



The Ivy Education Center

LEAGUE

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SAT Essay Prompts (October 2014 - June 2015)

June 2015

Prompt 1

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

At the core of any good dialogue is not the ability to talk louder than another person but rather the ability to listen calmly to diverse perspectives. You can always learn more by listening to other points of view, especially those you disagree with. Spend as much time as possible listening to what other people have to say, even when you are sure of your position. Understanding and appreciating others' positions is the first step in persuading people to accept yours.

Adapted from Libuse Binder, *Ten Ways to Change the World in Your Twenties*

Assignment: Is listening more important than speaking when you are trying to persuade 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.

As much as loyalty is the foundation of our relationships with friends and those we love, our loyalties are always getting hopelessly tangled and compromised. Even if we want to commit ourselves to being true, we can never escape the conflicting demands that our contradictory loyalties create. The loyalties we have to various people can come into conflict; the loyalties we have to family may clash with the loyalties we bear our friends; our personal loyalties may be at odds with our patriotic duties.

Adapted from Eric Felten, *Loyalty: The Vexing Virtue*

Assignment: Is it possible to maintain conflicting loyalties? 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 value education that is practical, work that is profitable, and products that are supposed to be useful. Often, they abandon ideas and projects that they consider to be unrealistic or to have no immediate use. However, although it is true that being practical may lead to material rewards, being impractical may enrich people in other ways. Furthermore, today's practical products and activities may soon become outdated, while what now seems impractical may one day prove to be highly valuable.

Assignment: Do people place too much value on ideas or activities that are practical? 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. According to an old saying, absence makes the heart grow fonder. In other words, the less you see of someone, the more you value them. But with so many different ways to communicate and interact in the modern world, people are rarely out of contact with one

another these days. As a result, people simply do not spend enough time alone to truly appreciate the presence of others.

Assignment: Do people need to spend less time with others in order to appreciate 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.

May 2015

Prompt 1

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

Many people believe that loyalty—whether to an individual, an organization, or a nation—means unconditional and unquestioning support no matter what. To these people, the withdrawal of support is by definition a betrayal of loyalty. But doesn't true loyalty sometimes require us to be critical of those we are loyal to? If we see that they are doing something that we believe is wrong, doesn't true loyalty require us to speak up, even if we must be critical?

Assignment: Does true loyalty require unconditional support? 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 a young age, we are taught that we should pursue our own interests and goals in order to be happy. But society today places far too much value on individual success and achievement. In order to be truly happy, we must help others as well as ourselves. In fact, we can never be truly happy, no matter what we may achieve, unless our achievements benefit other people.

Assignment: Must our achievements benefit others in order to 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 3

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

In today's complex society there are many activities and interests competing for our time and attention. We tend to think that the more choices we have in life, the happier we will be. But having too many options—choices about how to spend our time or what interests to pursue—can be overwhelming and can make us feel like we have less freedom and less time.

Adapted from Jeff Davidson, "Six Myths of Time Management"

Assignment: Is having too many choices a problem? 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.

From the time we are very young, we are cautioned to think before we speak. That is good advice if it helps us word our thoughts more clearly. But reflecting on what we are going to say before we say it is not a good idea if doing so causes us to censor our true feelings because others might not like what we say. In fact, if we always worried about others' reactions before speaking, it is possible none of us would ever say what we truly mean.

Assignment: Should we always think before we speak? 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 2015.

Essay Prompt 1

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

Self-discipline is what allows you to say "no" and to resist doing things that might make you happy but are bad for you. Self-discipline is like a muscle: the more you exercise it, the stronger it becomes. But what is so wonderful about such self-control? Life is short, so why deny yourself the little pleasures and indulgences that make you happy? Self-discipline serves only to take the joy out of life.

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.

Essay Prompt 2

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

Many people have said at one time or another that a book or a movie or even a song has changed their lives. But this type of statement is merely an exaggeration. Such works of art, no matter how much people may love them, do not have the power to change lives. They can entertain, or inform, but they have no lasting impact on people's lives.

Assignment: Do works of art have the power to change 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.

Essay Prompt 3

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

Is it necessary for people to combine their efforts with those of others in order to be most effective? 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.

Adapted from Stephen R. Covey, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*

Assignment: Can people have too much enthusiasm? 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 2015

Prompt 1

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

We are often told to "put on a brave face" or to be strong. To do this, we often have to hide, or at least minimize, whatever fears, flaws, and vulnerabilities we possess. However, such an emphasis on strength is misguided. What truly takes courage is to show our imperfections, not to show our strengths, because it is only when we are able to show vulnerability—or the capacity to be hurt—that we are genuinely able to connect with other people.

Assignment: Is it more courageous to show vulnerability than it is to show strength? 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 argue that it is impossible to create a perfect society because humanity itself is imperfect and any attempt to create such a society leads to the loss of individual freedom and identity. Therefore, they say, it is foolish to even dream about a perfect society. Others, however, disagree and believe not only that such a society is possible but also that humanity should strive to create it.

Assignment: Is a perfect society possible or even desirable? 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 people are very enthusiastic—always willing and eager to meet new challenges or give undivided support to ideas or projects—they are likely to be rewarded. They often work harder and enjoy their work more than do those who are more restrained. But there are limits to how enthusiastic people should be. People should always question and doubt, since too much enthusiasm can prevent people from considering better ideas, goals, or courses of action.

Assignment: Can people have too much enthusiasm? 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 the most important life experiences are the complex and difficult ones, such as learning a new skill, finding a solution to a problem, or overcoming a great obstacle. These experiences, which can be unpleasant at times, are worthwhile because of what we learn from them. However, simple joys can be just as valuable. Uncomplicated activities, such as spending time with friends, savoring a meal, or appreciating the beauty of nature can bring us great happiness.

Assignment: Are simple joys as valuable as complex experiences? 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 2014

Prompt 1

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

In decision making, we usually follow a reasoned process: weighing pros and cons, talking things over with a friend, and drawing on our past actions and experiences. In snap judgments—decisions that we make on the spot, with no reflection beforehand—we do not

follow such a methodical decision-making process. Everything tells us that relying on snap judgments is unwise. We make such decisions, however, because they ultimately work out better than decisions to which we give a lot of thought.

Assignment: Are snap judgments better than decisions to which people give a lot of thought? 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 believe that one must care very deeply about something in order to do it well. Passionate commitment, they argue, is a characteristic of every great achiever in history. But caring very deeply about something can cloud one's judgment and make it difficult to think clearly. More can be accomplished, in fact, with cool detachment. It is usually those who remain emotionally detached from their tasks who achieve the most.

Assignment: Is it better to care deeply about something or to remain emotionally detached? 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 this day and age, you must understand the overwhelming importance of owning unnecessary material. In the way we live now, you are not what you produce. You are what you buy. And outside of that which is found in a few aisles in the grocery and hardware stores, most of what you consume is totally unnecessary.

Adapted from James B. Twitchell, *Living It Up: Our Love Affair with Luxury*

Assignment: Is most of what people buy totally unnecessary? 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.

My father was my role model because he could do all of the things that I wanted to do in sports. I'm sure there are people like this in your life. You might have an older brother who is in college and is getting excellent grades. You can follow his lead by listening to what he says about doing well. Your role models don't have to be famous people. They can be the people you see and talk to every day.

Adapted from Derek Jeter (with Jack Curry), *The Life You Imagine: Life Lessons for Achieving Your Dreams*

Assignment: Can people who are not famous be better role models than people who are famous? 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 2014

Prompt 1

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

Many thoughtful people have said that cooperation brings out the best in people and leads to success in almost all endeavors. There is a limit, however, to the value of cooperative behavior, since such behavior may suppress people's willingness to be creative and to stand out from the crowd. Too often, cooperating means going along with the group even if that is not necessarily the best way.

Assignment: Does working with others lead to better results than acting as an individual? 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 have been taught since childhood that it is wrong to quit. We learn that quitting is impulsive and easy and that we should always endeavor to keep trying, even if it is difficult. But aren't there certain times when quitting is the right thing to do? In those instances, it takes great courage, maturity, and self-awareness to acknowledge that the plan we have chosen may need to be changed or that a new plan should be adopted.

Assignment: Is quitting ever a good idea? 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 wish that there were fewer limits on their behavior. They believe that rules—such as those imposed by parents, teachers, coaches, employers, and governments—prevent them from being successful in the activities they undertake. Other people believe that rules assist them in becoming successful in their endeavors. They claim that rules provide guidance and help define what is expected. They even say that having too much freedom can be a burden.

Assignment: Do rules interfere with or aid in the pursuit of 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 4

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

There is an old saying, "The squeaky wheel gets the grease." Simply put, this means that people who make their needs or desires known by making noise—that is, by complaining—are the ones who get what they need or want. But nobody likes a squeaky wheel: the complainer may get what he or she wants, but only at the risk of being perceived unfavorably.

Assignment: Should we complain to get what we 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.

October 2014

Prompt 1

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

Some politicians and educators advocate teaching values and character in schools. They claim that children need guidance to develop honesty, kindness, and trustworthiness and that schools should consider it their responsibility to foster these qualities just as they aim to foster academic skills. But good character simply cannot be taught in classrooms and through textbooks. Attempts to make values part of the curriculum will only take time and resources away from important academic subjects.

Assignment: Is it wrong to try to teach values and character in the classroom? 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.

Every country ought to have a program in which all young people are required to commit a year or more of their lives to doing community service at the international, national, or local level. The benefits of this compulsory service - not just for society but for the young people themselves - would far outweigh the personal cost of having to postpone individual goals for a year or more.

Assignment: Should young people be required to commit a year or more of their lives to doing community service? 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 tend to think of envy - jealousy of others, whether for their good fortune, happiness, or success - as a bad thing. We are told from childhood that we should not be envious of others, that we should instead be happy for others' good fortune and grateful for what we have. But envy has an undeservedly bad reputation. In fact, envy may help motivate people to improve themselves or accomplish their goals.

Assignment: Is envy necessarily 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.