

## The Short Persuasive Essay: Taking a Stand on an Issue

### Project Summary

Students who take the SAT or ACT are often required to take a stand on an issue or agree or disagree with a quote. Even if you will never take these national college admissions exams, you will be confronted over time with opinions of others and will have to make a clear case for your beliefs. In this assignment you will be given a quotation or an issue and asked to take a stand—to agree or disagree. Since the actual SAT test is 25 minutes long, you will be given just 25 minutes to complete this assignment.

*(Teacher will insert relevant quotation or issue in the space below.)*

### Writer's Purpose

Your purpose is to take a clear stand (or position) and defend your opinion in a persuasive way.

### Writer's Role

You will write as yourself, a student with an opinion.

### Audience

Your audience will be your teacher and classmates. You could also imagine readers from across the country who do not know you and have been hired to read and score your essay.

### Form

You will write a multi-paragraph essay in 25 minutes.

### Focus Correction Areas

1. Clear statement of opinion \_\_\_\_ points
2. Two to three compelling reasons with supporting details (one or two reasons must be academic) \_\_\_\_ points
3. To be determined \_\_\_\_ points



## Procedure

Before submitting your assignment, you will complete several activities in class:

- Fill in the Short Persuasive Essay Focus Sheet.
- Draft your essay.
- Read your draft in a one-foot voice; make any necessary changes to improve your essay.

Optional Steps:

- Work with a partner to peer edit and get feedback; double-check your FCAs to be sure you have completed the assignment.
- Rewrite your second draft with all your improvements.
- Due date \_\_\_\_\_.

## Samples of “to be determined” FCAs

- ▶ Strong conclusion
- ▶ Four part thesis statement
- ▶ Sentence variety
- ▶ Use one ? or ! sentence
- ▶ A short, catchy title
- ▶ An opposing position/refuted
- ▶ Clear organization (paragraphs and/or transitions)
- ▶ Two or more vivid verbs, circled
- ▶ Avoid the generic “you”
- ▶ Avoid colloquial language
- ▶ Use specific detailed examples—avoid the hypothetical
- ▶ Complete sentences
- ▶ Correct spelling—especially of common words (your, you’re)



## Notes on the Short Persuasive Essay Focus Sheet

The short persuasive essay, usually about 30 minutes, has become the standard for many writing tests. Some states require a persuasive essay in the third and fourth grades, and these essays continue on to the SAT and ACT for college admissions and are used in the adult world in job applications. Being a good persuasive writer is a skill you can use for the rest of your life.

Persuasive essay questions or prompts can usually be grouped into one of two kinds. One kind of prompt asks a question and then asks the writer to create an answer and argue why the answer is a good one. An example of this kind of prompt is this eighth grade question from Oklahoma:

If you could live during a different period in history, what period would you choose? Why would you make that choice? Support your ideas with details.

The hardest part in this type of prompt is to remember to brainstorm choices before you begin to write so that you have a choice you can defend with reasons and details. Also, if you have time, you can explain why you rejected one of the choices from your list.

The second kind of prompt, one you would see on the SAT or ACT, requires you to agree or disagree with a position. Here is an example from the ACT:

Many high school libraries use some of their limited funding to subscribe to popular magazines with articles that are interesting to students. Despite limited funding, some educators support this practice because they think having these magazines available encourages students to read. Other educators think school libraries should not use limited funds to subscribe to these magazines because they may not be related to academic subjects. In your opinion, should high school libraries use some of their limited funding to subscribe to popular magazines? In your essay, take a position on this question. You may write about either one of the two points of view given, or you may present a different point of view on this question. Use specific reasons and examples to support your position.

The Short Persuasive Essay Focus Sheet is helpful for both kinds of persuasive essays but may be most helpful with the agree/disagree kind by providing an outline of reasons for and against almost any topic. It then provides a quick, effective way of turning the reasons into a clear thesis statement. Be patient. The first few times you use the focus sheet may be time consuming, but as you practice using it, you will become quicker and your plan for your essay will come together faster, leaving more time to focus on your writing skills. Remember, the persuasive essay is a writing test. There is no right or wrong answer. The test scorers want to see how you develop your ideas in writing, not if you found the “right” answer.

**FOCUS SHEET**

**Short Persuasive Essay Sheet—  
HELPS: Getting and Organizing Your Ideas**

REASONS FOR

REASONS AGAINST

**H** Historic, Political, Legal

**H** Historic, Political, Legal

**E** Economic, Resource Utilization

**E** Economic, Resource Utilization

**L** Literary, Aesthetic

**L** Literary, Aesthetic

**P** Personal, Ethical, Religious

**P** Personal, Ethical, Religious

**S** Scientific

**S** Scientific

Position	→ Yes	Reason 1 _____
	→ Under certain conditions/circumstances	Reason 2 _____
	→ No	Reason 3 _____

**THESIS STATEMENT:** Topic / Position / 2 to 3 Reasons without “I.”

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