

# 5 TIPS TO HELP KIDS ACE THEIR SAT ESSAY

Is your child having nightmares about the SAT? Does the thought of writing the essay keep her up at night? It's prime test-taking season for kids hoping to get into college next year. And while it may seem a little scary, the essay section is actually one of the easiest areas to ace. As a parent, you can help, by giving your child some guidance. Surprisingly, a strong SAT is extremely formulaic. Here are five no-nonsense tips from the folks at the Princeton Review:

## Neatness Counts

The idea of having to handwrite an essay may seem quite old fashioned, somewhere along the lines of sending a letter through the mail, but like it or not, your kid won't be using Microsoft Word on the SAT. Therefore, one of the simplest ways to earn a good score is to write legibly. You see, graders are responsible for getting through tons of essays each day, and so they usually only spend around 2 minutes reading each one. When they come upon an essay that is messy and makes life more difficult, right away they are being left with a bad impression. Translation, a lower score. Tell your child to print neatly, because the graders will appreciate it. (That's print – no script!)

## Paragraphs Are Your Friend

Remember that basic writing structure you learned in grammar school English: intro, body, conclusion? Well, teach your child to follow that same format on the SAT essay: first, provide an introduction that includes a thesis (the SAT asks if you agree or disagree with a given statement). Then teach your child to follow with three supporting paragraphs that back up the thesis. End with a conclusion to sum it all up. By following this standard format, students give the impression that they are organized and that they know how to structure an essay. One other mini-tip: clearly indent all paragraphs, about a full half-inch. The clearer you make things for them, the happier the graders will be.

## Channel Your Inner Webster

Even though the new SAT requires less knowledge of vocabulary than previous years (analogies are gone), students can make a very favorable impression by simply adding a few well-placed big words. Ideally they should show-off any word prowess in the introduction or conclusion, because they might get lost in the body. Tell them not to go overboard though, and to make sure they actually know the meaning of the words before they use them. Short words are better than misused words any day.

## More Is More

You've probably heard the maxim, it's not the quantity, it's the quality that counts. Good advice in the real world, but in SAT land, quantity is just as important. According to the Education Testing Service (ETS), the guys who create the SAT, graders read an essay holistically, meaning they look at the overall package and won't really get down to the nitty-gritty. So when grading an essay as a whole, longer always looks better. There are 45 lines to fill. Tell your kid to get as close to that as possible. Filling 40 lines... good. Only 20... not so good. And for those who usually have a lot to say, it's important to know that you can only use the space that is given, there are no extra sheets of paper allowed.

## When Shakespeare Comes in Handy

Once your child gives their thesis statement in the intro, they need to back it up. The best way to do this is by citing examples. Some may be tempted to write about stuff they've seen on TV or read in US Weekly to explain "the Tragedy of War" (the great feud between Hillary Duff and Lindsay Lohan), or a recent breakup to explain "the Sorrow of Love Lost," but illustrations from history or literature will be better received. Urge them to show that they're well-read or that they know about topics like the Civil War. Graders will be impressed. Help them prepare by discussing some literary or historic examples before the big day.

Make it a family affair. Throw in some big words of your own each night at the dinner table during the weeks leading up to test time. And if your kid asks what they mean, be sure to tell them!