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## The Essay

The Essay assesses reading, analysis, and writing skills. It is optional and given at the end of the SAT. Some postsecondary institutions require it for admission, so if you know where you want to apply before testing, be sure to check each institution's requirements before you choose an Essay or no-Essay option during registration. (Note that you may be able to change from Essay to no-Essay — or the reverse — on test day, but that is not guaranteed.)

The SAT Essay presents you with a passage and asks you to explain how the passage's author builds an argument to persuade an audience. Essay passages examine ideas, debates, trends, and the like in the arts, the sciences, and civic, cultural, and political life that have wide interest, relevance, and accessibility. The passages tend not to be simple pro/con debates on issues but instead efforts to convey nuanced views on complex subjects.

Your response will analyze the passage for the author's use of evidence, reasoning, and/or stylistic and persuasive elements, and/or other features that you believe contribute to the persuasiveness of the passage. Be sure to base your essay on the features of the passage most relevant to responding to the prompt. If, for example, you don't feel that evidence use is particularly important in a particular passage, you don't have to write about it. Write instead about features that you believe help build the persuasive argument.

It's important to understand that your response should **not** focus on whether you agree or disagree with the claim made in the passage but should instead focus on how the author builds an argument to persuade an audience.

While the source text (and a bit of the language in the prompt) will vary from test to test, you'll always be presented with a passage and asked to explain how its author builds an argument.

Essays are evaluated for demonstrated comprehension of the passage, quality of analysis, and quality of writing. See the Essay Scoring Guide on pages 38 and 39 for more information.

## Essay Overview

- » Total questions: 1 prompt, with points to consider and directions
- » 1 passage
- » Time allotted: 50 minutes to read and analyze the passage and to develop a written response

On the Essay, you are asked to demonstrate college- and career-readiness proficiency in **reading, writing, and analysis** through comprehending a high-quality source text, producing a cogent and clear written analysis of that text, and supporting that analysis with critical reasoning and evidence drawn from the source. The Essay does not ask you to take a stand on the author's point of view but instead to analyze how the author builds a persuasive argument.

Your essay will receive three scores, each on a scale of 2 to 8:

**Reading:** Demonstrated comprehension of the passage, its main ideas, and its important details.

**Analysis:** Demonstrated understanding of the analytical task, and effective analysis of the author's use of evidence, reasoning, and/or stylistic or persuasive elements (and/or features of your own choice).

**Writing:** Communication of information and ideas in a structured, cohesive manner, using precise language and a variety of sentence structures and showing a command of the conventions of standard written English.

These scores are not combined with each other or with any other scores on the SAT. (They don't, for instance, affect the Evidence-Based Reading and Writing section score or the total test score.)

# Essay Test Question

## Directions

The essay gives you an opportunity to show how effectively you can read and comprehend a passage and write an essay analyzing the passage. In your essay, you should demonstrate that you have read the passage carefully, present a clear and logical analysis, and use language precisely.

Your essay must be written on the lines provided in your answer booklet; except for the Planning Page of the answer booklet, you will receive no other paper on which to write. You will have enough space if you write on every line, avoid wide margins, and keep your handwriting to a reasonable size. Remember that people who are not familiar with your handwriting will read what you write. Try to write or print so that what you are writing is legible to those readers.

You have 50 minutes to read the passage and write an essay in response to the prompt provided inside this booklet.

## Reminders:

Do not write your essay in this prompt booklet. Only what you write on the lined pages of your answer booklet will be evaluated.

An off-topic essay will not be evaluated.

The following sample illustrates the general format of the Essay task in the context of a specific prompt, this one related to a passage adapted from an article by Paul Bogard about the value of natural darkness.

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.
- stylistic or persuasive elements, such as word choice or appeals to emotion, to add power to the ideas expressed.

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

- 1 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.
- 2 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.
- 3 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.

- 4 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. . . .
- 5 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?
- 6 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.
- 7 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.

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.

## Sample Essays

The following student essays show you what kinds of attributes will be evaluated in the SAT Essay. Each essay is followed by an explanation of

why it received the assigned score on each of the three dimensions.

### SAMPLE 1

Bogard builds an argument to persuade his audience about what he is concerning about and feels it important to take care about. His essay talks about so much facts about sleeping how so little can effect us health wise examples like getting sleep disorders, diabetes, obesity, cardiovascular disease and depression. This facts helps people persuade the audience he also say that the world health organization classifies working night shift is bad. In his argument is not all about how it bad for the body he also claims and have proof that light cost are expensive and really costing people because they have light all

night long. He also claims light is messing with mother nature that animals need darkness to feed eat move around because there nocturnal creatures. He has details facts about human body, animals and about mother nature that he can use to support his idea of not using so much light at night and how we need darkness. With these features he can persuade the audience because people dont know why darkness can be good for us. He was all of facts and examples that he claim is efficting us and there world.

**This response scored a 2/1/1.**

**Reading—2:** This response demonstrates some comprehension of the source text, although the writer's understanding of Bogard's central idea isn't conveyed until the latter part of the essay, where the writer indicates that Bogard includes *details facts about human body, animals and about mother nature that he can use to support his idea of not using so much light at night and how we need darkness*. Prior to this, the writer has included details from the text, but without contextualizing these details within Bogard's broader argument, suggesting that the writer is relaying ideas from the text without much understanding of how they contribute to the whole. For example, the writer mentions the health problems cited in the text, that working the night shift is classified as bad, and that light costs are high, but doesn't explain how these points relate to Bogard's main claim that we must preserve natural darkness. On the whole, this essay displays only a partial understanding of the source text.

**Analysis—1:** In this essay, the writer has merely identified aspects of Bogard's use of evidence without explaining how the evidence contributes to the argument. The writer notes that Bogard's text *talks about so much facts about sleeping how so little can effect us health wise examples like getting sleep disorders, diabetes, obesity, cardiovascular disease and depression. This facts helps people persuade the audience*. Other than identifying these as persuasive facts, however, the writer does nothing to indicate an understanding of the analytical task. The writer again mentions persuasion before the conclusion of the essay (*With these features he can persuade the audience*

*because people dont know why darkness can be good for us*), but once again, there is no explanation of how or why these features are persuasive. Thus, the essay offers inadequate analysis of Bogard's text.

**Writing—1:** This response demonstrates little cohesion and inadequate skill in the use and control of language. From the outset, problems with language control impede the writer's ability to establish a clear central claim (*Bogard builds an argument to persuade his audience about what he is concerning about and feels it important to take care about*). The response also lacks a recognizable introduction and conclusion, and sentences are strung together without a clear progression of ideas (for much of the response, the writer merely lists claims Bogard makes). The response also lacks variety in sentence structures, in part because of repetitive transitions. (For example, *he also claims* is used two sentences in a row in this brief response). Weak control of the conventions of standard written English, coupled with vague word choice, undermine the quality of writing. Overall, this response has demonstrated inadequate writing skill.

## SAMPLE 2

Paul Bogard strongly believes that natural darkness should be preserved. In order to prove the need for natural darkness, Bogard divides his argument into three main topics, saying that natural darkness is beneficial to humans, essential to humans, and essential to ecosystems.

According to Bogard, natural darkness can be a positive help to humans. One of the ways it can accomplish this is by giving enjoyment to onlookers. To supplant this, Bogard gives a personal example of how he enjoyed seeing meteors dart across the night sky in Minnesota as a child. Also he states that natural darkness can be a source of solitude. Supporting this claim, Bogard states that darkness is invaluable to every religion. Additionally Bogard says that the night sky has inspired countless numbers of philosophers, artists, and stargazers for millennia. He then gives an appealing allusion by asking how Van Gogh could have painted "Starry Night" in the mist of electric light. One of Bogard's primary arguments for natural darkness shows how it can benefit humans.

Bogard then gives a scientific case that shows why natural darkness is essential to humans. He states a find of the World Health Organization that declares the night shift can be detrimental to one's health. He points to the necessity of darkness in producing melatonin, a hormone that helps prevent certain cancers from developing in the human body. Bogard then concludes his argument that darkness is essential to human well-being by analyzing sleep. He first makes

the obvious claim that darkness is essential for sleep. Then, he talks about the negative health effects of sleep disorders; these include "diabetes, obesity, cardiovascular disease and depression." To associate this with his argument for natural darkness, Bogard states the findings of recent research, which say that "long light" is one of the primary causes of "short sleep." Bogard uses scientific evidence to support his belief in the preservation of natural darkness.

Bogard's third primary defense of natural darkness declares that it is essential to nature. He notes that there are a variety of nocturnal and crepuscular species of birds, fish, mammals, insects, and reptiles worldwide. He gives two specific, well-known examples of these species; these discussed the 400 species of North American birds that migrate at night and the sea turtles that lay their eggs on the shore at night. He also gives a couple of lesser-known examples, involving bats and moths that show the positive actions that some nocturnal animals perform. He then concludes his argument for nocturnal darkness necessary to nature with persuasion, saying that removing natural darkness would essentially destroy an ecology that took billions of years to develop. Here, Bogard uses scientific fact to prove that natural darkness is a key to nature and ecology. Paul Bogard supports the preservation of natural darkness. He uses an argument to support his position that has three primary points—benefit to humans, need for humans and need for nature.

**This response scored a 4/1/3.**

**Reading—4:** This response demonstrates thorough comprehension of Bogard's text and a clear understanding of the interrelation between the central idea and important details. The writer briefly summarizes Bogard's central idea (*natural darkness should be preserved*) and aptly notes that Bogard's argument encompasses **three main points: that natural darkness is beneficial to humans, essential to humans, and essential to ecosystems.** The writer provides various details from the text that support these points. In the first body paragraph, for example, the writer demonstrates comprehension of how Bogard's *personal example of how he enjoyed seeing meteors dart across the night sky in Minnesota as a child* relates to his claim that natural darkness can give *enjoyment to onlookers*. The writer also sees the connection between darkness as a *source of solitude* and it inspiring *countless numbers of*

*philosophers, artists, and stargazers for millennia.* Providing these details highlights the writer's understanding of Bogard's claim that *natural darkness can benefit humans.* The writer continues to demonstrate how details in Bogard's text relate to each other and to his central idea in the subsequent discussion of how darkness is essential to humans' health and to nature. Although little is directly quoted from the text, the writer's thorough paraphrasing of multiple details taken from across the passage indicates that the writer comprehensively understands Bogard's argument and is able to convey it in his own words.

**Analysis—1:** The response offers ineffective analysis of Bogard's text and demonstrates little understanding of the analytical task. Although clearly comprehending the entirety of Bogard's argument, the writer does not communicate

how Bogard builds his argument with evidence, reasoning, or stylistic or persuasive elements, nor does the writer communicate what effect Bogard's argumentation has on his audience. Instead of providing effective analysis, the writer only identifies argumentative elements in Bogard's text, such as the *appealing allusion* Bogard offers regarding Van Gogh's *Starry Night* or the *scientific evidence* Bogard uses to *support his belief in the preservation of natural darkness*. The writer instead consistently lapses into summary. Overall, the response demonstrates inadequate analysis.

**Writing—3:** This mostly cohesive response demonstrates effective use and control of language. The writer presents an effective introduction with a clear central claim that lays out the three points discussed in the response (*In order to prove the need for natural darkness, Bogard divides his argument into three main topics, saying that natural darkness is beneficial to humans, essential to humans, and essential to the ecosystem*). The response also includes an generally effective

conclusion that summarizes rather than advances the essay (*Paul Bogard supports the preservation of natural darkness. He uses an argument to support his position that has three primary points—benefit to humans, need for humans and need for nature*) although the conclusion is not marked off by a paragraph break. The response is organized clearly around the three points identified in the introduction, and each body paragraph stays on topic. The writer also demonstrates a clear progression of ideas both within paragraphs and throughout the essay. Sentence structure tends to be repetitive and simple, however. For example, at or near the end of each body paragraph, the writer restates the point that introduces that paragraph (*Bogard then gives a scientific case that shows why natural darkness is essential to humans. . . . Bogard uses scientific evidence to support his belief in the preservation of natural darkness*). Although the writing in this response is proficient, it does not demonstrate the sentence variety, precise word choice, or highly effective progression of ideas that is expected at the advanced level.

### SAMPLE 3

In response to our world's growing reliance on artificial light, writer Paul Bogard argues that natural darkness should be preserved in his article "Let There be dark". He effectively builds his argument by using a personal anecdote, allusions to art and history, and rhetorical questions.

Bogard starts his article off by recounting a personal story – a summer spent on a Minnesota lake where there was "woods so dark that [his] hands disappeared before [his] eyes." In telling this brief anecdote, Bogard challenges the audience to remember a time where they could fully amass themselves in natural darkness void of artificial light. By drawing in his readers with a personal encounter about night darkness, the author means to establish the potential for beauty, glamour, and awe-inspiring mystery that genuine darkness can possess. He builds his argument for the preservation of natural darkness by reminiscing for his readers a first-hand encounter that proves the "irreplaceable value of darkness."

This anecdote provides a baseline of sorts for readers to find credence with the author's claims. Bogard's argument is also furthered by his use of allusion to art – Van Gogh's "Starry Night" – and modern history – Paris' reputation as "The City of Light". By first referencing "Starry Night", a painting generally considered to be undoubtedly beautiful, Bogard establishes that the natural

magnificence of stars in a dark sky is definite. A world absent of excess artificial light could potentially hold the key to a grand, glorious night sky like Van Gogh's according to the writer. This urges the readers to weigh the disadvantages of our world consumed by unnatural, vapid lighting. Furthermore, Bogard's alludes to Paris as "the famed 'city of light'". He then goes on to state how Paris has taken steps to exercise more sustainable lighting practices. By doing this, Bogard creates a dichotomy between Paris' traditionally alluded-to name and the reality of what Paris is becoming – no longer "the city of light", but moreso "the city of light...before 2 AM". This furthers his line of argumentation because it shows how steps can be and are being taken to preserve natural darkness. It shows that even a city that is literally famous for being constantly lit can practically address light pollution in a manner that preserves the beauty of both the city itself and the universe as a whole.

Finally, Bogard makes subtle yet efficient use of rhetorical questioning to persuade his audience that natural darkness preservation is essential. He asks the readers to consider "what the vision of the night sky might inspire in each of us, in our children or grandchildren?" in a way that brutally plays to each of our emotions. By asking this question, Bogard draws out heartfelt ponderance from his readers about the affecting power of an

untainted night sky. This rhetorical question tugs at the readers' heartstrings; while the reader may have seen an unobscured night skyline before, the possibility that their child or grandchild will never get the chance sways them to see as Bogard sees. This strategy is definitively an appeal to pathos, forcing the audience to directly face an emotionally-charged inquiry that will surely spur some kind of response. By doing this, Bogard develops his argument, adding gutthral power

to the idea that the issue of maintaining natural darkness is relevant and multifaceted.

Writing as a reaction to his disappointment that artificial light has largely permeated the presence of natural darkness, Paul Bogard argues that we must preserve true, unaffected darkness. He builds this claim by making use of a personal anecdote, allusions, and rhetorical questioning.

**This response scored a 4/4/4.**

**Reading—4:** This response demonstrates thorough comprehension of the source text through skillful use of paraphrases and direct quotations. The writer briefly summarizes the central idea of Bogard's piece (*natural darkness should be preserved; we must preserve true, unaffected darkness*), and presents many details from the text, such as referring to the personal anecdote that opens the passage and citing Bogard's use of *Paris' reputation as "The City of Light."* There are few long direct quotations from the source text; instead, the response succinctly and accurately captures the entirety of Bogard's argument in the writer's own words, and the writer is able to articulate how details in the source text interrelate with Bogard's central claim. The response is also free of errors of fact or interpretation. Overall, the response demonstrates advanced reading comprehension.

**Analysis—4:** This response offers an insightful analysis of the source text and demonstrates a sophisticated understanding of the analytical task. In analyzing Bogard's use of *personal anecdote, allusions to art and history, and rhetorical questions*, the writer is able to explain carefully and thoroughly how Bogard builds his argument over the course of the passage. For example, the writer offers a possible reason for why Bogard chose to open his argument with a personal anecdote, and is also able to describe the overall effect of that choice on his audience (*In telling this brief anecdote, Bogard challenges the audience to remember a time where they could fully amass themselves in natural darkness void of artificial light. By drawing in his readers with a personal encounter ... the author means to establish the potential for beauty, glamour, and awe-inspiring mystery that genuine darkness can possess. . . . This anecdote provides a baseline of sorts for readers to find credence with the author's claims*). The cogent chain of reasoning indicates an understanding of the overall effect of Bogard's personal narrative both in terms of its function in the passage and how it affects his audience. This type of insightful analysis is evident throughout the response and indicates advanced analytical skill.

**Writing—4:** The response is cohesive and demonstrates highly effective use and command of language. The response contains a precise central claim (*He effectively builds his argument by using personal anecdote, allusions to art and history, and rhetorical questions*), and the body paragraphs are tightly focused on those three elements of Bogard's text. There is a clear, deliberate progression of ideas within paragraphs and throughout the response. The writer's brief introduction and conclusion are skillfully written and encapsulate the main ideas of Bogard's piece as well as the overall structure of the writer's analysis. There is a consistent use of both precise word choice and well-chosen turns of phrase (*the natural magnificence of stars in a dark sky is definite, our world consumed by unnatural, vapid lighting, the affecting power of an untainted night sky*). Moreover, the response features a wide variety in sentence structure and many examples of sophisticated sentences (*By doing this, Bogard creates a dichotomy between Paris' traditionally alluded-to name and the reality of what Paris is becoming – no longer "the city of light", but more so "the city of light...before 2AM"*). The response demonstrates a strong command of the conventions of written English. Overall, the response exemplifies advanced writing proficiency.

## Essay Scoring Guide

Score	Reading	Analysis	Writing
4	<p><b>Advanced:</b> The response demonstrates thorough comprehension of the source text.</p> <p>The response shows an understanding of the text's central idea(s) and of most important details and how they interrelate, demonstrating a comprehensive understanding of the text.</p> <p>The response is free of errors of fact or interpretation with regard to the text.</p> <p>The response makes skillful use of textual evidence (quotations, paraphrases, or both), demonstrating a complete understanding of the source text.</p>	<p><b>Advanced:</b> The response offers an insightful analysis of the source text and demonstrates a sophisticated understanding of the analytical task.</p> <p>The response offers a thorough, well-considered evaluation of the author's use of evidence, reasoning, and/or stylistic and persuasive elements, and/or feature(s) of the student's own choosing.</p> <p>The response contains relevant, sufficient, and strategically chosen support for claim(s) or point(s) made.</p> <p>The response focuses consistently on those features of the text that are most relevant to addressing the task.</p>	<p><b>Advanced:</b> The response is cohesive and demonstrates a highly effective use and command of language.</p> <p>The response includes a precise central claim.</p> <p>The response includes a skillful introduction and conclusion. The response demonstrates a deliberate and highly effective progression of ideas both within paragraphs and throughout the essay.</p> <p>The response has a wide variety in sentence structures. The response demonstrates a consistent use of precise word choice. The response maintains a formal style and objective tone.</p> <p>The response shows a strong command of the conventions of standard written English and is free or virtually free of errors.</p>
3	<p><b>Proficient:</b> The response demonstrates effective comprehension of the source text.</p> <p>The response shows an understanding of the text's central idea(s) and important details.</p> <p>The response is free of substantive errors of fact and interpretation with regard to the text.</p> <p>The response makes appropriate use of textual evidence (quotations, paraphrases, or both), demonstrating an understanding of the source text.</p>	<p><b>Proficient:</b> The response offers an effective analysis of the source text and demonstrates an understanding of the analytical task.</p> <p>The response competently evaluates the author's use of evidence, reasoning, and/or stylistic and persuasive elements, and/or feature(s) of the student's own choosing.</p> <p>The response contains relevant and sufficient support for claim(s) or point(s) made.</p> <p>The response focuses primarily on those features of the text that are most relevant to addressing the task.</p>	<p><b>Proficient:</b> The response is mostly cohesive and demonstrates effective use and control of language.</p> <p>The response includes a central claim or implicit controlling idea.</p> <p>The response includes an effective introduction and conclusion.</p> <p>The response demonstrates a clear progression of ideas both within paragraphs and throughout the essay.</p> <p>The response has variety in sentence structures. The response demonstrates some precise word choice. The response maintains a formal style and objective tone.</p> <p>The response shows a good control of the conventions of standard written English and is free of significant errors that detract from the quality of writing.</p>