

## SAMPLE ESSAYS

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Here are top-scoring student SAT essays. The content varies, but all of these essays share strong organization and strong use of language.

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### Sample Essay One

This essay follows the two-example structure recommended in the Essay Writing Strategies section. The student supports his or her argument with two examples, one from history and one from literature. Both are explained in ample and relevant detail. Note the correct use of present tense when describing literature. The student introduces his or her examples directly in the introduction and explains them again in the conclusion. Both the introduction and conclusion are concise and stay on topic.

*Think carefully about the issue presented in the following excerpt and the assignment below.*

*Perhaps nothing in our society is more needed for those in positions of authority than accountability. Too often those with authority are able (and willing) to surround themselves with people who support their decisions without question.*

*—Adapted from Larry Burkett, “Business by the Book”*

**Assignment:** *Is it important to question the decisions of authority figures? Plan and write an essay in which you develop your point of view on this issue. Support your position with reasoning and examples taken from your reading, studies, experience, or observations.*

It is absolutely vital to question the ideas and decisions of authorities in order to foster innovative new ideas and challenge laboured ones. Both the novel *Bloodletting and Miraculous Cures* by Vincent Lam and the unconventional tactics of the scientist Alexander Fleming demonstrate how questioning authority can lead to success.

In the novel *Bloodletting and Miraculous Cures* by Vincent Lam, the character of Dr. Sri demonstrates how authority must be questioned. Dr. Sri faces an ethical issue: he suspects his patient, Claude, is psychologically disturbed but does not have proof, and thus cannot act to help him without breaching doctor-patient confidentiality. As a young resident doctor, Dr. Sri consults his superior for advice; however, she tells him to leave Claude in peace. Sri questions the wisdom of this choice and instead of following his superior’s advice, he seeks Claude out. By doing so, Sri saves Claude from committing a serious crime, and saves a young woman from becoming victim of Claude’s obsession. It was the act of questioning authority that allowed Sri to prevent a disastrous outcome.

The virtue of questioning authorities can also be seen in many of modern science’s greatest achievements. Alexander Fleming, the biologist who discovered the “silver bullet” against disease,

penicillin, did so because he did not follow his authorities' rules and regulations. At the time, all scientists were required to keep their laboratories clean and organized. Fleming, who conducted his experiments in a thoroughly unconventional and disorganized way, left Petri dishes of agar medium uncovered throughout his laboratory. He doubted the validity of the authorities' claims that clean labs made for more discoveries—and he was right. It was in one of Fleming's uncovered Petri dishes that a spore of penicillin grew, and grew, until it had defeated the other bacteria inside the dish. Fleming's marked rebellion against the authorities' rules allowed him to make one of the most important medical discoveries in human history.

Both literature and scientific discoveries demonstrate that great success can be achieved by refusing to accept decisions and ideas based on authority alone. Questioning the decisions of those with authority is utterly important to generating new ideas and bringing about positive change.

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## Sample Essay Two

This is another example with one historical and one literary example supporting the student's position. The student's analysis shows a wealth of specific detail and a complex understanding of the subject matter; there are no rash overgeneralizations. The student also considers not only whether success can lead to failure, but also *why* this is the case in his or her analysis. While the writing is a bit wordy from time to time, it demonstrates strong style and specific word choice.

*Think carefully about the issue presented in the following excerpt and the assignment below.*

*Success has made failures of many men.*

*—Adapted from Cindy Adams*

**Assignment:** *Can success lead to failure? Plan and write an essay in which you develop your point of view on this issue. Support your position with reasoning and examples taken from your reading, studies, experience, or observations.*

Initial success can lead to failure down the road. If we become too engulfed in the benefits of success and victory in our lives, we will immediately become distracted from our true goals and ultimately be forced to give up or lose everything we had worked for. In *The Tempest*, Shakespeare's Prospero becomes obsessed with achieving more knowledge and power after he successfully becomes the Duke of Milan, but forgets his true duties as Duke and is usurped by his brother Antonio. In the Second World War, Hitler achieved great initial success by bombing Britain continuously, but his desire for even more results propelled him to move his troops to the Western front, to a disastrous result. Both of these examples show that one must accept one's victories and defeats, but quickly return to one's regular motives and duties.

In Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, Prospero successfully becomes the Duke of Milan by winning over the people of his community. Once he gains power, he becomes increasingly interested in learning about magic and forgets his duties as Duke. He gives a role of temporary leadership to his

brother Antonio and focuses on reading books about magic. Antonio sees Prospero's inability to run Milan and secretly usurps his throne. Instead of working equally hard on magic and his dukedom, once he becomes powerful, Prospero becomes completely entranced with one element. Had Prospero acted sensibly when rewarded with a title of Dukedom, he would not have to face usurpation and revenge on his brother.

In the early years of World War Two, Hitler commenced an operation called "The Blitz," also known as the Battle of Britain. His sole intentions were to demobilize, deter, and reduce Britain to a state where its only option was to surrender. He experienced much success early on through these bombings, but as the situation deteriorated in the east, Hitler became obsessed with conquering more nations. As he called off the Blitz and moved his troops to the Western front to invade Russia, he did not take into account that he had just left Britain to rebuild, regroup, and prepare to continue its campaign in the war. Had Hitler correctly utilized the success of the Blitz and continued the operation for even a few more days, Britain would have surrendered and not have become increasingly motivated to defeat the German invaders.

Success has the potential to lead to failure later on if it is not properly cultivated. When Prospero and Hitler experienced positive results, they should have gone forth with their original duties. When experiencing success in one's endeavours, moving forward with original intentions is necessary, while becoming engulfed in unrealistic goals can lead to disaster.