

# The SAT<sup>®</sup> Writing Section: Predicting College Success



Good writing skills are critical to success in college and the workplace. The SAT<sup>®</sup> writing section, added in March 2005, tests students' writing skills: in particular, their ability to write concisely, coherently, and quickly. Like the rest of the SAT, the writing section measures what students have learned in the classroom and how well they apply that knowledge. Writing skills are particularly important because they transcend all majors and fields of study. The recently completed validity studies confirm the value of writing and demonstrate the test's success as a predictor of college achievement.

## VALIDITY STUDIES

In order to demonstrate and reaffirm the value of the SAT in college admissions, the College Board collected first-year performance data for the first full cohort of students who have taken the SAT since the addition of the required writing section. Results from the sample group, which included about 150,000 students attending 110 colleges and universities, show that:

- SAT scores, coupled with high school grades, provide colleges with a powerful barometer for predicting academic success.
- The changes made to the SAT, especially the inclusion of a required writing section, have increased the validity of the test as a college success indicator.
- Writing is the most predictive section of the SAT, slightly more predictive than either math or critical reading, and the most predictive section across all minority groups.

## IMPLICATIONS

The results of these studies provide a powerful indication of the important role that writing skills play in the success of students in college and beyond. As writing continues to be a crucial asset across academic and professional worlds, the new writing section is emerging as a critical assessment tool in the college admissions process.

## FAQ

### Q. How has the writing section affected high school curricula?

- A. In a 2006 survey conducted by the College Board, teachers and administrators reported that the SAT writing section is contributing to an increased focus on writing skills in high school classrooms that will strengthen student performance in school, college, and the working world.

### Q. Why is writing so important?

- A. Research shows that writing is fundamental to success in the workplace. A 2004 survey by the National Commission on Writing reports that writing is a "threshold skill" for employment and promotion. Whether composing an e-mail or preparing a detailed report, employees need to be able to express themselves clearly.

### Q. How does the College Board ensure that the scoring of the SAT essay is consistent and fair?

- A. Every essay is graded independently by two readers, based on specific and detailed criteria. Readers — all of whom are trained educators — score the essay from 1 to 6. Approximately 98 percent of the time, readers agree on the score within one point. If two readers disagree, the essay is graded by a third reader.