

HOW TO WRITE

**A KILLER
SAT ESSAY**

TOM CLEMENTS

Fore Word

Clarion



FIVE STAR REVIEW



...IN 25 MINUTES OR LESS!

Copyright 2011 by Tom Clements

All rights reserved. Except as permitted under the U.S. Copyright Act of 1976,
no part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or
transmitted in any form or by any means, or stored in a database or retrieval system,
without the prior written permission of the publisher.

TC TUTORING
346 Rheem Blvd, Suite 110-B
Moraga, California, 94556
www.tctutoring.net

First Edition: January 2011

Cover design by Namita Kapoor

Printed in the United States of America
ISBN: 978-0-578-07665-2



BLURBS

Joanne Levy-Prewitt, syndicated columnist for the San Francisco Chronicle
WOW! I am so impressed with this book. Talk about distillation. With incredible style and humor, Tom has managed to distill the essence of the SAT essay into 160 very readable pages.

RH, California

Tom's book was a crucial part of my preparation for the SAT. It not only taught me how to write an essay but it also gave me the confidence to do so. I don't know how I could possibly face the SAT essay without this helpful information. In addition, my sister used this material and ended up getting a perfect score on her paper. Tom's book will relieve any fears you have about writing the SAT essay.

KW, California

With Tom's guidelines, pet paragraphs, and transition sentences, writing the SAT essay was a breeze. Before even receiving the topic, I already had general supporting evidence sure to fit any prompt and transition and topic sentences for every paragraph. By making the essay into a universal outline where you can mix and match supporting points, Tom has created an ingenious method for writing an excellent essay in a short period of time, without the stress of trying to figure out structural details!

BK, India

I'm a grade 11 student from India and have my SAT next month. While searching for tips on acing the SAT essay, I happened to stumble upon a 2 chapter sample of your book, "How to Write a Killer SAT Essay in 25 Minutes or Less". Barely 2 pages through the first chapter, I found myself thinking, "Haha. This guy is a genius." By the time I reached the end, I was sold.

SH, California

Tom's book has a bunch of really simple strategies that are very applicable to the essay portion of the SAT. Since Tom had already helped me "prefabricate" and outline my essay before I even read the prompt, the first part of the SAT was a real breeze and I made it through without a whole lot of stress. The rest of the SAT test is evil, but Tom's book definitely simplifies the seemingly impossible essay. He's a real lifesaver!

AK, California

This book was my SAT fairy godmother. Reading the previous year's prompts and learning easy ways to develop a quick, concise, and intelligent essay lowered my stress level more than any other preparation could. Thanks to Tom I received a perfect score and blew those Readers away. The wit and wisdom apparent in this helpful guide gave me a healthier perspective on the overall SAT. It's all a game, and Tom will teach you to beat the inside tricks that the SAT essay writers create. Tom uses language that teens can relate to, dissecting the essay and making everything seem much simpler. He's the coolest tutor and writer around. Thanks, Tom!



CW, California

You need to know the system if you're going to beat it, and Tom's book is the best way to do so.

DD, California

Going into the SAT, the part I feared most was the essay. Tom really put me at ease and I was able to apply all of the techniques to my essay. The pet paragraphs fit perfectly with any prompt and I feel like I would be prepared to take on any essay topic thrown at me.

JL, California

When it came time to write my 25 minute essay during the SAT, I realized how much of an advantage I had compared to the other students. Prior to even knowing the topic, I was well prepared to put my pen to work the second I was allowed to open my test booklet, and had confidence in the essay I was constructing.

NB, California

I went into my SAT test completely assured that I would receive at least a 10 on my essay with minimal stress. Thanks to Tom's book I was able to do just that. I breezed right through it. (Maybe one day everyone will use the Tom Clements technique and then the College Board would have to revise their test!)

SG, California

I thought it would be nearly impossible to prepare and write a solid essay in 25 minutes until I took Tom's SAT course and read his book about the SAT essay. Reading the book helped me enter the SAT feeling confident and prepared, and I surprised myself by getting a great score of 11. Tom's book is highly recommended. And don't think it's like any other boring SAT textbook, you'll stay interested in it and, in addition, learn a few fun facts that have nothing to do with the SAT!

SC, California

Tom's book blew me away! When I started reading his book, I had no idea how to construct an essay in 25 minutes and I was scared to death of even trying. But he showed us how to structure the essay, add transitions, and prefabricate a lot of the content stuff we needed to support our thesis. His book is awesome! I came away totally prepared for whatever prompt the SAT was going to throw at me. Tom, you're the best.

HM, California

The SAT people are certifiably crazy for making you write an entire essay in 25 minutes. And yet, Tom has found some magical way to make it possible. Not only do his strategies instruct you how to write an essay they want to read and beat the time crunch; most importantly they give you confidence in your ability to ace the test. And when you're sitting in that desk on the day of the SAT, confidence is invaluable!



CONTEXT

Originality is nothing but judicious imitation.
Voltaire

Good artists borrow, great artists steal.
Picasso

I think conscious, deliberate imitation of a piece of prose one admires can be good training, a means toward finding one's own voice as a narrative writer.
Ursula Le Guin

Everything I've ever written has bits and pieces of everything I've ever heard. Any rapper that tells you different is a liar. You can't write a book if you've never read a book. And if you've read five books and you try to write a book, your book will mainly encompass the themes and the context of the five books you've read.
Bun B, rapper, interviewed in The Believer.

All writers stand on the shoulders of other writers. All writers use unoriginal research. Not all stories arrive pure and complete in the mind. It's all part of the stew.
Jon Carroll, San Francisco Chronicle columnist

Fact is like clay. You shape it to your own ends.
John Gregory Dunne



Table of Contents



Chapter 1: White Space	11
Basketball Jones	12
Sampling	12
SAT Structure	13
White Space	14
Readers — Who are These People?	14
Rules of Engagement	15
Chapter 2: Snapshot	19
Sample Essay	19
Building Blocks	21
Key Point about Prompts	22
Chapter 3: Prefab Structure	25
The Prompt	26
Introduction	26
Sample Intros	27
Conclusion	30
Sample Conclusions	31
Chapter 4: Prefab Content	35
Raw Material	36
Civil Rights	36
Scarlet Letter	39
Personal Experience	40
Pet Paragraphs	42



Pop Culture	43
Technology	45
Transitions within Paragraphs	47
Epilogue	48
Chapter 5: Real SAT Essays	49
October, 2005 Prompt	50
Alex's Essay (score = 12)	51
April, 2006 Prompt	54
Tara's Essay (score = 12)	56
May, 2007 Prompt	59
Alaizah's Essay (score = 12)	60
March, 2008 Prompt	62
Zach's Essay (score = 12)	63
March, 2009 Prompt	65
Craig's Essay (score = 12)	65
October, 2010 Prompt	63
Mike's Essay (score = 12)	67
Less Than Perfect	69
Chapter 6: Quotes	71
List of Famous Quotes	71
Famous Quotes in Context	72
Chapter 7: Pet Paragraphs	75
Literature	76
Movies	85
Music	90
Sports	95
Technology	98
Art	103
History	105
Personal Experience	117



Chapter 8: Spin the Prompt	125
Interpretation	126
Sample Prompts	127
Couple of Toughies	131
No spin zone	133
One Final Twist	135
What's Next	137
Chapter 9: Go Fish	139
Essays that Work	140



1—White Space



As George Orwell pointed out in *Animal Farm*: "All animals are created equal, but some animals are more equal than others." So it is with the SAT, nominally composed of nine equal sections, one of which — the essay — is definitely more equal than the others.

Not only is the essay the first section you encounter on the SAT, but you're expected to construct — in a rush — a dazzling piece of prose from scratch on two pages of blank paper. Bummer.

In terms of the sheer terror it evokes among test takers, the essay is easily every high school student's personal nightmare on Elm street. In fact, Freddy Krueger's got nothing on the folks at ETS, the compassion-challenged academics who administer the SAT test for the College Board with the clear intent of messing with your plans for college. And nowhere is that more apparent than in the way they've rigged the essay.

Imagine: you've got 25 minutes to compose — unedited — a masterful, structurally sound, intellectually solid, vocabulary-dense prose piece that shows both your command of language and your understanding of literary, historical and technological trends. Right.

Truth be told, it's a scam from top to bottom. And in this book I'm going to teach you how to scam the scammers. In these pages, I've assembled a collection of real-world tricks and techniques that enable you not only to eliminate the fear and loathing associated with the SAT essay but also to beat the clock, ace the prompt and bag a top score of 11 or 12.

And this isn't just me talking. I've trained hundreds of students to produce high-quality SAT prose under pressure-cooker conditions. In fact, over 30% of the students who have taken my SAT writing courses have received scores of 11 or 12 on their SAT essays. No mean feat.

And, to help show you the way, many of these successful student essays are reproduced here — in full and in part — so that you can take advantage of the insights provided by your peers.



I'm a firm believer in teaching-by-doing. And the first step in doing is seeing it done right.

Basketball Jones

Case in point: I became an All-League point guard in high school (which eventually led to a full ride to college) after spending the summer of my sophomore year watching Art Diaz, the star player on our basketball team, snake his way through countless pickup games, leaving most opponents clutching for air as he blew by them on his way to the basket.

Over the summer, I studied his moves, practiced his routines, played alongside him and eventually incorporated his magic into a style I could call my own. Imitation, in other words, is the sincerest form of flattery. Not only that, but imitation is the first step in learning how to develop and perfect your own individual style.

Watching Diaz play, I could see the possibilities for my own game starting to materialize.

Sampling

In the rap world, imitation is called sampling. You know how it works. Ice Cube, Dr. Dre, Eminem, all those street-smart artists find a nice melodic riff to use as a foundation for a new song, then overlay some syncopated beats and real-world lyrics to complete the mix.

Take, for example, "It Was a Good Day", Ice Cube's ironic anthem to street life in South Central LA. The song borrows its melody from the Isley brothers' "Footsteps in the Dark", transforming the tune into a drive-by dreamscape where a good day means "I didn't even have to use my AK."

The fact that Ice Cube reached back a couple of decades to sample an Isley Brothers tune gives rap credence to D. H. Lawrence's famous quote: "The ideas of one generation become the instincts of the next."

People everywhere, in other words, build on the work of those around them and the work of those that went before. That's the way we're going to do it here.

We're going to build a twenty-five minute essay on top of some tried and true American events like Civil Rights and Women's Rights, then we'll mix in some heavy riffs from literature using clips from books like *The Scarlet Letter* and the *Great Gatsby*. To cover all the bases, we might even throw in something from



technology like the NASA space shuttle disaster or the famous meltdown of the Russian nuclear reactor at Chernobyl. All this will give you the content you need to write an impressive, detailed essay and *appear* to be an expert in history, literature and technology. Remember, appearances trump reality when it comes to writing the SAT essay.

In the meager 25 minutes you're allotted to write the essay, you need to *appear* to be well-read, culturally sophisticated, historically hip and a master of prose style and structure. Don't worry, I'm going to show you how to do all that — and more — with a minimum of muss and fuss, all within the twenty-five minute time frame.

I'm going to show you, in other words, how to prefabricate a large part of your essay — in terms of content, structure and transitions — so that you can approach judgement day fully armed and ready to rock and roll with whatever essay prompt the SAT folks throw at you.

But first, just so you know what you're getting into, a few words on the general structure of the SAT.

SAT Structure

Like Gaul (ancient France), which Caesar (ancient emperor) divided into three parts, the new SAT has been divided into Writing, Reading, and Math sections by the folks at the College Board (modern-day Caesars). Each section has several subsections, which clock in at more or less 25 minutes apiece, so that the test as a whole looks like this:

- Writing
 - Essay — two pages of terrifying white space
 - Editing — select the best way to rephrase parts of a sentence
 - Grammar — rules and regulations
- Reading
 - Sentence completions — vocabulary in context
 - Short articles — bite-sized chunks of semi-interesting material
 - Long articles — long, dull, and annoying reading passages
- Math
 - Multiple choice — math questions with selected answers
 - Grid ins — you're on your own in this one, no answers given



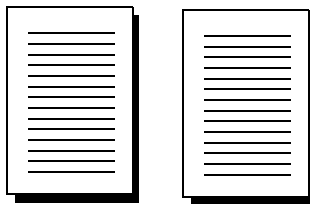
These categories are divided into sub-tests so that each section has a total of three sub-tests. This means that nine separate tests comprise the SAT. However, if this weren't enough, one extra test — called the dummy — is thrown into the mix.

The College Board uses the dummy to hype the SAT as a “statistically normalized” test, which allows them to throw in questions from old SATs, try out questions for new SATs and just generally make your life miserable by experimenting to their heart's content. All of this takes place on your dime. Since you have no idea which section of the SAT is the dummy (although it's usually an extra Math or Reading section), you have to treat all sections with the same due diligence.

The dummy brings the total number of sections you must finish on the new SAT to a mentally — and physically — exhausting total of ten. Roughly three hours and 45 minutes of SAT agony. And the worst part isn't finishing the test — it's getting started. Why? Here's the kicker — it's called white space. Read on.

White Space

When you open your test booklet for the SAT, you'll recall, the first thing staring you in the face is the essay — a mass of terrifying white space, two pages of lined paper waiting to be filled in with deathless prose. If you mess up here, panic overtakes you, and your score on the rest of the test suffers as well.



Two pages of terrifying white space

It's sort of like a basketball player missing his or her first couple of shots or a swimmer getting a slow start off the blocks. If you do poorly on the essay, you not only receive a low score on that portion of the test, but you also have a hard time recuperating and staying focused on the remainder of the SAT.

Conversely, if you nail the essay — and the vast majority of my students do — you move on into the rest of the test with confidence and purpose, knowing that you've got game and that the force is with you.



So, the essay is important not only on its own terms but also as a prelude to your performance on the rest of the test. Get off to a good start and enter the zone.

But what constitutes a good start and who says so?

Readers — Who are These People?

The College Board recruits high school and college teachers (typically, English teachers) to grade your essay, giving it a score from 1 to 6. Since two Readers are assigned to each essay, the top score is 12 — 6 from each reader.

At some point after the test has been scored, your essay, along with everyone else's, is scanned by a computer, turned into a PDF file and downloaded to an SAT database for eventual distribution to selected Readers.

Each reader receives a batch of essays and begins the scoring process. Now, do you suppose the Readers are going to grade your essay in the same way they grade class papers; that is, with meticulous attention to detail and a surplus of red ink? Absolutely not.

Readers get paid by the hour and the more essays they grade, the more chance they have of being invited back to participate in future essay-grading marathons. Therefore, the incentive for the reader is to move through each essay as swiftly as possible, spending no more than 2 minutes per essay.

That's right. You spill your guts out under intense please-god-get-me-into-college pressure and your reader takes a leisurely stroll down essay lane grading your prose in less than 10% of the time it took you to write it.

On the surface this may seem twisted and unfair, but you can make it work to your advantage. Knowing Readers prefer to work fast, you can structure your essay to help them do just that.

Two things are essential in this regard:

- Making a good first impression with your opening paragraph
- Using clear transitions from front to back throughout your essay so that the reader can follow, Oz-like, the yellow brick road

More on these things later. First, let's take a look at the criteria employed by Readers to judge your essay.



Rules of Engagement

There are several commonly-agreed upon criteria for judging good writing. Collectively these comprise a rubric or a set of rules employed as a scoring guide. These include:

- Structure — your essay must follow the classic five-paragraph format; that is, an introductory paragraph, three body paragraphs, and a conclusion
- Topic Sentence — your intro paragraph must have a clearly defined topic sentence or thesis
- Transitions — your essay must have smooth transitions (remember, guide the reader down the proverbial yellow brick road) both between paragraphs and within paragraphs
- Subordination — good prose style is characterized by heavy use of subordination. Subordination lends variety to your writing style by replacing short, choppy, subject-verb-object sentences with longer, more elegant sentences that incorporate dependent clauses.
 - For example: After refusing to give up her seat on the bus, Rosa Parks inspired the Civil Rights movement. Notice the long lead-in before the subject of the sentence, Rosa Parks, is introduced. Subordination can also work on the back end of a sentence.
 - For example: Tupac Shakur was murdered in 1996, a year that lives in infamy for west coast rappers. Technically, this last phrase (a year that lives in infamy for west coast rappers) is called an appositive, but in this book I define subordination as any phrase or clause that is not necessary for the main sentence to stand on its own. Grammarians, take note.
- Flash vocabulary — impress the reader with your use of interesting and sophisticated vocab sprinkled throughout your essay
- Concrete Examples — no matter how good your writing style, you need familiar examples from American history, literature and technology to support your thesis. Otherwise, the writing is just hot air. But don't worry, dozens of sample paragraphs (called pet paragraphs, since you'll be responsible for their care and feeding) are provided in later chapters.

As I say, these six criteria for judging an essay comprise a commonly accepted academic standard. That's all well and good; however, it should be pointed out that the College Board, in its infinite wisdom, publicly denies adherence to this — or any — rubric.

Instead, the College Board advises that each essay will be judged *wholistically*. Come again? That's right, *wholistically*. In other words, *subjectively*. *Wholistically* is just a cover, a subterfuge, a sneaky back-door admission by the test makers that they won't be pinned down or held accountable for any rubric whatsoever.



So what's really going on here?

No matter what the College Board publicly proclaims, it doesn't mean that Readers won't be applying the qualitative rules mentioned above — they will, they have to, they're academics! — it just means that another, strictly quantitative measure will also be applied, perhaps subliminally. That is:

- LENGTH

In the topsy-turvy world of the SAT essay, quantity seems to count as much as quality. So, no matter how good your prose, if the essay isn't long enough, your grade will suffer. It's not fair, I know, but — hey — we're here to deal with it. This means that, no matter what, you have to keep your pencil moving to eat up two pages of white space.

Adam Robinson, Princeton Review founder and SAT guru for over 20 years, advises his students to edge well past the 400 word mark. I agree with him and urge all my students to meet the 400 word mark for a minimum score of 10 on their essays. For an 11 or 12 (12 being a perfect score) I counsel at least 450 words.

No less an expert than Les Perelman from MIT, one of the official Readers-in-training for the SAT essay, had some interesting words to say about length as a indicator of essay success. In an interview with Linda Wertheimer from NPR, available on the web, Perelman states:

After I was given the (essay) samples at this conference, I went back to my hotel room and started going through it, and when I got to the ungraded samples, I realized I could score it before I read it because just a certain length was always a certain score. So being from MIT, where numbers are very important, I counted the words, put the number of words and the scores into an Excel spreadsheet and discovered that the correlation was the highest I've ever seen in test data

So there you have it. Not only are you required to write a qualitatively sound essay, applying the previously mentioned rules of engagement, but you're also expected to chew up every inch of white space available on two lined pages.

What if you write big, some of my students have inquired. Tough luck, is the unfortunate answer. To ensure you get at least a score of 10 (which, by the way, is very good) you have to write small AND fill up the white space.

Because the essays are graded subjectively — sorry, I mean *wholistically* — there are, of course, exceptions. But to be on the safe side, I have all my students write small, write fast, and write smart. Which is what this book is all about.



And remember, over 30% of my students have received an 11 or 12 on the essay. If that weren't enough, my students *average* a 10, which is well above the national norm and definitely within reach of each and every reader. Using the techniques and methodology described in this book, ANYONE can learn to write a top-scoring essay.

In the ensuing chapters, I'll elaborate on specifics. First, however, let's take a look at the literary lay of the land.

2—Snapshot



As the title suggests, this chapter is short and sweet. It's a quick overview of what an SAT essay should look like. In later chapters, I'll explain in gory, wide-angle detail how to prefabricate the component parts you need to build a successful essay from scratch. Right now, I'm more interested in taking a vertical approach, presenting an essay from top to bottom so you can see a clear beginning, middle and end.

As part of that process, I've also highlighted the component parts — building blocks - that go into the construction of the essay. Pay close attention to these since they are common to all good SAT essays and help the SAT Readers appreciate the logical progression and narrative flow that hold your supporting arguments together.

Sample Essay

That said, here's a sample essay written for the abbreviated prompt *Every Advance Involves Some Loss or Sacrifice*. This essay, derived from work produced by my students, has an introduction, three body paragraphs (examples from history, literature and personal experience) and a conclusion.

Most people in America, if not the world, would agree that every advance involves some sacrifice. In fact, a common sports adage proclaims: "No pain, no gain." In other words, progress is always accompanied by a certain amount of loss. This concept is illustrated throughout history, literature and personal experience.

One compelling illustration that some bad always accompanies some good is demonstrated in the Civil Rights movement. In 1955 Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on the bus to a white person. Although she was arrested and jailed, her brave efforts inspired the Montgomery Bus Boycott which lasted for over a year. Martin Luther King was inspired by her example and became known as one of the most admired figures of the Civil Rights movement. He organized hundreds of non-violent protests and gave an unforgettable speech entitled "I have a dream." Martin Luther King and Rosa Parks helped get the



Civil Rights Act of 1964 passed. Unfortunately, this social progress was accompanied by a tragic sacrifice: the assassination of Dr. King by a southern madman.

The theme that every advance involves some loss also occurs in Nathaniel Hawthorne's novel, *The Scarlet Letter*. The protagonist, Hester Prynne, is charged with adultery and is forced to wear a scarlet letter "A" embroidered on her dress. Although the Puritan community shuns her for her sins, Hester decides to reform her character by doing selfless charity work. As a result of her philanthropic character, the society changes its view of Hester and eventually thinks of the scarlet "A" on her dress as representing the word, "Able." Through her hard work and sacrifice, Hester is able to move forward with her life and become a valued member of the community.

A final illustration that progress always involves a loss occurred in my own personal experience building houses in Mexico with my church group. During the summer of my junior year in high school, I traveled with a small group to Guadalajara to help construct low-income housing for the poor. At first, I was appalled at the extent of the poverty around me and longed to return home to enjoy the rest of my summer lounging by the swimming pool. However, these thoughts soon departed when we finally got to work. Arranged in teams, we developed a sense of common purpose and community spirit while helping those less privileged than ourselves. Consequently, I learned the value of hard work and group sacrifice. As our church leader remarked, "You give up a little, in order that other people may gain a lot."

As seen in these historic, literary and personal experience examples, every advance is accompanied by inevitable suffering. However, with perseverance and planning, even the worst setbacks can be overcome. This notion is particularly relevant to our lives today for the world is undergoing change at an alarming rate. As Franklin D. Roosevelt once said, "You may be disappointed if you fail, but you are doomed if you don't try."

So, there it is — a classic five-paragraph essay with a good intro, serviceable conclusion, and three re-usable pet paragraphs.

I say re-usable since these three content examples — Civil Rights, *Scarlet Letter* and the Church Group personal experience — contain sufficient acts of historical importance, social drama, obstacles overcome and challenges met to support almost all prompts that come your way. The trick, of course, is to know how to define the prompt to fit your content examples. To make this crystal clear, I include an entire chapter later in the book called *Spin the Prompt* (Chapter 8) that shows you how to deal with all possible SAT essay topics.



Moreover, to ensure you have a variety of content examples at your disposal (over and above Civil Rights, *The Scarlet Letter* and an example from personal experience) I include another chapter called *Pet Paragraphs* (Chapter 7). This chapter provides content examples from other historical periods and literary works as well as examples from technology and personal experience.

In short, stick with the program, guys; in due time, you'll be well prepared for every possible SAT contingency.

Building Blocks

Every SAT essay is really just a series of building blocks stacked one on top of the other. One of the tricks to writing an essay in twenty-five minutes or less is knowing how to assemble these blocks quickly into a cohesive whole.

In this section, I walk through the snapshot essay from start to finish, highlighting the function of each of the major building blocks and showing, with snippets from the essay, how that function is put into play.

In other words, **notice how**:

- The introduction of the essay sets the scene with a broad, general statement, which is followed by a well-known quote that supplies context to the prompt.

Most people in America, if not the world, would agree that every advance involves some sacrifice. In fact, a common sports adage proclaims: "No pain, no gain."

- The second-to-the-last sentence of the introduction defines the topic. This is your thesis statement and is the central point around which your essay revolves.

In other words, progress is always accompanied by a certain amount of loss.

- The last sentence of the introduction acts as a transition to prepare the reader for the body paragraphs that follow.

This concept is illustrated throughout history and literature.

- Each body paragraph starts with a transition sentence that recaps the topic.

One compelling illustration that some bad always accompanies some good is demonstrated in the Civil Rights movement.

The theme that every advance involves some loss is also demonstrated in Nathaniel Hawthorne's novel, *The Scarlet Letter*.

A final illustration that progress always involves a loss occurred in my own personal experience building houses in Mexico with my church group.



- Each body paragraph supplies low-level supporting detail for the topic sentence.

In 1955 Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on the bus to a white person . . .

The protagonist, Hester Prynne, is charged with adultery and is forced to wear a scarlet letter “A” embroidered on her dress . . .

At first, I was appalled at the extent of the poverty around me and longed to return home to enjoy the rest of my summer lounging by the swimming pool.

- The conclusion starts with a transition sentence that recaps the topic.

As seen in these historic, literary and personal experience examples, every advance is accompanied by inevitable suffering.

- The conclusion closes the sale with a general statement and a quote from an apparent authority that has some broad relevance to the topic.

This notion is particularly relevant to our lives today for the world is undergoing change at an alarming rate. As Franklin D. Roosevelt once said, “You may be disappointed if you fail, but you are doomed if you don’t try.”

Key Point about Prompts

The key point to recognize in all of this is that these building blocks apply, in some degree or other, to *every* SAT essay. How can that be possible, you ask, when the prompts change for every test? Well, the trick is to understand that although every prompt *appears* different, they are all fundamentally the same. To paraphrase the French, when it comes to SAT prompts, the more things change, the more they stay the same.

Because the SAT is a national test, the prompts are generic, involving issues that lend themselves to different — and invariably conflicting — points of view. The easiest way to address such issues is to emphasize the dramatic elements inherent in the subject matter. As a result, regardless of the wording, all SAT prompts can be boiled down to themes involving one word: **DRAMA**. We’ve seen this already in the three content examples from our sample essay (Civil Rights, *Scarlet Letter* and the Church Group personal experience), all of which contain various elements of conflict, tension, and achievement: in short, drama.

Well, it turns out that this is the case for virtually every prompt. No matter what the prompt *appears* to say, you can address it using prefabricated content examples that interweave three basic motifs:

- Overcoming obstacles
- Meeting challenges
- Achieving progress — either individual, social or both



In the following chapters, we'll expand on this theme and explain how you can **prefabricate** the component parts of an essay ahead of time and spin them to address whatever topic the College Board throws at you.

Along the way, expect to see LOTS of examples from various students illustrating how these points are put into play. One of the key features of this book — and of my overall teaching methodology — is to use dozens of real-world essays to get you up and running as a successful SAT essay writer in the shortest possible amount of time.

