

# SAT Essay Prep Strategies

Your task is to closely read a text and analyze the writer's argument and write a critique of how the author structures and presents that argument; your own writing must be coherent, well developed, well organized.

**DO NOT** give YOUR opinion about the topic of the text. **DO** demonstrate your ability to objectively and comprehensively analyze an argument.

Plan on at least 20 minutes and ideally up to 30 minutes for reading, annotating and planning your essay.

Your essay score is based on your demonstration of a sophisticated, accurate and detailed understanding of the text, your ability to discuss the significance and relationship between the writer's ideas and support details, and your own skill as a writer in developing a coherent discussion of a clearly stated thesis with effective use of support (quote, paraphrase, summary) from the text.

Below are some strategies to help identify and analyze the central idea or argument and purpose of the speech or essay and to organize your analysis and annotation by identifying crucial elements related to the work:

## **READING & ANALYSIS:**

**Speaker:** Who is the writer? What is the background, experience of the writer? Is the speaker credible and knowledgeable or an expert on the topic? Is the speaker closely involved or affected by the issue? This is helpful in understanding motivation and perspective of the speaker.

**Purpose:** What is the intent of the author? To persuade? To attach? To defend? To inform? To explain? To celebrate? Does the writer want to teach or arouse the audience into action? There is a direct correlation between purpose and use of specific writing techniques.

**Audience:** For whom is the speech or paper intended? Is there a specific audience as well as wider audience? Are there difference audiences? Understanding audience(s) is important in analyzing a work and how effectively the work is shaped to impact and generate a response in the audience(s).

**Reason:** What is the provocation, inspiration or occasion for the speech or essay? Is it a specific type of event or venue of the speech or a greater social/political/environmental issue? The cause is significant in considering type of detail and range and focus of support.

Considering these elements should enable you to clearly identify the all-important thesis of the work:

**Claim:** What is the central claim of the work?

With a clear understanding of the author's thesis/purpose, you need to read and annotate the text to evaluate the effectiveness of the author's use of reasoning and evidence to connect claims to support, how the writer uses stylistic elements for support of his/her argument. Here you are drawing on your own skill and understanding of a range and variety of writing conventions and techniques. It is crucial that you explain **how** the author's choices contribute to purpose, strength of the work.

This requirement is less about 'what' the author uses and all about '**why**' and '**how**' the author made choices and their contribution to the quality of the argument.

Consider how the author uses:

**Quotes, paraphrases**

**Evidence:** facts, examples, anecdotes, biographical references.

**Language conventions:** diction/syntax/sentence structure/punctuation

**Literary/writing techniques:** simile, metaphor, imagery, symbolism, allusion, repetition, hyperbole, juxtaposition, comparisons, anecdotes, etc.

Consider how the author uses rhetorical appeals:

**Logic** (logos): Are the writer's ideas and reasons credible and support clear and relevant making the argument cohesive and convincing

**Emotion** (pathos): does the writer effectively connect with the audience(s) emotionally, with fear, humor, nostalgia, anger, etc.

**Ethics** (ethos): The reasoning and arguments of the writer appear credible to the audience. The writer creates a sense of worthiness that the position or actions set forth are just and deserving of consideration or acceptance.

**WRITING:**

Your final, and most important, task is to **write a unified, objective analysis of the writer's argument.**

**IMPORTANT:** This is NOT an essay stating YOUR opinion on the topic or text. You will explain how the author builds an argument, how he/she uses writing elements to strengthen the argument.

**Your score will be based on:**

A strong thesis/claim

Coherence and unity of organization

Varied sentence structure & precise diction

Appropriate, sophisticated, style/tone

Mastery of basic conventions of grammar, spelling & punctuation.

**Plan the order of your essay:**

**Intro:** You need a clear thesis articulating **YOUR purpose.** Brief statement of source text (use elements annotated during reading). Especially important is paraphrasing the author's argument. Remember, 1/3 of your score comes from your demonstration of understanding the source text.

You need to identify the **main points** of your essay

**Body: Support YOUR argument** with an effective, insightful use of a **variety of evidence** from the text.

Identify & explain the appeal, detail, grammatical/literary device or technique and elaborate on how this supports the author's argument; Critical is to **explain the connection between the device and the text.** 1/3 of your score is based on this insightful analysis of the argument.

Keep quotes short and to a minimum. Paraphrasing in YOUR words is better.

Bring the paper to a close with a strong **conclusion**

With a clear plan developed through a close reading and annotation following an organized strategy, you are ready to write with **confidence!!**