



The Ivy Education Center

LEAGUE

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SAT Essay Prompts (October 2013 - June 2014)

June 2014

Prompt 1

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

What determines success in life is not intelligence or talent, but character: those qualities gained both from living in an honorable and straightforward manner and from learning to deal with disappointment and hardship. Without character, an individual has no hope of true success. Even when competing against opponents of considerable intelligence or strength, those individuals who possess strong character will ultimately win.

Assignment: Does a person's character determine that person's success in life? 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 like to live by the old expression, "If you can't say anything nice, don't say anything at all." This expression reflects the widely shared belief that one should always try to be

polite and to have consideration for another person's feelings. While such an approach may make it easier to get along with people, no real relationship can truly thrive unless it is built on a solid foundation of truth.

Assignment: Is it more important to avoid hurting people's feelings or to 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.

Prompt 3

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

Identifying with a group makes people feel secure with and trust one another because of what they have in common. They might share the same interests, language, beliefs, ethnicity, or cultural background. However, by limiting their identities to a specific group, people may miss important opportunities to connect with and understand others.

Assignment: Is a strong group identity a good thing or a bad thing? 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 who move from place to place often say that they feel happier and more fulfilled than they would if they lived out their lives in one place. Other people say that spending a lifetime in the same community is actually a more rewarding option, because doing so enables them to maintain a strong network of family and friends—something that people who move around a lot may find difficult to develop.

Assignment: Are people who stay in the same community happier than those who move from one place to another? 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 2014

Prompt 1

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

We place far too much emphasis on experience and achievement in our society. We tend to judge people based on what they've done rather than on what they can do. But looking only at someone's experience and achievements ignores how that person may develop or what that person may become. We can only determine people's true worth by what they are capable of doing, not by what they have already done.

Assignment: Should people be judged by their potential rather than by their experience and achievements? 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.

We all have authority figures we need to deal with on a regular basis—parents, teachers, bosses, coaches, and others. Usually, we follow their advice and do what they tell us to do because they have more experience and knowledge than we do. However, sometimes we disagree with someone who holds authority over us and need to stand up for ourselves, even if it means suffering negative consequences.

Assignment: Should we express our disagreement with authority figures, even if there are negative 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 3

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

Many people believe that it is important to plan ahead and to work toward an accomplishment that may take years to achieve, even if doing so means giving up immediate pleasures and fun. To these people, the end result of such an achievement is worth making sacrifices for in the present. Others, though, believe that it is much more important to focus on enjoying the present because it is impossible to predict what will happen in the future and because life's joyful moments are so rare.

Assignment: Should people focus on enjoying the present moment instead of following a plan for future achievement? 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.

Public opinion—the sum of the attitudes or beliefs held by a majority of the population—is primarily expressed through the media or public opinion polls. Leaders and politicians are often swayed by it, believing that public opinion is everything. Yet true leaders should not listen to what the public thinks; they should follow their own convictions, whether or not the majority of their fellow citizens agree with them.

Assignment: Should leaders follow their own convictions or submit to public opinion? 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 2014

Prompt 1

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

Many people are philanthropists, giving money to those in need. And many people believe that those who are rich—those who can afford to give the most—should contribute the most to charitable organizations. Others, however, disagree. Why should those who are more fortunate than others have more of a moral obligation to help those who are less fortunate?

Assignment: Should people who are more fortunate than others have more of a moral obligation to help those who are less fortunate? 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.

Our culture puts entirely too much emphasis on popular entertainment. Of course, we all need to be distracted occasionally, but if we spend a lot of time browsing our favorite websites, watching television, playing video games, or updating our social networking accounts, we are merely avoiding life's more important realities. Moreover, none of these activities helps us develop any of the skills or acquire any of the knowledge we need to succeed in the real world.

Assignment: Can popular entertainment offer us anything of value, or is it just a worthless distraction? 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.

By never being satisfied with what we have, we are never content. Our focus on growth, progress, and the idea of “more” makes us fundamentally unhappy, always seeking more than

what we need. I used to believe greatly in “growth,” but I’ve changed my mind. It now makes sense to me that growth for growth’s sake creates a fundamental dissatisfaction with what I have.

Adapted from Ron McDonald, *The Spirituality of Community Life: When We Come 'Round Right*

Assignment: Do growth and progress make us happy or do they lead to dissatisfaction? 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 2014

Prompt 1

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

Frederick Douglass once said, "If there is no struggle, there is no progress. This struggle may be a moral one, or it may be a physical one, and it may be both moral and physical, but it must be a struggle." He was right. Progress is something that must be fought for; without conflict, progress simply does not occur.

Assignment: Does progress result only from struggle and conflict? 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.

There are two false assumptions about experts. One is that they see more clearly and think more intelligently than ordinary citizens. Sometimes they do, sometimes not. The other false assumption is that these experts have the same interests as ordinary citizens and hold the same values. In fact, the important decisions of society are within the capability of ordinary citizens.

Not only can ordinary people make their own decisions without the help of experts, but they ought to.

Adapted from Howard Zinn, *Declarations of Independence*

Assignment: Should people make more decisions on their own and rely less on the advice of experts? 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.

For many people, the traditional path to success involves graduating from high school and college before working their way up in a particular profession. However, many of society's most successful individuals taught themselves the skills they needed to start their own businesses, invent new technologies, or create works of art. For these individuals, the nontraditional path turned out to be the path to success.

Assignment: Are people who do not follow society's traditional paths to advancement more likely to be successful than those who do? 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 see printed books as dusty remnants from the preelectronic age. They point out that electronic books, or e-books, cost less to produce than printed books and that producing them has a much smaller impact on natural resources such as trees. Yet why should printed books be considered obsolete or outdated just because there is something cheaper and more modern? With

books, as with many other things, just because a new version has its merits doesn't mean that the older version should be eliminated.

Assignment: Should we hold on to the old when innovations are available, or should we simply move forward? 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 2013

Prompt 1

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

Being unwilling to change is often seen as a limitation. For example, a common accusation people often make in arguments is that the other person refuses to even consider taking new positions on issues. But being consistent is not always a bad thing. In fact, firmly supporting a position or point of view shows that one is stable and constant and does not change one's position whenever circumstances change. This consistency is far more important than a willingness to adjust one's thinking.

Assignment: Is it more important to remain consistent than to change one's mind when circumstances 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 2

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

Getting people to work well in teams is crucial to accomplishing ambitious goals. Teams work a kind of magic in developing important ideas and getting hard work done, and they give us the close human contact and shared purpose that we all need. But there's a dark side to teams too:

group identity can be too powerful. The desire to be an accepted member of a group can prevent individuals from forming their own moral judgments.

Adapted from Peter S. Temes, *The Power of Purpose*

Assignment: Are teams or groups beneficial for individuals, or does group membership prevent individuals from forming their own moral judgments? 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.

Modern society values convenience. From disposable napkins to the personal computer, from fast-food restaurants to cell phones, it seems that nearly everything we buy or use has been designed to maximize convenience. Unfortunately, instead of saving time and energy and minimizing frustration, many of the so-called conveniences in our lives turn out to be nuisances or have a negative impact on our health, the environment, or our emotional well-being.

Assignment: Does society place too much value on convenience? 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.

When we go shopping, most of us do not think about the impact our spending has on other people. However, if we buy products from companies or individuals that mistreat their employees or the environment, or that otherwise do harm, we indirectly approve or even encourage such behavior. On the other hand, it may be unrealistic to assume that anything would prevent people from buying a good product at the right price.

Assignment: Do consumers have a responsibility to purchase goods only from companies and people whose actions are beneficial to 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.

November 2013

Prompt 1

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

We are often reminded that acquiring and owning material possessions—money, property, jewelry, even clothing—will not lead to true happiness. While it is certainly true that material possessions alone cannot bring happiness or provide us with genuine meaning in life, there is something to be said for having material possessions. Not only can they make us comfortable, but the happiness they can provide, while it may be momentary, is still happiness.

Assignment: Do material possessions make us truly 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.

Prompt 2

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

Some people emphasize that strong leaders never depart from their goal, plan, or vision and that such dedication is, in fact, a measure of their strength. Others would argue, however, that strong leaders are flexible. Strong leaders know when to admit they have made a mistake and when it is appropriate to change their goal or mission. This flexibility shows their strength and the extent of their wisdom.

Assignment: Is flexibility the sign of a strong and wise leader? 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.

Aiming advertisements for products directly at teenagers is a practice that occurs on television, in magazines, and on the Internet. These advertisements may help prepare young people for adulthood, as teenagers gain experience in evaluating and selecting from among the many options in our complex consumer society. Many critics, however, argue that teenagers are especially vulnerable to misleading claims of the advertising industry; moreover, they argue that advertisements often promote values harmful to young people.

Assignment: Are advertisements harmful to teenagers? 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.

Too often, people—especially young people, who may not have settled on a firm identity yet—try to imitate others, because it is easier to do so than to develop their own unique individuality. They focus on trying to imitate what seems attractive or desirable in others. But imitating others is never a good idea: when we imitate others, all we do is harm our ability to develop our own individuality.

Assignment: Is imitation of others always 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.

October 2013

Prompt 1

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

Most people think that contentment—being happy with the way things are—is the perfect state of affairs. After all, what could be better than being so satisfied with how things are that you don't want anything else? But contentment has disadvantages: if we are content with the way things are, we are not motivated to change things, to improve ourselves, or to do better. We must therefore always choose between being content and pushing ourselves to do better.

Assignment: Does being content with the way things are prevent people from improving themselves and doing better? 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.

Privacy was once valued and protected. Diaries came with locks to keep the writer's privately recorded thoughts from being read by others. Public telephones were enclosed in booths so that conversations would not be overheard. But now people feel free to post information about themselves on social networking Web sites and carry on cell phone conversations in public places. We would be much better off if we valued privacy—our own and that of others—far more highly than we do.

Assignment: Do we place too little value on privacy? 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.

Nobody wants to be called old-fashioned or be considered out of touch with current trends and thinking. But there's something to be said for holding on to old ideas and customs even if they may not be in fashion at the moment. People are too easily impressed by anything new and

trendy—the latest television show, or music group, or technological gadget. They place too much emphasis on newness without bothering to look at something's real value.

Assignment: Do people place too much value on newness? 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.

Everything a public figure or celebrity says or does is likely to turn up on an internet site or a television show. The great appeal of these sites and shows is that they help us learn as much as possible about public figures. The more we know about political candidates, for example, the more informed we are as voters. Much of the information, however, is irrelevant and actually prevents us from focusing on the issues that matter.

Assignment: Does having too much information about public figures distract us from the important issues? 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.