

2—Snapshot



As the title suggests, this chapter is short and sweet. It's a quick overview of what an SAT essay should look like. In later chapters, I'll explain in gory, wide-angle detail how to prefabricate the component parts you need to build a successful essay from scratch. Right now, I'm more interested in taking a vertical approach, presenting an essay from top to bottom so you can see a clear beginning, middle and end.

As part of that process, I've also highlighted the component parts — building blocks - that go into the construction of the essay. Pay close attention to these since they are common to all good SAT essays and help the SAT Readers appreciate the logical progression and narrative flow that hold your supporting arguments together.

Sample Essay

That said, here's a sample essay written for the abbreviated prompt *Every Advance Involves Some Loss or Sacrifice*. This essay, derived from work produced by my students, has an introduction, three body paragraphs (examples from history, literature and personal experience) and a conclusion.

Most people in America, if not the world, would agree that every advance involves some sacrifice. In fact, a common sports adage proclaims: "No pain, no gain." In other words, progress is always accompanied by a certain amount of loss. This concept is illustrated throughout history, literature and personal experience.

One compelling illustration that some bad always accompanies some good is demonstrated in the Civil Rights movement. In 1955 Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on the bus to a white person. Although she was arrested and jailed, her brave efforts inspired the Montgomery Bus Boycott which lasted for over a year. Martin Luther King was inspired by her example and became known as one of the most admired figures of the Civil Rights movement. He organized hundreds of non-violent protests and gave an unforgettable speech entitled "I have a dream." Martin Luther King and Rosa Parks helped get the

Civil Rights Act of 1964 passed. Unfortunately, this social progress was accompanied by a tragic sacrifice: the assassination of Dr. King by a southern madman.

The theme that every advance involves some loss also occurs in Nathaniel Hawthorne's novel, *The Scarlet Letter*. The protagonist, Hester Prynne, is charged with adultery and is forced to wear a scarlet letter "A" embroidered on her dress. Although the Puritan community shuns her for her sins, Hester decides to reform her character by doing selfless charity work. As a result of her philanthropic character, the society changes its view of Hester and eventually thinks of the scarlet "A" on her dress as representing the word, "Able." Through her hard work and sacrifice, Hester is able to move forward with her life and become a valued member of the community.

A final illustration that progress always involves a loss occurred in my own personal experience building houses in Mexico with my church group. During the summer of my junior year in high school, I traveled with a small group to Guadalajara to help construct low-income housing for the poor. At first, I was appalled at the extent of the poverty around me and longed to return home to enjoy the rest of my summer lounging by the swimming pool. However, these thoughts soon departed when we finally got to work. Arranged in teams, we developed a sense of common purpose and community spirit while helping those less privileged than ourselves. Consequently, I learned the value of hard work and group sacrifice. As our church leader remarked, "You give up a little, in order that other people may gain a lot."

As seen in these historic, literary and personal experience examples, every advance is accompanied by inevitable suffering. However, with perseverance and planning, even the worst setbacks can be overcome. This notion is particularly relevant to our lives today for the world is undergoing change at an alarming rate. As Franklin D. Roosevelt once said, "You may be disappointed if you fail, but you are doomed if you don't try."