

Easy SAT Essay Template

For the SAT essay, the prompt is always the same. You are given an article to read. Then, you must answer the following prompt in an essay:

As you read the passage below, consider how [the author] uses **evidence**, such as facts or examples, to support claims; **reasoning** to develop ideas and to connect claims and evidence; and **stylistic or persuasive elements**, such as word choice or appeals to emotion, to add power to the ideas expressed.

So, before we dive into reading articles or outlining essays, we'll look at common types of literary devices. Studying these will help you figure out how writers use evidence, reasoning, and stylistic or persuasive elements to build arguments.

New SAT Guide to Literary Devices

(And how to use them in your essays!)

The Big Three:

Pathos means *feeling* words. Authors use pathos to make us feel sad about lonely puppies or happy about a beautiful day. These appeals are effective for some readers, but deal more in feelings than facts.

Ex. The tearful students implored their cruel chemistry teacher to cancel the draconian test.”

How to use it: The author’s descriptions of the “tearful students” struggling against a “cruel” teacher and a “draconian test” inspire feelings of sympathy and convince readers of the chemistry teacher’s villainy.

Logos means *appeals to logic*, which include facts, statistics, findings from studies, etc. Authors use these to convince us that their arguments have wider applications. It’s not *just* the author who believes their argument—it’s 3 million chemistry students or 78% of holiday elves.

Ex. 78% of holiday elves agree that Santa Claus should offer more paid time off and bigger holiday bonuses.

How to use it: By citing that 78% of holiday elves are dissatisfied with their work benefits, the author convincingly attests to the widespread nature of the elf labor problem.

Ethos means appeals to *authority*, usually in the form of quotes from experts. The author must establish the expert's authority by citing their credentials. You know this toothpaste is good because 4 out of 5 dentists think it's a good idea, or that knife is good because a famous chef endorses it. Pay attention to the source: A doctor or medical association is a good source for health info, but not for a plumbing guide.

Ex. Draco Dragonis, chair of Dragon Studies at Monster University, argued in his latest article that "dragons need more representation in local government," a point echoed by the university's study, "The Problem with Dragon Democracy."

How to use it: By citing Dr. Dragonis's latest article, the author demonstrates that even academic experts agree that "dragons need more representation" in the government.

Often, an author will blend all three of these for greater impact. For example, a personal testimonial (pathos) might be supported by evidence from a case study (logos) or a quote from an expert (ethos). In a pinch, you can fall back on pathos, logos, and ethos as your big three body paragraphs.

Other Literary Devices:

In addition to the big three, there are dozens of literary devices you could choose from. Here are a few more that you may find in your article.

Anecdotes - personal stories that relate to the author's point.

Allusions - references to pieces of media that support the argument.

Diction - word choice; does the author use fancy words, or are they casual? Pay attention to specific words the author uses; did they choose words with specific connotations?

Imagery - descriptions that "paint a picture;" imagery may also appeal to the senses of smell, hearing, taste, sensation, etc., in addition to sight.

Inclusive language - words that address the reader as part of the group, like "we" and "us."

Juxtaposition - comparing and contrasting two opposites, ex. All's fair in love and war."

Metaphorical Language - when the writer says one thing to mean something else.

- Analogies - comparing one thing to another, ex. "Life is like a box of chocolates."
- Metaphors - Saying one thing *is* another thing, ex. "Juliet is the Sun."
- Similes - saying one thing is *like* another thing, ex. "Juliet is as beautiful as the sun."

Repetition - repeated words or phrases, used to draw attention to an idea.

Tone - the way the author's writing sounds. Is it formal? Humorous? What is the author trying to do?

Reading & Annotating the Article:

Next we'll focus on reading and annotating the article. As you read, look for the literary devices discussed in the previous section. As you read, circle or underline any uses of these elements, jotting a note in the margin.

Begin by reading the essay on the next 2 pages. Take notes, paying close attention to evidence, reasoning, and stylistic and persuasive elements. Jot down which categories each piece of evidence falls into so you can pick the best options for your essay.

SAT Essay Prompt

As you read the passage below, consider how Paul Bogard uses evidence, such as facts or examples, to support claims; reasoning to develop ideas and to connect claims and evidence; and stylistic or persuasive elements, such as word choice or appeals to emotion, to add power to the ideas expressed.

The Article:

Adapted from Paul Bogard, "Let There Be Dark." © 2012 by Los Angeles Times. Originally published December 21, 2012.

At my family's cabin on a Minnesota lake, I knew woods so dark that my hands disappeared before my eyes. I knew night skies in which meteors left smoky trails across sugary spreads of stars. But now, when 8 of 10 children born in the United States will never know a sky dark enough for the Milky Way, I worry we are rapidly losing night's natural darkness before realizing its worth. This winter solstice, as we cheer the days' gradual movement back toward light, let us also remember the irreplaceable value of darkness.

All life evolved to the steady rhythm of bright days and dark nights. Today, though, when we feel the closeness of nightfall, we reach quickly for a light switch. And too little darkness, meaning too much artificial light at night, spells trouble for all.

Already the World Health Organization classifies working the night shift as a probable human carcinogen, and the American Medical Association has voiced its unanimous support for “light pollution reduction efforts and glare reduction efforts at both the national and state levels.” Our bodies need darkness to produce the hormone melatonin, which keeps certain cancers from developing, and our bodies need darkness for sleep. Sleep disorders have been linked to diabetes, obesity, cardiovascular disease and depression, and recent research suggests one main cause of “short sleep” is “long light.” Whether we work at night or simply take our tablets, notebooks and smartphones to bed, there isn’t a place for this much artificial light in our lives.

The rest of the world depends on darkness as well, including nocturnal and crepuscular species of birds, insects, mammals, fish and reptiles. Some examples are well known—the 400 species of birds that migrate at night in North America, the sea turtles that come ashore to lay their eggs—and some are not, such as the bats that save American farmers billions in pest control and the moths that pollinate 80% of the world’s flora. Ecological light pollution is like the bulldozer of the night, wrecking habitat and disrupting ecosystems several billion years in the making. Simply put, without darkness, Earth’s ecology would collapse...

In today’s crowded, louder, more fast-paced world, night’s darkness can provide solitude, quiet and stillness, qualities increasingly in short supply. Every religious tradition has considered darkness invaluable for a soulful life, and the chance to witness the universe has inspired artists, philosophers and everyday stargazers since time began. In a world awash with electric light... how would Van Gogh have given the world his “Starry Night”? Who knows what this vision of the night sky might inspire in each of us, in our children or grandchildren?

Yet all over the world, our nights are growing brighter. In the United States and Western Europe, the amount of light in the sky increases an average of about 6% every year. Computer images of the United States at night, based on NASA photographs, show that what was a very dark country as recently as the 1950s is now nearly covered with a blanket of light. Much of this light is wasted energy, which means wasted dollars. Those of us over 35 are perhaps among the last generation to have known truly dark nights. Even the northern lake where I was lucky to spend my summers has seen its darkness diminish.

It doesn't have to be this way. Light pollution is readily within our ability to solve, using new lighting technologies and shielding existing lights. Already, many cities and towns across North America and Europe are changing to LED streetlights, which offer dramatic possibilities for controlling wasted light. Other communities are finding success with simply turning off portions of their public lighting after midnight. Even Paris, the famed "city of light," which already turns off its monument lighting after 1 a.m., will this summer start to require its shops, offices and public buildings to turn off lights after 2 a.m. Though primarily designed to save energy, such reductions in light will also go far in addressing light pollution. But we will never truly address the problem of light pollution until we become aware of the irreplaceable value and beauty of the darkness we are losing.

The Annotations:

At my family's cabin on a Minnesota lake, I knew woods so dark that my hands disappeared before my eyes. I knew night skies in which meteors left smoky trails across sugary spreads of stars. But now, when 8 of 10 children born in the United States will never know a sky dark enough for the Milky Way, I worry we are rapidly losing night's natural darkness before realizing its worth. This winter solstice, as we cheer the days' gradual movement back toward light, let us also remember the irreplaceable value of darkness.

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It doesn't have to be this way. Light pollution is readily within our ability to solve, using new lighting technologies and shielding existing lights. Already, many cities and towns across North America and Europe are changing to LED streetlights, which offer dramatic possibilities for controlling wasted light. Other communities are finding success with simply turning off portions of their public lighting after midnight. Even Paris, the famed "city of light," which already turns off its monument lighting after 1 a.m., will this summer start to require its shops, offices and public buildings to turn off lights after 2 a.m. Though primarily designed to save energy, such reductions in light will also go far in addressing light pollution. But we will never truly address the problem of light pollution until we become aware of the irreplaceable value and beauty of the darkness we are losing.

Now it's time to plan the essay!

First, reread the prompt.

The Assignment:

Write an essay in which you explain how Paul Bogard builds an argument to persuade his audience that natural darkness should be preserved. In your essay, analyze how Bogard 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 Bogard's claims, but rather explain how Bogard builds an argument to persuade his audience.

Then, look at your notes and pick the 3 most common persuasive elements.

In my annotations, I noted the following:

- Pathos
- Logos
- Ethos
- Diction
- Allusions (i.e., references to "Starry Night" and the "City of Light")
- Inclusive language

Looking at your list, think about...

- Which persuasive elements could you write the strongest paragraphs about?
- Could any of these persuasive elements be combined with others to strengthen them?

My notes on pathos, logos, and ethos would make strong paragraphs. The allusions Bogard makes are used to make the reader *feel* that losing darkness is sad, so the allusions could be in the pathos paragraph. Diction and inclusive language could be combined into one paragraph about word choice, or I could add those specific examples where they fit in pathos, logos, and ethos.

Your Outline:

Then, make an outline using the guide below.

And you're ready to write!

Your outline should contain these basic parts:

- I. Intro
- II. Body Paragraphs
 - A. Topic 1
 - B. Topic 2
 - C. Topic 3
- III. Conclusion

Your body paragraphs should each focus on a different way the author supports their argument. That's where our literary devices come in.

This is my outline:

- IV. Intro
- V. Body Paragraphs
 - A. Pathos
 - B. Logos
 - C. Personal Examples
- VI. Conclusion

Now, it's time to start writing.

Building Your Essay:

Now we'll build an essay one paragraph at a time. Use the following templates to make writing your essay a no-brainer!

Intro:

You only need to do two things in the intro: Introduce the source article and make an argument about how the author supports their thesis. That's *two sentences*. Easy-peasy.

You can add some flair by beginning with a **hook**: a quote from the essay, a (potentially made-up) quote or example from another source, or a general statement relating to the topic.

That means all you *really* need to do is:

1. Hook the reader.
2. Introduce the source article.
3. Make an argument about how the author supports their thesis.

Your basic template then looks like this.

HOOK STATEMENT.

In "ARTICLE TITLE," AUTHOR argues that THESIS STATEMENT.

Through LIT. DEVICE 1, 2, & 3, AUTHOR demonstrates that RESTATED THESIS.

Thus, your intro paragraph becomes something like this:

Darkness is disappearing.

In "Let There Be Dark," Paul Bogard argues that the world's disappearing darkness threatens to harm people and animals on Earth.

Through emotive language, evidence from studies and examples, and his own experiences, Bogard proves that we should preserve darkness.

As you get comfortable using this template, you can jazz it up. For example:

Darkness is disappearing, to our detriment. In “Let There Be Dark,” Paul Bogard argues that darkness is crucial to life on Earth, and it’s disappearing. Through emotive appeals, prestigious science and health sources, and culturally significant examples, Bogard crafts a convincing case for preserving darkness.

OR

In his essay “Let There Be Dark,” Paul Bogard praises a seemingly paradoxical idea. Citing the “irreplaceable value of darkness,” he argues that the darkness we fear and avoid is actually integral to our lives. Through logic, emotional appeals, and personal examples, Bogard demonstrates that his readers should work to preserve darkness.

Body Paragraphs:

The body paragraphs are a little trickier.

You need a few things for your body paragraphs: transitions, topic sentences, at least two concrete pieces of evidence, and analysis that shows how the author uses that evidence to support their argument.

So this is all you really need to do:

1. Topic Sentence.
2. Concrete Evidence 1.
3. Analysis Relating to Thesis 1.
4. Concrete Evidence 2.
5. Analysis Relating to Thesis 2.
6. Conclusion Relating Paragraph to Thesis.

Let's break it down piece by piece.

Topic sentence: Introduce the literary device and relate it to the thesis.

TRANSITION PHRASE, AUTHOR uses TYPE OF EVIDENCE to ACCOMPLISH TASK RELATED TO THESIS.

Ex. From the beginning, Bogard uses romantic descriptions of dark nights from his childhood to capture his readers' imaginations.

Then it's time to use specific evidence from the passage.

Evidence: Cite specific evidence and show how it relates to your argument.

Note: Integrate your examples through paraphrasing (for longer quotes/ideas) and quotes (shorter quotes).

AUTHOR'S LITERARY DEVICE DOES X.
INTEGRATE QUOTE/ EXAMPLE 1.
EXPLAIN AND SHOW ITS EFFECTS.

Ex. His surprisingly poetic depictions of "night skies in which meteors left smoky trails across sugary spreads of stars" may appear out of place in a news article, yet they strengthen the reader's emotional connection to darkness. Bogard's imagery may even prompt readers to remember their own experiences with darkness, and thus to mourn even more deeply the loss of truly dark nights.

Now we do it again!

INTEGRATE QUOTE/ EXAMPLE 2. EXPLAIN, SHOW EFFECTS.

Ex. These descriptions essentially strengthen Bogard's facts; without being reminded that darkness inspired Van Gogh's *Starry Night*, Bogard's readers may not appreciate the tragedy of grim statistics like "8 of 10 children born in the United States will never know a sky dark enough for the Milky Way."

Conclusion: Wrap up the topic and relate it to the thesis again.

THUS, AUTHOR USES LITERARY DEVICE TO STRENGTHEN ARGUMENT THAT RESTATE THESIS.

Ex. Thus, Bogard's surprisingly delicate descriptions strengthen his argument by critically demonstrating to readers that when darkness departs, they will keenly feel its loss.

And it's done!

All together, this is our paragraph:

From the beginning, Bogard uses romantic descriptions of dark nights from his childhood to capture his readers' imaginations. His surprisingly poetic depictions of "night skies in which meteors left smoky trails across sugary spreads of stars" may appear out of place in a news article, yet they strengthen the reader's emotional connection to darkness. Bogard's imagery may even prompt readers to remember their own experiences with darkness, and thus to mourn even more deeply the loss of truly dark nights. These descriptions essentially strengthen Bogard's facts; without being reminded that darkness inspired Van Gogh's *Starry Night*, Bogard's readers may not appreciate the tragedy of grim statistics like "8 of 10 children born in the United States will never know a sky dark enough for the Milky Way." Thus, Bogard's surprisingly delicate descriptions strengthen his argument by critically demonstrating to readers that when darkness departs, they will keenly feel its loss.

Now, repeat this process for your other body paragraphs.

When the body paragraphs are done, you just need a short and sweet conclusion.

Conclusion:

In your conclusion, you need to do three things: restate your thesis, recall your examples, and make a concluding statement (the indeed statement).

Here's your template:

A careful analysis of AUTHOR'S "ARTICLE TITLE" proves/reveals THE ARGUMENT. By using LIT. DEVICES 1, 2, and 3, AUTHOR skillfully argues that KEYWORD indeed PROVES THE ARGUMENT.

A careful analysis of Paul Bogard's "Let There Be Dark" reveals a shrewd and well-reasoned defense of darkness. By using emotive descriptions to back up credible facts and citations from well-regarded authors, Bogard galvanizes his readers in support of darkness.

And the essay is done!

Practice this often, and reading the SAT essay article, taking notes, outlining, and even writing the essay will become easy.

Good luck on the SAT, and happy writing!