

Mission Possible: A 25 minute Essay

Thousands of teenagers across the country will be sweating bullets this summer and early fall. Breaking a sweat has nothing to do with the heat - it has to do with constructing a well-written, proof-read, coherent, legible essay response for College Board. What might seem Mission Impossible can really be Mission Possible: Crafting a well-written essay in 25 minutes on the SAT.

Writing a stellar, knock-your-socks-off essay in 25 minutes is difficult for an English professor, let alone a nervous teen. However, there are a few tricks up the sleeve of Laura Wilson, founder and president of WilsonDailyPrep, an online tutoring program. The key to SAT success is simple: practice makes perfect! Practicing essay responses will ensure that any student is prepared on test day. But how can you *predict* the essay question? How will you *know* what to write about? Laura Wilson's solution comes from understanding the SAT inside and out. There are patterns found on the essay section - 15 patterns to be exact. Heroism, community, conflict, wisdom and sacrifice are just 5 of these circulating essay themes. Students should practice writing essays with these 15 themes, so that on test day, they will have a pre-written essay response at the tips of their fingers - and number two pencils - to work with.

Knowing what to expect on test day takes a bit of the edge off. However, it doesn't buy you too much time. And time is precious. Laura Wilson offers another helpful hint: Little Children Have Play Sets. This mnemonic device will direct essay writing, especially in high-stress conditions. Often students just 'jump' into the essay with no structure and no plan. Students need to take 2 minutes at the beginning and write down Little Children Have Play Sets on their test booklet. The "L" stands for literature, "C" for current events, "H" for history, "P" for personal and "S" for sports. These are the areas from which to draw supporting examples when writing an essay. So, take 2 minutes and formulate an answer, an answer with at least two concrete examples from either history, literature, current events, sports, or the student's personal life.

It's test day. You unveil the hideous monster of an SAT essay question, and immediately realize it's a heroism theme. OK – you've written this before. You're ready. You know you should put literary examples, historical examples and you had a great sports example! But you've forgotten! You can't remember when FDR was president. What was the name of that book again? Tick tock. Tick tock.

The most important aspect of preparing for this essay and avoiding the nightmarish situation above is to not only have a pre-written essay prepared ahead of time, but to be an EXPERT with a few key examples. The real key to tackling your mission impossible is to know your examples down cold! How do you do this? Limit your focus. Choose a universal book: know characters, themes, plot. Just one book. This book should be able to address most of the 15 core topics (I recommend To Kill a Mockingbird, Of Mice and Men, or Lord of the Flies). And choose three moments in history – a war, a person and an era. Look over your class notes. Have these three moments carved into your memory. Just three, not an entire timeline! You should be able to fit your book and at least one of your historical moments into an essay. Then, top it off with some Children – current events. Where do you get the current events? You read Time and Newsweek Magazine three weeks before the SAT. And, voila! A perfect, 25 minute essay...Mission Impossible made Possible. No sweat!