

SAT Practice Essays

Preamble

SAT introduced the Essay for the Writing Section since the revamp of *SAT I* to *SAT Reasoning Test*. Interestingly, while trying to test students' writing skills, the examiners have developed a certain sort of fondness to a particular set of styles that allows students to demonstrate 'good writing' by sticking to a certain essay structure as guideline in addition to superior content knowledge (that can be fabricated on the spot and not necessarily gleaned from reading) as well as good expressions in writing.

This set of practice essays serve as models for following the ideal essay structure to be used for the SAT Reasoning Test. Reading these essays written for questions given on practice papers provided by College Board, one would be able to feel for themselves the kind of essays that are well-liked by the markers of SAT essay sections.

Kevin, 2009

Practice Paper – Motivation

"All our motivation comes from within" – Ward Sybouts
Does motivations to change oneself come from within or without?

Motivations to change can come both from within and without, contrary to what Ward Sybouts suggested in the quotation. The feeling of risk when one needs to change sometimes stems from within - the uncertainty of what lies ahead after the change and insecurity from this uncertainty. Yet circumstances, and forces without, drives the bigger risk of not changing. From within, there's motivation change because of dissatisfaction with the current state; just like . From without, circumstances and needs of certain situation can motivate people to change; just as Piscine Molitor Patel in Yann Martel's Novel 'Life of Pi' who started eating meat out of the need to survive. There can also be a combination of inner and external forces to cause a person to change; just as Will Smith's character, Hancock, in the movie 'Hancock' changes himself to be a true, better superhero both because he feels pathetic about his state and also because he befriended Jason Bateman's character, Ray who urged him to use his powers to save people.

Extreme circumstances will drive people to change. The most obvious example would be when one is subjected to adverse condition like when Piscine, in the novel 'Life of Pi' becomes the sole survivor of the cargo ship and is forced to survive on the marine life he caught. He was a vegetarian all his life but in order to preserve his own life at sea, on the lifeboat, he has no choice but to kill the turtles and fishes and feast on them. He feels sad about the change and thus he prays for their lives everyday, hoping to be forgiven for what he sees as an extremely sinful act. When forced to choose to change or die, many would choose to change and try their best to adapt to the new circumstances to preserve and prolong their lives.

Finally, both external and internal forces can act in tandem to drive people to change. Hancock, in the movie with the same name, decides to change his bad habits of drinking and poor character after realising that he's not happy with his life and also that he needs to change to preserve the true friendship with Ray, who believes strongly that Hancock has a mission of being a saviour of the world. Hancock originally had the drinking habit, behaves vulgarly and causes lots of damage to the city infrastructure in the course of trying to nab criminals or save lives. He's unhappy all the time but don't see a need for change. Befriending Ray makes him realise that he has a role to play in this world and he's also encouraged to change by this new circumstance of having a new friend. Both circumstances, and dissatisfaction can act together to be a very strong motivation for people to change.

To conclude, changes can be motivated by inner and external forces and it's a fact that both changing and not changing presents a risk to the individual depending on condition and circumstances. Pi would have died if he stubbornly tries to continue being a vegetarian after he became the sole survivor of the cargo ship accident; he might have risk dying from illness because his body cannot take meats but it's more risky for him to not eat and

hope to be rescued before his rations run out. Thus, the change is perhaps eventually carried out because of the fear of the larger risk after intuitive assessments. Eventually the changes are motivated either by internal or external forces or both acting on the individual at the same time in the same direction.

Practice Essay – Advancements

Have advancements in our world help to make our lives easier?

Advancements in engineering has always been to attempt to achieve what was once impossible so as to make lives easier; unfortunately the technology churned out in the recent years have become too good at making lives easier that we become compelled to achieve even more in face of these lifeless creatures working for us. Changes that make our lives easier indeed do not necessarily make them better since we may come up with even more things to do in order to keep ourselves productive. Emails have been a great messaging tool, allowing documents and writings to be sent across the globe in an instant, making communication easier; unfortunately our lives are not exactly better, having to keep up with replying to emails as far as they enter our inboxes. Mobile phone allow us to talk everywhere and anywhere but its presence mean we are compelled to be contactable at all times, making a retreat from the hustle and bustle of urban work life almost impossible. Finally, instant foods have been allowing us to prepare meals conveniently but often in the expense of our health because of their poor nutritional values.

Indeed, we have become victims of technologies that promises easier lives. The invention of emails mean that we no longer have to put all our messages and documents into envelopes to be carried in bags of postmen, shipped in cargo ships or flown on planes and then to be dropped into the destination's mail box weeks later. Recipients of our messages can retrieve our messages almost instantly, making communications and staying in touch so much easier. However, we become impatient with people who don't reply emails fast enough as oppose to replying letters which we perceive as a huge hassle and thus more understanding. Hence the irony of our lives becoming burdened by the need to respond fast enough with the increasing ease of communications; so our lives isn't quite any better.

Mobile phone would be another primary case in point for making our lives easier but definitely not much better. Being able to talk anywhere sure is a great convenience for people always on the move and without fixed line telephones. Nevertheless, one has learnt to yearn for periods of time when one is uncontactable and saved from the ringtones sounding off from everyone else's mobile phones around him/her everywhere one goes. Mobile phones now becomes a big nuisance in cinemas, theaters and even public trains. At the same time one is compelled to be contactable all the time, increasing the stress of worklife as bosses contact you when you are right in the middle of work and so on. Perhaps a busier life is a trade-off to an easier life.

Finally, the invention of instant foods have made life so much easier for urbanites who are deficient of culinary skills and probably fails big time in the kitchens. You could just drop by any convenience store, get a pack of instant spaghetti, heat it in the microwave oven and tada, a meal in minutes. But is the urbanites' life any better from these foods? Hardly, these carbo-packed foods are threatening to raise obesity to record levels and lack of fibers also endangers the health of these people. It's ease in the expense of health although industries are trying their best to develop instant foods that better satisfy our nutritional requirements.

To conclude, changes that makes our lives easier has indeed introduced new problems and thus doesn't quite make our lives any better when you consider the net effect of these changes. Nonetheless, these changes would at least allow us to inch towards better lives in general, creating a more sanitized environment for us to live in and also raise our productivity so that we are able to maximize the fruits of our labour.

Practice Essay – Selfishness

People are always driven by selfish motives. Do you agree?

Darwinian theory of evolution suggested a very narrow-minded approach to the perception of organisms, including mankind. We are seen as selfish creatures that tries to maximize our own gains in the expense of others in the 'survival of the fittest' and thus driven by personal desires for power, money and fame. However, we see that conscience have become a powerful voice inside the minds of people urging them to do the right thing - modern days have offered us ample examples of the power of conscience. The most apparent example is perhaps Oskar Schindler, the German businessman, a member of the Nazi Party, who saved thousands of Jews and Poles during the Holocaust. Likewise, Cynthia F Cooper of Worldcom had the conscience to expose the wrong-doings of her employer following her secret investigation that confirmed her suspicion that her company was doctoring accounts. Finally, in a rare case of investigative journalism in Singapore, Susan Long from Singapore Press Holdings followed her conscience, exposing National Kidney Foundations' misappropriation of charity funds.

Oskar Schindler was just an ordinary businessman with extremely good persuasive skills and he initially capitalized on the outbreak of the second World War to make a fortune for himself; he made use of the Prisoners of War and Jews who were captured by the Nazis to work for him in his factories that manufacture for the German army. He was selfish, driven by greed and was rising in power in the Nazis' hierarchy because of his monetary contribution to the war efforts but conscience drove him to protect his employees. Eventually he even sheltered more jews, claiming that they were his essential workers contributing to the war effort in order to prevent them from being sent to the extermination camps. For Oskar, conscience have become a powerful voice as he become increasingly exposed to the horrors of the war and he eventually sacrificed all his fortunes to save the thousands of jews he was sheltering through bribing to get them transported to a safer place.

A stronger illustration of the power of conscience as a motivator was for Cynthia F Cooper who couldn't ignore the signs of her firm doctoring accounts in order to cover up huge losses. Conscience tells her she must uncover the truth and expose the lies of her firm to protect the countless investors who had a stake in the publicly listed Worldcom. She conducted a thorough investigation of the accounts in secret, on her own. Upon confirming her suspicions, she reported that her company engaged in phony book-keeping to the company's audit committee under KPMG. She was risking her own career thus power and money, and would subsequently cause the company to go bankrupt but she went ahead to protect the public investors. Indeed, conscience is a more powerful motivator than money, fame or power.

Conscience pushes one to do the right thing without fear of what comes after, such is the power of it. Susan Long from Singapore Press exemplifies such a character when she exposed the fact that National Kidney Foundation (NKF) of Singapore had gold-plated taps installed in the CEO's office, indicating a misuse of charity funds and in retaliation to this claim by Susan Long, the CEO even charged her for defamation. Justice prevails when the trial exposed the CEO's unjustifiable huge paycheck and subsequently the release of false information on the number of patients the foundation was reaching out to. Susan risked her career and money in the defamation suit, but believing that she had done the right thing, she pressed on and her firm supported her, eventually exposing the fraud of NKF and leading to charges filed against the CEO.

Conscience is a powerful force guiding us in our lives, allowing us to be the kind creatures we are today. With the ability to sympathize, humans are able to be pushed towards performing the right things just as Oskar Schindler, Cynthia F Cooper and Susan Long showed us; this inner voice of conscience overwhelms the selfish desires for power, money and fame.

Practice Essay – Dangers of Success

Success is dangerous when one have too much of it. Do you agree?

Propelling oneself at a single direction, toward success without concern and regard for other matters could be very dangerous. Success can thus be disastrous when one's perspective become narrowed by this drive to achieve. Orson Welles' character, Kane, in the notable film 'Citizen Kane' illustrates how the media tycoon's preoccupation with success and wealth drove a wedge between him and the people around him. Jeffrey Skilling of Enron was

successful with coming up with innovations in trading energy but his obsession with trying to keep up with the appearance of success caused Enron to be drained of money and eventually led to its bankruptcy. Finally, the success of T T Durai of National Kidney Foundation in Singapore with fund raising has caused him to become overly confident and eventually end up squandering the charity organization's funds.

Indeed, different successful personalities have found their lives in deep trouble after their success; this is true of both fact and in fiction. Success bestow disaster upon Mr Kane in Orson Welles' acclaimed 'Citizen Kane' when his success in the media industry led to soured relationships between him and his wife. His drive to push his mistress to fame end up with his mistress living him and Mr Kane ended his life alone after building up a huge estate and media empire which eventually meant nothing to him. The entire theme film builds upon the idea that Mr Kane longed for the simple life when he was a young poor boy before he inherited the wealth from a Gold Mine when he reached the end of his life.

This idea of the grave consequence of success is likewise illustrated in the case of Jeffrey Skilling in the Enron scandal. Jeffrey Skilling was achieving great success as COO in Enron, pioneering novel means of trading energy in the market but he went too far when he advocated that Enron doesn't require 'real assets' and could just keep up with appearances and maintain high volumes of trading in an innovative accounting technique that place expected gains from current deals as current profits, pushing up the company's valuation. This eventually led to the draining of Enron's capital as it continued to pursue an aggressive investment strategy and eventually hollowed out the company.

Even those who started out with a simple dream of helping others could end up blinded by success and with that success, does things that brought upon one's downfall. TT Durai of the National Kidney Foundation (NKF) in Singapore was extremely successful with fund raising during his stint as CEO of the charity foundation; he helped NKF become the top charity organization in terms of fund raised. Perhaps blinded by greed subsequently, Mr Durai increased his own salary and abused funds when he flew on First Class flights with money that could be used to save kidney patients. He also squandered funds on expensive office renovations. NKF was eventually discovered to have blown up the figures for the number of patients they were helping and also underestimating the time their reserves could last them.

As seen from the examples above, though some fictional, that success could be dangerous when it blinds the person. Basking in the glory of success, one could go too far in trying to achieve more or to claim more gains from the success. Mr Skilling and Mr Durai sure exemplified personalities who have propelled themselves to success and then overdoing it, eventually plunging their lives into darkness and even fraud charges.

Practice Essay – Change for Better

Is our world changing for the better?

No one can predict the future or accurately forecast the changes that the world is going to undergo; however, the world have been plagued by countless wars and disasters and so the current times is really a period of relative peace that seem to promise that the world is indeed changing for the better. Advancements in technologies has not only made our lives so much easier than our forefathers, it seeks to solve the problems created by earlier, primitive forms of technologies. Diplomacy today has developed to a stage when we have unprecedented huge transnational organizations that pulls nations together in an intricate fabric of network relations, promising greater peace and stability. Finally, the rapid economic growth experienced by so many parts of the world in the past decades stands testimony to the claim that the world is changing for the better.

First, the advancement of technology have been increasing endlessly and extremely rapidly since the Industrial Revolution; in the past life have been harsh because man have been plagued by many infectious diseases, way too dependent on the weather because of primitive agricultural techniques and lived in constant fear of nature because of a lack of understanding if it. Medical technologies have cleanse most of the First World of infectious

disease and the situation in the Third World is improving as they open up to free trade. Genetically-modified crops have proved resistant to harsh conditions and increasing the stability of harvests. At the same time, new green technologies like hybrid cars are seeking to lower carbon emissions to reverse the problems caused by primitive energy technologies that has contributed to the bulk of carbon emissions in the past century.

Not only technology, the global economy is looking promising; growth have proceeded at an extremely rapid pace and more countries around the world are seeing GDP growths at higher rates than ever today. Trade flows have increase thanks to the opening up of markets and people are living better lives from improvement of their incomes, which goes a long way to improving social services that continues the virtuous cycle of educating more people and pulling more people out of poverty. Never in history have so many items from all around the world been within the grasp of a single individual shopping off the shelves at his local retail store. This increased variety of products and increased market competition that drove down prices of different products have improved the lives of everyone within this global economic network.

The relative peace that we are living in that has driven the belief that the world is changing for the better is mainly a result from the increased diplomatic exchanges and the formation of countless international organizations that bridged groups across the globe and increased interdependence of the countries on each other. These network of relations would help to sustain and peace, increase collaboration, create more friendships between people around the world, making the world a better place to live in. These collaboration also explains the rapid advancement of technology and economy that is explained in the paragraphs above. The future looks extraordinarily promising as we work together towards a sustainable pace of development that will allow continued growth without compromising the environment.

Critics may claim that people are getting together and talking but they are disagreeing, that technology is advancing but in the expense of the ecology and environment and that trade is compromising the sovereignty of countries, how can the world be changing for the better. Nonetheless, the fact is that unprecedented amounts of discussion are being carried out and deals over all sorts of matters, be it business, trade, environment, aid or politics are agreed upon and signed; likewise technologies have developed to a stage where we have become aware of their negative impact and have worked towards minimizing or even reversing them. Finally, the economic growth have pulled thousands out of poverty; although the income gap is increasing, the fact is that a greater number of people around the world are leading better lives with a higher standard of living. In view of all these positive developments, I dare say, the world is, indeed changing for the better.

Practice Essay – Adversity and hardship

Adversity and hardships makes us stronger. Do you agree?

Through adversity and hardship, we indeed discover ourselves and emerge stronger or positively-charged to improve ourselves so we may not be defeated once again. This applies not only to individuals but entire nations, as well as companies. The grandest example was China's defeat in the Opium Wars which made the people realise the incompetence of the Qing Dynasty and eventually led to support for Sun Yat-sen and the success of his revolution against the Manchu regime. Likewise, the Japanese Occupation of Singapore made Singaporeans discover their weakness resulting from a reliance on the British military protection and pushed them to independence and ultimately form their own defence force. In the final example, Abbott Laboratories which were rather laid back when it thought it was endlessly milking their cash cow - a particular antibiotics which they own the patent; leading to stagnation of the company in terms of research and innovation. When confronted by the fact that their patent was going to expire, they were pushed to diversify and eventually emerged as one of the most diversified and successful pharmaceutical giants of the world.

The Opium Wars in the mid 19th Century exposed the weakness of China's Qing Dynasty regime which was plagued by corruption, special interests from different groups within the government and internal power struggles. At the same time, it showed how backward China was, relative to the superior technology of the western powers. The defeat was an absolute humiliation that led the Chinese people to wake up to the incompetence of the

Manchu regime and strengthened their resolve to bring down the government. Revolution leaders subsequently emerged decades following the Opium Wars and eventually, the Xinhai Revolution led to the formation of the Republic of China led by Sun Yat-sen. Only in face of adversity that resulted from the incompetence of the Qing Dynasty did the Chinese people unite to topple the regime.

Another case in history would be the Fall of Singapore into the hands of Japanese that resulted in the 3 over years of Japanese Occupation. Believing that Singapore was well defended by the British military (then the most powerful naval power), Singaporeans did not prepare themselves to defend the land during the Second World War. The failure of the British military to protect their military vessels from the shelling of Japanese Zero Fighters led Singaporeans to realise they need to contribute to the war effort. Following the Japanese Occupation, Singaporeans quickly requested for self-government, believing that British could no longer be trusted to manage and protect their land. It's through adversity that Singaporeans discover the weakness of their land and become positively charged with the strong desire to defend and govern it themselves.

Even companies, which have grown laid back due to the success of a single product need an adversity to teach them to be prudent in their business. Abbott Laboratories was at one point in time extremely dependent on a particular antibiotic drug that proved extremely successful with combating several forms of infection. The lack of challenge caused them to be conceited and their research was not matching the aggressiveness of other firms in the industry; when the patent of this important drug was about to expire, the firm was plunged into deep trouble of the inability to find another key revenue-generating product. This crisis woke the firm up from their slumber and forced them to diversify from the pharmaceutical industry into other health care products. The discovery of their weakness as a result of this crisis pushed them to change themselves and eventually become one of the most diversified pharmaceuticals health care company.

An easy life only creates an unhealthy contentment that makes one too relaxed to handle tough challenges; only in face of adversity would we discover who we are so that we may grow stronger. Today, China's modernization, Singapore's success as a small island state with First World living standards and Abbott Laboratories' success in the industry stands testimony to the fact that we need adversity to provide the challenge that will help us discover our potential.