



The Ivy Education Center

LEAGUE

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SAT Essay Prompts (October 2008 - June 2009)

June 2009

Prompt 1

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

The discovery that someone we admire has done something wrong is always disappointing and disillusioning. Yet even when people we consider heroes have been tarnished by their faults, they are no less valuable than people who appear perfect. When we learn that an admired person, even one who is seemingly perfect, has behaved in less than admirable ways, we discover a complex truth: great ideas and great deeds come from imperfect people like ourselves.

Assignment:

Do we benefit from learning about the flaws of people we admire and respect? 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.

Prompt 2

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

Some people say you should be content with what you have and accept who you are. But it is possible that too much self-acceptance can turn into self-satisfied lack of ambition. People should always strive to improve themselves and to have more in their lives—friends, things, opportunities. After all, where would we be if great people, both in history and in our own time, did not try to have more and to improve themselves?

Assignment:

Is it best for people to accept who they are and what they have, or should people always strive to better themselves? 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.

Prompt 3

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

So-called common sense determines what people should wear, whom they should respect, which rules they should follow, and what kind of life they should lead. Common sense is considered obvious and natural, too sensible to question. But people's common sense decisions may turn out to be wrong, even if they are thought to be correct according to the judgment of vast majorities of people.

Adapted from Alain de Botton, *The Consolations of Philosophy*

responsible.

Assignment:

Can common sense be trusted and accepted, or should it be questioned? 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.

May 2009*Prompt 1*

Think carefully about the issue presented in the following excerpt and the assignment below. There are good reasons to pay attention to people who are older or more experienced than we are, even if their opinions on important issues are very different from ours. Of course, not every person older than us is worth learning from, while many young people are. But if the only people we listen to are our age and are likely to see things the same way we do, we will miss out on something important.

Assignment:

Should we pay more attention to people who are older and more experienced than we are? 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.

Prompt 2

Think carefully about the issue presented in the following excerpt and the assignment below. Good decision making generally requires people to think carefully and logically and to pay attention to practical details. However, people who depend on their feelings and emotions to make important decisions are not likely to spend hours gathering information, making lists, considering all possible outcomes, and so forth. When comparing the advantages or disadvantages of one course of action to another, these people ask themselves, "What do my feelings tell me?"

Assignment:

Should people let their feelings guide them when they make important decisions? 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.

Prompt 3

Think carefully about the issue presented in the following excerpt and the assignment below. Thanks to great advancements in technology, we live today in a world in which knowledge is more readily available to greater numbers of people than ever before in history. Having more and better technology, however, has not made people wiser or more understanding. Indeed, people are so overloaded with information today that they have become less, rather than more, able to make sense of the world around them than our ancestors ever were.

Assignment:

Has today's abundance of information only made it more difficult for us to understand the world around us? 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.

Prompt 4

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

People define themselves by work, by what they “do.” When one person asks another. “What do you do?” the answer always refers to a job or profession: “I’m a doctor, an accountant, a farmer.” I’ve often wondered what would happen if we changed the question to, “Who are you?” or, “What kind of person are you?” or even, “What do you do for fun?”

Adapted from Stephan Rechtschaffen, Time Shifting

Assignment:

Are people best defined by what they do? 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.

March 2009

Prompt 1

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

Many people believe that being honest and honorable limits their options, their opportunities, their very ability to succeed. Unfortunately, in today's me-first culture, ethics may be the only thing people choose to live without! They believe they have only two choices: (1) to win by doing whatever it takes, even if it is wrong, or (2) to be ethical and therefore lose. Few people set out to be dishonest, but nobody wants to lose.

Adapted from John C. Maxwell, There's No Such Thing as "Business" Ethics

Assignment:

Does being ethical make it hard to be successful? 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.

Prompt 2

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

Whatever happened to good manners? Many books and articles have been written about the lack of common courtesy and old-fashioned politeness in today's society. From spoiled children acting out in restaurants to so-called experts yelling at each other on cable news shows, people seem less concerned with good manners and civilized behavior than ever before. On the other hand, if people really want to change the world for the better, they have to risk being seen as impolite or uncivil.

Assignment:

Is it sometimes necessary to be impolite? 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.

Prompt 3

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

We define "courage" too loosely. Real courage is conscious self-sacrifice, either for the sake of others or to uphold a value. But we typically identify a single aspect of courage—daring or honesty, for example—as the entire virtue. We even say it takes courage to differ from the mainstream in one's preferences in fashion or music or to speak out about certain wrongs. Such acts, though admirable, are not necessarily courageous.

Adapted from John McCain with Mark Salter, *Why Courage Matters*

Assignment:

Should we limit our use of the term "courage" to acts in which people risk their own well-being for the sake of others or to uphold a value? 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.

January 2009

Prompt 1

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

Planning lets people impose order on the chaotic processes of making or doing something new. Too much planning, however, can lead people to follow the same predetermined course of action, to do things the same way they were done before. Creative thinking is about breaking free from the way that things have always been. That is why it is vital for people to know the difference between good planning and too much planning.

Adapted from Twyla Tharp, *The Creative Habit*

Assignment:

Does planning interfere with creativity? 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.

Prompt 2

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

Most people underestimate their own abilities. They tend to remember their failures more vividly than their successes, and for this reason they have unrealistically low expectations about what they are capable of. Those individuals who distinguish themselves through great accomplishments are usually no more talented than the average person: they simply set higher standards for themselves, since they have higher expectations about what they can do.

Assignment:

Do highly accomplished people achieve more than others mainly because they expect more of themselves? 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.

Prompt 3

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

People are taught that they should not go back on their decisions. In fact, our society supports the notion that to change your mind is evidence of weakness and unreliability, leading many people to say, "Once I decide, I decide!" But why do people make such a statement? If factors, feelings, and ideas change, isn't the ability to make a new decision evidence of flexibility, adaptability, and strength?

Adapted from Theodore I. Rubin, *Compassion and Self-Hate*

Assignment:

Should people change their decisions when circumstances change, or is it best for them to stick with their original decisions? 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.

Prompt 4

The history of human achievement is filled with stories of people who persevere, refusing to give up in the struggle to meet their goals. Artists and scientists, for instance, may struggle for years without any apparent progress or reward before they finally succeed. However, it is important to recognize that perseverance does not always yield beneficial results.

Adapted from Robert H. Lauer and Jeanette C. Lauer, *Watersheds*

Assignment:

Is striving to achieve a goal always the best course of action, or should people give up if they are not making progress? 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.

December 2008

Prompt 1

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

The biggest difference between people who succeed at any difficult undertaking and those who do not is not ability but persistence. Many extremely talented people give up when obstacles arise. After all, who wants to face failure? It is often said about highly successful people that they are just ordinary individuals who kept on trying, who did not give up.

Adapted from Tom Morris, *True Success: A New Philosophy of Excellence*

Assignment:

Is persistence more important than ability in determining a person's success? 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.

Prompt 2

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

Whether it is a child pouting to get ice cream or a politician using emotionally charged language to influence potential supporters, all people use some form of acting to achieve whatever ends they seek. Public figures of all kinds would have short, unsuccessful careers without the aid of acting. Acting—consciously assuming a role in order to achieve some purpose—is a tool people use to protect their interests and gain advantages in every aspect of life.

Adapted from Marlon Brando, Foreword to *The Technique of Acting* by Stella Adler

Assignment:

Is acting an essential part of everyday life? 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.

Prompt 3

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

When people are very enthusiastic—always willing and eager to meet new challenges or give undivided support to ideas or projects—they are likely to be rewarded. They often work harder and enjoy their work more than do those who are more restrained. But there are limits to how enthusiastic people should be. People should always question and doubt, since too much enthusiasm can prevent people from considering better ideas, goals, or courses of action.

Assignment:

Can people have too much enthusiasm? 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.

Prompt 4

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

Not yet available.

Assignment:

Do people help others only to help themselves? 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.

November 2008

Prompt 1

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

If an old tradition is still around today, we can assume that it deserves to remain in existence. Well-established customs, styles that are still popular, and ideas that people still find sensible survive because these traditions are strong enough to survive. Continuity guarantees quality. Old-fashioned hospitality, old-fashioned politeness, old-fashioned honor in business—all these traditions have qualities of survival. Fortunately, these will always be with us.

Adapted from Jacob Braude, *Jacob Braude's Second Encyclopedia of Stories, Quotations, and Anecdotes*

Assignment:

Do all established traditions deserve to remain in existence? 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.

Prompt 2

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

We cannot appreciate what we have for its own merit. We see ourselves as fortunate only when we have as much as, or more than, other people. Thus, our judgment of what represents an appropriate limit on anything—on wealth or status or possessions—is never arrived at independently. Instead, we compare ourselves to other people, always wondering if what we have is enough.

Adapted from Alain de Botton, *Status Anxiety*

Assignment:

Do people need to compare themselves with others in order to appreciate what they have? 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.

Prompt 3

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

On the surface, censorship seems objectionable because it limits our freedom. But all societies need to suppress or restrict information that is offensive or potentially harmful. People depend on the establishment of some limits, some way of making distinctions between what is right and what is wrong. Censorship is actually beneficial to a society because it helps to establish ideals of what is proper in such areas as art, music, and literature.

Assignment:

Should society limit people's exposure to some kinds of information or forms of expression? 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.

Prompt 4

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

Independent people—those who rely on themselves rather than on others — get what they want through their own efforts. Interdependent people combine their efforts with the efforts of others to achieve their goals. To be most effective, people need to be interdependent. People who do not think and act interdependently may achieve individual success, but they will not be good leaders or team players.

Adapted from Stephen R. Covey, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*

Assignment:

Is it necessary for people to combine their efforts with those of others in order to be most

effective? 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.

October 2010

Prompt 1

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

We are frequently told that compromise is the best way for people to work out their differences. When people compromise, with each side losing a little in order to reach a satisfactory agreement, both sides can continue to live in harmony. However, compromise can work only when the issues at stake are not that important. Compromise does not work when there is a genuine difference of opinion about strongly held principles or ideas.

Assignment:

Is compromise always the best way to resolve a conflict? 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.

Prompt 2

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

People usually assume that the quality of a decision is directly related to the time and effort that went into making it. We believe that we are always better off gathering as much information as possible and then spending as much time as possible analyzing that information. But there are times when making a quick judgment is the best thing to do. Decisions made quickly can be as good as decisions made slowly and cautiously.

Adapted from Malcolm Gladwell, *Blink: The Power of Thinking Without Thinking*

Assignment:

Are decisions made quickly just as good as decisions made slowly and carefully? 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.

Prompt 3

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

It is unrealistic to think that any group of people—a family, a committee, a company, a city—can function peacefully and productively without some kind of authority. The needs and interests of the individuals who make up any group are too varied for its members to operate as a unit without having someone to make the final decisions. Somebody has to be in charge; somebody has to be ultimately responsible.

Assignment:

Can a group of people function effectively without someone being in charge? 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.

Prompt 4

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

Governments, businesses, groups, or people reveal themselves by how they act, not by what they say. A company may claim to value its customers, or a politician may claim to be committed to a cause, but what do their actions say? People or groups may state what they wish were true or what they think others want to hear, but it is their actions that reveal their true values.

Assignment:

Do actions, not words, reveal a person or group's true attitudes and intentions? 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.