**New** [**SAT Persuasion Analysis Essay Tips**](http://blog.prepscholar.com/sat-essay-tips-15-ways-to-improve-your-writing-score)

**#1: State a Clear, Plagiarized Thesis Listing Your Subtopic Points**

What this means is that your essay needs to make a clear argument that the reader can easily identify. All you have to do to create your "precise central claim" is to identify the main idea of the passage and list the methods the author uses to support it. Fortunately, the SAT provides you with the passage’s main idea, so you don’t have to go hunting for it yourself. I've bolded the claim in this (fake) sample prompt so you can see this for yourself:

*Write an essay in which you explain how in the article “Monsters, Monsters, Everywhere,” Sam Lindsay builds an argument to persuade her audience that****more works of art should feature monsters****. In your essay, analyze how Lindsay 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 her argument. Be sure that your analysis focuses on the most relevant features of the passage. Your essay should not explain whether you agree with Lindsay’s claims, but rather explain how Lindsay builds an argument to persuade her audience.*

Now, here's an example of a thesis statement for an essay responding to this prompt:

*In the article “Monsters, Monsters, Everywhere,” Sam Lindsay uses pathos, logos, and ethos, to persuade her audience that more works of art should feature monsters.*

It's fine to copy the exact words describing the author’s central claim from the prompt into your thesis statement—in fact, this guarantees that the graders will see that your thesis is there and on-topic.

**#2: Include Both an Introduction and a Conclusion**

**Including an introduction paragraph in your essay is absolutely essential to getting a Writing score above a 4/8.** The introduction paragraph **introduces** the reader to what you’ll be talking about and allows you to set up the structure for the rest of the essay. Plus, an introduction can be a pretty good indicator of the quality for the rest of the essay – a poorly constructed introduction is often a warning that the essay that follows will be equally discombobulated. It's best to have both an introduction and a conclusion, but if you’re running short on time and can only have one, definitely pick the introduction. **A good introduction includes your thesis statement.** For the SAT essay, as I discussed in the previous point, your thesis (or your "precise central claim") **should be a statement about what devices the author uses to build her/his argument**.

I recommend this generic 4-sentence rhetorical question introduction tactic:

* Ask a “*Why should*” rhetorical question based on the issue in the article.
* Answer the question from the position that the author disagrees with: *Some folks argue that…*
* Answer the question from the author’s position: *Yet* *others contend that…*
* State the *topic sentence* indicating the techniques the author used to advance his position.

Model:

*Why should* any self-respecting artist incorporate monsters and ghouls into his work? *Some folks argue that* monsters are artistic junk-food for immature audiences, laugh-worthy B-movies, and children’s books. *Yet others contend that* monsters can appeal to mature, adult minds as well, since fear and evil are common denominators of the human condition. *In the article “Monsters, Monsters, Everywhere,” Sam Lindsay uses pathos, logos, and ethos to persuade her audience that more works of art should feature monsters.*

**#3: Use Correct, Formal, Non-repetitive Language**

For most of us, this is an area that takes a long time to develop, so unless your language skills are really rough or you're prepping a year ahead of time (or both), you'll probably get more out of focusing on the other components of the essay. This basically boils down to: **don't be repetitive and don't make grammar mistakes.** In addition, you should avoid using first person statements like "I" or "My" in the essay, along with any other informality. You're writing the equivalent of a school paper, not an opinion piece.

**Bad (Too informal):**

*“I think that Sam’s super persuasive in this article cause she’s just so passionate. It made me feel kinda bad that I don’t really monster it up in my everyday life.”*

**Good (Formal):**

*“Lindsay’s passionate defense of how drawing monsters “allows us to laugh at our personal foibles” causes her audience to put themselves in her shoes and empathize with her position.”*

 Finally, try to use different words to describe the same idea - don't use "shows" 15 times. Take the chance to **show off your vocabulary (*if, and only if*, the vocabulary is appropriate and makes sense)**. This component is the biggest reason why revising your SAT Essay is essential - it's fast and easy to change repeated words to other ones after you're finished, but it can slow you down during writing to worry about your word choice. If you're aiming for a top score, using advanced vocabulary appropriately is vital.

**#4: Include Only Information From the Passage in Your Subtopic Paragraphs—and Quote to Prove/Support Your Subtopic Points**

All the relevant information is in the passage, so aside from your introduction, avoid getting drawn into the topic and using your outside knowledge – you want to be sure to show that you’ve read the passage. In real life, there are many ways to support a thesis, depending on the topic. **But on the SAT, there's one kind of correct support: specific details drawn from the passage you’re asked to analyze**. You don’t have to mention every single detail that makes the argument effective. In fact, your essay will be more coherent and more likely to score higher in Analysis if you**focus your discussion on just a few points**. It's more important to show that you're able to pick out the most important parts of the argument and explain their function that it is to be able to identify every single persuasive device the author used.

Remember, don’t just puke back the passage in your essay. You must identify persuasive devices used by the author AND be sure to actually analyze **the way** the author of the passage builds her argument. As *The Official SAT Study Guide (March 2016 & Beyond)* [states](https://collegereadiness.collegeboard.org/pdf/official-sat-study-guide-ch-17-about-sat-essay.pdf#page=6&zoom=auto,-107,511),

*"[Y]our discussion should focus on what the author does, why he or she does it, and what effect this is likely to have on readers" (p. 178).*

The best way to get a high score for your essay is to **quote from the passage appropriately to support your points**. This shows not only that you’ve read the passage (without your having to summarize the passage at all), but also that you understand what the author is saying and the way the author constructed her argument.

**#5: Read the Prompt Before the Passage**

Why? Because the prompt includes the description of the author’s claim. **Knowing what the author’s claim is going into the article can help keep you focused on the argument,** rather than getting caught up in reading the passage (especially if the topic is one you're interested in).

**#6: Your Facts Must Be Accurate…But Your Interpretation Doesn’t Have to Be**

A big part of the Analysis score for the SAT essay is not just identifying the devices the author uses to build her argument, but **explaining the effect that the use of these devices has on the reader**. You don’t have to be completely, 100% accurate about the effect the passage has on the reader, because there is no one right answer. As long as you are convincing in your explanation and cite specific examples, you’ll be good.

Here's an example of an interpretation about what effect a persuasive device has on the reader (backed by evidence from the passage):

*Lindsay appeals to the emotions of her readers by describing the forlorn, many-eyed creatures that stare reproachfully at her from old school notebook margins. The sympathy the readers feel for these forgotten doodles is expertly transferred to Lindsay herself when she draws the connection between the drawn monsters and her own life: “Often, I feel like one of these monsters – hidden away in my studio, brushes yearning to create what no one else cares to see.”*

Now, you don't necessarily know for sure if "sympathy for the doodles" is what the author was going for in her passage. The SAT essay graders probably don't know either (unless one of them wrote the passage). But as long as you can **make a solid case for your interpretation, using facts and quotes from the passage to back it up**, you'll be good.

**#7: You Should Write More Than One Page**

This has always been true for the SAT essay, but for the first time ever, the College Board actually came out in *The Official SAT Study Guide* and explicitly said that **length really does matter**. You’ll have one page for (ungraded) scrap paper that you can use to plan out your essay, and four pages of writing paper for the essay – plan on **writing at least two pages for your essay**.

**#8: Be Objective When Reading the Passage**

A good way to practice this is to **read news articles on topics you care deeply about by people who hold the opposite view that you do**. For instance, as a composer and violist/violinist, I might read articles about how children should not be encouraged to play musical instruments, since it holds no practical value later on in life (a view I disagree with vehemently). I would then work on my objectivity by **jotting down the central ideas, most important details, and how these details relate to the central ideas of the article**. Being able to understand the central ideas in the passage and details without being sidetracked by rage (or other emotions) is key to writing an effective SAT essay.

**#9: Memorize and Identify Specific Persuasive Techniques [*ethos, logos, pathos*] Before the Test**

Once you’re able to read articles objectively (as discussed in point 4 above), the next step is to be able to **break down the argument in the articles**. To do this successfully, you'll need to be aware of some of the techniques that are frequently used to build arguments. The SAT essay prompt does mention a few of these techniques (bolding mine):

*As you read the passage below, consider how Lindsay uses*

* *evidence,****such as facts or examples****, to support claims.* ***LOGOS***
* ***reasoning****to develop ideas and to connect claims and evidence.* ***LOGOS***
* *stylistic or persuasive elements, such as word choice or* ***appeals to emotion****, to add power to the ideas expressed.* ***PATHOS***

It’s certainly possible to wing it and go into the test without knowing specific names of particular persuasive devices and just organically build up your essay from features you notice in the article. However, it's way easier to go into the essay knowing certain techniques [like **PATHOS, LOGOS, and ETHOS** [when the author quotes an authority or expert to build credibility and trust in his idea/argument] that you can then scan the passage for.

**#10: Keep Your Essay Organized**

The SAT essay rubric states: *“The response demonstrates a deliberate and highly effective progression of ideas both within paragraphs and throughout the essay.”*

The main point to take away from this is that you should **follow the standard structure for an SAT essay (introduction--sub 1--sub 2—sub 3--conclusion)**. Using a basic 4 or 5 paragraph essay structure will both keep you organized AND make it easier for the essay graders to follow your reasoning - a win-win situation!

“Raise the minimum wage”, *Los Angeles Times* *May 5, 2013*

Patrick T. Fallon / Bloomberg

Fast-food workers and supporters organized by the Service Employees International Union protest outside a Burger King restaurant in Los Angeles on Aug. 29. Lawmakers in Sacramento have struck a deal to raise the state's minimum wage to $10 an hour.

A last-minute compromise between state legislative leaders and Gov. [Jerry Brown](http://www.latimes.com/topic/politics-government/jerry-brown-PEPLT007547-topic.html) has cleared the way for a bill that would significantly increase the minimum wage in California over the next 2 1/2 years. Not surprisingly, the California Chamber of Commerce called it a "job killer." The chamber is probably right about that to a degree; some employers will eliminate jobs, reduce hours or expand their payrolls more slowly as a consequence of the higher entry-level wage. But the measure will bring much-needed relief to thousands of Californians struggling to get by on the minimum wage today, as well as help the businesses where they'll spend their extra dollars. Because the gains clearly offset the costs, Brown should sign the bill into law.

California first set a minimum wage in [1916,](http://lat.ms/17ZHPwV) 22 years before the federal government [established](http://lat.ms/17ZRgfD) a national one. The state's minimum has gone up 25 times since then, rising to $8 in January 2008. On Thursday, the Legislature was expected to give final approval to a revised [bill](http://lat.ms/17ZRDH5) by Assemblyman Luis Alejo (D-Watsonville) that would raise the minimum to $9 in July 2014 and $10 in January 2016. The [original version](http://lat.ms/17ZRPpQ) of the bill would have increased the minimum more gradually, reaching $9.25 in 2016, but with automatic cost-of-living increases in later years.

It's hard to say exactly how many Californians' pay would go up with the new minimum — the government doesn't report how many people in the state earn $8 to $10 an hour. The left-leaning Economic Policy Institute estimates that 3.4 million low-wage Californians would receive raises if the minimum climbed to $10.10, as some Democrats in [Congress](http://www.latimes.com/topic/politics-government/government/u.s.-congress-ORGOV0000131-topic.html) have proposed.

A full-time minimum-wage worker with one dependent barely makes enough today to stay above the federal poverty line of $15,510 a year. But [most minimum-wage workers](http://lat.ms/15o10C0) don't have the luxury of full-time positions — and that's often not by choice. The combination of minimum wages and limited hours translates into dismally low, poverty-level earnings.

That would be less of a travesty if minimum- and near-minimum-wage jobs were simply the first rung on the career ladder for young Americans. Sadly, such jobs are increasingly being filled by workers in their mid- to late-20s, not teenagers just trying to supplement their allowances. And about a third of them are parents.

What's worse, a growing percentage of U.S. jobs are in the low-skill industries that are the most likely to pay the minimum wage. Six of the 10 [occupations](http://lat.ms/15o1hER) expected to see the fastest growth this decade fall into this category, led by retailing, food service and home healthcare.

Ideally, brisk economic growth would force employers to compete more for workers, increasing wages and benefits across the board. That's what happened in the mid- to late-1990s, and it's evident today in some boom towns. But in California, as in most of the United States, growth has been sluggish. Many businesses are still hesitant to expand because the main driver of the economy, consumer spending, remains stuck in low gear.

That aversion to risk helps explain how the solid corporate profits and stock market gains in recent years have coexisted with diminishing median wages and stubbornly high unemployment. Raising the minimum wage should help shift some of the profits now being captured by business owners and investors back into the economy, because unlike upper-income Americans, minimum-wage earners aren't savers. They spend, and that spending promotes growth.

The unusually large increases called for in Alejo's bill would put the state on track to have the country's highest minimum wage, potentially making it less attractive to some employers. But that risk isn't as big as it may seem because so many low-wage, low-skill jobs are in service industries, which have to set up shop where their customers are. McDonald's can't sell burgers to Angelenos by opening a restaurant in Houston.

Admittedly, it's foolish to think that government can raise wages without having an adverse effect on at least some employers. Otherwise, the Legislature would set the minimum wage at $50 an hour. The 25% increase called for by Alejo's bill will be painful for minimum-wage employers with thin profit margins, especially if labor represents most of their costs, as is typically the case. Those companies may respond by cutting workers' hours, which would only hurt the people Alejo is trying to help.

The [best available research,](http://lat.ms/15o4Aff) however, shows that previous increases in the minimum wage haven't decreased or increased hours or jobs in any statistically significant manner. Employers have [adapted](http://lat.ms/15o0Nie) in a variety of ways, including boosting productivity and trimming raises for other workers. And a higher minimum wage tends to keep workers on the job longer, reducing the costs associated with training new employees.

One other way employers have responded is to pass at least part of the increase on to consumers. In a sense, though, employers in minimum-wage industries are already passing on part of their costs to taxpayers, who pick up the tab when workers earn so little that they qualify for Medicaid and food stamps. A recent [congressional study](http://lat.ms/15o6Pzl) estimated that low-wage workers at one Wal-Mart superstore receive about $5,800 worth of safety-net benefits each annually. By raising the minimum wage, shoppers will pay some of those costs at the cash register, not on their tax bills.

Improving workers' education and skills are part of the long-term solution too. In the meantime, though, no Californian who works full time should be stuck with poverty wages.

Top of Form

Why should American businesses and politicians consider raising the minimum wage? Some folks like liberal-minded Bernie Sanders exhort businesses out of good conscience to increase their minimums to $15.00 an hour so that working families can save for necessities like college tuition and health care. Yet others like Donald Trump disparage current wages as too high and as a drain on small businesses. The *Los Angeles Times* editorial board in “Raise the Minimum Wage” successfully supports the position that the minimum wage should be increased by exploiting the classic persuasion techniques of logos and pathos.

The use of pathos—or emotional suggestiveness and sensitivity—is most pronounced in the opening paragraph, building a sense of pity for the hardworking Californians who cannot make a living wage while working full-time. As the authors argue, “the measure will bring much-needed relief to thousands of Californians struggling to get by” (2). Carefully chosen diction in subsequent paragraphs echoes this sense of pity toward the overworked and underpaid. For example, the authors describe the low earning levels in the state as “dismal” (2). They evoke greater moral outrage in the next sentence by dubbing the lack of career advancement opportunity in American low-wage jobs as a “travesty” (2). Not timid about playing the emotion card, the authors contend that “sadly” (2), workers well into their twenties--many of them parents with young mouths to feed (nothing piques sympathy like starving kiddoes, eh?)—cannot earn much more cash than a teenager supplementing a threadbare allowance. The writers

also exploit a sense of pride in their home state, indicating that California was “the first to set a minimum wage in 1916, 22 years before the federal government established a national one” (2). This detail may stir the fires within proud Californians, appealing to the “be-a-leader-not-a-follower” mentality that Americans generally attribute to west-coasters, and hopefully motivating them to support what was—much like surfboards and the Beach Boys—another California-borne trend, this one perhaps more humanitarian.

Still, emotion without reason appeals to a limited crowd, so the bulk of the persuasive power in the *Times* piece emerges from it brilliant manipulation of logos (logic-based strategies), chief among them statistics, facts, research, and the acknowledgement of alternative viewpoints. For the more conservative reader timid about social welfare giveaways that may send the economy into recession, the writers emphasize the gradual, progressive nature of the bill revised by Assemblyman Luis Alejo, indicating that the bottom wage under his legislation would commence at $9 in 2014 before edging to $10 in 2016. While Alejo’s revision is gradual, the board points out that it is still more aggressive than the original version of the bill, giving hope to liberals while assuaging the fears of conservatives who feel that a minimum wage hike will not act as catnip to the economy. The board also cites the statistic that “six out of ten occupations expected to see the fastest growth” (2) are most likely to benefit from the wage hike, creating a sense of urgency to implement an increase lest a broad swath of the American workforce spiral into

abject poverty. The authors offer historical fact to buoy this urgency, reminding readers that employers in the 1990’s engaged in wage competition to attract workers once economic growth arrived, offering superior benefit packages to workers in boom towns (3).

It’s common knowledge among Lotharios, advertisers, and demagogues that while the human brain is a logic-driven organ, so much of what we do and say is driven by emotion. Wisely, the *Times* board capitalized on this knowledge, softening the hearts of its readers in the first half of the editorial with emotion-laden language before appealing to their more reasonable nature with convincing facts and statistics.