



The Ivy Education Center

LEAGUE

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SAT Essay Prompts (October 2006 - June 2007)

June 2007

Prompt 1

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

People are happy only when they have their minds fixed on some goal other than their own happiness. Happiness comes when people focus instead on the happiness of others, on the improvement of humanity, on some course of action that is followed not as a means to anything else but as an end in itself. Aiming at something other than their own happiness, they find happiness along the way. The only way to be happy is to pursue some goal external to your own happiness.

Adapted from John Stuart Mill, *Autobiography*

Assignment:

Are people more likely to be happy if they focus on goals other than their own happiness? 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.

Heroes may seem old-fashioned today. Many people are cynical and seem to enjoy

discrediting role models more than creating new ones or cherishing those they already have. Some people, moreover, object to the very idea of heroes, arguing that we should not exalt individuals who, after all, are only flesh and blood, just like the rest of us. But we desperately need heroes—to teach us, to captivate us through their words and deeds, to inspire us to greatness.

Adapted from Psychology Today, "How To Be Great! What Does It Take To Be A Hero?"

Assignment:

Is there a value in celebrating certain individuals as heroes? 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. The advancements that have been made over the past hundred years or more are too numerous to count. But has there been progress? Some people would say that the vast number of advancements tells us we have made progress. Others, however, disagree, saying that more is not necessarily better and that real progress—in politics, literature, the arts, science and technology, or any other field—can be achieved only when an advancement truly improves the quality of our lives.

Assignment:

Have modern advancements truly improved the quality of people's lives? 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

It is not true that prosperity is better for people than adversity. When people are thriving and content, they seldom feel the need to look for ways to improve themselves or their situation. Hardship, on the other hand, forces people to closely examine—and possibly change—their own lives and even the lives of others. Misfortune rather than prosperity helps people to gain a greater understanding of themselves and the world around them.

Assignment:

Do people truly benefit from hardship and misfortune? 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 2007

Prompt 1

Think carefully about the issue presented in the following excerpt and the assignment below. Materialism: it's the thing that everybody loves to hate. Few aspects of modern life have been more criticized than materialism. But let's face it: materialism—acquiring possessions and spending money—is a vital source of meaning and happiness in our time. People may criticize modern society for being too materialistic, but the fact remains that most of us spend most of our energy producing and consuming more and more stuff.

Adapted from James Twitchell, "Two Cheers for Materialism"

Assignment:

Should modern society be criticized for being materialistic? 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.

Knowledge is power. In agriculture, medicine, and industry, for example, knowledge has liberated us from hunger, disease, and tedious labor. Today, however, our knowledge has become so powerful that it is beyond our control. We know how to do many things, but we do not know where, when, or even whether this know-how should be used.

Assignment:

Can knowledge be a burden rather than a benefit? 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 do not take the time to determine right from wrong. Reflecting on the difference between right and wrong is hard work. It is so much easier to follow the crowd, going along with what is popular rather than risking the disapproval of others by voicing an objection of any kind.

Adapted from Stephen J. Carter, *Integrity*

Assignment:

Is it always best to determine one's own views of right and wrong, or can we benefit from following the crowd? 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.

It is often the case that revealing the complete truth may bring trouble—discomfort, embarrassment, sadness, or even harm—to oneself or to another person. In these circumstances, it is better not to express our real thoughts and feelings. Whether or not we should tell the truth, therefore, depends on the circumstances.

Assignment:

Do circumstances determine whether or not we should tell the truth? 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 2007

Prompt 1

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

From the time people are very young, they are urged to get along with others, to try to "fit in." Indeed, people are often rewarded for being agreeable and obedient. But this approach is misguided because it promotes uniformity instead of encouraging people to be unique and different. Differences among people give each of us greater perspective and allow us to make better judgments.

Assignment:

Is it more valuable for people to fit in than to be unique and different? 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.

It is easy to imagine that events and experiences in our lives will be perfect, but no matter how good something turns out to be, it can never live up to our expectations. Reality never matches our imaginations. For that reason, we should make sure our plans and goals are modest and attainable. We are much better off when reality surpasses our expectations and something turns out better than we thought it would.

Adapted from Baltasar Graciány Morales, *The Art of Worldly Wisdom*

Assignment:

Is it best to have low expectations and to set goals we are sure of achieving? 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.

Every event has consequences that are potentially beneficial. We may not always be happy about an experience, but we should at least gain in some way from it. For example, the worldwide gasoline shortage in the early 1970's created many hardships but inspired efforts to conserve energy. Whether the gains are large or small, there is something positive or useful

for us in everything that happens to us.

Assignment:

Do we really benefit from every event or experience in some way? 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 2007

Prompt 1

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

Many people believe that our government should do more to solve our problems. After all, how can one individual create more jobs or make roads safer or improve the schools or help to provide any of the other benefits that we have come to enjoy? And yet expecting that the government—rather than individuals—should always come up with the solutions to society's ills may have made us less self-reliant, undermining our independence and self-sufficiency.

Assignment:

Should people take more responsibility for solving problems that affect their communities or the nation in general? 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 human beings spend their lives doing work they hate and work that the world does not need. It is of prime importance that you learn early what you want to do and whether or not the world needs this service. The return from your work must be the satisfaction that work brings you and the world's need of that work. Income is not money, it is satisfaction; it is creation; it is beauty.

Adapted from W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Autobiography of W.E.B. Du Bois: A Soliloquy on*

Viewing My Life from the Last Decade of Its First Century

Assignment:

Is it more important to do work that one finds fulfilling or work that pays well? 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.

The education people receive does not occur primarily in school. Young people are formed by their experiences with parents, teachers, peers, and even strangers on the street, and by the sports teams they play for, the shopping malls they frequent, the songs they hear, and the shows they watch. Schools, while certainly important, constitute only a relatively small part of education.

Adapted from Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, "Education for the Twenty-First Century"

Assignment:

Is education primarily the result of influences other than school? 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.

If we are dissatisfied with our circumstances, we think about changing them. But the most important and effective changes—in our attitude—hardly occur to us. In other words, we should worry not about how to alter the world around us for the better but about how to change ourselves in order to fit into that world.

Adapted from Michael Hymers, "Wittgenstein, Pessimism and Politics"

Assignment:

Is it better to change one's attitude than to change one's circumstances? 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 2006

Prompt 1

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

In order to be the most productive and successful people that we are capable of being, we must be willing to ignore the opinions of others. It is only when we are completely indifferent to others' opinions of us — when we are not concerned about how others think of us—that we can achieve our most important goals.

Assignment:

Are people more likely to be productive and successful when they ignore the opinions of others? 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.

In many circumstances, optimism—the expectation that one's ideas and plans will always turn out for the best—is unwarranted. In these situations what is needed is not an upbeat view but a realistic one. There are times when people need to take a tough-minded view of the possibilities of success, give up, and invest their energies elsewhere rather than find reasons to continue to pursue the original project or idea.

Adapted from Martin E. P. Seligman, *Learned Optimism*

Assignment:

Is it better for people to be realistic or optimistic? 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 easy to make judgments about people and their actions when we do not know anything about their circumstances or what motivated them to take those actions. But we should look beyond a person's actions. When people do things that we consider outrageous, inconsiderate, or harmful, we should try to understand why they acted as they did.

Assignment:

Is it important to try to understand people's motivations before judging their actions? 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.

Abraham Lincoln said, "Most people are about as happy as they make up their minds to be." In other words, our personal level of satisfaction is entirely within our control. Otherwise, why would the same experience disappoint one person but delight another? Happiness is not an accident but a choice.

Assignment:

Is happiness something over which people have no control, or can people choose to be happy? 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 2006

Prompt 1

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

It is wrong to think of ourselves as indispensable. We would love to think that our contributions are essential, but we are mistaken if we think that any one person has made the world what it is today. The contributions of individual people are seldom as important or as necessary as we think they are.

Assignment:

Do we put too much value on the ideas or actions of individual people? 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.

Many people deny that stories about characters and events that are not real can teach us about ourselves or about the world around us. They claim that literature does not offer us worthwhile information about the real world. These people argue that the feelings and ideas we gain from books and stories obstruct, rather than contribute to, clear thought.

Adapted from Jennifer L. McMahon, "The Function of Fiction"

Assignment:

Can books and stories about characters and events that are not real teach us anything useful? 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.

"No one is perfect." There are few among us who would disagree with this familiar statement. Certain that perfection is an impossible goal, many people willingly accept flaws and shortcomings in themselves and others. Yet such behavior leads to failure. People can only succeed if they try to achieve perfection in everything they do.

Assignment:

Can people achieve success only if they aim to be perfect? 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.

Everybody has some choice. People are always blaming their circumstances for what they are. I don't believe in circumstances. The people who get on in this world are the people who get up and look for the circumstances they want and, if they can't find them, make them.

Adapted from George Bernard Shaw, *Mrs. Warren's Profession*

Assignment:

Do success and happiness depend on the choices people make rather than on factors beyond their control? 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 2006

Prompt 1

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

While some people promote competition as the only way to achieve success, others emphasize the power of cooperation. Intense rivalry at work or play or engaging in competition involving ideas or skills may indeed drive people either to avoid failure or to achieve important victories. In a complex world, however, cooperation is much more likely to produce significant, lasting accomplishments.

Assignment:

Do people achieve more success by cooperation than by competition? 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.

Sometimes it is necessary to challenge what people in authority claim to be true. Although some respect for authority is, no doubt, necessary in order for any group or organization to function, questioning the people in charge—even if they are experts or leaders in their fields—makes us better thinkers. It forces all concerned to defend old ideas and decisions and to consider new ones. Sometimes it can even correct old errors in thought and put an end to wrong actions.

Assignment:

Is it important to question the ideas and decisions of people in positions of authority? 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 don't really learn anything properly until there is a problem, until we make a mistake, until something fails to go as we had hoped. When everything is working well, with no problems or failures, what incentive do we have to try something new? We are only motivated to learn when we experience difficulties.

Adapted from Alain de Botton, *How Proust Can Change Your Life: Not a Novel*

Assignment:

Does true learning only occur when we experience difficulties? 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.

There are two kinds of pretending. There is the bad kind, as when a person falsely promises to be your friend. But there is also a good kind, where the pretense eventually turns into the real thing. For example, when you are not feeling particularly friendly, the best thing you can do, very often, is to act in a friendly manner. In a few minutes, you may really be feeling friendlier.

Adapted from a book by C. S. Lewis

Assignment:

Can deception—pretending that something is true when it is not—sometimes have good results? 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.