



Chapter 1

The New SAT

For better or for worse, many people have criticized the SAT that was introduced in 2004. In particular, many disliked how it was a test that could essentially be “gamed”, as in, a test-taker didn’t have to know the material as much as she needed to know the best test-taking strategies. Whether that’s true or not is a subject for debate, but it is my opinion that nothing beats a thorough understanding of the content. But College Board took those criticisms severely to heart, and announced they would start administering a new, redesigned SAT starting from March 2016.

The redesigned SAT reverts to the 1600-point marking scale of the SAT before 2004. The two English sections—Critical Reading and Writing—are now collapsed into one subscore of 800 that is a composite of the two component tests, which are the Evidence-Based Reading and Writing sections of the redesigned SAT. Furthermore, the mandatory 25-minute persuasive essay introduced in 2004 is now an optional 50-minute analytical essay, which means this book will be for an “optional” part of the new SAT. The fact remains,

however, that many highly selective schools will still require a new SAT Essay score, so it is still very much a wise decision to be holding this book in your hands!

Do keep in mind that this essay will no longer be a persuasive essay. Where the old SAT essay asked students to respond to a prompt with their own opinions supported by examples, the new SAT essay demands students analyze and explain how another author develops an argument. This is an exercise rooted in literature classes in high school, more so than the persuasive essay which many critics of the old SAT claimed didn't test what students actually learned in class.

This book will not spend too much time—if any time at all—discussing the relative merits of either test format. It remains, however, that those who wish to achieve acceptance into a selective American college must overcome this hurdle that is the new SAT Essay. So, with that said, let's take a look at the new SAT essay's format.

The following is the sample essay prompt anyone can find on the College Board website:

The essay gives you an opportunity to show how effectively you can read and comprehend a passage and write an essay analyzing the passage. In your essay, you should demonstrate that you have read the passage carefully, present a clear and logical analysis, and use language precisely.

Your essay must be written on the lines provided in your answer booklet; except for the planning page of the answer booklet, you will receive no other paper on which to write. You will have enough space if you write on every line, avoid wide margins, and keep your handwriting to a reasonable size. Remember that people who are not familiar with your handwriting will read what you write. Try to write or print so that what you are writing is legible to those readers.

You have 50 minutes to read the passage and write an essay in response to the prompt provided inside this booklet.

1. Do not write your essay in this booklet. Only what you write on the lined pages

of your answer booklet will be evaluated.

2. An off-topic essay will not be evaluated.

Prompt

As you read the passage below, consider how Paul Bogard 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.

Adapted from Paul Bogard, “Let There Be Dark.” © 2012 by Los Angeles Times. Originally published December 21, 2012.

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.

Write an essay in which you explain how Paul Bogard builds an argument to persuade his audience that natural darkness should be preserved. In your essay, analyze how Bogard uses one or more of the features in the directions that precede the passage (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 Bogard's claims, but rather explain how Bogard builds an argument to persuade his audience.

If you've ever written an essay according to the old SAT's format, you will notice right away that this new format is nothing like it. Old SAT essay prompts were usually a quote that had something to do with the opinion-based essay question. Here, the essay is clearly designed for the student to respond to another writer's work. So why did I refer to the Louvre and Delacroix' *Liberty Leading the People* back in the foreword?

Because, as I think is evident, students writing the new SAT essay will be taking

on the role of critic as they approach the works of other writers. Like a critic approaches a painting, the student will examine and dissect the techniques the writer uses to construct his argument and his piece, and in doing so produce a critique, or *commentary*, of the piece. Those in the International Baccalaureate program studying English Literature should be familiar, indeed, overly so, with this type of writing.

Other students who may not have experience with this type of writing may find it difficult to grasp at first. However, writing commentaries is not only easier than writing a persuasive essay but also far more straightforward. What is the difference? Well, for one, it is easier to objectively dissect another writer's work in fifty minutes as opposed to composing an entirely original piece in twenty-five. Furthermore, because both the student and the marker are reading from the same source material, they will have at least some degree of common ground, which makes a mutual understanding between marker and student more straightforward rather than the student trying to convince the marker of something on which the two hold drastically different views.

So what will we cover in this book?

First, we'll look at how to take apart the passage prompts. We'll look at how writers develop their arguments, particularly through literary, stylistic, and persuasive devices. We'll take apart the structure of some pieces in particular and show how the writer develops his argument logically through the structure of his piece. We'll learn some useful strategies to approach passages from a practical point of view, which will allow us to glean more information from these passages in a shorter amount of time.

Then we'll actually get into writing. We'll look at how to build an essay-how to construct a frame around which your essay will rise. We'll examine how to choose the best words to describe your ideas. We'll learn to write an essay that's ideationally sound, logically watertight, and structurally invincible.

Finally, we'll synthesize these two aspects and practice writing some SAT essays. We'll look at how SAT essays are graded and how you can get the best score possible.

So, are you ready to become a critic? Are you ready to question the great masters?