



The Ivy Education Center

LEAGUE

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SAT Essay Prompts (October 2010 - June 2011)

June 2011

Prompt 1

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

People assume that every accomplishment—each step in what we call progress—will lead to the solution to a problem and will help them reach the goal of understanding themselves and the world around them. In reality, however, each new answer provokes additional questions and each fresh discovery uncovers further complications. Every accomplishment leads to further problems, added responsibilities, more complications, and new challenges.

Assignment:

Does every achievement bring with it new challenges? 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.

Loyalty is a virtue that is encouraged and rewarded in every aspect of our lives. We are, therefore, loyal to our families, our teams, our schools, and our countries. But too often loyalty is blind: by automatically identifying ourselves with a group and accepting its values as our own,

we avoid taking responsibility for our own thoughts and actions.

Assignment:

Does accepting the values of a group allow people to avoid taking responsibility for their own thoughts and 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 3

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

A requirement for membership in any group is conformity. Members must agree on such vital issues as how decisions will be made, who will serve as leaders, and how much freedom group members will have. The quality of decision making, however, is better when groups encourage nonconformity and disagreement among their members. Although it sometimes creates disorder and conflict, disagreement may prevent powerful majorities from making mistakes.

Assignment:

Do groups that encourage nonconformity and disagreement function better than those that discourage 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.

May 7, 2011

Prompt 1

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

Most of us tend to find rules, limits, and restraints irritating. We want to be free of anything that limits our choices. But limitations protect us. Without limitations on our behavior, too many of us will act without regard to the consequences for ourselves, for others, and for the future. Limitations contribute to, rather than take away from, our overall happiness.

Assignment:

Do rules and limitations contribute to a person's 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.

People today seem to spend most of their free time being passively entertained: they just sit on the couch and watch movies or television or sporting events. This is mainly because they use up all their energy at work or at school. If they had more time and energy to devote to activities outside of work or school, you can be sure they would enjoy more creative and active pursuits during their free time.

Assignment:

If people worked less, would they be more creative and active during their free time? 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.

While serious thinking about important matters may disturb people in the short term, it benefits them immeasurably in the long term. Only by confronting unpleasant truths and by weighing both sides of complex issues can people understand the facts—whether in history, politics, literature, or their own lives—and make appropriate decisions. People may find it difficult, or uncomfortable, to think seriously about important matters, but not doing so means that they are leading lives without meaning or purpose.

Assignment:

Does every individual have an obligation to think seriously about important matters, even when doing so may be difficult? 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.

Many people think that success is impossible without help and support from others. They believe that even the strongest and most successful leaders need advisers to define their goals, and followers to carry out their plans. Real success, however, cannot be claimed by those who need others to solve their problems and help them confront obstacles. Only those whose accomplishments are truly their own can claim to be successful.

Assignment:

Is real success achieved only by people who accomplish goals and solve problems on their own? 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 2011

Prompt 1

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

Reality television programs, which feature real people engaged in real activities rather than professional actors performing scripted scenes, are increasingly popular. These shows depict ordinary people competing in everything from singing and dancing to losing weight, or just living their everyday lives. Most people believe that the reality these shows portray is authentic, but they are being misled. How authentic can these shows be when producers design challenges for the participants and then editors alter filmed scenes?

Assignment:

Do people benefit from forms of entertainment that show so-called reality, or are such forms of entertainment harmful? 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.

Photographs are very much a part of our daily lives. They show us faraway places, things to buy, important people and happenings, and sometimes just the ordinary. These pictures seem like frozen moments of real life. Cameras do copy what is in front of the lens, and so, in that sense, photographs show us what is real. They are at the same time, however, creations of the artist's intentions and unconscious mind.

Adapted from Leslie Sills, *In Real Life: Six Women Photographers*

Assignment:

Are photographs straightforward representations of real life, or are they artistic creations reflecting the photographer's point of view? 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.

When we are young, we learn from parents and teachers that we should wait patiently for what we want. Few people would dispute the wisdom or truth of this teaching. Our society, however, with its mad rush and hurry and its insistence on instant gratification and quick responses, encourages and rewards impatience. Experience teaches us that we should not and do not have to wait.

Assignment:

Is it better for people to act quickly and expect quick responses from others rather than to wait patiently for what they want? 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.

Jan. 2011

Prompt 1

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

Idealistic people, people who pursue great ideas in hopes of changing the world, often have ambitious plans that are difficult or even impossible to carry out. These people can claim few solid accomplishments. In contrast, practical people concentrate on workable ideas and goals, even though these may not meet an idealist's high standards. Their approach is likely to be more valuable than the approach of idealistic people.

Assignment:

Is an idealistic approach less valuable than a practical approach? 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 generally put more trust in what they have learned for themselves than in what they learn from others. Few people, however, are really motivated to learn anything on their own. They are much more apt to learn when others are willing to teach them. Even though learning from others means occasionally learning things that are not useful or important, people are still better off when they learn from others.

Assignment:

Is it better for people to learn from others than to learn on their own? 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.

Too many people do not consider their task or project complete or acceptable until every detail has been done right. Fortunately, such people have not always had their way, since nothing

would ever be completed if we had to check every detail before we could consider our work done. In fact, none of the world's greatest accomplishments would have been made, because none of them is perfect in every detail.

Assignment:

Do people put too much importance on getting every detail right on a project or task? 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.

People in our goal-oriented society place far too much emphasis on the outcomes of what they do. As a result, they miss out on the most important part of attempting anything: the process itself. The process of trying to achieve something is always more meaningful and enjoyable than reaching the final goal. Whether we succeed or fail, it is the process—how we go about achieving the goal — that matters most.

Assignment:

Does the process of doing something matter more than the outcome? 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 2010

Prompt 1

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

Again and again we hear the complaint that we have no heroes anymore. Heroes—people who should be admired for their great courage or noble achievements—are no longer recognized in our modern world. Many people, in fact, believe that heroes existed only in the past. But this belief is wrong. Because more praise is given to the latest technological innovation than to one individual's heroic achievements, we may not be aware of our heroes, but we do have them.

Assignment:

Is it possible to be a hero in the modern world? 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.

Technology has dramatically increased the speed with which we can communicate and share information. Some people are critical of this development, claiming that rapid communication, often made possible by some form of technology, discourages people from focusing at length on any one topic, shortens their attention spans, and prevents them from truly learning about the world and people around them. But what is wrong with how instantly and easily information is communicated thanks to the wonders of modern technology?

Assignment:

Does the way that information is communicated today result in people learning less 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 3

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

Is a temporary or partial solution to a problem better than no solution at all? Many people would say so. All that humanity can hope to accomplish is to find workable solutions to the serious problems of the world. Others would argue, however, that the world's serious problems are, in fact, caused by the so-called solutions. These solutions are creating problems more serious than the problems they are addressing.

Assignment:

Do temporary or otherwise imperfect solutions to problems only create more serious 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 4

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

Choice improves the quality of our lives. On the other hand, the fact that some choice is good doesn't necessarily mean that more choice is better. There is a problem with having too much choice. We are unwilling to give up any of our options, but stubbornly insisting upon having all the choices available to us can lead to bad decisions, stress, and dissatisfaction.

Adapted from Barry Schwartz, *The Paradox of Choice: Why More Is Less*

Assignment:

Is it better for people to have limited choices? 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 2010

Prompt 1

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

We are very individually oriented. We see everything in terms of personal independence, personal pleasure, personal fulfillment. "Do your own thing," we say. The idea that people can actually do things for someone or something else — a community, a school, or any other group — is lost. It is important to realize, however, that all people are interconnected. We cannot survive without each other.

Adapted from Willard Gaylin in Bill Moyers, *A World of Ideas*

Assignment:

Do people put too much emphasis on doing things by and for themselves? 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 people are so impressed by facts and objectivity that they do not appreciate the use of imagination. They worry that our imaginations get us away from reality, distort our views and perspectives, and, worst of all, are unscientific. As a result, using our imagination and other related activities such as appreciating art or music or being creative are often considered the "frosting"—the nice extras in life—rather than vital pursuits that are crucial to everyone.

Adapted from Rollo May, *The Courage to Create*

Assignment:

Is imagination less valuable than facts and objectivity? 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.

There is no more powerful way to initiate significant change in our communities, our society, and our lives than to start talking to others. When people discover that they share a common concern, that is when the process of change begins. Change does not start with an individual leader of a group, a nation, or an organization announcing a new plan. It begins when a group of people notices something that could, or even must, be done differently.

Adapted from Margaret J. Wheatley, "Some Friends and I Started Talking..."

Assignment:

Is a group of people more likely than an individual leader to bring about significant change? 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.

Some people believe that making mistakes is unacceptable, that whatever is done must be done error free. However, research has found that perfectionists tend to be less successful than nonperfectionists because they spend too much time trying to be perfect. Even when they do some things wrong, nonperfectionists often achieve more of their goals than perfectionists do.

Adapted from Glenn Hirsch, "An Imperfect Look At Overcoming Perfectionism"

Assignment:

Would it be better if people were more accepting of mistakes? 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 2010

Prompt 1

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

Why do we not value the creative arts more than we do? Why are subjects like music, drama, photography, and creative writing always the first to be cut from school budgets during hard times? Many would answer that, unlike math, science, history, and other subjects taught in school, the arts are unnecessary. But this is so untrue. The arts are as necessary as these other subject areas — possibly even more necessary.

Assignment:

Is it absolutely necessary for people to study the creative arts? 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.

I spent some part of every year at the farm until I was twelve or thirteen years old. The life that I led there was full of charm and so is the memory of it yet. I can call back the faint odors of wildflowers, the sheen of rain-washed foliage, the clatter of raindrops when the wind shook the trees, and the far-off hammering of woodpeckers. I can call back the prairie—and its loneliness and peace.

Adapted from Mark Twain, *My Autobiography*

Assignment:

Is it important for people to spend time outdoors and to learn to appreciate the natural environment? 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.

In some circumstances we are encouraged to conform—to follow others, to do and think what everyone else is doing and thinking. In other circumstances, however, we are told to be individuals and are reminded that most people we consider great are not afraid to be different. Conformity may be appropriate in day-to-day life, but we should save our highest praise for people who choose to be unique.

Assignment:

Should originality always be more highly praised than conformity? 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.