

"Lively and engaging!" —Christine Florie, Editor, Marshall Cavendish Benchmark

ACE THE SAT* WRITING EVEN IF YOU HATE to WRITE

Second Edition

***SHORTCUTS AND STRATEGIES TO
SCORE HIGHER REGARDLESS OF YOUR SKILL LEVEL***

- ▶ Three complete practice tests with answers and detailed explanations
- ▶ 30 example essays with scores
- ▶ Insider tips from SAT graders and top tutors
- ▶ Score boosting techniques for multiple choice questions

TAMRA B. ORR

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Praise for
“Ace the SAT Writing Even If You Hate to Write”
By Tamra B. Orr

“Today’s teens are faced with the daunting task of taking the ‘new and improved’ SAT. The pressure is on. Take a deep breath and relax. *Ace the SAT Writing Even If You Hate to Write* is to the rescue. Its lively and engaging style will painlessly take you through the essay-writing process specifically geared for the writing section of the SAT. The book explains what determines a ‘good’ writer, the ins and outs of the scoring process and the ever important skills to become an awesome writer. Sample essays and discussion of the multiple choice section round out this extremely valuable resource.”

—Christine Florie, Editor, *Marshall Cavendish Benchmark*

“Finally! A book about writing that actually helps students who don’t like to write! It is more than a quick guide to how to do it—it actually helps students become better writers. And for students who don’t like to write, you will find out more than advice to get through the essay section of the SAT—with no mind-numbing exercises. If you don’t like to write, or if you aren’t very good at it, this is the book for SAT writing prep.”

—Samuel Barnett, Ph.D., *Certified Educational Planner*

“Learn how to get your words down on paper and polish them to make them the best they can be.”

—Pam Rosenberg, Editor, *Editorial Directions*

“Writing can be fun and this book proves that even writing for the SAT can be less painful than you ever imagined. What should you do first when you open the writing section of the new SAT? By following the advice in this book, you will avoid that pounding panic that can overtake anyone. You will learn the best ways to approach and master the writing situation. The information is not only helpful and to the point, but it also explains what test scorers are looking for in top rate exams. The book examines the skills of good writers and shows you how to use those skills yourself. Included are 30 essays, both good and bad, to study as examples. It also includes information and help to overcome the dreaded multiple choice portion of the SAT. Study this book carefully, and you can confidently master the writing section of the SAT.”

—Sandra Roy, *Educational Test Writer*

“A rare combination of verve and precision. In this time of high-stakes accountability, *Ace the SAT Writing Even If You Hate to Write* provides an accessible way for students to get through the SATs. The author has an insider’s perspective on assessment having participated in all aspects of test development. She knows what the test writers are looking for because she is one of them. Her knowledge of assessment combined with her writing talents make this book a ‘must’ for students who want to help themselves and improve their test scores.”

—Brenda Thomas, *Educational Editor*

Ace the SAT Writing Even If You Hate to Write

- Second Edition -

By Tamra B. Orr

Author of "America's Best Colleges for B Students"

Ace the SAT* Writing Even If You Hate to Write (2nd Edition)

By Tamra B. Orr

Published by SuperCollege, LLC
3286 Oak Court
Belmont, CA 94002
www.supercollege.com

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Previous editions © 2006

Cover design by TLC Graphics, www.TLCGraphics.com. Design: Monica Thomas.

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ISBN: 9781932662306

Manufactured in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Tamra B. Orr

Ace the SAT Writing Even if You Hate to Write 2nd Ed.

p. cm.

Includes appendices.

ISBN 9781932662306

1. Test Preparation I. Title

2. Reference 3. Education

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When Writing Equals a Root Canal (without an Anesthetic!) / 11

If the idea of writing an essay for the new SAT makes you shudder, gasp and have a panic attack, you have come to the right place. In the past, you might have dealt with the typical class paper without having to resort to breathing in a brown paper bag, but this is an all new demand. You have to write well and write fast—and your SAT scores are going to reflect how you did. No pressure, huh-uh.

But don't despair! This book is here to help. It will show you what you need to know to ace it even if writing is right up there with that proverbial root canal. You will find 30 essays of all different calibers (with scores ranging from zero to six) to read and analyze; and to top it all off, you will also learn the best way to handle the multiple choice portion of the test (a.k.a. error identification, improving sentences and improving paragraphs).

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Who are the people that actually read and score your test? What are they looking for? What *aren't* they looking for? What counts most and least? Let's talk to some of the people that do this for a living and get tips and insight from the graders themselves.

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Here you will find 30 essays to read, absorb and learn from. There are some wonderful ones (scores of 4-6), which you can imitate and some not so great ones (scores 1-3), which we will critique and then rewrite.

SECTION 5:**Enie, Meenie, Miney, Mo: The Multiple Choice Portion of the SAT / 179**

In this section, we will take a look at the 60 questions that will be asked in the multiple choice portion of the SAT. There will be several sample questions and answers, as well as information about the Process of Elimination and the Art of Good Guessing (yes, guessing counts!...when it's done right, that is.)

SECTION 6:**Help! I Have Less than a Week to Study / 205**

You will gain key study strategies to prepare for the SAT in one week and understand how to use the powerful process of elimination strategy to boost your score.

SECTION 7:**Help! I Am Taking the SAT in 24 Hours / 211**

In this section, you will learn 10 tips that will help you prepare in just one day and smart strategies for guessing.

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Here you will get real experience with three full practice tests with answers and explanations and see both good and bad essay answer examples.

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*To my kids who brighten my life, my husband who enriches my life
and my parents who gave me life.*

|

**When Writing Equals
a Root Canal...**

**(without an
Anesthetic!)**

INTRODUCTION

When Writing Equals a Root Canal... (without an Anesthetic!)

If you ask your parents whether anything in life is inevitable, they will probably tell you yes: “death” and “taxes.” Chances are you are way too young to worry about either one of these yet, but don’t think you are off the hook that easily. The one inevitable event in the life of a student is taking the SAT. And you’ll just have to accept it. It’s one of those parts of life we have to tolerate, whether we want to or not. It’s like cleaning out underneath your bed, getting a camp physical, having the stomach flu or running out of chocolate: you have to get through it and do the best that you can in the process.

And just to add a little sadistic twist to the knife—the new SAT now includes a pretty extensive writing portion. Lucky test takers such as you get to answer 60 multiple choice questions about various aspects of the English language. And the new bonus is that you also get to write a timed essay. (I don’t hear you cheering yet!)

Have you wondered why the powers that be (PTB) decided to add an essay portion to the new SAT? You aren’t the first. Contrary to what may first come to mind, it was not to (a) torture you, (b) humiliate you, (c) annoy you, (d) depress you or (e) all of the above. Simply put, according to the experts at the College Board, they believe the “addition of writing encourages and supports the teaching of writing at every grade level...The College Board, and its many member advisers, strongly believes that making the writing section required and not optional sends a strong message about the importance of writing for success in college and the workplace.”*

In other words, the College Board thinks that the ability to write a strong, clear essay is one of the most essential skills you will need to get through college, as well as succeed in a wide variety of careers. To see if you can pen such an essay, they are giving you a limited time to put one together. For the students in your English class who *always* get A’s on their papers, know what every single vocabulary words means and think research papers are lots of fun (gag!), this new requirement is a piece of cake. (Go ahead; stick your tongue out at them right now!) For the rest of us, however, it can be as terrifying as a root canal without an anesthetic (hence the title of this chapter!)

If the idea of writing an essay for the new SAT makes you turn pale, hyperventilate and break out into a cold sweat, you have come to the right place. Even if you can hold your own on a term paper, the thought of writing a timed essay for an important standardized test is enough to send a chill down many a student’s spine. This book will show you simple steps to improve your writing, gain confidence in your abilities and (most importantly) raise your score—even if writing is next to scrubbing the toilet on your list of exciting things to do.

The dirty little secret about the SAT is that you don’t have to be a Fitzgerald or a Hemingway (heck, you don’t even have to know who they are!) to do well on the test. Through the techniques you learn in this book you will learn how to put words on paper in a coherent and effective fashion. Not only will these skills boost your test score on the SAT but they will also help you in other areas of your life such as finding jobs, getting jobs and keeping jobs. Hey, it might even help you write an effective plea to your parents for more money when you are in college. In other words, good writing skills are not just useful for the SAT but they are useful for life.

*From the College Board website at: www.collegeboard.com/about/news_info/sat/faqs.html

There’s nothing to writing. All you do is sit down at a typewriter and open a vein.

~ Walter Wellesley
“Red” Smith, famed
sports writer

Writing is easy: All you have to do is sit staring at a blank sheet of paper until drops of blood form on your forehead.

~ Gene Fowler,
screenwriter and
director

Here is an overview of what *Ace the SAT Writing Even if You Hate to Write* will show you:

- In the **first section**, we will dissect a professional writer to see what she does that non-writers may not know about. (We promise it won't hurt her though.)
- In the **second section**, we will chat with some of those lovely people (no, they cannot be bribed) that read and score your essay. We want to know what they look for, what matters most and what we can just quit worrying about.
- In the **third section**, we give you so much information that you had better have at least two highlighters ready. This info will make that SAT essay easier, but it will also help you to write well in almost any present or future situation. Get ready to learn all about everything from prewriting techniques, outlines, thesis statements and transitions to examples and anecdotes, good old grammar, big words, legible handwriting and writing FAST.
- In the **fourth section**, we will show you example after example of essays written by students just like you. You will get to see the "before" and "after" shots of some of them, like those weight loss ads you see on television. The "before" version shows how the essay was handed in and the score it would get. And if it rates a 3 or less, it will be followed by an "after"—what could have been done to make it better so that it received a higher score. By the time you have read through all of them, you should be an expert yourself.
- In the **fifth section**, we will spend time talking about the three kinds of multiple choice questions you will deal with on the SAT: error identification, improving sentences and improving paragraphs. (Where is that cheering?)

Other perks to this book are the handy-dandy charts of info, as well as a number of practice questions designed to make sure you understand what you just read and can apply the information. Ideally, you are reading this book several months before you need to take the SAT. Hopefully, it's not 48 hours before the SAT starts and you plan to read, gulp coffee, munch chocolate and read until the test. (If you are, however, pass some of that chocolate over, please.) However much time you have, this book can help you; so sit back, grab a pencil (no, it doesn't have to be a #2) and let's take a look at what writing is all about.

POP QUIZ:

To make sure you got the highlights of the intro, and to give you some great practice for the SAT exam, here are a couple of multiple choice questions to get the brain cells in gear:

(1) The reason the College Board added an essay portion to the SAT is because they:

- (a) will make more money from this longer, updated version
- (b) want to make sure students can actually write an essay
- (c) are lonely, bored, retired teachers and need something to read
- (d) have personal vendettas against high school seniors
- (e) love reading student essays more than anything else in life

(2) Fitzgerald and Hemingway are:

- (a) journalists
- (b) animal trainers
- (c) authors
- (d) circus acrobats
- (e) janitors

(3) The best part of reading this book is that it will teach you how to:

- (a) write a solid essay
- (b) win a Pulitzer Prize
- (c) score a perfect 2400
- (d) get a girl/boyfriend
- (e) win the local lottery

Answer key: (1) b; (2) c; (3) a

Hint: The multiple choice questions on the SAT are a tad bit more difficult than the ones you will encounter in this book, but these will help you feel proud of yourself and still get the point across.

The (Relatively Painless) Anatomy of a Writer

Highlights: What you will (hopefully) learn in this chapter...

- Understanding the intuitive part of writing
- Utilizing the power of thinking positively and paying attention
- Calling on all of your resources
- Focusing on the words, not the count
- Reading your work to get a sense of “rightness”
- Putting together a puzzle of words
- Learning the huge importance of practice

*And by the way,
everything in life is
writable about if you
have the outgoing
guts to do it and
the imagination to
improvise. The worst
enemy to creativity is
self-doubt.*

*~ Sylvia Plath,
Pulitzer Prize winning
poet*

The (Relatively Painless) Anatomy of a Writer

Do you remember the part in the “Matrix” movies when Trinity and Neo could learn how to do just about anything by having it directly downloaded into their brains? Need to know how to fly a fancy helicopter? There it is. Want to know powerful martial arts (not to mention levitate at the same time) in a few seconds? Voila. You got it. Sadly, the closest we have to the Matrix technology so far is tight, black leather outfits, but that ability to learn something instantaneously would be pretty darn handy. Before you walked in to take the SAT, for instance, you could just download how to be a natural writer straight into your brain. In lieu of that, let’s take a look inside the brain of a writer—the old fashion way—to see how he or she thinks and works.

If you ask writers—either straight A English students or authors of dozens of books—how they do what they do, it is unlikely that they will be able to tell you. It is largely intuitive. It is simply an inherent part of who they are. That is true of almost anyone who is successful in some genre. For example, think of something at which you personally excel. Perhaps you can fly around the high school track in record time; maybe you can do trig problems blindfolded and with both hands tied behind your back; possibly you can play the clarinet way better than Kenny G. Do you know HOW you do it? It is usually a combination of intuition, natural skill, tons of practice and education. The same is true for writing. While you may not be a natural born writer, there is no reason you cannot learn the skills, practice and become a truly competent writer.

As a full time writer, I have written more than 50 books and 1,000 magazine articles. I can write several thousand words almost in my sleep (you should see me right before deadline!). When I try to dissect exactly how I do what I do, it is very difficult. I struggle to break it down into steps because it is all such an integral part of who I am and how I think. (Example: I’m terrible with a face-to-face confrontation, but I can write a *mean* letter to the editor!) Most of my writing is done at the unconscious level. After thinking and analyzing, however, here is a list of writing hints that I find helpful in my writing:

1. *Thinking positively and paying attention.* When I approach any writing assignment (read “SAT test” for you), I do it with confidence that I will do a good job. I psyche myself up to concentrate on the topic at hand and I don’t let myself get distracted. If my attention wanders to the summer day outside, the comfy hammock in the back yard or the good book waiting on my night table, I am lost. The same principle applies when you go in to take the SAT. If you are busy thinking about how you did or will do in another section of the test, or whether or not your socks match or if the cute guy/girl sitting behind you is free later, your writing will suffer for it.

How much influence do your attitude and attention have on what you write? Bunches—but don’t just take my word for it! Sit down and try to write something coherent and interesting if you are either thinking about something else and/or telling yourself negative thoughts. See how it turns out.

In the book, *Blink: The Power of Thinking without Thinking*, Malcolm Gladwell explained how attitude can substantially affect your ability on an exam. Gladwell described an organization that came up with a unique test. A group

of people were told that they were going to answer 42 relatively difficult questions from the board game “Trivial Pursuit.” Before they answered these questions, however, they were told to imagine what it would be like to be a college professor. They were instructed to take five minutes and write down what a job like that might involve. Another group was also ready to play the game, but for their five minutes, they were told to think about kids having fun kicking a soccer ball around. When the two groups began to answer the “Trivial Pursuit” questions, the group that imagined being a professor did substantially better (55.6 percent right) than the soccer group (42.6 percent). Was one group smarter than the other? Not at all. “They weren’t smarter or more focused or more serious,” writes Gladwell. “They were simply in a ‘smart’ frame of mind, and clearly, associating themselves with the idea of something smart, like a professor, made it a lot easier—in that stressful instant after a trivia question was asked—to blurt out the right answer. The difference between 55.6 and 42.6 percent, it should be pointed out is enormous,” he continues. “That can be the difference between passing and failing.”

What all this means to you is that when you write the SAT essay (or any other writing assignment), you need to go into the room with confidence and in the right frame of mind. If you are filling your head with statements like, “I am going to bomb this thing,” “I don’t know how to write” or “This is going to be just horrible,” then don’t be surprised if each statement comes true. After all, you just told your brain that you were going to fail, so why would it try to do anything else? Instead, you need to program your mind with the same kind of thoughts professional writers (like me!) do. I often say, “This chapter will turn out just the way I want it to,” or “This book is coming together perfectly.” Try positive thoughts such as “I am going to do my best on this essay,” “I am ready to do a great job” or “This is going to go very well.” It isn’t a guarantee (be prepared: there are no guarantees) but it is one important step you can make to become a better writer.

2. *Using all of your resources.* When I write a book or an article, I often have several types of sources that I need to seamlessly blend together. I have my research, a few quotes, occasionally some interview notes and my own personal experiences. All of these have to work together to support the central idea I am writing about. If I leave any one of them out, there will be a gap in my writing. Without an integration of ideas, people will be confused when they read what I have written (or, more likely, an editor will be yelling at me over the phone). It is the same thing when you write your essay. You need to reach down inside and draw upon your life experience and knowledge to support your point of view or main topic. Don’t be afraid to use personal experiences and bits of knowledge that you’ve collected in your SAT essay.

3. *Focus on the words, not the word count.* Just like you have a certain number of lines to fill on the SAT essay; I have a specific word count to meet, regardless of what I am writing. If I focus solely on meeting the word count instead of just covering the subject thoroughly, however, I start making mistakes. I say ten words when I only need four; I repeat myself; I concentrate on the wrong thing. That magic number has suddenly become more important than my actual message. If you focus on filling up the lines of the exam instead of on writing well, you are almost sure to make those same errors.

Writing comes more easily if you have something to say.

~ Sholem Asch,
 novelist and
 playwright

4. *Reading it over to get a “sense.”* When I have finished writing something, I don’t hit the send or the print button until I have done one more thing—I make my husband read it out loud to me while I listen with my eyes closed. I am a very auditory person and so while he reads, I listen for errors. If he stumbles or pauses over how I phrased something, I know a reader may stumble over it too. If I hear a repeated word, an awkward phrase or something that just doesn’t flow, I have him mark the spot and I go back and fix it. When you write your SAT essay, read it (silently) to yourself and “listen” for mistakes. Everyone perceives errors differently. I *hear* them, but you might *see* or feel them, depending on your own personal style.

5. *Putting together a puzzle.* If you have ever assembled a puzzle (and who hasn’t?), you know that you have to take many different pieces and slowly fit them together so that they make a clear and understandable picture. When I write something, I am doing the same thing, but each one of the pieces is an idea. I can’t throw them together in any order, just like you can’t put a puzzle piece anywhere that you want. The result in both cases would be a jumbled mess. I have to make sure that each sentence connects to the one next to it in a logical way. The ideas have to flow together; they have to fit. When you write your SAT essay, the sentences must flow together in a clear and logical order. One must smoothly lead to the next one. If you—or I—jump around and write without continuity, confusion ensues. I get in trouble with the boss; you get a lower test score.

6. *Practice, practice, practice.* Because I am a full time writer, I get lots of practice putting words together. On a typical day, I write no less than 30 or 40 emails, as well as several thousand words on one project or another. At least six hours (and up to 16!) a day are devoted to playing around with words in one way or another. I can write much faster than I could five years ago. I am quicker and better today because of the daily practice I get. I’ve trained my brain to think and write faster. You may write things for school, but chances are you only spend a few hours each year writing essays. In order to be good at it, you need to spend several hours each week writing essays. Think of it this way. If you were on the football team, how well would you play if you skipped practices and just showed up for the games? You would have missed learning new skills, finding out new plays and getting to know your teammates. *Anything* that you want to do well takes practice. Not a little, not some, but A LOT.

If you are not a person who writes very often, even practicing writing an essay may seem intimidating. Here is something to try instead. Have a friend or parent read a writing prompt to you. Then respond to it verbally. Say what you would normally have to write. If you practice responding to this kind of question orally, at least your brain will get used to the format. If you do it enough, it will become more familiar and easier to translate into words on paper later.

One of the best pieces of advice this writer can give to you, the so-called non-writer, is simply this: “To become, act as if.” In other words, to become a good writer, act as if you already are one. By copying the traits and habits of a professional writer, you will be much closer to actually becoming one yourself.

POP QUIZ:

(1) What is one of the main things a professional writer uses when putting words together?

- (a) thesaurus
- (b) chocolate
- (c) intuition
- (d) whiskey
- (e) printer

(2) How does thinking positively affect your overall performance?

- (a) It makes you go at least 44.2 percent faster.
- (b) It uses less gas overall than a typical SUV.
- (c) It guarantees perfection in any arena.
- (d) It gives you all the right answers.
- (e) It puts you in the right frame of mind to do well.

(3) When you are writing your essay, you should concentrate mainly on:

- (a) the clock
- (b) your message
- (c) how many lines you have left
- (d) what color to dye your hair next
- (e) what your girlfriend/boyfriend is wearing

(4) Which of the following is a good resource to use while writing your essay?

- (a) quotes
- (b) personal experiences
- (c) examples from history
- (d) examples from literature
- (e) all of the above

(5) If there is a number one key to writing well on a regular basis, it is:

- (a) cheating
- (b) copying
- (c) spelling
- (d) practicing
- (e) avoiding

Answer Key: (1) c; (2) e; (3) b; (4) e; (5) d