



The Ivy Education Center

LEAGUE

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SAT Essay Prompts (October 2009 - June 2010)

June 2010

Prompt 1

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

Common sense tells us that people tend to get along better with those who are like them, who think and act as they do. Many people, however, get along very well with people who are very different from them and may prefer to associate with those whose views and actions are different from their own. In fact, some people even complain that they are bored and irritated by those who are too much like them.

Assignment:

Do people tend to get along better with people who are very different from them or with those who are like them? 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.

From early childhood, we are encouraged—pressured, even—to be in the company of others: we are urged to belong to this or that group, to join this or that club, to spend time with this or that friend. People do everything to avoid being by themselves, treating solitude as though it were the equivalent of loneliness. And yet it is only when people are by themselves that they can truly achieve their most important goals.

Assignment:

Is solitude—spending time alone—necessary for people to achieve their most important goals? 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.

Usually, people look to others around them—ordinary people—for their heroes. They define heroes as decent citizens who make sacrifices or try to make a difference. For example, people name streets after local war veterans, parks after teachers, bridges after local politicians. Rejecting historical, literary, or national figures as heroes, people tend to believe that anyone can be a hero. A hero does not have to be superhuman.

Adapted from Peter H. Gibbon, *A Call to Heroism*

Assignment:

Should ordinary people be considered heroes, or should the term "hero" be reserved for extraordinary 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.

May 2010

Prompt 1

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

People make decisions all the time. Some of these decisions may seem to be minor and inconsequential—whether to read a book or to not attend a meeting while others are obviously more important. But even though the important decisions are likely to have equally important consequences, people should not treat casually or overlook the small decisions. The so-called small decisions have the greatest impact on our lives.

Assignment:

Do small decisions often have major consequences? 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.

A well-known company recently proposed setting aside every Friday as a day with no e-mail-based communication. On these e-mail-free Fridays, employees would be encouraged to refrain completely from reading or sending e-mail or text messages and advised instead to call each other or talk in person. This idea can work for everyone. If each week we set aside time to actually talk to one another, our communications will be less impersonal and more effective and satisfying.

Assignment:

Is talking the most effective and satisfying way of communicating with 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 3

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

Our distant ancestors survived because they were physically active, hunting wild animals and gathering fruits and vegetables over large areas of land. Modern life, however, is characterized by physical inactivity. Given the resulting health problems and the tremendous cost of treating them, the government should work with schools and businesses to ensure that people eat the right foods and get enough exercise each day.

Assignment:

Should the government be responsible for making sure that people lead healthy 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

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

In business, the term "personal brand" describes how companies define themselves and differentiate their products from those of other companies. People, too, are often advised to develop a kind of personal brand or style—to make themselves stand out from other people by developing unique characteristics. Nowadays, people who want to be successful in school, at work, or in their personal relationships must emphasize their differences from their peers in the same way that companies emphasize their differences from their competitors.

Assignment:

Do people succeed by emphasizing their differences from other 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.

March 2010

Prompt 1

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

Many powerful leaders throughout history have considered themselves above the law and acted in ways that violated the laws or guidelines of their own country or group. People are quick to condemn these leaders, but shouldn't leaders be held to different standards? If what a leader is doing benefits the majority of the people in a country or group, it does not matter if a law or guideline is violated.

Assignment:

Should leaders of a country or group be judged by different standards? 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 are often advised to practice moderation in everything they do. The way to succeed in achieving their goals, they are told, is to remain balanced, controlled, and restrained. But this advice is misguided. Instead of being moderate, people should be passionate and intense. Throughout history, moderation has produced nothing extraordinary or exceptional. Excellence in any pursuit requires excess — great enthusiasm, high energy, and extreme effort.

Assignment:

Is moderation an obstacle to achievement and 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 3

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

Possibly because we live in a work-oriented society, most of us feel that we must be continually busy in order to be successful. We are led to believe that fabulous wealth and fame await the person who works the hardest and is always busy. The irony is that taking it easy now and then would help us achieve our goals a lot sooner. In fact, overwork can stifle our creative ability.

Adapted from Ernie J. Zelinski, *The Joy of Not Working*

Assignment:

Does society put too much emphasis on working hard? 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 2010

1. Think carefully about the issue presented in the following excerpt and the assignment below. External constraints-factors that limit people's plans and projects can create stress, but this stress is not always bad, and may even be necessary. In fact, the pressure of deadlines, budgets, rules and the demand imposed by others push people to accomplish things that they would find impossible to accomplish with unlimited time, money, and the absence of pressure.

Assignment:

Do the demands of others tend to make people more productive than they would be without such pressure?

2. Think carefully about the issue presented in the following excerpt and the assignment below. Are people entitled to have their own opinions? Yes and no. people can virtually have any opinion, no matter how illogical, uninformed, or foolish. But this does not mean that they are entitled to have their uninformed opinion taken seriously or their opinions should be considered as valuable as those informed ones. Opinions are valuable only when they are backed by thorough knowledge of the subject.

Assignment:

Should all people's opinion be valued equally or should only informed opinions be taken seriously?

3. Think carefully about the issue presented in the following excerpt and the assignment below. There are books that try to show the world as it is and there are books that try to show the world as it could be or should be. Which books should we be offering children and reading ourselves? One answer is the argument for the value of truth, for "telling it like it is". Writers could promote certain positive ideals by being less realistic; but all of us-especially the children-have a right to be told the truth.

Assignment:

Should books portray the world as it is or as it should be?

4. Think carefully about the issue presented in the following excerpt and the assignment below. Great discoveries often occur when a person explores the unknown, venturing far from what is familiar. But important breakthroughs---innovative solutions to difficult problems, for example--can also result when people take the time to look closely at their daily surroundings. In fact, the greatest discoveries often occur when people recognize in their familiar surroundings certain opportunities that others have overlooked or when people recognize that the ways things have always been done is unjust or ineffective or unnecessary.

Assignment:

Do people make the greatest discovery by exploring what is unfamiliar with them or by paying close attention to what seems familiar?

December 2009

Prompt 1

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

Thanks to the Internet, the word "friendship" now has a much broader meaning. No longer are the bonds of friendship limited to telephone conversations, shared activities, or speaking face-to-face. In this day and age, very close friendships can be formed without the people ever meeting and by simply typing words on a screen.

Adapted from Sharon Hendricks, "A Broader Definition of Friendship"

Assignment:

Is it easier now to form friendships than ever before? 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.

An Internet phone service is offering unlimited free telephone calls for anyone who signs up. There is only one catch: the company will use software to listen to customers' phone conversations and then send customers advertisements based on what they have been talking about. For example, if they talk about movies with their friends, advertisements for movies will appear on their computer screens. Commentators have voiced concern about customers' giving up their privacy in exchange for phone service.

Assignment:

Should people give up their privacy in exchange for convenience or free services? 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 often criticized for working out their own ideas before learning all that others have discovered about a problem or subject. But those people are right; it is possible to know too much, especially at first. The time for thorough inquiry and extensive research is later, after you have made your own discoveries and come to your own conclusions.

Adapted from Charles Horton Cooley, *Life and the Student*

Assignment:

Is it better for people to work out their own ideas on a problem or issue before learning how others have approached it? 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 2009

Prompt 1

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

Popular culture refers to television shows, movies, books, musical selections, artworks, products, activities, and events that appeal to the interests and desires of large numbers of people. Popular culture tells us a lot about the people of a society. Some people may criticize popular culture or deny its influence on their lives, but one thing is clear: popular culture typically displays the ideas and principles that people value most.

Assignment:

Are the values of a society most clearly revealed in its popular culture? 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 ruin their chances of achieving success or refrain from attaining a goal because they have learned that success is selfish. But they should not feel guilty about trying to achieve their own goals. People who act on their inner desires—their greatest wishes and ambitions—only make their own and other people's lives better and are more likely to benefit society. Imagine how much better the world would be if everyone could be happy and fulfilled.

Adapted from Sheri O. Zampelli, *From Sabotage to Success*

Assignment:

Do society and other people benefit when individuals pursue their own goals? 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 matter how much people try and how much they believe in themselves, everyone encounters situations in which it is impossible to succeed. People are often advised, "Never give up," but sometimes, when it seems as though success will not be achieved, they should stop trying, learn from the experience, and move on.

Adapted from Phyllis George, *Never Say Never*

Assignment:

Is it better for people to stop trying when they feel certain they will not succeed? 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.

Winning does not require people to be against someone else; people can reach their goals through cooperation just as well as they can through competition. Winning is not always the result of selfish individualism. People achieve happiness by cooperating with others to increase the happiness of all, rather than by winning at others' expense. Ours is not a world in which the price of one person's happiness is someone else's unhappiness.

Adapted from Gilbert Brim, *Ambition*

Assignment:

When some people win, must others lose, or are there situations in which everyone wins? 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 2009

Prompt 1

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

Both in society and in our own lives, today's problems are serious and require serious solutions. Increasingly, however, people are taught to laugh at things that aren't usually funny and to cope with difficult situations by using humor. They are even advised to surround themselves with funny people. There is strong evidence that laughter can actually improve health and help fight disease.

Adapted from Marshall Brain, *How Laughter Works*

Assignment:

Is using humor the best way to approach difficult situations and problems? 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.

Call it a clan, call it a network, call it a family. Whatever you call it, whoever you are, you need one. You need one because you are human. You didn't come from nowhere. Before you, around

you, and, presumably, after you, there are others. Even if you live alone and even if your solitude is by your own choice, you still cannot do without a network or a family.

Adapted from Jane Howard, *All Happy Clans Are Alike: In Search of the Good Family*

Assignment:

Does everyone, even people who choose to live alone, need a network or family? 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.