

These draft test specifications and sample items and other materials are just that — drafts. As such, they will systematically evolve over time. These sample items are meant to illustrate the shifts in the redesigned SAT® and are not a full reflection of what will be tested. Actual items used on the exam are going through extensive reviews and pretesting to help ensure that they are clear and fair, and that they measure what is intended. The test specifications as well as the research foundation defining what is measured on the test will continue to be refined based on ongoing research.

## Essay Analyzing a Source

Students' abilities to analyze source texts and, more broadly, to understand and make effective use of evidence in reading and writing are widely recognized as central to college and career readiness. National curriculum surveys conducted by the College Board and others demonstrate that postsecondary instructors rate high in importance such capacities as summarizing a text's central argument or main idea, identifying rhetorical strategies used in a text, and recognizing logical flaws in an author's argument, as well as writing analyses and evaluations of texts, using supporting details and examples, and developing a logical argument. Institutions such as Duke University, Cornell University, Texas A&M University, and the University of California, Berkeley have devoted considerable resources to developing the skills of source analysis and evidence use in their students.<sup>1</sup>

The redesigned SAT® prominently emphasizes source analysis and evidence use in the context of writing on the Essay (which is optional), where students must write effectively in response to a provided text. The basic aim of the Essay is to determine whether students can demonstrate college- and career-readiness proficiency in reading, writing, and analysis by comprehending a high-quality source text and producing a cogent and clear written analysis of that text supported by critical reasoning and evidence drawn from the source. While the source text will vary from administration to administration, the Essay prompt itself is highly consistent. Such transparent consistency allows students, in their preparation and during the actual test, to focus squarely on source analysis and use of evidence in the specific text they are to analyze.

All passages are taken from high-quality, previously published sources. While the specific style and content of the passages inevitably vary to some extent given the College Board's commitment to using authentic texts with this task, the passages take the general form of what might be called arguments written for a broad audience. That is, the passages examine ideas, debates, trends, and the like in the arts, the sciences, and civic, cultural, and political life that have wide interest, relevance, and accessibility to a general readership. Passages tend not to be simple pro/con debates on issues but instead strive to convey nuanced views on complex subjects. They are notable, too, for their use of evidence, logical reasoning, and/or stylistic and persuasive elements. Text complexity of

the passages is carefully monitored to ensure that the reading challenge is appropriate and comparable across administrations but not an insuperable barrier to students responding to the source text under timed conditions. Prior knowledge of the passages' topics is not expected or required.

For the Essay, students are asked to explain how the author of the accompanying passage builds an argument to persuade an audience. Students are informed that they may analyze such aspects of the passage as the author's use of evidence, reasoning, and stylistic and persuasive elements but that they may also or instead choose other features to analyze; students are further advised that, in all cases, they should center their discussion on those aspects that are most salient to the passage in question. Responses are not to focus on whether students agree or disagree with the claims made in the passage but rather on how the author builds an argument to persuade an audience. In broad terms, responses are evaluated for demonstrated comprehension of the source text, the quality of analysis of that source text, and the quality of the writing in the response. Students' responses should demonstrate such dimensions as a careful understanding of the passage; effective, selective use of textual evidence to develop and support points; clear organization and expression of ideas; and a command of the conventions of standard written English.

In a break from the past and present of much standardized direct-writing assessment, the Essay task is not designed to elicit students' subjective opinions but rather to assess whether students are able to comprehend an appropriately challenging source text and to craft an effective written analysis of that text. Rather than merely asking students to emulate the form of evidence use by drawing on, say, their own experiences or imaginations, the Essay requires students to make purposeful, substantive use of textual evidence in a way that can be evaluated objectively. The Essay also connects reading and writing in a manner that both embodies and reinforces the interdependency of these literacy skills. Considered together with the multiple-choice SAT Reading and SAT Writing and Language Tests, the Essay response gives rich, detailed insight into students' reading and writing achievement and their readiness for college and careers.

While the College Board remains steadfast in its commitment to the importance of analytical writing for all students, two factors have contributed to its decision to no longer make the Essay a required part of the SAT. First, while the writing work that students do in the Evidence-Based Reading and Writing section of the exam is strongly predictive of college and career readiness and success, one single essay historically has not contributed significantly to the overall predictive power of the exam.

Second, feedback from hundreds of member admission officers was divided: some of them found the current essay useful but many did not. Therefore, by making the redesigned Essay optional, colleges will have the flexibility to make their own decisions about requiring the Essay, and students applying to colleges that do not require the Essay will be saved the expense and time for test results that will not be considered. The College Board will require several samples of analytical essay writing throughout its Advanced Placement Program® courses as well as in the sample work designed for classrooms in grades 6–12.

The following sample illustrates the general format of the Essay task in the context of a specific prompt, this one related to a passage adapted from an article by Dana Gioia about the value of literary reading.

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As you read the passage below, consider how Dana Gioia uses

- evidence, such as facts or examples, to support claims.
  - reasoning to develop ideas and to connect claims and evidence.
  - stylistic or persuasive elements, such as word choice or appeals to emotion, to add power to the ideas expressed.
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**Adapted from “Why Literature Matters” by Dana Gioia. ©2005 by The New York Times Company. Originally published April 10, 2005.**

[A] strange thing has happened in the American arts during the past quarter century. While income rose to unforeseen levels, college attendance ballooned, and access to information increased enormously, the interest young Americans showed in the arts—and especially literature—actually diminished.

According to the 2002 Survey of Public Participation in the Arts, a population study designed and commissioned by the National Endowment for the Arts (and executed by the US Bureau of the Census), arts participation by Americans has declined for eight of the nine major forms that are measured. . . . The declines have been most severe among younger adults (ages 18-24). The most worrisome finding in the 2002 study, however, is the declining percentage of Americans, especially young adults, reading literature.

That individuals at a time of crucial intellectual and emotional development bypass the joys and challenges of literature is a troubling trend. If it were true that they substituted histories, biographies, or

political works for literature, one might not worry. But book reading of any kind is falling as well.

That such a longstanding and fundamental cultural activity should slip so swiftly, especially among young adults, signifies deep transformations in contemporary life. To call attention to the trend, the Arts Endowment issued the reading portion of the Survey as a separate report, “Reading at Risk: A Survey of Literary Reading in America.”

The decline in reading has consequences that go beyond literature. The significance of reading has become a persistent theme in the business world. The February issue of *Wired* magazine, for example, sketches a new set of mental skills and habits proper to the 21st century, aptitudes decidedly literary in character: not “linear, logical, analytical talents,” author Daniel Pink states, but “the ability to create artistic and emotional beauty, to detect patterns and opportunities, to craft a satisfying narrative.” When asked what kind of talents they like to see in management positions, business leaders consistently set imagination, creativity, and higher-order thinking at the top.

Ironically, the value of reading and the intellectual faculties that it inculcates appear most clearly as active and engaged literacy declines. There is now a growing awareness of the consequences of nonreading to the workplace. In 2001 the National Association of Manufacturers polled its members on skill deficiencies among employees. Among hourly workers, poor reading skills ranked second, and 38 percent of employers complained that local schools inadequately taught reading comprehension.

The decline of reading is also taking its toll in the civic sphere. . . . A 2003 study of 15- to 26-year-olds’ civic knowledge by the National Conference of State Legislatures concluded, “Young people do not understand the ideals of citizenship . . . and their appreciation and support of American democracy is limited.”

It is probably no surprise that declining rates of literary reading coincide with declining levels of historical and political awareness among young people. One of the surprising findings of “Reading at Risk” was that literary readers are markedly more civically engaged than nonreaders, scoring two to four times more likely to perform charity work, visit a museum, or attend a sporting event. One reason for their higher social and cultural interactions may lie in the kind of civic and historical knowledge that comes with literary reading. . . .

The evidence of literature’s importance to civic, personal, and economic health is too strong to ignore. The decline of literary reading foreshadows serious long-term social and economic problems, and it is time to bring literature and the other arts into discussions of public policy. Libraries, schools, and public agencies do noble work, but addressing the reading issue will require the leadership of politicians and the business community as well . . . .

Reading is not a timeless, universal capability. Advanced literacy is a specific intellectual skill and social habit that depends on a great many educational, cultural, and economic factors. As more Americans lose this capability, our nation becomes less informed, active, and independent-minded. These are not the qualities that a free, innovative, or productive society can afford to lose.

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Write an essay in which you explain how Dana Gioia builds an argument to persuade his audience that the decline of reading in America will have a negative effect on society. In your essay, analyze how Gioia uses one or more of the features listed in the box above (or features of your own choice) to strengthen the logic and persuasiveness of his argument. Be sure that your analysis focuses on the most relevant features of the passage.

Your essay should not explain whether you agree with Gioia’s claims, but rather explain how Gioia builds an argument to persuade his audience.

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As noted earlier, the above format is almost entirely consistent from administration to administration of the SAT Essay. The only substantial variable (apart from the passage itself, of course) is the brief acknowledgment of the specific content of the passage in question (here, “the decline of reading in America will have a negative effect on society”).

Given the intentional breadth of the task, there are many ways in which a student might respond successfully. A student could, for example, analyze how the author uses *reasoning* in paragraph 1 to highlight the irony and gravity of a dwindling percentage of readers by juxtaposing the rise in income, college attendance, and access to information to the decline of young Americans’ interest in the arts and in literature. A student might also observe how the author provides survey data in paragraph 6 as *evidence* to support the claim that “the significance of reading has become a persistent theme in the business world”

(paragraph 5). This claim and supporting evidence contribute to the author’s central idea that the decline in reading skills among young adults has negative long-term consequences. A student could also discuss how the final sentences of the passage *appeal* to fear and national pride by warning that unless more emphasis is placed on reading, the United States will become “less informed, active, and independent-minded.” These lines serve as an emotional call to action and raise the stakes of the argument the author is making.

While these examples are far from a complete list of features that a student might choose to address in his or her written response, they do help suggest the nature and richness of the analytical task that is at the core of the SAT Essay.

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NOTE

- 1 College Board, *College Board Standards for College Success: English Language Arts* (New York: Author, 2006), [http://www.collegeboard.com/prod\\_downloads/about/association/academic/english-language-arts\\_cbscs.pdf](http://www.collegeboard.com/prod_downloads/about/association/academic/english-language-arts_cbscs.pdf); Mary Seburn, Sara Frain, and David T. Conley, *Job Training Programs Curriculum Study* (Eugene, OR: Educational Policy Improvement Center, 2013), <http://www.nagb.org/content/nagb/assets/documents/what-we-do/preparedness-research/judgmental-standard-setting-studies/job-training-programs-curriculum-study.pdf>; Achieve, Inc., The Education Trust, and Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, *The American Diploma Project: Ready or Not: Creating a High School Diploma that Counts* (Washington, DC: Achieve, Inc., 2004), <http://www.achieve.org/files/ReadyorNot.pdf>; YoungKoung Kim, Andrew Wiley, and Sheryl Packman, *National Curriculum Survey on English and Mathematics* (New York: The College Board, 2012), 7–15, <https://research.collegeboard.org/sites/default/files/publications/2012/7/researchreport-2011-13-curriculum-survey-english-mathematics.pdf>; “Working with Sources,” Duke University Thompson Writing Program, accessed January 10, 2014, <http://twp.duke.edu/writing-studio/resources/working-with-sources>; “Critically Analyzing Information Sources,” Cornell University Library, accessed January 10, 2014, <http://guides.library.cornell.edu/content.php?pid=318835&sid=2612843>; “Critically Analyzing Information Sources,” Texas A&M University Libraries, accessed January 10, 2014, <http://library.tamu.edu/help/help-yourself/using-materials-services/critically-analyzing-information-sources.html>; “Critical Evaluation of Resources,” University of California, Berkeley Library, last modified November 2009, <http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/instruct/guides/evaluation.html>.