

Sample Essays

New SAT Online Resources

Now let's look at some sample student writing and see how the College Board's criteria apply to full-length essays. We have provided examples of four essays in response to the prompt below. The four sample essays demonstrate Reading, Analysis, and Writing scores of 1, 2, 3, and 4.

Essay Prompt

As you read the passage below, consider how Al Gore uses

- evidence, such as facts or examples, to support claims.
- reasoning to develop ideas and to connect claims and evidence.
- stylistic or persuasive elements, such as word choice or appeals to emotion, to add power to the ideas expressed.

Adapted from former Vice President Al Gore's 2004 speech "The Climate Emergency," collected in *Red, White, Blue, and Green: Politics and the Environment in the 2004 Election (2004)*, edited by members of Yale School of Forestry & Environmental Studies, James R. Lyons, Heather S. Kaplan, Fred Strebeigh, and Kathleen E. Campbell.

- 1 The environment is often felt to be relatively invulnerable because the earth is so big. People tend to assume that the earth is so big that we as human beings can't possibly have any impact on it. That is a mistake.
- 2 In Europe during the summer of 2003, we experienced an extreme heat wave that killed an estimated 20,000 people, and many predict such events will be much more commonplace as a result of increasing temperatures. The anomaly was extreme, particularly in France, with consequences that were well reported in the press. Year-to-year, decade-to-decade there's variation, but the overall upward trend worldwide since the American Civil War is really clear and really obvious, at least to me.
- 3 If you look at the glaciers around the world, you see that many are melting away. A friend of mine named Lonnie Thompson of Ohio State studies glaciers, and he reports that 15 to 20 years from now there will be no more snows of Kilimanjaro. This shrinking of glaciers is happening all around the world, including Latin America, China, and the U.S. In our own Glacier National Park, all of the glaciers are predicted to be gone within 15 to 20 years.
- 4 An area of Bangladesh is due to be flooded where ten million people live. A large area of Florida is due to be flooded. The Florida Keys are very much at risk. The Everglades are at risk.

- 5 The trend is very clear. What's behind it all? I've come to believe that global warming, the disappearance of the ocean fisheries, the destruction of the rain forests, the stratospheric ozone depletion problem, the extinction crisis, all of these are really symptoms of an underlying cause. The underlying cause is a collision between our civilization and the earth. The relationship between the human species and our planet has been completely changed. All of our culture, all of our literature, all of our history, everything we've learned, was premised on one relationship between the earth and us, and now we have a different one.
- 6 Think about the subsistence that we have always drawn from the earth. The plow was a great advance, as was irrigation. But then we began to get more powerful with these tools. At the Aral Sea in Russia, something as simple as irrigation on a large scale led to the virtual disappearance of the fourth largest inland body of water in the world. We're changing the surface of the earth, and technology sometimes seems to dwarf our human scale. We now have to try to change this pattern.
- 7 There's another assumption that needs to be questioned. In contrast to the idea that the earth is so big that we can't have any impact on it, there are others who assume that the climate change problem is so big we can't solve it. I, however, believe that we can if we put our minds to it. We had a problem with the ozone hole, a big global problem that seemed too big to solve. In response, we had political leadership and the world passed a treaty outlawing chlorofluorocarbons, the chemicals that caused this problem. The United States led the way, and we brought about a dramatic drop in CFCs and are now in the process of solving that problem. We now have the ability to buy hybrid cars like the Toyota Prius and the marketplace for new sources of energy is increasing dramatically. We're also seeing new efficiencies with energy savings. If we have political leadership and the collective political will to say it is important to solve this problem, we can not only solve it, we can create more jobs, we can create higher incomes, a better way of life, and a higher quality of life by solving the problem.
- 8 Everything we have ever known—and Carl Sagan made a beautiful long statement about this—all the wars, all the heartbreak, all the romance, every triumph, every mistake, everything we've ever known is contained in this small planet. If we keep the right perspective and keep our eyes on the prize, we can solve this problem, we will solve this problem, we must solve this problem. It really is up to you.

Write an essay in which you explain how Al Gore builds an argument to persuade his audience that climate change is a serious problem we must address. In your essay, analyze how Gore uses one or more of the features listed in the box above (or features of your own choice) to strengthen the logic and persuasiveness of his argument. Be sure that your analysis focuses on the most relevant features of the passage.

Your essay should not explain whether you agree with Gore's claims, but rather explain how Gore builds an argument to persuade his audience.

Sample Essay #1

I agree with Al Gore that it's a good trend to help the environment. Earth is the only planet we have, its our responsibility to keep it safe. Otherwise who will?! Like he says in the time of the Civil War, they didn't know about pollution but now it's different. We now have the ability to buy hybrid cars or recycle your plastic to help the environment. no excuses. Two thousand people died in Europe because of global warming. It's time to shape up, America!! These days, there's to much technology and there messing up the oceans. Like I saw on the news that turtles are dying because people don't recycle plastic. Like Al says, we gotta stop asuming that nature is going to be OK when really we're the one's who are hurting nature. But I think things are getting better, you know? You see people now they are really working hard to make a difference. Helping animals and planting trees. Green technology too. Scientists are figuring out important stuff that will help. I believe that in the end, we will be able to save the planet.

Score Breakdown: Essay #1

Reading Score: 1. The writer does not demonstrate that he comprehends Gore's main argument (that climate change is a serious problem we must address).

The writer does not demonstrate an understanding of important details or how they relate to the main idea. Although he highlights Gore's reference to the Civil War, this is not a substantial piece of evidence for Gore's argument. Meanwhile, the writer ignores other details that are more relevant to the central idea of the passage. Furthermore, the writer introduces errors not present in the source text. For example, he states that the number of people who died in the European heat wave was two thousand, when the passage says 20,000, or twenty thousand.

The writer does not use textual evidence to support his assertions. The only direct quote from the essay—"We now have the ability to buy hybrid cars"—is not presented as a quotation from the passage.

Analysis Score: 1. The writer does not attempt to analyze how Gore constructs his argument. Instead, the writer gives his own opinion about Gore's argument, which is not the assignment at hand.

Furthermore, the writer does not engage with Gore's use of the features highlighted by the prompt, or with the passage itself. Instead, the writer brings in his own evidence, such as something he saw on the news, rather than analyzing Gore's use of evidence. He also makes claims that do not relate to the passage itself. For example, he says scientists are making important discoveries, but no information in the passage supports that.

Writing Score: 1. The writer demonstrates little mastery of language and minimal organization.

The tone and style are too casual for an academic essay. Exclamations, rhetorical questions, and the informal use of the second-person point of view are inappropriate for formal writing. The word choice is often vague (“figuring out stuff”) and full of clichés. There are also substantial errors in grammar and usage, including sentence fragments, run-on sentences, and homophone confusion. Sentences are generally simple, with little variation.

This essay also lacks a clear structure. Although the writer makes a central claim in his first sentence, the rest of the essay does not focus on that claim. Ideas are not separated into paragraphs, and the flow from sentence to sentence is unclear. The essay is also too short to develop a meaningful argument.

Sample Essay #2

In Al Gore's speech, he describes some of the major issues that our environment is facing today. He says that although humanity has caused these problems, we also have the power to fix them. Gore uses strong evidence and persuasion to make his message seem urgent and important.

One of the most important ways that Gore builds his argument is the evidence he uses. He mentions an “extreme heat wave” in Europe that resulted in 20,000 deaths, which was “well reported in the press.” This example of the consequences of raising temperatures makes the crisis seem massive. He also mentions a researcher at Ohio State who studies glaciers, using an authoritative source for his claim that the glaciers are melting at an alarming rate and will be gone “within 15 to 20 years.” He explains that one of the issues with glaciers melting is mass flooding, such as in a part of Bangladesh “where ten million people live.” Gore uses evidence to show that if we do not do something about climate change, many people will die.

The way he structures his argument is important to his message. First, he uses evidence to show that we are in a serious crisis. Then he explains why he thinks we have wound up here, because “the relationship between the human species and our planet has been completely changed.” Modern technology, which has caused the problem, “sometimes seems to dwarf our human scale,” which is why the crisis is so big that it can seem hopeless. After Gore makes the problem seem huge, he switches to a hopeful note, writing that although some people think we can't solve the problem, “I, however, believe that we can.”

Another thing that makes his argument feel more emotional is the rhetorical tools that he uses. He uses repetition, which has a dramatic affect. He repeats "at risk" to describe the Florida Keys and the Everglades, which really drives the risk home. Then he uses more repetition in the phrase, "we can solve this problem, we will solve this problem, we must solve this problem." He is driving his point home again, but this time what he is driving home is hope.

Ultimately, Gore is able to make his speech inspirational for the reader rather than depressing, because of how he builds his speech from the dire reports of a European heat wave to encouraging the reader to "keep our eyes on the prize." He gives a lot of bad news, but he makes the reader feel like all is not lost. After all, as he says, "It really is up to you."

Score Breakdown: Essay #2

Reading Score: 3. The writer understands Gore's main argument, and clearly states it in his first paragraph.

The writer uses evidence from the text to support his claims. When he uses direct quotes, he provides enough context for them to make sense, and he explains why they are relevant to his argument. He focuses on details that are important for conveying the central ideas of the passage, and records them accurately.

To get a 4, the writer would have needed to discuss the more subtle aspects of Gore's argument, such as the way he connects the changing relationship of humans and the earth to both the problem and its solution.

Analysis Score: 3. The writer fulfills the assignment by focusing on how Gore builds his argument, not on the topic of the passage.

The writer analyzes the role that evidence plays in Gore's argument. He also analyzes how both the organization of the passage and certain stylistic choices make Gore's argument more compelling. Furthermore, he carefully chooses things to focus on which are significant in the passage. The writer develops his claims and supports them using evidence from the text.

To get a 4, the writer would have needed to fully develop his analysis more consistently. For example, his third paragraph would have been better if he had explained how the transition he identifies contributes to Gore's argument.

Writing Score: 3. The writer demonstrates adequate mastery of language and organization.

The writer has a central claim, which he states in his introduction and develops through the whole essay. He effectively organizes his essay into paragraphs with topic sentences and a clear focus on a single point. They are in a logical order and the writer uses transitions to make his argument easier to follow.

The tone and style are consistent and appropriately academic. The writer uses both simple and slightly more complicated sentences. He also chooses words that will communicate his meaning precisely. While there are a few mistakes, the essay demonstrates adequate proficiency in grammar and usage.

To get a 4, the writer would have needed to use greater variation in sentence structure and less repetitive language for a more sophisticated tone. He also could have used more transitions within paragraphs to develop his arguments more clearly.