

### **What is the purpose of the SAT?**

SAT exists because it is the only comprehensive *standardized test* that US colleges and universities can use to determine how applicants compare in academics. Suppose a tennis coach is looking for a left-handed doubles player to fill a gap on the roster and has three good applicants, one from the USA, one from Russia and one from Canada. Admission departments and coaches have no way to compare the school marks of the three applicants, because each comes from a different part of the world and has gone through a different school system. It would be like comparing apples to oranges to bananas! However as every SAT is the same, no matter where in the world it is written, the marks can be compared.

**Taking the SAT**– it's a household expression in the USA, a rite of passage, but little known elsewhere in the world except where students are aiming for a spot at a university/college in the USA.

**SAT – Scholastic Assessment Test (formerly Scholastic Aptitude Test)**, a standardized test in three sections that measures competence in verbal/reasoning skills, writing and math, is mandatory for all students applying to university/college in the USA, with or without an athletic scholarship. It's an old-fashioned paper and pencil test – no computers yet.

If you (or your tennis-playing daughter or son) are considering an athletic scholarship, it's never too early to begin preparing for the SAT. Most students take the test at some point during the first semester of grade 12. Those who are better prepared try the test towards the end of grade 11 – some even earlier – thus allowing time to concentrate on grade 12 subjects, to boost those marks. US college admissions take both SAT and secondary school credits into consideration.

Without a SAT score, any offer of an athletic scholarship will be conditional, so the earlier students take the test, the better position they will be in when it comes to comparing and choosing colleges. SAT can be taken more than once, although without intensive work, the difference between the first and subsequent scores will likely be small.

The test comprises three sections – verbal, written and math, each worth 800 marks, for a total of 2400. Scores are also converted to percentiles (rankings.) There is no pass/fail point. Colleges will let you know the score they will accept. With a score of 2000 – a very good score – the ball will be in your court! A score at the lower end will leave you scrambling and constantly retrieving!

In general, colleges demand a higher score from native English speakers than from ESL students, who may also have to take the TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language.) Some colleges – generally the more prestigious institutions – require applicants to take SAT subject tests too.

### **Get the ball in play! How to begin the SAT preparation process:**

Check [www.collegeboard.com](http://www.collegeboard.com) where you will find everything you need to know about the test, in a very user-friendly format. Waste no time in creating a free account to:

- receive a question of the day – can be printed if you wish
- check test dates/locations and register – most locations in Ontario fill up quickly
- research hundreds of colleges to find out what SAT mark range is required – a very useful tool
- access free practice material
- set up a personal study plan

Don't forget the traditional print study guides available in bookstores – in use long before the age of the internet – these are great to take on the road with you to read.

*Start rallying: There's no substitute for reading!*

The greatest asset/skill in SAT readiness is an enriched, wide-ranging vocabulary. This can only be acquired through reading. Watching a movie of play/novel or reading summaries online just won't cut it! *It's the structure of the sentence and the meaning of words that are important.* For those who have always been keen readers, just continue. You are already well on the way. The others are going to have play catch up. It's like being on the court and doing nothing but scurrying from side to side to retrieve the ball and never managing to be on the offensive. Read everything you set eyes on. Bookmark a good quality online newspaper and make a point of reading one article a day. Start reading the classics. That doesn't mean you have to wade through *War and Peace* or *David Copperfield*. Think smart! Choose something short and set a daily reading target. Almost all of the titles suggested below can be found online (just google them) and are absolutely free.

Some suggestions:

Steinbeck – *The Pearl, Of Mice and Men*

Dickens – *A Christmas Carol*

Orwell – *1984, Animal Farm*

Wells – *The Time Machine*

Hemingway – *The Old Man and the Sea, The Sun Also Rises*

Fitzgerald – *The Great Gatsby*

Joyce – *The Dubliners* (short stories- just read a few)

Buchan – *The Thirty-Nine Steps*

SAT was designed decades ago by Americans, for Americans and is based on the classical/traditional Eurocentric, North American culture of the time, with emphasis on American and British (often Victorian) literature. Although it is not essential to know the background to the questions and reading passages, it certainly helps and gives a feeling of confidence to be able to relate to the material. In general, the more you know, the better you will do on the SAT. Students who take French seriously are also at an advantage, as many of the higher level, abstract words in English have a French/Latin root.

The math sections too are language-based. Read carefully and make sure you know the basic math facts, including the multiplication tables. During study sessions I am always amazed at the number of students who reach for a calculator to work out something as simple as  $5 \times 12$ ! It's much easier to memorize! I have taught SAT prep classes in China, where the students memorize very effectively. Can you differentiate the between

mean/median/mode? How many degrees are there in a straight line? When do you use  $\pi$ -r squared and  $2\pi r$ ?

With the exception of the essay and a few math questions SAT is multiple choice: there is only one answer. Your personal input, opinions and interpretation are NOT required. SAT exists to check on your college readiness – your ability to concentrate, be decisive, work quickly and efficiently, focus intently, think logically, think on your feet, apply a set of solid skills to the task on hand..... not unlike what you need to be successful on the court. Some things are universal!

### **Can you go the distance?**

You all know the feeling of going on court, expecting a quick, easy win, only to find yourself facing a tough opponent who pushes everything back and seems to get all the lucky breaks. It's the same with SAT. The test lasts four hours, unheard of anywhere else where even three hours is considered a very long exam. Start practising your timing/mental stamina skills by working uninterrupted on a practice test for one hour, then two hours and gradually increasing to four hours.

### **Strategy and avoiding unforced errors**

Multiple choice tests require the acquisition and constant honing of specific strategies to avoid falling into traps. Finish off the point and move on to the next one!

Practice SATs are offered at some secondary schools in Ontario, throughout the year.

Contact student services at your school for information. A practice SAT is usually offered in Halton (Oakville or Burlington) in late February/early March. Contact ACE Tennis Academy at Cedar Springs, Burlington, [info@acetennis.ca](mailto:info@acetennis.ca), 905.632.9500 or visit the ACE TENNIS website [www.acetennis.ca](http://www.acetennis.ca). Classes during the summer and tutoring via Skype are also available.

### **Two essential resources that SAT takers should begin to use well ahead of time:**

**[www.collegeboard.org](http://www.collegeboard.org)** This is where you will find all the information you need about SAT – how/where to register, cost, free online resources, receive a question every day in your e-mailbox, track your results. You can open a free account right away. It's a very user friendly site. You can load the app for question of the day.

**SAT Study Guide** (Princeton Review or College board), available at bookstores or order online. This is a very large volume – and heavy – but again, contains everything you need to know to prepare for the SAT, except registration information – use the website for that. There are new editions every year, but as long as you have one that is post-2005, it will be fine. Cost new is around \$30 CAD plus HST.

Another useful supplementary website is **[www.majortests.com](http://www.majortests.com)** where you can download free practice tests, print if you wish, or simply complete them online and check the answers online too.

### **These players have some perfect matches.**

SAT takers who are well-prepared work hard to improve and enrich their vocabulary. I have created a matching activity for you, **using adjectives that appear regularly on the**

**SAT.** Study the list below and match each adjective to the tennis player who best fits the description. You may find that an adjective fits more than one player, but try to make the best choice. If you make a hasty selection you may find that the last adjective and the last player don't match. Be careful!

This exercise is a very good way to begin your own vocabulary lists, on a word processor or on plain old paper. Create a page for each letter of the alphabet. Write the word and its definition. Try to add a word a day.

Try to think of another player and an adjective that matches that player and post in the reply section to share with everyone.

The answers will be posted in the next issue of the "All You Need To Know About SAT"

### **Adjectives Matching Activity.**

Please complete a very entertaining matching activity, using adjectives that appear regularly on the SAT.

Below please find the correct answers and see if they match yours.

Answers :

1c 2g 3f 4b 5h 6a 7e 8d

All of these words turn up regularly on SAT. As your SAT studies progress, these words will become like old friends!

If you have not already begun your own vocabulary lists, start with these. The average student in grade 11 likely knows two or three of the words in the matching activity. That's not enough for SAT! Some words are obvious, like **comedic**; the first five letters appear in the word **comedy** and as *Djokovic* is known as a bit of a joker, you can quickly make the connection.

The root of the word **voluble** is **volume** so when you think of the loudest shrieker on the tour, it's usually *Sharapova*.

**Tenacious** is a word you should know. It comes from the French **tenir** – to hold/hold on to and thus means someone who never gives up – an apt description for *Nadal*.

How about the word **urbane**? As soon as you hear the definition – smooth and polished – the only choice is *Federer*! Yes, the root is urban, meaning city dweller.

I wish I could apply the word urbane to my compatriot *Murray* but as soon as you read the definition of **lugubrious** – exaggeratedly or affectedly mournful and over-dramatic, I'm sure you'll agree that that is a much better fit!

The first three letters of the word **irascible** also begin the word **irate**. As *Serena* is known for her short fuse, you get the connection.

And now to the **inscrutable** *Stosur*.....can you ever read her emotions? (Perhaps it's those omnipresent sunglasses that act as a mask.) The root word is **scrutinize** – to examine closely. The prefix **in** at the beginning of the word changes the meaning to the opposite, i.e., someone who cannot be scrutinized or figured out.

You could say that quite few of the top tennis players are **loquacious**, especially during those repeated interviews when some of them never know when to stop talking, but one of biggest chatterboxes is undoubtedly *Wozniacki*.

Even if you don't agree with my matches.....just learn the words!

### **Reading for comprehension**

Many of the students I tutor for SAT struggle to read fairly simple material with expression and appropriate interpretation of punctuation marks – commas, colons (:), semi-colons (;), question marks (?) exclamation marks (!) and even periods (.) at the end of sentences. Some students even run out of breath before they reach the end of the sentence! This often means that after finishing the sentence *they still do not understand it*. To improve on this, you have to practise reading **aloud**. Choose a passage from a novel, play etc. that you are studying in school, or use the passage I have included below. Have a family member or a friend listen to you read and make suggestions. The actual SAT exam is of course, conducted in silence so it is essential that you practise aloud regularly, before the test date. Regular reading helps you build up confidence, and as you improve, you will find that you will be able to *anticipate* what comes next, allowing you to adjust the tone of your voice accordingly and to stop for breath where needed.

The math section of SAT too also requires careful reading and interpretation. Some students actually know how to do the math operation required, but misinterpret it because they do not understand the question.

Here is a well-known passage for you to practise. You can locate the rest of this monologue (Mark Antony's funeral speech after the assassination of Julius Caesar) online to practise some more.

**Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears;**

**I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him.**

**The evil that men do lives after them;**

**The good is oft interred with their bones;**

**So let it be with Caesar.**

*William Shakespeare, ("Julius Caesar", Act 3 scene 2)*

### **Sounding out words**

**Phonics** – it sounds like what you did in the primary grades but it is an essential skill in the reading process as you prepare for the SAT. Phonics means sounding out the sections – syllables – of long words and deciding where to put the stress on the word.

*Example:*

1. vacillate ( means to keep changing your mind between two choices)  
**va/si/late** The stress is on the **first** syllable. Some students pronounce this word incorrectly as vakillate.

Remember the rule for the letter "c" followed by a vowel:

**c** followed by **a** is hard, as in **cat, caution**

**c** followed by **e** is soft, as in **ice, certain**

**c** followed by **i** is soft, as in **circle, citrus**

**c** followed by **o** is hard, as in **copy, costume**

**c** followed by **u** is hard, as in **cut, current**

**c** followed by **y** is soft, as in **cyclone, cynical**

**Apply this rule when sounding out new words. It works!**

2. loquacious (a loquacious person is one who talks a great deal) The word is broken up like this:  
lo/**kway**/shous The stress is on the **second** syllable.
3. magnanimity (means great generosity of spirit)  
mag/**na/ni**/mity The stress is on the third syllable.
- Practise words like these with a friend or family member. Remember that SAT is conducted in silence. You have to practise phonics and reading skills **aloud** long before the test.

**The question of the day** on the **collegeboard website** provides some very useful statistics.

These help you to evaluate your own progress and give you a realistic idea as to where you are on your study plan:

1. The number of students who have attempted the question of the day, thus giving you an idea of just how huge the SAT is. It is not uncommon for the website to have more than 300,000 responses every day. It certainly gives you a sense of perspective.
2. The percentage of correct responses, giving you an idea of the level of difficulty of the question. If 75% of the responses are correct, you know that that particular question is easy. Make sure you get it right! If however the percentage of correct responses is 40%, you know that that is a hard question so study it very carefully before selecting your answer. Of the seven questions of the day every week, you should aim for a minimum of five out seven.

Question of the day is a wonderful free website. Make smart use of it!

### **SAT is crammed with numbers and statistics**

Here are those you should know and understand:

**raw score** – the total of all three sections – math, critical reasoning, writing (this includes the essay and grammar sections) – 800 each = 2400. A very good score is 2000 plus. Few students score in that range the first time they take the SAT. Sometimes it requires three tries.

**percentile** – from 0 – 99. This indicates where a student ranks in a random group of 100 test takers. If you are on the 90th percentile, that means that out of one hundred test takers, only nine scored higher than you. That makes you a very solid prospect for any college. What the SAT does **not** refer to are percentages. However, you can use percentages yourself to gauge your progress as you study. For every ten questions you do, add up the total correct. If you have eight out of ten correct, that is 80%, which equates to a raw score of 1920. That will keep you in the safe zone. Anything less than eight out of ten means that you have your work cut out for you.

### **Skills and strategies for SAT**

Just as in tennis or any discipline you have to have a strong set of skills to be able to tackle the SAT. You cannot apply strategies if you have little or no knowledge of the subject matter. Skills in math usually progress along with the timing of math instruction in school. If you can plan to take the SAT during a semester when you are taking a math course, the skills will be fresh in your mind. This is a good strategy. At other times of the year, when you are not taking math at school, your skills can become rusty. In the critical reasoning and writing sections, learning and progress are ongoing because you have to read constantly, no matter what the subject and in most subjects you have to write too. So the work you do in Civics for example is a huge help to you in the language sections of SAT.

Apart from the essay section and a few sections of the math, SAT uses the multiple choice format for answers. In schools in Ontario, multiple choice is just one of many forms of testing/evaluation. You have to work on strategies

**SAT is a multiple choice exam**[With the exception of the essay and a few questions in the math section.]

The Ontario Curriculum (and the curriculum in many other parts of Canada too) focuses on many types of responses, not just multiple choice so Canadian students really have to pay attention to strategies to improve their chances of getting the right – and only – answer when it comes to multiple choice, as they do not always get a much chance to practise in school.

Every question has five answer choices, A/B/C/D/E. Taking a guess at the right answer is really like picking numbers on Lotto 649 – what are your chances of picking the right answer out of five on every question to win the jackpot? Infinitesimal! Don't even think about it.

Well-prepared students never have to resort to guessing.

It is often possible to identify an “outlier” – one of the five answer choices that is very clearly not the right answer. Now you're down to four. If there is no outlier, try to eliminate two of the possible five answers as you see fit. If you change your mind, you can always include them again. Once you're down to three possible answers the task becomes more manageable and you have a better chance of making a “bestimate” (your best estimate.)

Next week we'll look at very specific strategies for the sentence completion sections.

### **Time management for exams**

The common theme among those who took the test was that they ran out of time on most of the sections and had to leave some questions unanswered.

In the hectic lives of students combining school with high level athletic pursuits, there are two types of time management, what I call macro time management and micro time management. The macro involves a number of people as well as the student athlete – parents, (even grandparents) siblings, teachers, coaches, tutors, and friends. All of these are part of the organization required to make the best possible use of everyone's time and to enhance the opportunities for the student to succeed. Everyone plays a part. The wise student athlete will be aware and appreciative of these combined efforts and will be better able to make the switch to micro time management – the skills required when you are all on your own in a test-taking situation. Then it is you and only you. (This can be compared to a

singles tennis match of course, when at the most; there will be very limited communication with a coach. The biggest difference is of course that tennis is not a game with time limits.) So if the SAT section gives you 20 minutes to answer 20 questions, you know that you have a minute for each question.

When you are in your family vehicle on the way to a practice or tournament, are you making use of this macro time by reading a few pages of a novel or reviewing for a test? (You can access entire texts of some short novels online.) Do you have vocabulary lists that you can review on your laptop/ipad/iphone? Even an old-fashioned notebook or binder will be fine. Once you reach your destination, check the time that has elapsed and then check what you have achieved in reading, reviewing etc. during that time. This will help you make the transition to the micro time when you are writing the SAT.

### **Strategies for the critical reading sections on SAT**

#### **Sentence completion:**

These questions are always at the beginning of the critical reading section. There are usually as few as five, and as many as nine. They tend to be in order of difficulty so start at #1. You have about one minute to answer each question. Some of the questions have one blank space to be filled in, while others have two.

The best strategy of all is of course, to know all the words! While you are in the process of learning all the words, here are some strategies/techniques:

Of the five multiple choices try to reduce them to three, or even better, two. Here are some suggestions;

1. a) Establish whether the missing word (or words if it is a two blank sentence) is positive or negative. In a two blank sentence the possibilities are: positive/positive, negative/negative, positive/negative or negative/positive
2. b) Remember that just as in math, two negatives can cancel each other out, to make a positive
3. c) Finding the root of a word. Very often this means looking for a French/Spanish/Italian root – one of the great advantages of taking a second language beyond grade 9.
4. d) Look at the prefix (one or two letters, e.g., **ex/in/un/pro/anti/re**located at the beginning of the word) to see how those letters change the meaning of the word.

The more you read, the more you know...

Next week, we'll look at some specific examples of sentence completion questions from study materials.

#### **Strategies for tackling the sentence completion questions**

These questions are always in the first part of the critical reading sections. There are usually between five and nine of them and as I explained in the last article, some of the questions are one blank while others are two blank.

Let's start with a one blank question from an actual test:

**Conservationists are contemplating a plan to remove the broken crates, washed-up cargo, and other \_\_\_\_\_ left over from the shipwreck.**

A.raiment      B.detritus      C. periphery      D.desolation      E. trajectory

First of all, determine the meaning of the sentence and try to find a word of your own that fits. You're very likely to come up with the word "garbage" or "trash." Now study the five choices. As tennis players, you should know what the *trajectory* of the ball is, so that is obviously not the answer. Eliminate E. You should also figure out that *periphery* has got something to do with peripheral vision (essential in all sports!), so again, that is not the right choice. Eliminate C. The word *desolation* is certainly a word that describes what you might actually feel and describe when you come upon a shipwreck. But does it actually have anything to do with garbage? Possibly, but the connection is very weak and *desolation* is not a synonym for *garbage*. Eliminate D. Now you're left with *raiment* and *debris*. Although *raiment* sounds a bit like *remain(s)*, which certainly explains garbage, you cannot change the initial vowel in a word – that is, you cannot simply change **ai** in *raiment* to **e** without changing the root of the word and therefore the meaning. So it's safe to say that *raiment* cannot be the answer. Eliminate A. You're left with *debris*. **B** is the answer. *Debris* is another word for *debris* (*débris* in French.) So now you know the meaning of *debris* and you will always remember it. The word *raiment*? It's an old-fashioned word for clothing, especially the garments worn by priests or ministers. Now if you had only known that, you see how much easier the question would be!

### Strategies for tackling the two blank sentence completion questions in the critical reading section of SAT

This question comes from a SAT practice test. Can you find the answer?

**While industry in the late twentieth century believed itself to be \_\_\_\_\_ in its treatment of labourers, Cesar Chavez made a career of revealing the \_\_\_\_\_ experienced by farm workers.**

1. **generous... injustices**
2. **just ... satisfaction**
3. **vindictive ... challenges**
4. **superior ... relationships**
5. **immutable ... consistencies**
6. Read the sentence carefully. You can read aloud the first time, but remember that during the actual SAT you must read silently, to yourself. If you have heard of Cesar Chavez, then you have some background knowledge, and you can immediately supply a context (setting) for the sentence. However, it is not essential. You can still figure out the meaning of the sentence.
7. Try to establish the relationship between the two missing words in terms of **positive** and **negative**. There are always four possibilities: positive/positive, positive/negative, negative/positive and negative/negative. There is also a third category – **neutral** words. As you read the sentence, you should be able to deduce that the first blank is positive and the second blank is negative. You can see that after the word "*labourers*" there is a change in direction. The word "*while*" at the beginning of the sentence also indicates that there will be a change of direction. So you are looking for a positive/negative correlation. That eliminates right away:
  8. – positive/positive
  9. – negative/positive

10. – positive/neutral (the word relationships is neutral; it requires an adjective in front of it to make it positive or negative)
11. – neutral/positive.  
That leaves you with A, which is the answer, as it is the only positive/negative pair.
3. Even if you don't know the words **vindictive** and/or **immutable**, the second word in each pair does not fit the positive/negative correlation, so you can eliminate it.
4. Now that you've got the answer, find out the meaning of **vindictive** and **immutable**!

### **Strategies for tackling the sentence completion questions on the critical reading section of SAT**

My most recent articles dealt with strategies for tackling the **one-blank** and **two-blank** questions. This week let's incorporate some basic counting as a strategy. There are **five** multiple choice answers for the one-blank questions, and ten words arranged in pairs for the two-blank questions. For the one-blank questions, if you know the meaning of all five words, the right answer simply falls into place in seconds. If you know **four** of the five words, there's a good chance you will be able to identify the right answer quickly. If you know only **three**, your chances are slimmer – you'll really have to apply the strategies I have already demonstrated. **Two** of the words or just **one**? You're struggling. You'll have to apply some heavy duty strategies! Of course, occasionally you get a lucky break: you know only one of the words and it just happens to be the right one. Don't count on it though! For the two-blank questions, you must know **nine** or **ten** of the words to be sure of choosing the correct pair right away. If you know **eight** of the words, it will take you a bit longer but you still have a very good chance. **Seven** words? It's possible, but you'll have to work hard at applying the strategies. **Six** or under, it's a slog!

### **Suggestions for reading to prepare for SAT and college**

If your goal is to attend college in the USA, you will at some point have to take a course in **American literature**. Start reading now and you will also do a great deal to build up your vocabulary for the SAT. Doubling up is a smart strategy!

You can locate many e-texts online. I located *The Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne (an American classic, set in the 17th century but written in the 19th century), simply by googling it. There are 24 short chapters in this novel. The language is old-fashioned but the built-in dictionary lets you check meanings of words on the spot – a huge bonus. Set yourself a goal of a chapter at a time whenever/wherever you are connected to the Internet. Even if you don't complete the novel, you will have a good idea what it's about and you will learn many new words that I guarantee you'll find on the SAT!

### **SAT Strategies: Answering the Questions in Order or Choosing Those You Can Do Best**

*The strategies vary according to the section:*

**MATH** – Look first for the questions you can do quickly. Then do the rest.

**CRITICAL READING** –

1. Sentence Completion – The questions are usually in order of difficulty, so start at the beginning.
2. Short Reading Passages – There are usually only four questions to answer based on two passages. If the passages are **not** related, deal with the questions on each passage separately. If the two passages are related, read both before answering the questions.
3. Long Reading Passages – Skim the questions. If they deal with specific line references in the passage, do them as you reach those lines. Otherwise, read the entire passage before answering the questions.

### **WRITING –**

1. Improving Sentences – It is best to do these in order, as the level of difficulty does not vary greatly.
2. Identifying Sentence Errors – as for Improving Sentences.
3. Improving Paragraphs – As you read the paragraph, you will likely spot errors. Check to see if some of the questions focus on these errors and do them right away.

Remember too that if you do the questions out of order, it is very important to make sure that you do not inadvertently omit some questions. Always check this.

### **Strategies for essay writing**

#### **PART 1.**

The essay is always the first section on the SAT and is always a debate-type topic. You have to be able to write coherent sentences (subject/verb/object), spell well, use varied vocabulary and express opinions in a fair and objective way. The essay asks you to draw upon/refer to examples from the following six categories:

#### **Literature, the arts, science and technology, history, current events, or your own experience or observations**

Choosing **three** of these categories is sufficient to back up your thesis, argument or viewpoint. You are not expected to cover all six. Let's start with the most obvious choice – **your own experience or observations**. As you are all tennis players, use tennis as your catalyst (your core, jumping off point.) Think of your own tennis experiences and then think of the players on the tour and whether your experiences are similar. If the essay topic is about  **censorship**, you will have lots to write about – racquet abuse, profanity towards officials/other players. What do you think should be done in those situations? If the topic is  **honesty**, you can write about your experiences with bad calls on the court and how you have handled them. That could lead to the challenge system (replay of dubious calls) at major tournaments and whether you think it is a practical innovation. How about an essay topic on the pros and cons of the  **internet**? Is instant access to player statistics online a useful application or is it just too much information?

By sticking to a domain (a subject area) about which you are knowledgeable and familiar, you become much more confident, and the words will flow from pen to paper much more easily.

Part 2 of essay writing strategies will be about applying themes from literature. I bet you can't wait!

#### **Strategies for the essay section on the SAT**

There are themes from  **literature** that you can incorporate into your essay. The best way to get started is to make a list of everything you can remember reading, at school or at home.

Divide the titles into two main sections: **novels/short stories** and **drama**. You can also add **poetry**. This will help you classify the titles. A typical list for a grade 11 or 12 student might look like this:

There are of course, many other titles. This is just a sample.

Next step – identify the main theme(s) in each of the works on your list. For instance, in *The Scarlet Letter*, hypocrisy is one of the main themes. In *The Great Gatsby*, you encounter shallowness and betrayal, in *Macbeth*, greed. Once you have identified these main themes, choose **three** that you feel you know best and start to develop them. That will be more than enough to apply to almost any of the essay questions. Next week we'll look at ways to apply the themes in literature to some of the essay topics from actual SAT's. Hold your breath!

### **Strategies for essay writing – incorporating themes from literature into your essay**

Once you have completed your list of works you have read (see **last week's article** about identifying the main themes), choose three which you feel you know best and which you enjoyed reading. It's best to stick to the classics, as the readers/scorers of your essay will know the classics too. Remember too, that the readers of the essays are American, so they will be familiar with American authors. If you choose a novel or poem that you have read, but that few others have read, it will be more difficult to get your point across to the readers without going into a lot of detail, something that is not essential to the essay.

Let's say you choose **Macbeth**, **The Scarlet Letter** and **The Kite Runner**. Have you noticed the balance I have created here – one each from British, American and non-western literature – a safe and sagacious (find the meaning!) choice. I've selected three essay topics from recent SAT's (I have shortened them slightly):

1. Are we free to make our own choices in life, or are our decisions always limited by the rules of society?
2. Is honesty always the best policy?
3. Do we need knowledge of the past to fully understand the present?

Essay question # 1 – *making choices*. Can you apply a theme? Think of **Macbeth** as he listens to the words of the witches and decides to interpret them to suit his ambitions... He makes a choice... and sets off down the path of no return...

Essay question # 2 – *honesty*. Can you apply a theme? Think of the main characters in **The Scarlet Letter**. Who is honest and who is dishonest (*dishonesty* is also related to *hypocrisy*, another big essay theme)

Essay question # 3 – *knowledge of the past*. Can you apply a theme? Think of the setting of **The Kite Runner** and how it switches from an "old" part of the world with centuries of tradition to a "new" part of the world with fewer conventions, and how the main character adapts...

By now, the format of the essay question should be taking shape in your mind or on paper (or laptop, iPad, iPhone).

### **Strategies for Essay Writing – Incorporating Current Events**

Keeping up-to-date with current events is not difficult. Most of you have electronic gadgets connected to the Internet all the time (in fact, some of these gadgets are permanently

welded to your hand), so choose a news source and read the main page every day. Skim the headlines and choose an article that interests you to read in its entirety. There are, of course, old-fashioned things, like newspapers, that will give you exactly the same information.

The readers/markers of the essay are all US citizens, so be sensible and do not be too critical of US policies. Stick to politics and world events for a global perspective. Remember that is not the details of current events – you have neither time nor space for that – that are important in the essay, but rather the main point, the gist or the big picture. However, as you read news articles over a period of time, you do absorb information about date/time, location, names of people/events and you gradually memorize them. Bit by bit, these details merge to form the bricks to build up a framework, and within this framework you will become faster at identifying the main points. Try it, it works.

### **Ready to take the SAT?**

For those of you planning on taking the SAT in the fall, June is the time to start serious study, just as soon as your exams are over. Yes, you can mix tennis and academics in the summer. They actually go very well together. There's lots of time for both and I've given you enough strategies this year to keep you going all summer. The extra oxygen flowing through your veins on the tennis court will nourish the brain.

If you're serious about a top college in the USA, you should aim for a score of 2000 on the SAT. That takes a lot of work – and time. A lower mark than 2000 may be enough, but why take a chance? You will be competing with students from all around the world, many of whom apply themselves to SAT prep far more diligently than the some of the students I work with here. Something to think about!

Most of the top colleges require two subject tests as well as the SAT itself. These are held in November. Information is on the collegeboard website – [www.collegeboard.org](http://www.collegeboard.org). These subject tests can be very demanding. If you choose English for instance, you will find that the test is heavily literature-based, so if you're not a keen reader, it's not for you.