

Official SAT Practice

Lesson Plans

for Teachers by Teachers

LESSON 19

The SAT Essay—Part Three

Note: This lesson assumes that students have already completed Lessons 9 and 10, which introduced the SAT Essay.

Focus: Taking a deeper look at the SAT® Essay

Objectives:

Students will

- understand the scope and purpose of the task of the SAT Essay.
- identify key elements in an argumentative essay: evidence, reasoning, and stylistic choices.

Before the Lesson:

- Make sure students have been exposed to Lessons 9 and 10 on the SAT Essay.
- Preview and print (if necessary) the student materials.

Introductory Activity | 25 minutes

1. Remind students about the SAT Essay prompt and that they are expected to analyze how the author builds his or her argument by examining the elements and techniques listed in the three bullet points below.

As you read the passage below, consider how [the author] 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.

Write an essay in which you explain how [the author] builds an argument to persuade [his/her] audience that [author's claim]. In your essay, analyze how [the author] uses one or more of the features listed above (or features of your own choice) to strengthen the logic and persuasiveness of [his/her] argument. Be sure that your analysis focuses on the most relevant features of the passage.

Your essay should not explain whether you agree with [the author's] claims, but rather explain how the author builds an argument to persuade [his/her] audience.

2. This lesson will delve deeper into each of the strategies listed in the prompt, starting with "**evidence**." Ask students to think about the kinds of evidence that they might use to support one of the following claims (or select a local issue of interest). Remind them that evidence can be facts and statistics, but personal examples and the testimony of experts in the field can also be considered "evidence." Discuss the different types of evidence and why some types of evidence might be more persuasive than others. Here is the list of claims:
 - ◆ Vaccines should be mandatory/voluntary
 - ◆ Government surveillance is essential/dangerous
 - ◆ Social media brings us together/causes separation
 - ◆ College should be free/reasonably priced
 - ◆ Immigration to the U.S. should be expanded/stopped
3. Now, look closely at Excerpt 1 from the passage that students read in Lesson 10 about banning plastic bags. Discuss how the author uses evidence here. What kinds of evidence does he use, and how does it help to make his argument more persuasive?

4. The term “**stylistic or persuasive elements**” in the prompt covers a wide range of possibilities including rhetorical devices and word choice. One of the most effective concepts for students to examine in a text is its use of appeals. Students are likely familiar with the following terms, but it might be worthwhile to review them:
- ◆ **Ethos** is an appeal to ethics, and it is a means of convincing someone of the character or credibility of the persuader.
 - ◆ **Pathos** is an appeal to emotion, and is a way of convincing an audience of an argument by creating an emotional response.
 - ◆ **Logos** is an appeal to logic, and is a way of persuading an audience by reason.
5. Ask students to return to Excerpt 1 and identify which appeals are at work in this section; Discuss how those appeals help the author to make his case.
6. Another key aspect of the “**stylistic or persuasive elements**” category is word choice. When writing an argument, most writers choose their words very carefully and have an intended effect in mind. Often, word choice helps to create pathos, an emotional reaction in the audience. Ask students to carefully examine the word choice in Excerpt 2, which is the conclusion of the plastic bags passage. How do the specific word choices affect the audience and help to make the argument stronger? Students should identify the power of words and phrases such as *evil incarnate*, *compel*, *free society*, and *infringe*.
7. A third element that the SAT Essay prompt suggests that students might address in the passage they will analyze is “**reasoning**,” which is “the connective tissue that holds an argument together. It’s the ‘thinking’—the logic, the analysis—that develops the argument and ties the claim and evidence together.” This can be the most challenging of all three aspects in the prompt because it asks students to explain how the author logically moves the reader through the argument, and in reality, some writers do not do this; they rely heavily on emotion or make broad leaps in logic to arrive at a desired conclusion. One of the most accessible ways for students to evaluate reasoning, however, is to examine how the writer addresses—or does not address—the counterargument. Often, successful arguments raise and address the concerns of others who may not agree with the author’s claim. Part of reasoning is the ability to address these counterarguments, and students should be on the lookout for when writers attempt to do this.
8. Remind students that the author of the plastic bag passage is **against banning** plastic bags. Ask students to offer reasons **in favor of banning** plastic bags, and then examine Excerpt 3 to see how the writer addresses—or does not address—the main counterarguments. How does this aspect of reasoning help to strengthen his argument?
9. This may be an important place to point out the following to students:
- Your analysis does not have to focus exclusively on how the author’s use of evidence, reasoning, and stylistic and persuasive elements makes the argument stronger or more persuasive. You may also choose to point out ways in which the author’s use (or lack of use) of one or more of these elements weakens the effectiveness of the argument.*

In other words, students can explain how the writer’s argument is NOT effective, by pointing out flaws in the way the argument is constructed. However, please caution students to use this carefully; sometimes when we argue against someone’s argument, we focus on the issue, not the argument. Remind them that their opinion on the issue is irrelevant; they have to focus on how those elements are used to make an argument stronger—or not. In addition, students who take this approach must have sufficient details of their own to support their claims. Many often do not and so do poorly in analysis.

Pair/Group Practice | 20 minutes

1. Ask students to form groups of three and individually read the passage, “Let There Be Dark,” by Paul Bogard, who argues that natural darkness should be preserved. One member of the group should look specifically at the various kinds of evidence Bogard uses, another should look at the stylistic and persuasive elements, specifically ethos and pathos, while the third member should look carefully at the reasoning Bogard uses, including how he addresses—or does not address—the counterarguments.
2. The groups should discuss their individual findings, pointing to specific examples of the elements they examined the text for.

Individual Practice | 5 minutes

1. Students should write their own thesis statement for an essay they might write evaluating how the argument is built. If students need a reminder about thesis statements for the essay, look back at Lesson 10. Students should sketch out a brief outline of what each paragraph of their essay will focus on. They will write the essay in the next lesson.
2. Last, students should reflect on their current abilities to write the SAT Essay. Where are their strengths and weaknesses?

Homework | 50 minutes

- Direct students to the Essay practice tab on Official SAT Practice on Khan Academy®. Students should write and submit a draft response for automatic feedback. Teachers may want to share a student’s feedback anonymously for class discussion.

Student Materials—Lesson 19

Introductory Activity

From Adam B. Summers, “Bag Ban Bad for Freedom and Environment.”

Excerpt #1:

- 4 According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, plastic bags, sacks, and wraps of all kinds (not just grocery bags) make up only about 1.6 percent of all municipal solid waste materials. High-density polyethylene (HDPE) bags, which are the most common kind of plastic grocery bags, make up just 0.3 percent of this total.
- 5 The claims that plastic bags are worse for the environment than paper bags or cotton reusable bags are dubious at best. In fact, compared to paper bags, plastic grocery bags produce fewer greenhouse gas emissions, require 70 percent less energy to make, generate 80 percent less waste, and utilize less than 4 percent of the amount of water needed to manufacture them. This makes sense because plastic bags are lighter and take up less space than paper bags.
- 6 Reusable bags come with their own set of problems. They, too, have a larger carbon footprint than plastic bags. Even more disconcerting are the findings of several studies that plastic bag bans lead to increased health problems due to food contamination from bacteria that remain in the reusable bags. A November 2012 statistical analysis by University of Pennsylvania law professor Jonathan Klick and George Mason University law professor and economist Joshua D. Wright found that San Francisco’s plastic bag ban in 2007 resulted in a subsequent spike in hospital emergency room visits due to *E. coli*, salmonella, and campylobacter-related intestinal infectious diseases. The authors conclude that the ban even accounts for several additional deaths in the city each year from such infections.

Rhetorical Appeals:

- **Ethos** is an appeal to ethics, and it is a means of convincing someone of the character or credibility of the persuader.
- **Pathos** is an appeal to emotion, and is a way of convincing an audience of an argument by creating an emotional response.
- **Logos** is an appeal to logic, and is a way of persuading an audience by reason.

Excerpt #2

9 Notwithstanding the aforementioned reasons why plastic bags are not, in fact, evil incarnate, environmentalists have every right to try to convince people to adopt certain beliefs or lifestyles, but they do not have the right to use government force to compel people to live the way they think best. In a free society, we are able to live our lives as we please, so long as we do not infringe upon the rights of others. That includes the right to make such fundamental decisions as “Paper or plastic?”

Excerpt #3

6 Reusable bags come with their own set of problems. They, too, have a larger carbon footprint than plastic bags. Even more disconcerting are the findings of several studies that plastic bag bans lead to increased health problems due to food contamination from bacteria that remain in the reusable bags. A November 2012 statistical analysis by University of Pennsylvania law professor Jonathan Klick and George Mason University law professor and economist Joshua D. Wright found that San Francisco’s plastic bag ban in 2007 resulted in a subsequent spike in hospital emergency room visits due to *E. coli*, salmonella, and campylobacter-related intestinal infectious diseases. The authors conclude that the ban even accounts for several additional deaths in the city each year from such infections.

7 The description of plastic grocery bags as “single-use” bags is another misnomer. The vast majority of people use them more than once, whether for lining trash bins or picking up after their dogs. (And still other bags are recycled.) Since banning plastic bags also means preventing their additional uses as trash bags and pooper scoopers, one unintended consequence of the plastic bag ban would likely be an increase in plastic bag purchases for these other purposes. This is just what happened in Ireland in 2002 when a 15 Euro cent (\$0.20) tax imposed on plastic shopping bags led to a 77 percent increase in the sale of plastic trash can liner bags.

Group/Pair Practice:

**Adapted from Paul Bogard, “Let There Be Dark.” ©2012 by Los Angeles Times.
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At my family’s cabin on a Minnesota lake, I knew woods so dark that my hands disappeared before my eyes. I knew night skies in which meteors left smoky trails across sugary spreads of stars. But now, when 8 of 10 children born in the United States will never know a sky dark enough for the Milky Way, I worry we are rapidly losing night’s natural darkness before realizing its worth. This winter solstice, as we cheer the days’ gradual movement back toward light, let us also remember the irreplaceable value of darkness.

All life evolved to the steady rhythm of bright days and dark nights. Today though, when we feel the closeness of nightfall, we reach quickly for a light switch. And too little darkness, meaning too much artificial light at night, spells trouble for all.

Already the World Health Organization classifies working the night shift as a probable human carcinogen, and the American Medical Association has voiced its unanimous support for “light pollution reduction efforts and glare reduction efforts at both the national and state levels.” Our bodies need darkness to produce the hormone melatonin, which keeps certain cancers from developing, and our bodies need darkness for sleep. Sleep disorders have been linked to diabetes, obesity, cardiovascular disease and depression, and recent research suggests one main cause of “short sleep” is “long light.” Whether we work at night or simply take our tablets, notebooks and smartphones to bed, there isn’t a place for this much artificial light in our lives.

The rest of the world depends on darkness as well, including nocturnal and crepuscular species of birds, insects, mammals, fish and reptiles. Some examples are well known—the 400 species of birds that migrate at night in North America, the sea turtles that come ashore to lay their eggs—and some are not, such as the bats that save American farmers billions in pest control and the moths that pollinate 80% of the world’s flora. Ecological light pollution is like the bulldozer of the night, wrecking habitat and disrupting ecosystems several billion years in the making. Simply put, without darkness, Earth’s ecology would collapse....

In today’s crowded, louder, more fast-paced world, night’s darkness can provide solitude, quiet and stillness, qualities increasingly in short supply. Every religious tradition has considered darkness invaluable for a soulful life, and the chance to witness the universe has inspired artists, philosophers and everyday stargazers since time began. In a world awash with electric light...how would Van Gogh have given the world his “Starry Night”? Who knows what this vision of the night sky might inspire in each of us, in our children or grandchildren?

Yet all over the world, our nights are growing brighter. In the United States and Western Europe, the amount of light in the sky increases an average of about 6% every year. Computer images of the United States at night, based on NASA photographs, show that what was a very dark country as recently as the 1950s is now nearly covered with a blanket of light. Much of this light is wasted energy, which

means wasted dollars. Those of us over 35 are perhaps among the last generation to have known truly dark nights. Even the northern lake where I was lucky to spend my summers has seen its darkness diminish.

It doesn't have to be this way. Light pollution is readily within our ability to solve, using new lighting technologies and shielding existing lights. Already, many cities and towns across North America and Europe are changing to LED streetlights, which offer dramatic possibilities for controlling wasted light. Other communities are finding success with simply turning off portions of their public lighting after midnight. Even Paris, the famed "city of light," which already turns off its monument lighting after 1 a.m., will this summer start to require its shops, offices and public buildings to turn off lights after 2 a.m. Though primarily designed to save energy, such reductions in light will also go far in addressing light pollution. But we will never truly address the problem of light pollution until we become aware of the irreplaceable value and beauty of the darkness we are losing.