



Taking the Mystery
Out of the
SAT® and ACT®



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Taking the Mystery Out of the SAT® and ACT®

A Friendly Conversation with Andrew Pudewa

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HomeHighSchoolHelp.com

[Andrew Pudewa: IEW.com](http://AndrewPudewa.com)

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UPDATE: Important Changes to the SAT® Test

Since this free e-book was originally published, The College Board announced there will no longer be an Essay portion of the SAT® Test.

While the SAT® essay is no longer used in college admission, there is still an optional essay on the ACT® test. More importantly, learning the skill of writing an essay will always be useful.

I still recommend regular, timed, short essay-writing practice once a week toward the end of high school. Quick essays skills are literally the ONLY thing both of my children came home to say "thank you" for teaching them. That didn't happen with Latin, logic, history or calculus. Nope. They thanked me for the timed essay practice - you know, that subject they so loathed at the time, when they were actually homeschooling. So yes, I still recommend that you teach quick essay skills, even if it's not required on the SAT®.

Lee: Today, we're going to talk about taking the mystery out of the SAT® and ACT. My guest is Andrew Pudewa of the Institute for Excellence in Writing, and I am very happy to have you. Thank you so much for coming.

I want to direct you to the Institute for Excellence in Writing: IEW.com. Andrew is such a great teacher and encourager. I actually used Andrew's materials with

my own children, and both of my boys got perfect scores on the SAT® essay. The most notable outcome of using Andrew's materials was when one of my sons came home a week after starting college and thanked me for teaching him how to write a quick essay, because he was the only one in class who knew how to do it and didn't freak out.

In high school, our family used the [Advanced Communication Series](#) by IEW. It that covers public speaking, quick essays and note taking. We made great use of all three pieces, and I just want to say a personal 'thank you' for putting that material together, because it was just wonderful.

Andrew: It is always good to hear such things, Lee, thank you.

Lee: Tonight, we're going to cover the basics of the SAT® and the ACT. I will speak first, and then about twenty minutes into it, Andrew will jump in and discuss the details of the essay portion of these tests.

Both the SAT® and the ACT® are college admission tests, and will usually meet your state's testing requirements—if you live in a state that requires testing, these tests will cover that requirement. This can save you money, if you don't double up but simply use the one test to accomplish two things. These tests are often required by colleges one way or the other, and they're usually tied to scholarship money. Sometimes colleges will tell you how much scholarship money they award for a good score, at other times it's implied. If you're looking for help to find a college that will love and appreciate your child, read [Three Steps to Finding a College](#).

The SAT® and ACT® are given at public or private high schools and colleges, and I usually suggest that students take them in the spring of 11th grade, so that they can repeat it in the spring or fall of 12th grade if it is necessary. If your child has to take the test while they're feeling under the weather, it's likely that their

score will be better if they take it again later; taking it early will give you enough time to repeat it if necessary.

Each high school testing location chooses whether to provide the SAT® or the ACT® to their students. The states on the coasts tend to give the SAT® and the states in the center of the country tend to give the ACT®. I've heard that boys do better on the SAT® and that girls might do better on the ACT®; science lovers might do better on the ACT® and poor writers might do better on the ACT® without the essay, although I don't recommend that. It's important to decide which test is going to be better for your student.

Keep in mind that colleges will have their own preferences; they might say that they prefer the ACT® because it covers science or the SAT® because it requires an essay. Learn about both tests and choose the one that is best for your child. Since we're homeschooling, we don't have to use the test that the public schools choose; we can have our children take the test that best suits them, and just locate a school that offers that test. Both tests require photo ID. If your child doesn't have a driver's license, you might consider getting them a regular state ID. Some homeschoolers create an ID for their kids, and use it as their school ID.

Be prepared for a very long test, because your child can end up being there for four and a half hours. Make sure to bring a snack and some water. For the math portion, have them bring a calculator that they're familiar with. Don't get a brand-new calculator for the test – it should be something that they're used to using.

Make sure to bring multiple pencils, and to locate the bathroom. That sounds a bit funny, but as homeschoolers, your student will take this test in an environment they are not familiar with, but all the other students are. This is important so that they can make optimal use of their ten-minute break. Choose a location to meet at after the test, so that your child doesn't have any anxiety, which will help them relax a bit.

Homeschoolers have the advantage with these tests, because you get to choose whether to take the SAT® or the ACT® or both. Use the test that makes your child look like a genius. A third of students will do better on the SAT®, about a third will do better on the ACT®, and for the remaining third it doesn't matter which one you take. One way to figure it out for sure is to give sample tests of each one, and then determine the relative score. Study for and take the test that is best for your child.

The SAT® is a college admission test. If you need any more information, you can go to [CollegeBoard.com](https://collegeboard.com). They have a section for parents, but you're also a professional educator so you can go to the portion of the College Board website that is for teachers and other professionals.

The time, hand-written essay is a required part of the SAT®. The SAT® measures three things: reading, writing, and math. The reading section does not include analogies. The essay is timed, and handwritten in pencil, which is a little scary, and that is why Andrew is here to talk about it in a couple of minutes. Although the essay is optional according to the College Board, it may be required by the universities you may choose to apply to. For that reason, I recommend you take the optional essay portion of the test.

The math mostly consists of multiple-choice questions, but it does have grid-in answers and some relations where you fill in the bubbles. It covers Algebra 1, Geometry, and Algebra 2. The more you understand Algebra 1 and Geometry, the better your score will be. To score well on the test, it's most important that your child actually understand Math at whatever level they're studying, rather than move ahead to Calculus and not understand it. Help them understand and have mastery of the math level that they're in. There will be several breaks between sections, which is the reason why bringing in some food and water is a good idea.

There are two sections on the SAT®, reading and math. Each section of the SAT® is scored from 200-800: 200 is the lowest possible score and 800 is perfect. Within each section, 500 is average, and in general 600 is a good score, 700 is a great score and 800 is a perfect score. If you add all scores together, the range of scores possible is 600-1600.

The ACT® is the other college admission test, and their website is ACT.org. This test is similar to the SAT, because it also covers reading, writing, and math, but the ACT® goes beyond this and also has a section on science reasoning.

The ACT® also has a timed, hand-written essay. Again, although the essay is optional according to the testing company, your university choices may require it. That's why I recommend you take the optional essay portion of the test. Remember that science is not covered in the SAT®, which can make a big difference. If your child really struggles with their handwriting or is a rotten writer, you may choose to skip it; but if at all possible, I encourage you to utilize the writing option.

The composite score for the ACT® ranges from 1-36, and the average is usually 20. Usually the score averages are recorded by state, so it's hard to say the exact average since it varies by state. The test is all multiple choice, and there is no penalty for guessing. The ACT® is also tied to scholarship money.

When studying for the tests, I encourage people to incorporate test preparation into their regular homeschool work, and to study for the test in 10th and 11th grade. For instruction on how to prepare, read [College Admission Tests - How to Ace the SAT or ACT](#). It's easier, cheaper, and probably best to take real tests and utilize real writing prompts.

I also recommend the Princeton Review materials, because they are written with the voice of a student, and use phrases that a student might use, which makes the work a little bit more understandable for students. Short study sessions are probably a good idea. My children did one section of the test about three times a week. Each section is about thirty minutes long, so it wasn't time consuming for us.

While the Princeton Review materials are excellent preparation for the fill in the bubble sections, I'd like for Andrew to share how to prepare for the essay portion of the test. Andrew, can you share some thoughts? Do you want to discuss the differences between those two?

Andrew:

The [High School Essay Intensive by the Institute for Excellence in Writing](#) is designed to address two very specific needs—writing for the university application and the scholarship application. What you had (the [Advanced Communication Series](#)) was a little broader – it was actually intended for kids who are already in college, to help them write a very persuasive essay, develop persuasive public speaking, and learn advanced note taking, as well as how to spy on your professor and figure out his writing style, so you can get a better grade on every paper.

Lee: Extremely valuable tips, by the way. The [High School Essay Intensive](#) is an excellent curriculum, and I had a chance to review it in full. Loved it! I even laughed a few times – your teaching style is so engaging! I said a lot about how the essay, the SAT, and the ACT® are tied to scholarships. Another thing that is tied to college scholarships is writing a very good application essay. I talk with my Gold Care Club members frequently about what's involved with college application essays, and some extra help with that really could save families thousands of dollars, so that's really cool.

Lee: There is another book called 501 Writing Prompts, which I like because it's so inexpensive. I think it's only \$8 or \$10 on Amazon, and strangely enough, it has 501 writing prompts, which is a lot – more than you'll ever need. It also shows examples. I'm a very visual learner, so seeing visual examples of what a score of 6 would be and what a score of 4 would be – I just found that incredibly helpful.

When you study for the SAT® or ACT®, you can take online classes. There are also live classes, which tend to be pretty expensive. If you are going to do specific study for the test, I do not recommend that you call it SAT® Preparation on homeschool records. Instead, I would call it something like “Study Skills” or “College-Readiness Skills.” Instead of the class title screaming “I teach for the test” the transcript would make it clear that your child is ready for college.

Just remember that prior to 10th grade, the best preparation for the SAT® and the ACT® is to make sure that you cover reading, writing, and math. Logic is also helpful, but reading, writing, and math are the critical.

So, Andrew, I'm going to have you just chime in here and share your thoughts.

Andrew: Lee, I'm just grateful for the very practical immediate application type of advice that you seem to be full of. Every time I talk to you, I get another tip. I'm so appreciative, and I know that all the folks out there have been blessed by your suggestions. I'm so happy to chip in a little bit.

The essay portion of the SAT® is very significant. It was first included in 2005, and a recent statement from the College Board themselves stated that of all the sections of the SAT®, the writing section is the most predictive of college success. The writing section is not just the essay; the writing section counts for 30% of that overall writing section score.

It is interesting to note that the College Board is aware of the feedback from their member institutions, stating that writing skills are just essential for success in the university environment. The fascinating thing that we came across recently is that one-third of the freshmen coming into the University of California system need remediation in reading, and half of the freshmen coming into the California state system need remediation in writing, so it is a distinct need.

Fortunately, homeschoolers tend to be on top of that, because they raise up literate kids – they listen well, think well, express themselves, and polish up their writing skills so it's not necessarily an overwhelming task.

What I'd like to do is to give a few tips on this essay part of the writing section. When I teach this, it's like a game for the kids. Taking the SAT® is a game, and if you know some of the rules, some of the strategies, and some of the tactics, you're likely to do better in taking that test than if you don't. That kind of sets them free. It's something that you can learn and apply, just like you can learn a little strategy in soccer or chess.

Let's go ahead and look at some basic concepts. One thing we know is that writing is a very specific task, and if you practice this specific task, then you'll do better. In fact, I tell kids, "If you just wrote five essays not knowing anything, you'd do better on the test than if you didn't. At minutes per essay, there's about two hours out of your life, you've wasted two hours in better ways, so why not practice a few essays?" The kids always laugh at that one.

Writing for the SAT® isn't like the writing that students have done in the real world. Perhaps they've been writing letters to their parents, or maybe they took a high school or college online class where they had time to collect some ideas and bounce them off parents and friends, organize an outline, write, get some help, edit, and rewrite. That would be real-world writing, but the SAT® is very synthetic: you walk in and they say, "Here, read this and tell us as much as you

can about this thing, which you might not have heard about before, and be as articulate as possible.” Most students have never done that before, and it can be somewhat daunting. Practice is key, and if you can practice using some of the tactics that we share with you this evening, it will be even better.

One of the things that I point out to kids right up front is this essay really has nothing to do with telling the truth – of being honest about what you really think or feel about something. It’s an argumentative essay, so the questions are constructed so that you argue a point. And of course, to argue, there are two sides so it’s okay if you argue, and it’s okay if you don’t even agree with yourself.

I tease kids and say, “You should like this, you love to argue – you argue for fun!” But some kids, especially homeschool kids who have been raised with an emphasis on character and integrity, will say “I have to write what I really think and believe... what’s the truth about this.”

Fortunately, the test writers try to stay away from moral arguments. Depending on your examples, you can argue both sides of an issue. That’s why I say argue and don’t worry about whether you agree with yourself.

So how is the essay scored and who are the people who grade this thing? First of all, they tend to be high school and junior college English and Journalism teachers. The technical requirement is that they must be actively teaching or recently retired from subjects that required writing, so mostly you’ve got English teachers, Journalism and Humanities teachers, possibly some History and Government people.

We are aware that statistically-- and no offense to anyone out there-- school teachers are mostly registered democrats, and tend to be a little on the liberal side, sometimes a lot on the liberal side. There are always exceptions, but you

won't know. Just because you live in a particular state doesn't mean that the person grading your test is going to be from your area.

We also do know statistically that the majority of the graders are women, which is interesting. If a woman is reading the essay, perhaps she would be happy if I were to use an example of a great woman in history, or a female character from literature. Think about what kinds of examples or what kind of tone would be a good fit for a high school teacher, and there's a good chance that they'll fit that profile.

A very interesting fact, one that shocks a lot of people when they first hear it, is that these graders spend only two minutes per paper, which means they're doing thirty essays an hour. It's important for kids to really make a good first impression. Nobody reading these essays is going to really pore over them, hear deeply what you really want to say, and figure out where your heart— they're going to read it and grade it. Your first impression is your only impression, and that's important to keep in mind.

Some high school English teachers I've met are kind of allergic to a five-paragraph essay model, which is perhaps the most common thing that kids are taught, particularly in homeschool. I've met a couple of teachers personally who say that if you do a five-paragraph essay in this class it's an automatic F.

Our advice is to not do the five-paragraph model for a couple of reasons. One, you might get a teacher who is kind of allergic because it's too cliché, overused, stifling, and doesn't allow for activity; or two, it's very hard to do justice to five paragraphs in the limited time available.

In the space of twenty-five minutes, you must think about what you're going to write for two to three minutes, write as much as you can in twenty minutes, and then save yourself two or three minutes to read what you wrote in order to put in

the missing period, add the missing apostrophe, or cross out the word you don't want. It is physically difficult to get 400 words on paper writing with a number 2 pencil in minutes.

Lee: That's another good reason to practice, too, Andrew. Because then you can strengthen up those hand muscles so you don't get a hand cramp.

Andrew: Absolutely, build up stamina. Homeschoolers in particular, most particularly ones I know, tend to write everything. So, exercise yourself before you do this; write some letters to your grandma on paper with a pencil, take notes, hand write an essay, do copy work – build the stamina.

Lee: With the two-minute time limit that the teachers have to grade those, I think that's one of the reasons why the paper really doesn't matter too much, because they really don't have time to think about whether the facts are correct or incorrect. I also think that's why having legible handwriting can make such a big difference, because if they can even read it, they are happy.

I usually like to point out that it doesn't matter what style of handwriting you use, or whether it's cursive or not, it just has to be legible.

Andrew: Yes, legible. So, whatever is probably fastest and legible for your student; the cursive doesn't really impress anybody anymore. Most kids I meet do have legible writing. It's pretty rare for me to meet a student whose writing is so difficult to figure out. Teachers are getting paid by the essay, so they want to knock them off as quickly as possible. The easier it is, the faster they go, the happier they'll be.

The score that each grader uses ranges from 0 to 6, although if you got a 0, you would have to do basically nothing. Six is the highest and one is very weak. Two

people grade each paper, so the combined score could be up to twelve points, and 12 would be the perfect score.

A lot of researchers state that longer essays generally score better, and this is true for a couple of reasons: one, people who can write more probably do more writing, they're more fluent, and they have better facility and aptitude, so their writing will be better simply because they do more and they can.

The other thing is that, considering it's an argumentative essay, you know as well as I do that whenever you're in an argument, whoever can talk more generally wins. If you're writing an argumentative essay, the more you can support your position, the more detailed your examples can be, the higher your essay generally will score.

You can look at test samples with these links [Insert links here!!](#): the SAT® writing test samples, the ACT® writing test samples, and these are available so that you can read an essay and learn why it received the score it did. The rubric which SAT® graders use to evaluate an essay includes point of view, critical thinking, reasoning examples and evidence, organization and focus, language and vocabulary, sentence structure, and grammar usage are the mechanics.

Point of View

The point of view from which you write the essay should be definitive. Don't be wishy-washy. Try to definitely agree or disagree with the statement, and make your opinion clear right from the beginning, because that is how the graders are going to determine whether you supported your position.

In this essay, a student should not explore the idea and eventually come to a conclusion at the end, because the reader won't know their position clearly

enough. Rather, in an argumentative essay, say “Yes, I agree with this” or “No, I don’t agree,” then use examples to support the ‘yes’ or ‘no’ position.

Again, prompt writers try to provide non–controversial essay topics, so you may get a question like “Does technology always lead to progress?” to which you could say, “Yes, of course it does” and use some examples to show that technology is always good and leads to the good of human life; you could also argue the other way and say, “No, here are some examples where technology has certainly made life harder and more difficult.” Have a point of view, don’t keep it a secret until the end, let the reader know, and argue.

Critical Thinking

Critical thinking includes two things: thinking and critical. I often tease kids and say “What is thinking? How do you do it?” If someone answers, “Think,” I ask, “how do you make that happen?” That’s a tough thing for kids to answer. I very rarely get a student who can explain how they think. How do you make yourself think?

The most common answer I get is “You use your brain.” But of course, the follow up question is, “How do you use your brain?” It just happens. For many people, thinking is like a passive, intransitive type of verb where you just kind of wait around long enough and then something will come to you. But the problem is that on the SAT® essay, you can’t wait around until something comes to your mind; you’ve got to make it happen, and the good news is that thinking really has nothing to do with things coming to you (inspiration of the Holy Spirit notwithstanding); it has almost everything to do with things coming out of you.

The trick to thinking is to figure out what you’ve got inside, pull it out, and then put it into a composition that perhaps is unique. I tell students to imitate their moms, because if a student knows something and their moms want to know what

they know, what do moms do? They say, “Where have you been? What were you doing? Why are you late? Who else was there? How are you going to clean this up?” Moms are master question-askers.

The trick for kids is to become a master question-asker of themselves, which is a great part of what we are involved in at Institute for Excellence in Writing – helping kids learn how to ask good questions to extract what they know from their mind, and organize and present it in a winsome way.

Critical thinking is a slightly higher order of thinking, so while basic fact accumulation can be the ‘who, what when, where, how’, critical thinking is asking, “Okay, what’s the value of that? What’s the significance of that? What’s the impact, the validity or the application?” And then you start to get in deep, and your opinion gets to be even more effective.

Reasoning Samples and Evidence

Reasoning applies to logical thinking. I strongly encourage all homeschoolers to teach logic – do it formally, get a course on it, whether you’re learning the Fallacies of the Fallacy Detective or traditional logic material.

The study of logic is an area that’s very weak in America, which is pretty evident during the election time. But what would happen to the people if all 8th to 10th graders got two or three years of formal logic? It would be awfully hard for some of the politicians to get away with everything they say! Logic is a good study, and it will come out in your writing.

Your use of examples and evidence should keep in mind your audience. You’ve got to think, “Okay, I’ve got an English teacher, a Journalist, possibly a Humanities person. Let’s appeal to them.” Literature, of course, is very useful since English teachers fell in love with literature. If you’ve read a classic book a

few times and you know it well, then you can draw from the characters for your essay, and you can think about things like how Agamemnon dealt with this situation in the Iliad, for example. If you mention books like these, then English teachers will be very impressed, since not a lot of people read those books anymore, and if they do, they don't necessarily remember much of them.

Lee: Don't you think it would be a great idea to just have a couple of examples to use ahead of time for your essay, and no matter what the prompt question is, you'll have a few books to draw examples and illustrations from?

Andrew: Absolutely. If you've got a rich book that has a lot to do with human relationships, decisions, quandaries, and circumstances, you're probably going to find something from that book that would apply to almost all of the prompts-- not guaranteed, but likely. I tell kids that if they don't want to read really hard books to help them with essay prompts, just watch the movies, because you won't be going into great detail in just one paragraph, and you can get the gist of a story from a movie.

History is a great area to draw examples from, and it's not terribly important whether you get the right facts or not. If you get a date wrong, get a place wrong, or even get a whole battle wrong, SAT® graders are instructed to grade on the writing skills and not on the accuracy of the facts. They are specifically told in the instructions, "You're grading them not on the facts; don't grade them based on incorrect facts."

For kids of character who were raised to value the truth, we need to encourage them to just view this as a creative writing assignment. This is not a situation where they need to worry about absolute accuracy of facts.

Lee: One student I know used history examples in his essay, and he came out of the test completely confident that he would fail the essay, because he mixed

up George Washington and Thomas Jefferson, and was appalled that he had done that. Of course, the graders didn't care, and he got a perfect score, which made him angrier – that he could pass something after giving terrible examples.

Andrew: There are a lot of people who don't like this about the SAT®, but the truth is the test creators really don't want kids to be handicapped by a lack of general knowledge in one area. If the student uses an example, they get the grade, whether their facts are correct or not. We know that in the real world, you're going to check your facts, so I can understand both sides of the argument.

Current events are also excellent ideas. There isn't any teacher in the world who doesn't think that kids should be more aware of what's going on in the world. Some kids like reading the news, they like knowing what's going on in Egypt, or Alaska, or Korea, while other kids just don't wonder or pay attention to the news.

Whether you like it or not is irrelevant, but three months before you take the test, read the news every day. It won't kill you, and it might give you an upper hand, because if you can draw an example from a politician who shows that education and possessions can destroy your life, the grader reading that the essay will be impressed that the student is aware of what's happening in the country.

Personal experiences are also very good. If you do it well, it can be very emotionally powerful. You don't have to use a personal experience, so don't force it. But if you do have a good one, use it.

If you're relating a personal experience, you should say, "I did" or "I experienced". If you're not speaking from personal experience, then you should minimize the use of the word 'I'. You don't want to continually state in your essay, "I think" "I feel" "I believe" and "In my opinion," because this weakens your writing.

Nobody cares what you think, what you feel, what you believe or what your opinions are. What you want to present is the truth and the facts of the situation. Even if it's your opinion, make your opinion sound like facts, and you're writing will come across as stronger, more effective, and more knowledgeable.

If you can include a few quotations from some well-known people, your essay will sound richer. Again, don't worry if you include a great quote and mix up the name; it's not going to be a huge disaster. It's better to try than to not try.

Just to reiterate that point, fewer examples with more details tend to score better than more examples with less detail. We encourage kids to have a short introduction, two paragraphs which each give one example or illustration to support their argument with as much detail as they can fill in, and a short conclusion that re-states their statement and makes a call to action, such as "This is the situation and this is what we do about it to make the world a better place."

These styles of essays tend to do very well. I've had any number of kids tell me they've scored 11s and 12s with the four-paragraph structure, which is the one we recommend for the SAT®. For the ACT®, you get extra minutes to write, so an additional fifth paragraph can be a good idea.

Language and Vocabulary

Vocabulary is, of course, the words that you use, and language is the way you use those words. Most homeschoolers have an above-average vocabulary, and most kids realize that they could benefit from knowing more words, as long as they don't use them around their peers-- in case they come across as 'over-educated' for their peer groups.

The idea of having a few good words up your sleeve, ones that are off the beaten track, if you will, is a great advantage. The graders are English teachers, people

who love the language – they love some of the literary devices, which can make your writing more interesting.

Similes and metaphors are probably the most common literary devices that kids run into in English classes, but teachers love to point out that there are other devices, like alliteration and assonance. All these things that kids have learned about in their high school literature class are things that, if you can include in your essay, will impress the teacher who's grading.

Keep studying vocabulary and Greek and Latin word use. This will benefit you not just in the essay where you show your own vocabulary, but in the multiple-choice section, too.

Lee: It actually carries over into college, because sometimes the words they use in college don't make any sense unless you know some Latin and Greek roots – you can decipher the words that your professors use.

We took notes in college level lectures using your note taking from the Advanced Communication Series. That was one of the ways I exposed my children to unusual vocabulary... by listening to college level lectures by the great courses. They would use your note taking strategies and write notes so that college vocabulary came to be a part of who they were on a day-to-day basis. I know that's not what we're talking about today, but I did truly love it; so, thanks.

Andrew: Well, I love to hear that, and that note taking is very powerful.

Sentence Structure. Most of us tend to write like we speak, in the subject-verb-object pattern. If your writing includes a lot of subject-verb, subject-predicate, subject-subject, it starts to lack variety, which is one of the criteria on the essay

Students should practice starting sentences with different patterns. Try using a prepositional phrase, or an –ing, which would be a participle opener, or a clause. Most books on writing will tell you to vary your sentence structure, but that's often not enough information. In order to do this, students need modelling and samples.

Mechanics. I can't fix everybody's grammar skills in just one minute, but we can give advice to try the most simple thing and help you save a couple of minutes. When you take the test and write the essay, the proctor will probably say "five-minute warning." If you can see a clock on the wall, that's even better, but if someone says "five-minute warning," the test taker needs to realize that they only have two or three minutes to write their last two or three sentences. Then they need to use those last few minutes to read the essay at least one time, so that they can fix all those tiny things that may have slipped by, since they're writing fast on a pressured time – that's normal. Make sure to save a couple of minutes so that you can fix any errors.

I also encourage people not to erase anything unless you absolutely have to. Even though you're using a pencil, if you want to fix something on your writing, don't take the time to erase it, because it takes three to five times longer to erase the word than it does to write it.

Erasing is just time consuming, so just line it out and keep going. If you need to write over something to make it clear, do that. Only erase if you have to and you'll save on time. Again, it doesn't have to be pretty, it just has to be legible.

Models to Follow. Very simple: just determine your point of view and agree or disagree. Remember, you don't have to believe it. List two to five possible examples from your reading, observation, studies and experience (R.O.S.E.) that would support your opinion on the essay.

Choose the best two of those examples, make a quick little outline, maybe ten words. What are the examples you're going to use, two or three details about each one-- just so you get started-- and then move right in to the writing. At the end, you want to have a strong conclusion.

I suggest that you have something like a call to action, a mini sermon. Present the truth about the situation; this is what we need to do to make a better place again. The application, the significance, and the impact will make your conclusion better.

Study the grading rubric in great detail, which is available on CollegeBoard.com. Practice with the model and check the website for sample prompts. Practice writing three or four essays.

You don't have to read what you wrote if you don't want to. Then evaluate your own personal weak points--whether that's speed, particular spelling words that always crop up in your writing, or grammar issues. Don't double space on the paper – you don't have to write really small but you don't want to write too big or you'll run out of space, because they'll only give you two pages.

Lee: The advantages are yours. You get to take the SAT® or the ACT®, whichever is best for your child, the one that they will score best on. This can help your student gain admission to the college of their choice, and earn scholarships (<http://www.thehomescholar.com/homeschool-records-webinar.php>) to cover the costs of attendance.

Question and Answer

Question: Can you take both tests, whichever they choose, and get the results they want?

(Lee) Answer: Yes, it is possible for kids to take both of the tests as long as both of the tests make them look good. It can actually strengthen your position a little bit, but when you have them take the ACT®, I do recommend that they take the optional essay.

Question: Do you have any recommendations for my eight-year-old and eleven-year-old to prepare for the SAT®? She already has the Student Writing Intensive Instruction and Style.

(Andrew) Answer: I think, Lee, you and I are always on agreement on this, which is to teach your children what they're excited about, teach them what or where the Holy Spirit is leading. In my view, you don't need to worry or think about SAT® for an 11-year old.

There are several years to fill that cup with an appreciation of the world, with wonderful language – not the way of the Math. I completely agree with your philosophy on that, which is that it's better to know that you know that you know than to have tried to keep up with a textbook with a number on the cover and not know much of it. That's free learning.

Lee: Exactly. What I usually recommend for people with young children is to just teach reading, writing, and math because that's what the test covers. Anytime you do anything involving reading, writing, and math at that age, you are preparing them for the test. Beyond that, you're also preparing them for college, and for a job, so it's a win-win.

Question: I've been told that a child can take the SAT® or ACT® as practice without having their scores submitted. Is that the case?

(Lee) Answer: I usually recommend that you don't have your children take these tests until they are in 10th or 11th grade, preferably in 11th grade, especially not any earlier than that unless they have quite a bit of math.

What I get concerned about is people who take their children to a real SAT® just for practice and the child gets there without the skills necessary to even do an average job. They can get frustrated, think that they're a terrible test taker, and then develop some testing anxiety.

In my opinion, taking them to take the tests early can actually backfire on you. I think it's more helpful to wait until they're at least 10th grade or usually in 11th grade.

Question: My 16-year old daughter takes 25 hours to write a five-paragraph essay. How do I get it down to the number of minutes allowed?

(Andrew) Answer: Probably starting with the time limit rather than the length goal and see what she can get done in the time limit. It's got to be a prompt from which the student can write from their head. Part of writing a good essay is doing research.

I can understand 5 or 10 hours to write an essay if you need to collect research, outline and organize. But we're not interested in this type of thing for an SAT® essay. What we are interested in is thinking quickly and writing what you're thinking.

I would suggest you get the book of prompts, the 501 Writing Prompts, and have your child write a timed piece no longer than 25 minutes to see if they can build up the volume gradually over time. I would guess that this student is probably a perfectionist.

Lee: Yes, that happened in my case in my homeschool. I think some of the prompts from the 501 Writing Prompts book are a lot easier than the SAT®, so it kind of eases them a little bit. With my son, the perfectionist, I remember sitting down the first time we did the timed essay.

I told him to get it done in just 25 minutes, but he complained and told me it was unfair. I told him “24 minutes” but he kept complaining, and I told him “23 minutes.” That only happened one time, but the timer was still on, so it worked pretty well after that.

Question: Is this information going to be helpful on the PSAT™?

(Lee) Answer: The PSAT™ test comes before the SAT®, much like a practice SAT®. It does not currently have an essay on it, so the essay portion is only going to help you on the SAT® or ACT®. Everything else is the same, so it does cover reading, writing, and math; it just doesn’t have the essay involved in it.

Question: How high of a math level does the SAT® or ACT® go to? I’m currently taking Calculus.

(Lee) Answer: The bulk of the math questions are going to involve Algebra 1 and Geometry. Slightly fewer questions will be about Algebra 2, and then slightly fewer questions will be Pre-Calculus or Calculus.

One of the problems in having a child who’s already in Calculus is that when they take the SAT, they tend to forget the basics of Algebra and Geometry. This is one of the reasons why using those Eleven Real Practice Tests can help you, because you’ll go back and look at the Algebra 1 questions that you haven’t considered a long time.

It's not uncommon for somebody in Calculus to not do very well on the math portion on the SAT® or ACT® unless they study for it. That's hard for kids who are already in Calculus because they have to go back and study, and that's no fun. Again, it significantly raises your score and it can improve your chances of scholarship money and admission, so it does pay off.

Suggested Resource

The Total Transcript Solution

Impress College with The Total Transcript Solution!

Easy 4-step solution to create your transcript quickly
Training, tools and templates to explain everything simply
In-depth personal consultation for extra help

Easy and Fast 4 Step Transcript Solution

- Step 1. Video training to provide instruction and boost your confidence
- Step 2. Book instruction for those who learn best through books
- Step 3. Ten transcript templates to choose the one that fits your needs best
- Step 4. Personal coaching by phone or by email for feedback by The HomeScholar

Everyday Value Bonuses

- Bonus 1: Testing Pack to maximize your child's performance on high school tests
- Bonus 2: Resource Pack with planning guide, grading criteria and year-by-year calendar
- Bonus 3: Savings Pack with resources to help you save money
- Bonus 4: Continuing Education with the Silver Training Club support system for parents
 - 5 new classes each month, including tools and templates
 - First 30 days free, then \$27.00 / month,
 - Cancel anytime with one click cancel or email request

Surprise Bonuses Look for surprise bonuses with your purchase, for added value!

Purchase the Total Transcript Solution

TotalTranscriptSolution.com

Other Online Resources and Homeschool Solutions

[Total Transcript Solution](#): everything you need to solve your transcript worries

[Comprehensive Record Solution](#): create records for college admission and scholarships

[College Launch Solution](#): prepare to successfully launch your teen into college and life

[High School Solution](#): start high school strong and understand every age and stage

[Gold Care Club](#): support and encouragement with personal coaching