

**March 2005**

**Prompt 1**

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

Given the importance of human creativity, one would think it should have a high priority among our concerns. But if we look at the reality, we see a different picture. Basic scientific research is minimized in favor of immediate practical applications. The arts are increasingly seen as dispensable luxuries. Yet as competition heats up around the globe, exactly the opposite strategy is needed.

Adapted from Mihaly Csikszentmihaly

**Assignment**

Is creativity needed more than ever in the world today?

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**June 2005**

**Prompt 1**

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

Many persons believe that to move up the ladder of success and achievement, they must forget the past, repress it, and relinquish it. But others have just the opposite view. They see old memories as a chance to reckon with the past and integrate past and present.

Adapted from Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot

**Assignment:**

Do memories hinder or help people in their effort to learn from the past and succeed in the present?

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**Prompt 2**

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

I cannot comprehend those who emphasize or recognize only what is useful. I am concerned that learning for learning's sake is no longer considered desirable, that

everything we do and think must be directed toward the solution of a practical problem. More and more we seem to try to teach how to make a good living and not how to live a good life.

Adapted from Philip D. Jordan

**Assignment:**

Do people put too much emphasis on learning practical skills?

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**Prompt 3**

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

Most of our schools are not facing up to their responsibilities. We must begin to ask ourselves whether educators should help students address the critical moral choices and social issues of our time. Schools have responsibilities beyond training people for jobs and getting students into college.

Adapted from Svi Shapiro

**Assignment:**

Should schools help students understand moral choices and social issues?

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**Prompt 4**

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

The media not only transmit information and culture, they also decide what information is important. In that way, they help to shape culture and values.

Adapted from Alison Bernstein

**Assignment:**

Do newspapers, magazines, television, radio, movies, the Internet, and other media determine what is important to most people?

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**January 2006**

### Prompt 1

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

Every important discovery results from patience, perseverance, and concentration--sometimes continuing for months or years--on one specific subject. A person who wants to discover a new truth must remain absorbed by that one subject, must pay no attention to any thought that is unrelated to the problem.

Adapted from Santiago Ramon Cajal, Advice for a Young Investigator

### Assignment:

Are all important discoveries the result of focusing on one subject? 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.

## **June 2006**

**If you took the June 2006 SAT Reasoning Test, you would have been given one of the essay prompts below:**

### **Prompt 1**

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

We measure our progress as a civilization by what we see as advances in technology, which seem more significant than such concerns as education and the condition of the natural world. Still, I would prefer to be a part of a community that judged itself on the happiness of its members rather than on the development of new technology.

Adapted from Thomas Moore

### **Assignment:**

Does a strong commitment to technological progress cause a society to neglect other values, such as education and the protection of the environment? 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.

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### **Prompt 2**

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

People are often told to obey the rules. In reality, these rules are not permanent: what is right at a given point in time may be declared wrong at another time and vice versa. The world changes so rapidly that rules are out-of-date almost as soon as they are created. People cannot rely on established guidelines to determine what they should and should not do.

Adapted from Gregory D. Foster

### **Assignment:**

Are established rules too limited to guide people in real-life situations? 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.

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### **Prompt 3**

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

I suspect that like many people who watch their diet, exercise regularly, and check the weather report before leaving the house, I am a little too concerned with controlling what can't be fully controlled. I know I am doing the sensible thing. But I sometimes think that the more reckless among us may have something to teach the rest of us about freedom. Perhaps there is something good about taking chances against our better judgments.

Adapted from Melvin Konner

### **Assignment:**

Is it sometimes better to take risks than to follow a more reasonable course of action? 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.

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### **Prompt 4**

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

It is rare to find an objective and independent viewpoint on style, literature, politics, or any other matter. Many people's opinions are formed through their associations with others. It is our nature to conform; conformity is a force that few can successfully resist. We give in to the human instinct to go along with the crowd and to have its approval.

Adapted from Mark Twain

**Assignment:**

Do we tend to accept the opinions of others instead of developing our own independent ideas? 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 2006**

**If you took the October 2006 SAT Reasoning Test, you would have been given one of the essay prompts below:**

**Prompt 1**

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

While some people promote competition as the only way to achieve success, others emphasize the power of cooperation. Intense rivalry at work or play or engaging in competition involving ideas or skills may indeed drive people either to avoid failure or to achieve important victories. In a complex world, however, cooperation is much more likely to produce significant, lasting accomplishments.

**Assignment:**

Do people achieve more success by cooperation than by competition? 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.

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**Prompt 2**

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

Sometimes it is necessary to challenge what people in authority claim to be true. Although some respect for authority is, no doubt, necessary in order for any group or organization to function, questioning the people in charge-even if they are experts or leaders in their fields-makes us better thinkers. It forces all concerned to defend old ideas and decisions and to consider new ones. Sometimes it can even correct old errors in thought and put an end to wrong actions.

### **Assignment:**

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

Is it important to question the ideas and decisions of people in positions of authority? 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.

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### **Prompt 3**

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

We don't really learn anything properly until there is a problem, until we make a mistake, until something fails to go as we had hoped. When everything is working well, with no problems or failures, what incentive do we have to try something new? We are only motivated to learn when we experience difficulties.

Adapted from Alain de Botton, How Proust Can Change Your Life: Not a Novel

### **Assignment:**

Does true learning only occur when we experience difficulties? 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.

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### **Prompt 4**

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

There are two kinds of pretending. There is the bad kind, as when a person falsely promises to be your friend. But there is also a good kind, where the pretense eventually turns into the real thing. For example, when you are not feeling

particularly friendly, the best thing you can do, very often, is to act in a friendly manner. In a few minutes, you may really be feeling friendlier.

Adapted from a book by C. S. Lewis

**Assignment:**

Can deception—pretending that something is true when it is not—sometimes have good results? 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.

We have a collection of SAT Essay Prompts from March 2005 till the most recent test released by College Board.

**November 2006**

**If you took the November 2006 SAT Reasoning Test, you would have been given one of the essay prompts below:**

**Prompt 1**

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

It is wrong to think of ourselves as indispensable. We would love to think that our contributions are essential, but we are mistaken if we think that any one person has made the world what it is today. The contributions of individual people are seldom as important or as necessary as we think they are.

**Assignment:**

Do we put too much value on the ideas or actions of individual people? 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.

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**Prompt 2**

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

Many people deny that stories about characters and events that are not real can teach us about ourselves or about the world around us. They claim that literature does not offer us worthwhile information about the real world. These people argue that the feelings and ideas we gain from books and stories obstruct, rather than contribute to, clear thought.

Adapted from Jennifer L. McMahon, "The Function of Fiction"

**Assignment:**

Can books and stories about characters and events that are not real teach us anything useful? 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.

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**Prompt 3**

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

"No one is perfect." There are few among us who would disagree with this familiar statement. Certain that perfection is an impossible goal, many people willingly accept flaws and shortcomings in themselves and others. Yet such behavior leads to failure. People can only succeed if they try to achieve perfection in everything they do.

**Assignment:**

Can people achieve success only if they aim to be perfect? 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.

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**Prompt 4**

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

Everybody has some choice. People are always blaming their circumstances for what they are. I don't believe in circumstances. The people who get on in this world are the people who get up and look for the circumstances they want and, if they can't find them, make them.

Adapted from George Bernard Shaw, Mrs. Warren's Profession

**Assignment:**

Do success and happiness depend on the choices people make rather than on factors beyond their control? 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 2006**

**If you took the December 2006 SAT Reasoning Test, you would have been given one of the essay prompts below:**

**Prompt 1**

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

In order to be the most productive and successful people that we are capable of being, we must be willing to ignore the opinions of others. It is only when we are completely indifferent to others' opinions of us—when we are not concerned about how others think of us—that we can achieve our most important goals.

**Assignment:**

Are people more likely to be productive and successful when they ignore the opinions of 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.

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**Prompt 2**

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

In many circumstances, optimism—the expectation that one's ideas and plans will always turn out for the best—is unwarranted. In these situations what is needed is not an upbeat view but a realistic one. There are times when people need to take a tough-minded view of the possibilities of success, give up, and invest their energies elsewhere rather than find reasons to continue to pursue the original project or idea.

Adapted from Martin E. P. Seligman, *Learned Optimism*

**Assignment:**

Is it better for people to be realistic or optimistic? 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.

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**Prompt 3**

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

It is easy to make judgments about people and their actions when we do not know anything about their circumstances or what motivated them to take those actions. But we should look beyond a person's actions. When people do things that we consider outrageous, inconsiderate, or harmful, we should try to understand why they acted as they did.

**Assignment:**

Is it important to try to understand people's motivations before judging their actions? 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.

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**Prompt 4**

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

Abraham Lincoln said, "Most people are about as happy as they make up their minds to be." In other words, our personal level of satisfaction is entirely within our control. Otherwise, why would the same experience disappoint one person but delight another? Happiness is not an accident but a choice.

**Assignment:**

Is happiness something over which people have no control, or can people choose to be 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.

**January 2007**

**If you took the January 2007 SAT Reasoning Test, you would have been given one of the essay prompts below:**

**Prompt 1**

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

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 the 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? 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.

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**Prompt 2**

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

Most human beings spend their lives doing work they hate and work that the world does not need. It is of prime importance that you learn early what you want to do and whether or not the world needs this service. The return from your work must be the satisfaction that work brings you and the world's need of that work. Income is not money, it is satisfaction; it is creation; it is beauty.

Adapted from W.E.B. Du Bois, The Autobiography of W.E.B. Du Bois: A Soliloquy on Viewing My Life from the Last Decade of Its First Century

**Assignment:**

Is it more important to do work that one finds fulfilling or work that pays well? 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.

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**Prompt 3**

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

The education people receive does not occur primarily in school. Young people are formed by their experiences with parents, teachers, peers, and even strangers on the street, and by the sports teams they play for, the shopping malls they frequent, the songs they hear, and the shows they watch. Schools, while certainly important, constitute only a relatively small part of education.

Adapted from Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, "Education for the Twenty-First Century"

**Assignment:**

Is education primarily the result of influences other than school? 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.

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#### **Prompt 4**

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

If we are dissatisfied with our circumstances, we think about changing them. But the most important and effective changes—in our attitude—hardly occur to us. In other words, we should worry not about how to alter the world around us for the better but about how to change ourselves in order to fit into that world.

Adapted from Michael Hymers, "Wittgenstein, Pessimism and Politics"

#### **Assignment:**

Is it better to change one's attitude than to change one's circumstances? 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 2007**

**If you took the March 2007 SAT Reasoning Test, you would have been given one of the essay prompts below:**

#### **Prompt 1**

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

From the time people are very young, they are urged to get along with others, to try to "fit in." Indeed, people are often rewarded for being agreeable and obedient. But this approach is misguided because it promotes uniformity instead of encouraging people to be unique and different. Differences among people give each of us greater perspective and allow us to make better judgments.

#### **Assignment:**

Is it more valuable for people to fit in than to be unique and different? 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.

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### **Prompt 2**

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

It is easy to imagine that events and experiences in our lives will be perfect, but no matter how good something turns out to be, it can never live up to our expectations. Reality never matches our imaginations. For that reason, we should make sure our plans and goals are modest and attainable. We are much better off when reality surpasses our expectations and something turns out better than we thought it would.

Adapted from Baltasar Gracián y Morales, The Art of Worldly Wisdom

### **Assignment:**

Is it best to have low expectations and to set goals we are sure of achieving? 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.

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### **Prompt 3**

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

Every event has consequences that are potentially beneficial. We may not always be happy about an experience, but we should at least gain in some way from it. For example, the worldwide gasoline shortage in the early 1970's created many hardships but inspired efforts to conserve energy. Whether the gains are large or small, there is something positive or useful for us in everything that happens to us.

### **Assignment:**

Do we really benefit from every event or experience in some way? 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 2007**

**If you took the May 2007 SAT Reasoning Test, you would have been given one of the essay prompts below:**

### **Prompt 1**

Think carefully about the issue presented in the following excerpt and the

assignment below.

Materialism: it's the thing that everybody loves to hate. Few aspects of modern life have been more criticized than materialism. But let's face it: materialism—acquiring possessions and spending money—is a vital source of meaning and happiness in our time. People may criticize modern society for being too materialistic, but the fact remains that most of us spend most of our energy producing and consuming more and more stuff.

Adapted from James Twitchell, "Two Cheers for Materialism"

**Assignment:**

Should modern society be criticized for being materialistic? 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.

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**Prompt 2**

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

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? 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.

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**Prompt 3**

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

We do not take the time to determine right from wrong. Reflecting on the difference between right and wrong is hard work. It is so much easier to follow the crowd, going along with what is popular rather than risking the disapproval of others by voicing an objection of any kind.

Adapted from Stephen J. Carter, Integrity

**Assignment:**

Is it always best to determine one's own views of right and wrong, or can we benefit from following the crowd? 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.

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#### **Prompt 4**

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

It is often the case that revealing the complete truth may bring trouble—discomfort, embarrassment, sadness, or even harm—to oneself or to another person. In these circumstances, it is better not to express our real thoughts and feelings. Whether or not we should tell the truth, therefore, depends on the circumstances.

#### **Assignment:**

Do circumstances determine whether or not we should 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.

#### **June 2007**

**If you took the June 2007 SAT Reasoning Test, you would have been given one of the essay prompts below:**

#### **Prompt 1**

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

People are happy only when they have their minds fixed on some goal other than their own happiness. Happiness comes when people focus instead on the happiness of others, on the improvement of humanity, on some course of action that is followed not as a means to anything else but as an end in itself. Aiming at something other than their own happiness, they find happiness along the way. The only way to be happy is to pursue some goal external to your own happiness.

Adapted from John Stuart Mill, *Autobiography*

#### **Assignment:**

Are people more likely to be happy if they focus on goals other than their own happiness? 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.

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## **Prompt 2**

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

Heroes may seem old-fashioned today. Many people are cynical and seem to enjoy discrediting role models more than creating new ones or cherishing those they already have. Some people, moreover, object to the very idea of heroes, arguing that we should not exalt individuals who, after all, are only flesh and blood, just like the rest of us. But we desperately need heroes—to teach us, to captivate us through their words and deeds, to inspire us to greatness.

Adapted from Psychology Today, "How To Be Great! What Does It Take To Be A Hero?"

### **Assignment:**

Is there a value in celebrating certain individuals as heroes? 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.

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## **Prompt 3**

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

The advancements that have been made over the past hundred years or more are too numerous to count. But has there been progress? Some people would say that the vast number of advancements tells us we have made progress. Others, however, disagree, saying that more is not necessarily better and that real progress—in politics, literature, the arts, science and technology, or any other field—can be achieved only when an advancement truly improves the quality of our lives.

### **Assignment:**

Have modern advancements truly improved the quality of 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.

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## **Prompt 4**

It is not true that prosperity is better for people than adversity. When people are thriving and content, they seldom feel the need to look for ways to improve



themselves or their situation. Hardship, on the other hand, forces people to closely examine—and possibly change—their own lives and even the lives of others. Misfortune rather than prosperity helps people to gain a greater understanding of themselves and the world around them.

**Assignment:**

Do people truly benefit from hardship and misfortune? 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 2007**

**If you took the October 2007 SAT Reasoning Test, you would have been given one of the essay prompts below:**

**Prompt 1**

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

A person does not simply "receive" his or her identity. Identity is much more than the name or features one is born with. True identity is something people must create for themselves by making choices that are significant and that require a courageous commitment in the face of challenges. Identity means having ideas and values that one lives by.

Adapted from Thomas Merton, *Contemplation in a World of Action*

**Assignment:**

Is identity something people are born with or given, or is it something people create for themselves? 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.

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**Prompt 2**

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

We value uniqueness and originality, but it seems that everywhere we turn, we are surrounded by ideas and things that are copies or even copies of copies. Writers, artists, and musicians seek new ideas for paintings, books, songs, and movies, but many sadly realize, "It's been done." The same is true for scientists, scholars, and

businesspeople. Everyone wants to create something new, but at best we can hope only to repeat or imitate what has already been done.

**Assignment:**

Can people ever be truly original? 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.

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**Prompt 3**

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

All people who have achieved greatness in something knew what they excelled at. These people identified the skills that made them special—good judgment, or courage, or a special artistic or literary talent—and focused on developing these skills. Yet most people achieve superiority in nothing because they fail to identify and develop their greatest attribute.

Adapted from Baltasar Gracián y Morales, *The Art of Worldly Wisdom*

Adapted from Stephen J. Carter, *Integrity*

**Assignment:**

Do people achieve greatness only by finding out what they are especially good at and developing that attribute above all else? 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.

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**Prompt 4**

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

Having many admirers is one way to become a celebrity, but it is not the way to become a hero. Heroes are self-made. Yet in our daily lives we see no difference between "celebrities" and "heroes." For this reason, we deprive ourselves of real role models. We should admire heroes—people who are famous because they are great—but not celebrities—people who simply seem great because they are famous.

Adapted from Daniel Boorstin, *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America*

**Assignment:**

Should we admire heroes but not celebrities? 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 2007**

**If you took the November 2007 SAT Reasoning Test, you would have been given one of the essay prompts below:**

### **Prompt 1**

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

People today have so many choices. For instance, thirty years ago most television viewers could choose from only a few channels; today there are more than a hundred channels available. And choices do not just abound when it comes to the media. People have more options in almost every area of life. With so much to choose from, how can we not be happy?

### **Assignment:**

Does having a large number of options to choose from make people 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.

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### **Prompt 2**

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

We are often urged to solve problems by ignoring traditional approaches and by finding solutions that are innovative or unconventional. We are encouraged to be creative and to trust that a new way of thinking will yield new insights. But innovation may be impractical and unnecessary. The best ways of fixing problems are often the tried-and-true ways.

### **Assignment:**

Is it always necessary to find new solutions to problems? 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.

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### **Prompt 3**

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

Many people consider the arts—literature, music, painting, and other creative activities—unnecessary because they provide us with nothing more than entertainment. Yet the arts are extremely valuable because they have much to teach us about the world around us and also because they help people find meaning in life.

### **Assignment:**

Is the main value of the arts to teach us about the world around us? 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.

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### **Prompt 4**

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

All people judge or criticize the ideas and actions of others. At times, these criticisms hurt or embarrass the people receiving them. Other criticisms seem to be intended to make the critics appear superior. And yet criticism is essential to our success as individuals and as a society.

Adapted from Ken Petress, "Constructive Criticism: A Tool for Improvement"

### **Assignment:**

Is criticism—judging or finding fault with the ideas and actions of others—essential for personal well-being and social progress? 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 2007**

**If you took the December 2007 SAT Reasoning Test, you would have been given one of the essay prompts below:**

#### **Prompt 1**

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

The first problem for all of us is not to learn but to unlearn. We hold on to ideas that were accepted in the past, and we are afraid to give them up. Preconceptions about what is right or wrong, true or false, good or bad are embedded so deeply in our thinking that we honestly may not know that they are there. Whether it's women's role in society or the role of our country in the world, the old assumptions just don't work anymore.

Adapted from Gloria Steinem, "A New Egalitarian Lifestyle"

**Assignment:**

Do people need to "unlearn," or reject, many of their assumptions and ideas? 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.

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**Prompt 2**

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

Our determination to pursue truth by setting up a fight between two sides leads us to believe that every issue has two sides—no more, no less. If we know both sides of an issue, all of the relevant information will emerge, and the best case will be made for each side. But this process does not always lead to the truth. Often the truth is somewhere in the complex middle, not the oversimplified extremes.

Adapted from Deborah Tannen, *The Argument Culture*

**Assignment:**

Should people choose one of two opposing sides of an issue, or is the truth usually found "in the middle"? 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.

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**Prompt 3**

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

All around us appearances are mistaken for reality. Clever advertisements create favorable impressions but say little or nothing about the products they promote. In stores, colorful packages are often better than their contents. In the media, how certain entertainers, politicians, and other public figures appear is more important

than their abilities. All too often, what we think we see becomes far more important than what really is.

**Assignment:**

Do images and impressions have too much of an effect on people? 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.

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**Prompt 4**

Until fairly recently, technological innovations and inventions were intended to serve basic human needs or desires. Today, however, the most important and urgent problem confronting us is no longer the satisfaction of basic needs. The primary purpose of modern technology is to solve the unintended problems caused by the technology of years past.

Adapted from Dennis Gabor, *Innovations: Scientific, Technological, and Social*

**Assignment:**

Is the most important purpose of technology today different from what it was in the past? 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 2008**

**If you took the January 2008 SAT Reasoning Test, you would have been given one of the essay prompts below:**

**Prompt 1**

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

It is better to try to be original than to merely imitate others. People should always try to say, write, think, or create something new. There is little value in merely repeating what has been done before. People who merely copy or use the ideas and inventions of others, no matter how successful they may be, have never achieved anything significant.

**Assignment:**

Is it always better to be original than to imitate or use the ideas of 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.

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### **Prompt 2**

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

Often we see people who persist in trying to achieve a particular goal, even when all the evidence indicates that they will be unlikely to achieve it. When they succeed, we consider them courageous for having overcome impossible obstacles. But when they fail, we think of them as headstrong, foolhardy, and bent on self-destruction. To many people, great effort is only worthwhile when it results in success.

Adapted from Gilbert Brim, "Ambition"

### **Assignment:**

Is the effort involved in pursuing any goal valuable, even if the goal is not reached? 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.

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### **Prompt 3**

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

Newness has become our obsession. Novelty is more interesting to us than continuing with whatever is "tried and true." We discard the old so we can acquire the most recent model, the latest version, the newest and most improved formula. Often, we replace what is useful just because it is no longer new. Not only with material goods but also with cultural values, we prefer whatever is the latest trend.

### **Assignment:**

Should people always prefer new things, ideas, or values to those of the past? 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.

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### **Prompt 4**

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

Since we live in a global society, surely we should view ourselves as citizens of the whole world. But instead, people choose to identify and associate with smaller and more familiar groups. People think of themselves as belonging to families, nations, cultures, and generations—or as belonging to smaller groups whose members share ideas, views, or common experiences. All of these kinds of groups may offer people a feeling of security but also prevent them from learning or experiencing anything new.

**Assignment:**

Is there any value for people to belong only to a group or groups with which they have something in common? 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 2008**

**If you took the March 2008 SAT Reasoning Test, you would have been given one of the essay prompts below:**

**Prompt 1**

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

Organizations or groups that share a common goal often mention teamwork as their secret to success by insisting that people in the group work together for the good of the entire group. However, by requiring each individual to accept the decisions of the others in the group, organizations may discourage the expression of individual talent. Ultimately, a group is most successful when all of its members are encouraged to pursue their own goals and interests.

**Assignment:**

Are organizations or groups most successful when their members pursue individual wishes and goals? 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.

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**Prompt 2**

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

Being loyal—faithful or dedicated to someone or something—is not always easy. People often have conflicting loyalties, and there are no guidelines that help them decide to what or whom they should be loyal. Moreover, people are often loyal to



something bad. Still, loyalty is one of the essential attributes a person must have and must demand of others.

Adapted from James Carville, Stickin': The Case for Loyalty

**Assignment:**

Should people always be loyal? 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.

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**Prompt 3**

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

Winning feels forever fabulous. But you can learn more from losing than from winning. Losing prepares you for setback and tragedy more than winning ever can. Moreover, loss invites reflection and a change of strategies. In the process of recovering from your losses, you learn how to avoid them the next time.

Adapted from Pat Conroy, My Losing Season

**Assignment:**

Do people learn more from losing than from winning? 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 2008**

**If you took the May 2008 SAT Reasoning Test, you would have been given one of the essay prompts below:**

**Prompt 1**

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

Technological advances have freed society from tiresome labor, such as washing clothes by hand, hauling heavy loads, and walking long distances, and have given people increased access to information and entertainment. Yet, when given a choice, many people still resist using modern conveniences. There must be something to be gained from not using technology

**Assignment:**

Are there benefits to be gained from avoiding the use of modern technology, even when using it would make life easier? 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.

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**Prompt 2**

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

From talent contests to the Olympics to the Nobel and Pulitzer prizes, we constantly seek to reward those who are "number one." This emphasis on recognizing the winner creates the impression that other competitors, despite working hard and well, have lost. In many cases, however, the difference between the winner and the losers is slight. The wrong person may even be selected as the winner. Awards and prizes merely distract us from valuable qualities possessed by others besides the winners.

**Assignment:**

Do people place too much emphasis on winning? 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.

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**Prompt 3**

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

There are those who believe that everything we do is inspired by the desire for power in its various forms. They maintain that our actions are nothing but expressions of a striving for power. In this view, even when we act kindly toward other people, we are motivated, whether we know it or not, by a desire to have some control over their lives, for our act of kindness puts them partially in our power.

Adapted from Leszek Kolakowski, Freedom, Fame, Lying, and Betrayal: Essays on Everyday Life

**Assignment:**

Are people's actions motivated primarily by a desire for power over 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.

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**Prompt 4**

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

Common sense suggests an obvious division between the past and present, between history and current events. In many cases, however, this boundary is not clear cut because earlier events are not locked away in the past. Events from history

remain alive through people's memories and through books, films, and other media. For both individuals and groups, incidents from the past continue to influence the present—sometimes positively and sometimes negatively.

**Assignment:**

Do incidents from the past continue to influence the present? 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.

**June 2008**

**If you took the June 2008 SAT Reasoning Test, you would have been given one of the essay prompts below:**

**Prompt 1**

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

Most of us are convinced that fame brings happiness. Fame, it seems, is among the things people most desire. We believe that to be famous, for whatever reason, is to prove oneself and confirm that one matters in the world. And yet those who are already famous often complain of the terrible burden of fame. In fact, making the achievement of fame one's life goal involves commitments of time and effort that are usually wasted.

Adapted from Leszek Kolakowski, *Freedom, Fame, Lying, and Betrayal: Essays on Everyday Life*

**Assignment:**

Does fame bring happiness, or are people who are not famous more likely to be 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.

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**Prompt 2**

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

A society composed of men and women who are not bound by convention—in other words, they do not act according to what others say or do—is far more lively than one in which all people behave alike. When each person's character is developed

individually and differences of opinion are acceptable, it is beneficial to interact with new people because they are not mere replicas of those whom one has already met.

Adapted from Bertrand Russell, *The Conquest of Happiness*

**Assignment:**

Is it better for a society when people act as individuals rather than copying the ideas and opinions of 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.

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**Prompt 3**

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

When someone has the same ideas or views as most people do, we tend to believe that the person is reasonable and correct. Often, however, views that are considered reasonable or commonsensical are anything but sensible. Many widely held views regarding current events, science, education, arts and literature, and many other topics ultimately prove to be wrong. The fact that an idea or view is widespread—held by many people—does not make it right.

**Assignment:**

Are widely held views often wrong, or are such views more likely to be correct? 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 2008**

**If you took the October 2008 SAT Reasoning Test, you would have been given one of the essay prompts below:**

**Prompt 1**

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

We are frequently told that compromise is the best way for people to work out their differences. When people compromise, with each side losing a little in order to reach a satisfactory agreement, both sides can continue to live in harmony. However, compromise can work only when the issues at stake are not that important.

Compromise does not work when there is a genuine difference of opinion about strongly held principles or ideas.

**Assignment:**

Is compromise always the best way to resolve a 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.

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**Prompt 2**

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

People usually assume that the quality of a decision is directly related to the time and effort that went into making it. We believe that we are always better off gathering as much information as possible and then spending as much time as possible analyzing that information. But there are times when making a quick judgment is the best thing to do. Decisions made quickly can be as good as decisions made slowly and cautiously.

Adapted from Malcolm Gladwell, *Blink: The Power of Thinking Without Thinking*

**Assignment:**

Are decisions made quickly just as good as decisions made slowly and carefully? 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.

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**Prompt 3**

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

It is unrealistic to think that any group of people—a family, a committee, a company, a city—can function peacefully and productively without some kind of authority. The needs and interests of the individuals who make up any group are too varied for its members to operate as a unit without having someone to make the final decisions. Somebody has to be in charge; somebody has to be ultimately responsible.

**Assignment:**

Can a group of people function effectively without someone being in charge? 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.

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#### **Prompt 4**

Not yet available.

#### **November 2008**

**If you took the November 2008 SAT Reasoning Test, you would have been given one of the essay prompts below:**

#### **Prompt 1**

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

If an old tradition is still around today, we can assume that it deserves to remain in existence. Well-established customs, styles that are still popular, and ideas that people still find sensible survive because these traditions are strong enough to survive. Continuity guarantees quality. Old-fashioned hospitality, old-fashioned politeness, old-fashioned honor in business—all these traditions have qualities of survival. Fortunately, these will always be with us.

Adapted from Jacob Braude, *Jacob Braude's Second Encyclopedia of Stories, Quotations, and Anecdotes*

#### **Assignment:**

Do all established traditions deserve to remain in existence? 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.

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#### **Prompt 2**

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

We cannot appreciate what we have for its own merit. We see ourselves as fortunate only when we have as much as, or more than, other people. Thus, our judgment of what represents an appropriate limit on anything—on wealth or status or possessions—is never arrived at independently. Instead, we compare ourselves to other people, always wondering if what we have is enough.

Adapted from Alain de Botton, *Status Anxiety*

**Assignment:**

Do people need to compare themselves with others in order to appreciate what they have? 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.

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**Prompt 3**

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

On the surface, censorship seems objectionable because it limits our freedom. But all societies need to suppress or restrict information that is offensive or potentially harmful. People depend on the establishment of some limits, some way of making distinctions between what is right and what is wrong. Censorship is actually beneficial to a society because it helps to establish ideals of what is proper in such areas as art, music, and literature.

**Assignment:**

Should society limit people's exposure to some kinds of information or forms of expression? 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.

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**Prompt 4**

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

Independent people—those who rely on themselves rather than on others—get what they want through their own efforts. Interdependent people combine their efforts with the efforts of others to achieve their goals. To be most effective, people need to be interdependent. People who do not think and act interdependently may achieve individual success, but they will not be good leaders or team players.

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

**Assignment:**

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.

**December 2008**

**If you took the December 2008 SAT Reasoning Test, you would have been given one of the essay prompts below:**

**Prompt 1**

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

The biggest difference between people who succeed at any difficult undertaking and those who do not is not ability but persistence. Many extremely talented people give up when obstacles arise. After all, who wants to face failure? It is often said about highly successful people that they are just ordinary individuals who kept on trying, who did not give up.

Adapted from Tom Morris, *True Success: A New Philosophy of Excellence*

**Assignment:**

Is persistence more important than ability in determining a person's 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.

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**Prompt 2**

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

Whether it is a child pouting to get ice cream or a politician using emotionally charged language to influence potential supporters, all people use some form of acting to achieve whatever ends they seek. Public figures of all kinds would have short, unsuccessful careers without the aid of acting. Acting—consciously assuming a role in order to achieve some purpose—is a tool people use to protect their interests and gain advantages in every aspect of life.

Adapted from Marlon Brando, Foreword to *The Technique of Acting* by Stella Adler

**Assignment:**

Is acting an essential part of everyday 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.

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**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.

**January 2009**

**If you took the January 2009 SAT Reasoning Test, you would have been given one of the essay prompts below:**

**Prompt 1**

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

Planning lets people impose order on the chaotic processes of making or doing something new. Too much planning, however, can lead people to follow the same predetermined course of action, to do things the same way they were done before. Creative thinking is about breaking free from the way that things have always been. That is why it is vital for people to know the difference between good planning and too much planning.

Adapted from Twyla Tharp, *The Creative Habit*

**Assignment:**

Does planning interfere with creativity? 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.

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**Prompt 2**

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

Most people underestimate their own abilities. They tend to remember their failures more vividly than their successes, and for this reason they have unrealistically low expectations about what they are capable of. Those individuals who distinguish themselves through great accomplishments are usually no more talented than the average person: they simply set higher standards for themselves, since they have higher expectations about what they can do.

**Assignment:**

Do highly accomplished people achieve more than others mainly because they expect more of themselves? 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.

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**Prompt 3**

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

People are taught that they should not go back on their decisions. In fact, our society supports the notion that to change your mind is evidence of weakness and unreliability, leading many people to say, "Once I decide, I decide!" But why do people make such a statement? If factors, feelings, and ideas change, isn't the ability to make a new decision evidence of flexibility, adaptability, and strength?

Adapted from Theodore I. Rubin, *Compassion and Self-Hate*

**Assignment:**

Should people change their decisions when circumstances change, or is it best for them to stick with their original decisions? 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 2009**

**If you took the May 2009 SAT Reasoning Test, you would have been given one of the essay prompts below:**

**Prompt 1**

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

Many people believe that being honest and honorable limits their options, their opportunities, their very ability to succeed. Unfortunately, in today's me-first culture, ethics may be the *only* thing people choose to live without! They believe they have

only two choices: (1) to win by doing whatever it takes, even if it is wrong, or (2) to be ethical and therefore lose. Few people set out to be dishonest, but nobody wants to lose.

Adapted from John C. Maxwell, *There's No Such Thing as "Business" Ethics*

**Assignment:**

Does being ethical make it hard to be successful? 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.

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**Prompt 2**

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

Whatever happened to good manners? Many books and articles have been written about the lack of common courtesy and old-fashioned politeness in today's society. From spoiled children acting out in restaurants to so-called experts yelling at each other on cable news shows, people seem less concerned with good manners and civilized behavior than ever before. On the other hand, if people really want to change the world for the better, they have to risk being seen as impolite or uncivil.

**Assignment:**

Is it sometimes necessary to be impolite? 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.

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**Prompt 3**

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

We define "courage" too loosely. Real courage is conscious self-sacrifice, either for the sake of others or to uphold a value. But we typically identify a single aspect of courage—daring or honesty, for example—as the entire virtue. We even say it takes courage to differ from the mainstream in one's preferences in fashion or music or to speak out about certain wrongs. Such acts, though admirable, are not necessarily courageous.

Adapted from John McCain with Mark Salter, *Why Courage Matters*

**Assignment:**

Should we limit our use of the term "courage" to acts in which people risk their own well-being for the sake of others or to uphold a value? 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 2009**

**If you took the May 2009 SAT Reasoning Test, you would have been given one of the essay prompts below:**

### **Prompt 1**

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

There are good reasons to pay attention to people who are older or more experienced than we are, even if their opinions on important issues are very different from ours. Of course, not every person older than us is worth learning from, while many young people are. But if the only people we listen to are our age and are likely to see things the same way we do, we will miss out on something important.

#### **Assignment:**

Should we pay more attention to people who are older and more experienced than we are? 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.

Good decision making generally requires people to think carefully and logically and to pay attention to practical details. However, people who depend on their feelings and emotions to make important decisions are not likely to spend hours gathering information, making lists, considering all possible outcomes, and so forth. When comparing the advantages or disadvantages of one course of action to another, these people ask themselves, "What do my feelings tell me?"

#### **Assignment:**

Should people let their feelings guide them when they make important decisions? 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.

Thanks to great advancements in technology, we live today in a world in which knowledge is more readily available to greater numbers of people than ever before in history. Having more and better technology, however, has not made people wiser or more understanding. Indeed, people are so overloaded with information today that they have become less, rather than more, able to make sense of the world around them than our ancestors ever were.

**Assignment:**

Has today's abundance of information only made it more difficult for us to understand the world around us? 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..

**June 2009**

**If you took the June 2009 SAT Reasoning Test, you would have been given one of the essay prompts below:**

**Prompt 1**

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

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? 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.

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**Prompt 2**

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

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? 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.

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**Prompt 3**

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

So-called common sense determines what people should wear, whom they should respect, which rules they should follow, and what kind of life 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*

responsible.

**Assignment:**

Can common sense be trusted and accepted, or should it be questioned? 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 2009**

**If you took the October 2009 SAT, you would have been given one of the essay prompts below:**

**Prompt 1**

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

Both in society and in our own lives, today's problems are serious and require serious solutions. Increasingly, however, people are taught to laugh at things that aren't usually funny and to cope with difficult situations by using humor. They are even advised to surround themselves with funny people. There is strong evidence that laughter can actually improve health and help fight disease.

Adapted from Marshall Brain, How Laughter Works

**Assignment:**

Is using humor the best way to approach difficult situations and problems? 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.

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**Prompt 2**

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

Call it a clan, call it a network, call it a family. Whatever you call it, whoever you are, you need one. You need one because you are human. You didn't come from nowhere. Before you, around you, and, presumably, after you, there are others. Even if you live alone and even if your solitude is by your own choice, you still cannot do without a network or a family.

Adapted from Jane Howard, All Happy Clans Are Alike: In Search of the Good Family

**Assignment:**

Does everyone, even people who choose to live alone, need a network or family? 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 2009**

**If you took the November 2009 SAT, you would have been given one of the essay prompts below:**

**Prompt 1**

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

Popular culture refers to television shows, movies, books, musical selections, artworks, products, activities, and events that appeal to the interests and desires of large numbers of people. Popular culture tells us a lot about the people of a society. Some people may criticize popular culture or deny its influence on their lives, but one thing is clear: popular culture typically displays the ideas and principles that people value most.

## **Assignment:**

Are the values of a society most clearly revealed in its popular culture? 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.

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### **Prompt 2**

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

Some people ruin their chances of achieving success or refrain from attaining a goal because they have learned that success is selfish. But they should not feel guilty about trying to achieve their own goals. People who act on their inner desires—their greatest wishes and ambitions—only make their own and other people's lives better and are more likely to benefit society. Imagine how much better the world would be if everyone could be happy and fulfilled.

Adapted from Sheri O. Zampelli, From Sabotage to Success

### **Assignment:**

Do society and other people benefit when individuals pursue their own goals? 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.

No matter how much people try and how much they believe in themselves, everyone encounters situations in which it is impossible to succeed. People are often advised, "Never give up," but sometimes, when it seems as though success will not be achieved, they should stop trying, learn from the experience, and move on.

Adapted from Phyllis George, Never Say Never

### **Assignment:**

Is it better for people to stop trying when they feel certain they will not succeed? 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 2009**

**If you took the December 2009 SAT, you would have been given one of the essay prompts below:**

**Prompt 1**

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

Thanks to the Internet, the word "friendship" now has a much broader meaning. No longer are the bonds of friendship limited to telephone conversations, shared activities, or speaking face-to-face. In this day and age, very close friendships can be formed without the people ever meeting and by simply typing words on a screen.

Adapted from Sharon Hendricks, *"A Broader Definition of Friendship"*

**Assignment:**

Is it easier now to form friendships than ever before? 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.

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**Prompt 2**

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

An Internet phone service is offering unlimited free telephone calls for anyone who signs up. There is only one catch: the company will use software to listen to customers' phone conversations and then send customers advertisements based on what they have been talking about. For example, if they talk about movies with their friends, advertisements for movies will appear on their computer screens. Commentators have voiced concern about customers' giving up their privacy in exchange for phone service.

**Assignment:**

Should people give up their privacy in exchange for convenience or free services? 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.

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**Prompt 3**

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

People are often criticized for working out their own ideas before learning all that others have discovered about a problem or subject. But those people are right; it is possible to know too much, especially at first. The time for thorough inquiry and extensive research is later, after you have made your own discoveries and come to your own conclusions.

Adapted from Charles Horton Cooley, *Life and the Student*

**Assignment:**

Is it better for people to work out their own ideas on a problem or issue before learning how others have approached it? 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 2010**

**If you took the March 2010 SAT, you would have been given one of the essay prompts below:**

**Prompt 1**

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

Many powerful leaders throughout history have considered themselves above the law and acted in ways that violated the laws or guidelines of their own country or group. People are quick to condemn these leaders, but shouldn't leaders be held to different standards? If what a leader is doing benefits the majority of the people in a country or group, it does not matter if a law or guideline is violated.

**Assignment:**

Should leaders of a country or group be judged by different standards? 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.

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**Prompt 2**

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

People are often advised to practice moderation in everything they do. The way to succeed in achieving their goals, they are told, is to remain balanced, controlled, and restrained. But this advice is misguided. Instead of being moderate, people should be passionate and intense. Throughout history, moderation has produced nothing extraordinary or exceptional. Excellence in any pursuit requires excess — great enthusiasm, high energy, and extreme effort.

**Assignment:**

Is moderation an obstacle to achievement and 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.

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**Prompt 3**

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

Possibly because we live in a work-oriented society, most of us feel that we must be continually busy in order to be successful. We are led to believe that fabulous wealth and fame await the person who works the hardest and is always busy. The irony is that taking it easy now and then would help us achieve our goals a lot sooner. In fact, overwork can stifle our creative ability.

Adapted from Ernie J. Zelinski, *The Joy of Not Working*

**Assignment:**

Does society put too much emphasis on working hard? 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 2010**

**If you took the May 2010 SAT, you would have been given one of the essay prompts below:**

**Prompt 1**

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

People make decisions all the time. Some of these decisions may seem to be minor and inconsequential—whether to read a book or to not attend a meeting—while others are obviously more important. But even though the important decisions are

likely to have equally important consequences, people should not treat casually or overlook the small decisions. The so-called small decisions have the greatest impact on our lives.

**Assignment:**

Do small decisions often have major 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.

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**Prompt 2**

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

A well-known company recently proposed setting aside every Friday as a day with no e-mail-based communication. On these e-mail-free Fridays, employees would be encouraged to refrain completely from reading or sending e-mail or text messages and advised instead to call each other or talk in person. This idea can work for everyone. If each week we set aside time to actually talk to one another, our communications will be less impersonal and more effective and satisfying.

**Assignment:**

Is talking the most effective and satisfying way of communicating with 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.

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**Prompt 3**

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

Our distant ancestors survived because they were physically active, hunting wild animals and gathering fruits and vegetables over large areas of land. Modern life, however, is characterized by physical inactivity. Given the resulting health problems and the tremendous cost of treating them, the government should work with schools and businesses to ensure that people eat the right foods and get enough exercise each day.

**Assignment:**

Should the government be responsible for making sure that people lead healthy 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.

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#### **Prompt 4**

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

In business, the term "personal brand" describes how companies define themselves and differentiate their products from those of other companies. People, too, are often advised to develop a kind of personal brand or style—to make themselves stand out from other people by developing unique characteristics. Nowadays, people who want to be successful in school, at work, or in their personal relationships must emphasize their differences from their peers in the same way that companies emphasize their differences from their competitors.

#### **Assignment:**

Do people succeed by emphasizing their differences from other people? 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.

#### **June 2010**

**If you took the June 2010 SAT, you would have been given one of the essay prompts below:**

#### **Prompt 1**

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

Common sense tells us that people tend to get along better with those who are like them, who think and act as they do. Many people, however, get along very well with people who are very different from them and may prefer to associate with those whose views and actions are different from their own. In fact, some people even complain that they are bored and irritated by those who are too much like them.

#### **Assignment:**

Do people tend to get along better with people who are very different from them or with those who are like 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.

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### **Prompt 2**

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

From early childhood, we are encouraged—pressured, even—to be in the company of others: we are urged to belong to this or that group, to join this or that club, to spend time with this or that friend. People do everything to avoid being by themselves, treating solitude as though it were the equivalent of loneliness. And yet it is only when people are by themselves that they can truly achieve their most important goals.

### **Assignment:**

Is solitude—spending time alone—necessary for people to achieve their most important goals? 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.

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### **Prompt 3**

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

Usually, people look to others around them—ordinary people—for their heroes. They define heroes as decent citizens who make sacrifices or try to make a difference. For example, people name streets after local war veterans, parks after teachers, bridges after local politicians. Rejecting historical, literary, or national figures as heroes, people tend to believe that anyone can be a hero. A hero does not have to be superhuman.

Adapted from Peter H. Gibbon, *A Call to Heroism*

### **Assignment:**

Should ordinary people be considered heroes, or should the term "hero" be reserved for extraordinary people? 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 2010**

**If you took the October 2010 SAT, you would have been given one of the essay prompts below:**

## Prompt 1

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

Why do we not value the creative arts more than we do? Why are subjects like music, drama, photography, and creative writing always the first to be cut from school budgets during hard times? Many would answer that, unlike math, science, history, and other subjects taught in school, the arts are unnecessary. But this is so untrue. The arts are as necessary as these other subject areas—possibly even more necessary.

### Assignment:

Is it absolutely necessary for people to study the creative arts? 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.

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## Prompt 2

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

I spent some part of every year at the farm until I was twelve or thirteen years old. The life that I led there was full of charm and so is the memory of it yet. I can call back the faint odors of wildflowers, the sheen of rain-washed foliage, the clatter of raindrops when the wind shook the trees, and the far-off hammering of woodpeckers. I can call back the prairie—and its loneliness and peace.

Adapted from Mark Twain, *My Autobiography*

### Assignment:

Is it important for people to spend time outdoors and to learn to appreciate the natural environment? 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.

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## Prompt 3

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

In some circumstances we are encouraged to conform—to follow others, to do and think what everyone else is doing and thinking. In other circumstances, however, we are told to be individuals and are reminded that most people we consider great are not afraid to be different. Conformity may be appropriate in day-to-day life, but we should save our highest praise for people who choose to be unique.

**Assignment:**

Should originality always be more highly praised than conformity? 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 2010**

**If you took the November 2010 SAT, you would have been given one of the essay prompts below:**

**Prompt 1**

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

We are very individually oriented. We see everything in terms of personal independence, personal pleasure, personal fulfillment. "Do your own thing," we say. The idea that people can actually do things for someone or something else—a community, a school, or any other group—is lost. It is important to realize, however, that all people are interconnected. We cannot survive without each other.

Adapted from Willard Gaylin in Bill Moyers, *A World of Ideas*

**Assignment:**

Do people put too much emphasis on doing things by and for themselves? 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.

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**Prompt 2**

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

Most people are so impressed by facts and objectivity that they do not appreciate the use of imagination. They worry that our imaginations get us away from reality, distort our views and perspectives, and, worst of all, are unscientific. As a result, using our imagination and other related activities such as appreciating art or music or being



creative are often considered the "frosting"—the nice extras in life—rather than vital pursuits that are crucial to everyone.

Adapted from Rollo May, *The Courage to Create*

**Assignment:**

Is imagination less valuable than facts and objectivity? 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.

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**Prompt 3**

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

There is no more powerful way to initiate significant change in our communities, our society, and our lives than to start talking to others. When people discover that they share a common concern, that is when the process of change begins. Change does not start with an individual leader of a group, a nation, or an organization announcing a new plan. It begins when a group of people notices something that could, or even must, be done differently.

Adapted from Margaret J. Wheatley, "Some Friends and I Started Talking..."

**Assignment:**

Is a group of people more likely than an individual leader to bring about significant 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 4**

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

Some people believe that making mistakes is unacceptable, that whatever is done must be done error free. However, research has found that perfectionists tend to be less successful than nonperfectionists because they spend too much time trying to be perfect. Even when they do some things wrong, nonperfectionists often achieve more of their goals than perfectionists do.

Adapted from Glenn Hirsch, "An Imperfect Look At Overcoming Perfectionism"

**Assignment:**

Would it be better if people were more accepting of mistakes? 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 2010**

**If you took the December 2010 SAT, you would have been given one of the essay prompts below:**

### **Prompt 1**

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

Again and again we hear the complaint that we have no heroes anymore. Heroes—people who should be admired for their great courage or noble achievements—are no longer recognized in our modern world. Many people, in fact, believe that heroes existed only in the past. But this belief is wrong. Because more praise is given to the latest technological innovation than to one individual's heroic achievements, we may not be aware of our heroes, but we do have them.

### **Assignment:**

Is it possible to be a hero in the modern world? 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.

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### **Prompt 2**

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

Technology has dramatically increased the speed with which we can communicate and share information. Some people are critical of this development, claiming that rapid communication, often made possible by some form of technology, discourages people from focusing at length on any one topic, shortens their attention spans, and prevents them from truly learning about the world and people around them. But what is wrong with how instantly and easily information is communicated thanks to the wonders of modern technology?

### **Assignment:**

Does the way that information is communicated today result in people learning less than ever before? 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.

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### **Prompt 3**

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

Is a temporary or partial solution to a problem better than no solution at all? Many people would say so. All that humanity can hope to accomplish is to find workable solutions to the serious problems of the world. Others would argue, however, that the world's serious problems are, in fact, caused by the so-called solutions. These solutions are creating problems more serious than the problems they are addressing.

### **Assignment:**

Do temporary or otherwise imperfect solutions to problems only create more serious problems? 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.

Choice improves the quality of our lives. On the other hand, the fact that *some* choice is good doesn't necessarily mean that *more* choice is better. There is a problem with having too much choice. We are unwilling to give up any of our options, but stubbornly insisting upon having all the choices available to us can lead to bad decisions, stress, and dissatisfaction.

Adapted from Barry Schwartz, *The Paradox of Choice: Why More Is Less*

### **Assignment:**

Is it better for people to have limited choices? 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 2011**

### **Prompt 1**

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

Idealistic people, people who pursue great ideas in hopes of changing the world, often have ambitious plans that are difficult or even impossible to carry out. These people can claim few solid accomplishments. In contrast, practical people

concentrate on workable ideas and goals, even though these may not meet an idealist's high standards. Their approach is likely to be more valuable than the approach of idealistic people.

**Assignment:** Is an idealistic approach less valuable than a practical approach? 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.

People generally put more trust in what they have learned for themselves than in what they learn from others. Few people, however, are really motivated to learn anything on their own. They are much more apt to learn when others are willing to teach them. Even though learning from others means occasionally learning things that are not useful or important, people are still better off when they learn from others.

**Assignment:** Is it better for people to learn from others than to learn on their own? 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.

Too many people do not consider their task or project complete or acceptable until every detail has been done right. Fortunately, such people have not always had their way, since nothing would ever be completed if we had to check every detail before we could consider our work done. In fact, none of the world's greatest accomplishments would have been made, because none of them is perfect in every detail.

**Assignment:** Do people put too much importance on getting every detail right on a project or task? 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 in our goal-oriented society place far too much emphasis on the outcomes of what they do. As a result, they miss out on the most important part of attempting

anything: the process itself. The process of trying to achieve something is always more meaningful and enjoyable than reaching the final goal. Whether we succeed or fail, it is the process—how we go about achieving the goal—that matters most.

**Assignment:** Does the process of doing something matter more than the outcome? 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.