

# Ace the Essay on the SAT\*

Use an effective opening line and re-state the prompt.

*In today's fast-paced, driven society, much emphasis is placed on the final result of an endeavor. American society places a premium on success; our culture has little tolerance for failures or losers. Within this cultural framework it sometimes becomes easy to immediately dismiss failures. However, value is not found only in success. As the examples of the recent Columbia shuttle disaster and the Vietnam War demonstrates, events that are not successful still have value.*

State a clear thesis and forecast examples.

*When the Columbia space shuttle disintegrated upon reentry, the American people experienced a great tragedy. The failure of NASA engineers to prevent this disaster shocked the nation. Certainly, many people would argue that there is no value in this horrific failure. But the Columbia tragedy led to a complete investigation of the space program. Deficiencies in the chain of command and in the entire culture of NASA were exposed. As a result of the Columbia tragedy, NASA will reexamine its practices and change their ways so something like this doesn't happen again. Surely, this is a valuable thing to come from a horrible failure.*

Minimize number of misspelled words and grammatical errors.

Use examples from history, current events, etc.

*Another unsuccessful endeavor was the Vietnam War. America sent troops to Vietnam to prevent the country from becoming Communist. However, after many years of struggle, the troops were withdrawn and Vietnam fell to the Communist party. But this failure had much value. On one hand, our failure in Vietnam led to an important lesson in successful war strategy. The experience of the fierce guerrilla war led to changes in tactics that later helped America in other conflicts. Also, the Vietnam failure helped change the American culture. People protested the war and the government responded to the voice of the public. These important changes show the value that can come from failure.*

Use strong transitions to introduce points.

*Clearly, there is much value in things that our not successful. The Columbia disaster and the Vietnam War are but two examples of unsuccessful events that led to valuable lessons and changes. There is much to be learned from a failure and those who focus only on success will miss out on valuable lessons.*

Reiterate thesis and focus message.

Include an introduction, two to three body paragraphs, and a conclusion.

An SAT essay score is based on following a highly formulaic approach to writing.

Two graders will read your essay, and each will assign a score of 1 to 6. If their scores differ by two or more points, then a third grader will be brought in to grade your essay.

*Directions:* Consider carefully the following excerpt and the assignment below it. Then plan and write an essay that explains your ideas as persuasively as possible. Keep in mind that the support you provide—both reasons and examples—will help make your view convincing to the reader.

*Intellectuals in America and abroad have debated over the concept of success in American culture. Success can be defined quite differently by different people, but few people argue that being successful is not considered valuable. However, some people also advocate the view that something considered unsuccessful can also have some value.*

*Assignment:* What is your view of the claim that something unsuccessful can still have some value? In an essay, support your position by discussing an example (or examples) from literature, the arts, science and technology, current events, or your own experience and observations.