

# SAT writing prompts for practice

Read and think carefully about the issues presented in the following excerpts and the assignments below. Plan and write an essay in which you develop your point of view on one of these issues. Support your position with reasoning and examples taken from your reading, studies, experience, or observations.

The discovery that someone we admire has done something wrong is always disappointing and disillusioning. Yet even when people we consider heroes have been tarnished by their faults, they are no less valuable than people who appear perfect. When we learn that an admired person, even one who is seemingly perfect, has behaved in less than admirable ways, we discover a complex truth: great ideas and great deeds come from imperfect people like ourselves.

**Assignment:** Do we benefit from learning about the flaws of people we admire and respect?

*Source: www.collegeboard.com, 2009*

Some people say you should be content with what you have and accept who you are. But it is possible that too much self-acceptance can turn into self-satisfied lack of ambition. People should always strive to improve themselves and to have more in their lives — friends, things, opportunities. After all, where would we be if great people, both in history and in our own time, did not try to have more and to improve themselves?

**Assignment:** Is it best for people to accept who they are and what they have, or should people always strive to better themselves?

*Source: www.collegeboard.com, 2009*

So-called common sense determines what people should wear, whom they should respect, which rules they should follow, and what kind of lives they should lead. Common sense is considered obvious and natural, too sensible to question. But people's common sense decisions may turn out to be wrong, even if they are thought to be correct according to the judgment of vast majorities of people.

Adapted from Alain de Botton, *The Consolations of Philosophy*

**Assignment:** Can common sense be trusted and accepted, or should it be questioned?

*Source: www.collegeboard.com, 2009*

Winning does not require people to be against someone else; people can reach their goals through cooperation just as well as they can through competition. Winning is not always the result of selfish individualism. People achieve happiness by cooperating with others to increase the happiness of all, rather than by winning at others' expense. Ours is not a world in which the price of one person's happiness is someone else's unhappiness.

Adapted from Gilbert Brim, *Ambition*

**Assignment:** When some people win, must others lose, or are there situations in which everyone wins? 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.

Source: *www.collegeboard.com*, 2009

Knowledge is power. In agriculture, medicine, and industry, for example, knowledge has liberated us from hunger, disease, and tedious labor. Today, however, our knowledge has become so powerful that it is beyond our control. We know how to do many things, but we do not know where, when, or even whether this know-how should be used.

**Assignment:** Can knowledge be a burden rather than a benefit?

Source: *The Official SAT Study Guide, The College Board, 2009*

A mistakenly cynical view of human behavior holds that people are primarily driven by selfish motives: the desire for wealth, for power, or for fame. Yet history gives us many examples of individuals who have sacrificed their own welfare for a cause or a principle that they regarded as more important than their own lives. Conscience — that powerful inner voice that tells us what is right and what is wrong — can be a more compelling force than money, power, or fame.

**Assignment:** Is conscience a more powerful motivator than money, fame, or power?

Source: *The Official SAT Study Guide, The College Board, 2009*

Many people believe that our government should do more to solve our problems. After all, how can one individual create more jobs or make roads safer or improve our schools or help to provide any of the other benefits that we have come to enjoy? And yet expecting that the government — rather than individuals — should always come up with the solutions to society's ills may have made us less self-reliant, undermining our independence and self-sufficiency.

**Assignment:** Should people take more responsibility for solving problems that affect their communities or the nation in general?

Source: *The Official SAT Study Guide, The College Board, 2009*

Technology promises to make our lives easier, freeing up time for leisure pursuits. But the rapid pace of technological innovation and the split-second processing capabilities of computers that can work virtually nonstop have made all of us feel rushed. We have adopted the relentless pace of the very machines that were supposed to simplify our lives, with the result that, whether at work or play, people do not feel like their lives have changed for the better.

Adapted from Karen Finucan, *Life in the Fast Lane*

**Assignment:** Do changes that make our lives easier not necessarily make them better?

Source: *The Official SAT Study Guide, The College Board, 2009*

A better understanding of other people contributes to the development of moral virtues. We shall be both kinder and fairer in our treatment of others if we understand them better. Understanding ourselves and understanding others are connected, since as human beings we all have things in common.

Adapted from Anne Sheppard, *Aesthetics: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Art*

**Assignment:** Do we need other people in order to understand ourselves?

Source: *The Official SAT Study Guide, The College Board, 2009*

The old saying “be careful what you wish for” may be an appropriate warning. The drive to achieve a particular goal can dangerously narrow one’s perspective and encourage the fantasy that success in one endeavor will solve all of life’s difficulties. In fact, success can sometimes have unexpected consequences. Those who propel themselves toward the achievement of one goal often find that their lives are worse once “success” is achieved than they were before.

**Assignment:** Can success be disastrous?

Source: *The Official SAT Study Guide, The College Board, 2009*

There is, of course, no legitimate branch of science that enables us to predict the future accurately. Yet the degree of change in the world is so overwhelming and so promising that the future, I believe, is far brighter than anyone has contemplated since the end of the Second World War.

Adapted from Allan E. Goodman, *A Brief History of the Future: The United States in a Changing World Order*

**Assignment:** Is the world changing for the better?

Source: *The Official SAT Study Guide, The College Board, 2009*

Some people believe that there is only one foolproof plan, perfect solution, or correct interpretation. But nothing is ever that simple. For better or worse, for every so-called final answer there is another way of seeing things. There is always a “however.”

**Assignment:** Is there always another explanation or another point of view?

Source: *The Official SAT Study Guide, The College Board, 2009*

Honesty is important, of course, but deception can actually make it easier for people to get along. In a recent study, for example, one out of every four of the lies told by participants was told solely for the benefit of another person. In fact, most lies are harmless social untruths in which people pretend to like someone or something more than they actually do (“Your muffins are the best!”).

Adapted from Allison Kornet, *The Truth About Lying*

**Assignment:** Is deception ever justified?

Source: *The Official SAT Study Guide, The College Board, 2009*

Traditionally the term “heroism” has been applied to those who have braved physical danger to defend a cause or to protect others. But one of the most feared dangers people face is that of disapproval by their family, peers, or community. Sometimes acting courageously requires someone to speak out at the risk of such rejection. We should consider those who do so true heroes.

**Assignment:** Should heroes be defined as people who say what they think when we ourselves lack the courage to say it?

Source: *The Official SAT Study Guide, The College Board, 2009*

“Tough challenges reveal our strengths and weaknesses.” This statement is certainly true; adversity helps us discover who we are. Hardships can often lead us to examine who we are and to question what is important in life. In fact, people who have experienced seriously adverse events frequently report that they were positively changed by their negative experiences.

**Assignment:** Do you think that ease does not challenge us and that we need adversity to help us discover who we are?

Source: *The Official SAT Study Guide, The College Board, 2009*



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