Crafting a Logical Argument

- Demonstrates the connection between the evidence and the author's central claim.
- Identifies the major benefits that can be achieved by supporting the author's central claim.
- Demonstrates a cause-and-effect relationship between what is happening now and what could happen in the future.
- Leads the reader to conclude that the benefits of the author's recommendation outweigh the drawbacks of doing nothing.