

SAT ELA

IN THE CLASSROOM

Integrating Assessments,
Standards, and Instruction

authored by
A-List Education

 **LIST**

An **Eye On Education** Book

SAT ELA in the Classroom

Bring SAT ELA prep into the classroom to enhance student learning! In this new copublication from Routledge and test-prep experts A-List Education, you'll learn how the updated SAT exam is closely aligned with the Common Core, making it easy to weave test prep into your curriculum and help students hone the skills they need for college readiness. The book is filled with practical examples of how the Common Core State Standards are connected to specific sections, question types, and strategies applicable to the SAT, so you can simultaneously prepare your students for the test while improving their reading, writing, and language skills.

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SAT ELA in the Classroom

Integrating Assessments,
Standards, and Instruction

A-List Education

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Contents

<i>eResources</i>	vii
<i>About the Author</i>	ix
<i>Introduction and Overview</i>	xi
1 About the SAT	1
Format	3
Reading	5
Writing and Language	10
Essay	12
Changes to the Test	15
2 Alignment With Common Core ELA Standards	19
How to Read the ELA Standards	19
Alignment	20
How to Read This Section	22
Alignment Beyond the Test	25
Reading	26
Writing	46
Language	63
Other Topics	79
3 Reading Assignments	81
Choosing a Passage	82
Writing the Questions	86
Giving the Assignment	95
Sample Passage	98
Sample Questions	100
Answers and Explanations	101
4 Writing Assignments	105
Format	106
Practice Tests	108
Revision	111
Expand the Assignment	114
Essay Assignment Summary	117
<i>Appendix: All ELA Alignment Tables</i>	119
<i>Additional Resources</i>	133

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eResources

This book is accompanied by free online eResources, including a Study Guide to help you work on this book with colleagues, as well as additional materials to help you with school-wide implementation of the ideas in this book. To access the eResources, go to www.routledge.com/9781138668300 and click on the eResources tab. Then click on the items you'd like to view. They will begin downloading to your computer.

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About the Author

A-List Education was founded in 2005 with a mission to bring innovation and opportunity to education, empowering students to reach their true potential. We work with schools, school districts, families, and nonprofits and provide tailored solutions for specific learning and curriculum needs—ultimately working to improve college readiness and access. Our staff comprises experienced and passionate educators each with a distinctive and personal approach to academic success, and our management team collectively possesses more than 75 years of tutoring, teaching, and test preparation experience. We now provide leading-edge education services and products to more than 500 high schools and nonprofit organizations, helping more than 70,000 students a year in the United States and around the world.

A-List has a variety of offerings for SAT and ACT preparation, including:

- ◆ **Textbooks** for students studying individually or for teachers conducting classes. Our content not only emphasizes test-taking techniques but also reinforces core skills, which empower students for academic success long after taking the test.
- ◆ **Professional development** to help schools and organizations set up their own courses. Our seminars create valuable educational expertise that will allow teachers in your district to bring content and problem-solving strategies directly into their classrooms.
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Introduction and Overview

The SAT and the Common Core

The Common Core State Standards Initiative (CCSSI) is a program designed to unify the state standards across the United States so that students, parents, and educators have a clear sense of what skills students must acquire in school to become ready for college or a career. It is an independent initiative in which states may voluntarily choose to participate, but by the end of 2015, 42 states plus the District of Columbia had chosen to adopt the standards. The standards are designed to be rigorous, clear, and consistent, and they are based on real evidence to align with the knowledge and skill necessary for life beyond high school.

The program is controversial to be sure, but a strong foundation is already in place, and schools around the country are working to align their own materials and programs with the newly adopted standards. The standards specifically do not outline exact requirements for curriculum, such that schools and districts can still make their own choices about how to run their classes while still adhering to the standards. As a result, some schools may struggle to find the right material.

However, there already exists a comprehensive source of material that addresses the wide range of skills and knowledge that the Common Core emphasizes: the SAT.

Not all schools currently offer preparation programs for the SAT, but even those that do tend to treat the test as distinct from normal schoolwork. The test is seen as supplementary, and preparation is an unpleasant game in which students learn tricks to game the system without actually learning skills. This view of the test, however, is not just uncharitable but false. In fact, SAT preparation can fill many of the gaps to help schools align their curricula with the Common Core.

The SAT requires students to use many of the same math and reading skills that are the goals of the standards. It is designed to identify whether students are ready for college by testing them on the skills and knowledge they will need when they get there. In fact,

the designer of the SAT, the College Board, was actively involved in the creation of the standards, and their own research about college readiness was integral to the program. Furthermore, recent changes to the test in 2016 were initiated in no small part to bring the test further in alignment with the standards.

Preparing for the test can accomplish two goals at once. Test preparation's primary goal is to prepare for the test itself, helping students maximize their scores on the test and thus improving their chances of being admitted to the colleges of their choice. Beyond pure admissions, students' test scores can have a number of uses for different programs and institutions. For example,

- ◆ **College admissions.** Roughly half of a student's admissions profile is composed of a combination of GPA and SAT or ACT score. A high score can be a huge differentiator for the majority of elite universities and a minimum hurdle for the majority of state universities.
- ◆ **Scholarships.** There are billions of dollars of aid in private and school-based scholarship money tied directly to test scores.
- ◆ **Community colleges.** Even at community colleges with low graduation rates, good scores can allow students to avoid placement in remedial classes.
- ◆ **Military.** For students interested in the military, baseline scores can qualify a student for officer training as opposed to regular enlistment.
- ◆ **State assessment.** The SAT is increasingly used as a statewide student assessment to identify achievement of particular benchmarks.

But test preparation is also a valuable activity in itself; students will also be working on honing and strengthening the skills they need for college readiness. Furthermore, the test material itself is valuable even beyond their application to the actual test. The passages, essay prompts, and mathematical concepts contained herein can be divorced from the SAT. You do not have to actually take the SAT to draw value from reading and analyzing its passages, analyzing its grammatical structures, or attempting its math problems.

It is for these reasons that some states have decided to use the SAT as its primary measurement for high school achievement, rather than a more explicitly standards-based assessment.

Alignment

In 2010, the College Board produced an alignment study to show how the standards align with the skills that the SAT assessed. The results of these studies show that the test significantly aligned with the standards.¹

Since then, the test was radically changed starting with the PSAT in 2015 and the SAT in 2016. While the changes to the test were clearly motivated by alignment to the standards, the College Board has not yet produced an official alignment study for the new SAT. They have not officially said much to date about the Common Core specifically. In a guide to implementing the new test, in response to alignment with the CCSS, the document states: “The redesigned SAT measures the skills and knowledge that evidence shows are essential for college and career success. It is not aligned to any single set of standards.” This seems to distance the test from the notion that the Common Core was the motivation for the redesign. But it also notes that the skills for the new SAT draw from the same evidence base as “state academic standards including the Common Core, the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills, and the Virginia Standards for Learning—as well as in the best college-prep curricula.”²

However, we at A-List want to take a closer look at how exactly the new test aligns with the Common Core. We have compared the old alignment document and the new test material to project the alignment for the new test.

What does this alignment tell us? Several things:

1. The redesigned test aligns strongly with the CCSS.
2. The redesigned test does not align *perfectly* with the CCSS. There are a number of standards that are not relevant to the SAT.
3. While some changes to the SAT have made it more aligned with the CCSS, others have made it less so. As a whole, the test isn’t necessarily more aligned with the test than it already was.
4. *But the old SAT was already strongly aligned with the CCSS.*

The College Board’s study demonstrated that the skills tested by the SAT align with the skills of the standards. This study is heavily researched and incredibly thorough. However, it has not been updated for the new test and it does not link these skills to real test material. This book will

use that information to demonstrate specifically the connection between the test and the standards in a practical manner. Furthermore, this book will show that test material can be adapted and expanded to address even those standards that are outside the scope of the test.

About This Book

This book has two main goals:

1. To show how specific SAT ELA material aligns with the ELA CCSS.
2. To discuss how to incorporate SAT preparation into your regular ELA classes outside of an explicit test preparation class.

Why do we focus on the CCSS? First of all, because the grand majority of states use it. There's no shortage of debate about the value of the standards, but it's undeniable that they are in place throughout most of the country. Even some states that are moving away from the standards are doing so more in name than in practice and are keeping the content of the CCSS in place.

Of course, not every state uses CCSS, but it remains a useful framework for connecting SAT material to classroom material. We can't run through every state's particulars in one book, but the popularity of the CCSS make them a convenient reference. If you don't use them, you can still use CCSS as a touchstone to compare to your own state standards. Even if you do use CCSS, your state may also have its own assessments or graduation requirements that deviate from CCSS. The alignment information is one piece of the picture.

Second, some states are actually using the SAT as their main state-wide assessment. They are generally doing so because of the SAT's alignment to the Common Core. Is this a good idea? That's debatable, and we won't take sides here. The question is part political, part pedagogical, often emotional. However, we can offer our research and expertise in the test so you can see for yourself where it coincides with your curriculum and where it doesn't.

Structure of the Book

Chapter 1 will describe the structure and content of the SAT's ELA sections for those who may be unfamiliar with the test, along with discussion of how the test has changed and some effective test-taking

techniques. Keep in mind that this is a general overview. It draws information from our main textbook, *The Book of Knowledge*, which is the product of years of experience with the test and goes into much greater detail about the test's content and the most effective strategies.

Chapter 2 will connect the SAT to the Common Core ELA standards (Reading, Writing, and Language). This section will take a closer look to show where the test does and does not align with these standards. It will go through each individual standard one by one to discuss what specific sections, question types, or strategies align with the standard in question. Additional discussion also describes how, even when the test does not align with the standard, test material can be pushed beyond its intended scope in order to do so.

Chapters 3 and 4 will focus on how to use all this material in the classroom. This could mean using your classes as explicit preparation for the test; it could mean using test material to supplement your regular classes; it could mean preparing for the test as a tool with which to get your students to meet the standards; or it could be a combination of these things. This section will include some discussions and samples to help get you started.

The Appendix will list all of the alignment tables discussed in Chapter 2, followed by a bibliography and suggestions for further reading.

Notes

1. Interestingly, this document is no longer available on the College Board's website, possibly to avoid confusion between the old test and the new test. It is still possible to find it online hosted elsewhere with a bit of searching.
2. *College Board Guide to Implementing the Redesigned SAT*, October 2014, <https://collegereadiness.collegeboard.org/pdf/college-board-guide-implementing-redesigned-sat-installment-2.pdf>

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1

About the SAT

The SAT is a college admissions test, first and foremost. It was designed for that purpose and has been used as such since 1926. In the century since its creation, it has substantially changed a number of times, but its primary goal has remained the same: to provide a standardized metric for colleges to be able to judge students from disparate backgrounds.

With the redesign of the SAT in 2016, however, the College Board has been trying to shift the focus of the test more towards the K–12 market. Much of the rhetoric surrounding the redesign centered around “real-world skills” and “math that matters most”, eliminating “irrelevant vocabulary”.

Of course, this is not the first time the SAT has been redesigned—most recently in 2005 when analogies were removed and the Writing component and essay were added, or in 1994 when calculators were first permitted and non-multiple-choice grid-in questions were added. It seems like every redesign has been surrounded by rhetoric of focusing on real-world, important skills. With this redesign, the College Board has made an active effort to emphasize college readiness benchmarks to a greater degree than they did before. They are re-organizing their suite of tests, including versions the PSAT starting as early as eighth grade, and moving toward a longitudinal assessment of benchmarks throughout high school. They are moving past the market of individual students taking the test for college and marketing their

tests directly to schools, to be used both for college admissions and for skills assessment.

Is this a good idea? Who knows? Very limited data is currently available so it's impossible to say yet whether the test does a good job at assessing these skills. We don't even know how well the new test serves for admissions. The old SAT, when combined with high school GPA, was a stronger predictor of college performance than was either of those metrics alone. We shall see how the new test shapes up when we see more data and that new-test smell starts to wear off.

In the meantime, it's here, so we must acknowledge it and deal with it. While we don't know much about how the scores will shape up, we do know quite a bit about what's on the test, enough that we can make a concerted effort to prepare students for it.

We want to help you incorporate SAT material into your classroom in order to prepare students, without running an explicit SAT prep course. To do so, the first and most important thing is simply to know what's on the test and what the test is like. The best way to do that is firsthand: *you should absolutely do some official practice tests yourself*. There are four full-length SATs and one PSAT available for free download on the College Board's website. Go do one and see what you think.

In the meantime, we're not going to go through our whole prep book (it is, however, for sale on our website!), but we do want to give you an overview of the structure and content of the test.

Format

The SAT is split into two subjects, **Evidence-Based Reading and Writing** and **Mathematics**. The test has four sections, two for each of the subjects, plus an optional fifth section for the **Essay**. The test lasts 3 hours, or 3 hours and 50 minutes if you choose to do the essay.

Besides the Essay, most sections have only multiple-choice questions, with one exception: each Math section will contain some questions for which students must produce their own responses. All multiple-choice questions will have four possible choices.

The two sections for Evidence-Based Reading and Writing (henceforth called EBRW) will cover two different content areas: **Reading and Writing and Language**. The two Mathematics sections will cover mostly the same material, but on one section calculators are permitted and on the other they are not.

Table 1.1 SAT Format

Section	Portion	Number of Questions	Time	Description
Evidence-Based Reading and Writing	1. Reading Test	52 questions	65 min	5 passages, each with 10–11 questions on reading comprehension
	2. Writing & Language Test	44 questions	35 min	4 passages, each with 11 questions on grammar, usage, and style
	Total	96 questions	100 min	
Math	3. No Calculator	20 questions	25 min	15 multiple-choice questions 5 student-produced response questions (grid-ins)
	4. Calculator OK	38 questions	55 min	30 multiple-choice questions 8 student-produced response questions (grid-ins)
	Total	58 questions	80 min	
Essay	5. Essay	1 essay	50 min	<i>Optional. One 1–4 page essay.</i>
	Total	154 questions	3 hours	
	<i>with essay</i>	<i>154 questions + 1 essay</i>	<i>3 hours 50 min</i>	

Scores

Each student will get a *Section Score* ranging from 200 to 800 for each of the two subjects. These scores are added together to produce a *total score* ranging from 400 to 1600. These are scaled scores, calculated by taking the number of right answers and converting them to the scaled score using a scoring table unique to the particular test the student took. This is done to ensure that differences in difficulty across forms will not affect scores. Note that students do not lose points for wrong answers.

Each student will also get three *Test Scores* in Reading, Writing and Language, and Mathematics ranging from 10 to 40. These scores are tied directly to the section scores: the EBRAW section score is the sum of the Reading and Writing test scores multiplied by 10. The Math section score is your Math test score multiplied by 20.

Each student will also get a variety of *subscores* for different types of questions within each section. These scores are either on a 1 to 15 or 10 to 40 scale. Students who take the essay will get three *essay scores*, each on a 2 to 8 scale. The essay scores are separate from the rest of the test; they will not be factored into students' EBRAW section scores or any other scores.

This book will focus on the ELA-relevant portions of the test—Evidence-Based Reading and Writing section, and the Essay. We will not be discussing the Mathematics sections.

Table 1.2 Reading and Writing Subscores

Name	Type	Scale	Sections
Words in Context	Subscore	1–15	Reading, Writing and Language
Command of Evidence	Subscore	1–15	Reading, Writing and Language
Standard English Conventions	Subscore	1–15	Writing and Language
Expression of Ideas	Subscore	1–15	Writing and Language
Analysis in Science	Cross-Test Score	10–40	Reading, Writing and Language, Math
Analysis in History/Social Studies	Cross-Test Score	10–40	Reading, Writing and Language, Math

Reading

There will be 52 total passage-based questions over five passages with 10–11 questions each. These questions will present a short passage on a particular topic, followed by questions asking about what the passage says. One of the passages will be a *double passage*, in which two passages on a similar topic are presented, followed by questions discussing each passage individually or the relationship between the two.

Passage Types

The passages used for the SAT will be drawn from one of three content areas: *Fiction*, *History/Social Studies*, and *Science*. Only one of these categories is “literature” in the traditional sense. The majority of the passages will be nonfiction essays on a variety of topics.

But that’s not to say that traditional literature won’t appear. Fiction passages may be drawn from recent novels or from classic works of literature. Note that all fiction passages will be *prose* fiction: no drama and no poetry.

Table 1.3 Passage Topics From Two Practice Tests

Passage	Test 1	Test 2
1. Fiction	From Lydia Minatoya, <i>The Strangeness of Beauty</i> , 1999	From Charlotte Brontë, <i>The Professor</i> , 1857
2. History/Social Studies	An essay about the relationship between the perceived and actual value of gift-giving, 2008	An essay about the role of ethics in economic decisions, 2013
3. Science	From a paper by Watson and Crick about the structure of DNA, 1953	A double passage with two articles about the effects of electronic media on the brain, both from 2010
4. History/Social Studies	From Virginia Woolf, <i>Three Guineas</i> , 1938, about the role of women in English society	From Elizabeth Cady Stanton’s address to the 1869 Women’s Suffrage Convention
5. Science	A double passage with two articles about space mining, both from 2013	From an article about scientists studying undersea waves, 2014

For example, table 1.3 shows the topics and sources of the passages in the first two tests in *The Official SAT Study Guide*, a book of official tests published by the College Board. Note that the passage types are always in the same order.

As you can see, the passages come from a wide range of eras, with some passages taken from very modern sources and some much older. Published tests have had passages taken from as far back as the late eighteenth century.

The variety of different passage contents can affect a student's ability to easily understand a passage. However, it obscures the most important thing to keep in mind about the passages themselves: *students do not need any outside knowledge to do the questions*, other than an understanding of the English language. Students will not be tested on specific content of literary history, nor will they be expected to be familiar with any historical events or scientific principles discussed in the passages. All they need is the information in the passage itself. You do not need to be a historian or a scientist. You just need to be able to read.

The Great Global Conversation

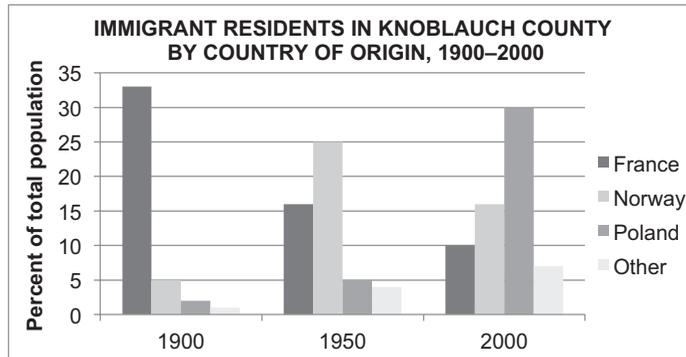
The test specifications dictate that one of the history/social studies passages will belong to what the College Board calls "The Great Global Conversation". This simply means it will be a primary source document of historical importance "on a topic such as freedom, justice, or liberty". The examples they have provided are usually taken specifically from American history (like the Elizabeth Cady Stanton passage mentioned above), but they need not be specifically American (like the Virginia Woolf passage mentioned above).

Data Figures

Two passages, one science and one history/social studies, will contain one or more figures presenting data that is somehow relevant to the passage. These could be tables, bar graphs, scatterplots, or any kind of data visualization. There will be some questions asking students to analyze the information presented, draw conclusions, or connect it to the passage.

Here's an example of a data question, taken from A-List's *The Book of Knowledge*:

Figure 1.1 Sample Data Question



15. Which of the following statements is true for the information depicted in the graph?
- A) The percentage of French residents was lowest in 1900.
 - B) The percentage of Norwegian residents peaked in 1950.
 - C) The percentage of Norwegian residents grew steadily over the years shown.
 - D) The percentage of Polish residents grew at a constant rate over the years shown.

Strategies

Main Ideas

One of the biggest problems students have with the passages is that reading takes a long time. Students try to memorize every point and understand every subtle detail and convoluted sentence in the passage. Instead, read the passage quickly and get the *main ideas*. Every paragraph is nothing more than a collection of sentences that have some common theme. That common theme is the main idea of the paragraph. It's the answer to this question: *What's it about?*

The goal is to *spend less time reading the passage* so you can spend *more time on the questions*, since the questions are what actually matters. Therefore, when reading the passage, skim the details and focus on the overall themes. These themes should be simple: the plot of the story, the argument of the essay, or the description of the information given. The details will become important only when and if a question asks about them.

Go Back to the Passage

Most questions will give a line reference saying exactly where in the passage the relevant information can be found. Once students read

the question, before doing anything else, they should *go back to the passage and check the line reference*. If a question asks about line 35, go back to line 35 and see what it says before looking at the choices.

While students should not worry about the details when reading the passage, they can worry about the details once questions actually ask about them. The point is not to rely on what you remember about the passage. This is an open-book test. You can look it up.

Anticipate

All the information you need is in the passage itself. Read the question, follow the line reference back into the passage, and see what those lines say about the question. That's your *anticipation* of the answer to the question. Try to *paraphrase* the lines in your own word. The right answer will rarely be an *exact* match for the anticipation; rather, the right answer will have the same *meaning* as the anticipation, but worded differently. Then look at the choices and see which one matches the anticipation.

Eliminate

Sometimes it will be difficult to anticipate the answer based on the passage alone, but you can still eliminate choices that are obviously wrong and guess from what's left. Wrong choices are usually wrong for one of three reasons:

- ◆ **Random.** The choice talks about things that the passage doesn't even mention.
- ◆ **False.** The choice is explicitly contradicted by the passage.
- ◆ **Irrelevant.** The choice is something the author *says*, but it doesn't actually answer the question.

Note that all three of these reasons require you to have an understanding of what the passage does and doesn't say. But seeing that a wrong choice is wrong is often simpler than understanding the nuances of the correct answer. It's easier to spot a wrong choice than a right choice—after all, 75% of the choices are wrong.

Question Types

Passage questions tend to fall into easily recognizable types. These categories can give you a good sense of what the SAT expects you to be able to do.

- ◆ **Explicit questions** ask about what the passage literally states.

- ◆ **Evidence questions** ask students to choose which line from the passage provides evidence for the answer to a previous question.
- ◆ **Vocabulary-in-context questions** ask students to define a particular word as it is used in the context of a particular sentence in the passage.
- ◆ **Inferential questions** ask students to make conclusions about what the passage implies.
- ◆ **Main Idea questions** ask students to summarize or identify themes of part or all of the passage.
- ◆ **Strategy questions** ask about the author's rhetorical strategy or structural choices in the passage.
- ◆ **Tone questions** ask about the author's tone (or that of characters in a fiction passage).
- ◆ **Data questions** ask students to answer questions about a graph or table accompanying the passage, either on its own or in relation to the passage's contents.

Writing and Language

The Writing and Language test is composed of four short passages, each of which has 11 questions that ask about the grammar, usage, style, and rhetoric of the passage. The format is similar to the task of editing an essay: the student must make corrections to improve the essay, both in the context of an individual sentence its own right and in the larger context of the essay as a whole.

The passages will draw from four content areas: history/social studies, science, humanities, and careers. But the content of the passages has little impact on a student's ability to answer the questions. A question about proper comma placement will be the same regardless of what the sentence is about. One passage on the test will be accompanied by a graph or data representation, just like on the Reading test. There will be one or two questions that test students' ability to understand the figure. However, such questions will be a much smaller part of the Writing test than they were on the Reading test.

Students will get two subscores (1–15) in two main areas: **Standard English Conventions** (20 questions) and **Expression of Ideas** (25 questions).

Standard English Conventions

Standard English Conventions questions ask students to identify errors in a sentence. Generally, a word or part of a sentence will be underlined and students will be asked to choose how to rewrite the phrase according to rules of grammar, usage, and punctuation. Choice A) will usually be "NO CHANGE", meaning they can leave the phrase as it was originally written.

There are three types of Standard English Conventions questions:

- ◆ **Conventions of Usage.** These questions test relationships between single words and phrases within a sentence, relationships such as subject and verb, or pronoun and antecedent.
- ◆ **Sentence Structure.** These questions deal with the way larger parts of sentences are connected, such as the way to connect clauses properly and where to place long phrases.
- ◆ **Conventions of Punctuation.** These questions will usually present four choices that differ only in their punctuation. Students will be tested on when to use (and when not to use) commas, apostrophes, and other common punctuation marks.

Expression of Ideas

Expression of Ideas questions focus less on writing *grammatically* and more on writing *effectively*. It tests how to choose the best way to phrase a sentence, the best way to structure a paragraph, or the best way to accomplish the writer's goal. Unlike Standard English Conventions questions, Expression of Ideas questions may ask about the essay as a whole, not just single words or phrases.

There are three types of Expression of Ideas questions:

- ◆ **Effective Language Use.** These questions ask about the choice of language in the essay, as well as stylistic errors rather than grammatical or structural ones. Students will be asked to trim wordy sentences, make phrases more specific, or ensure the language accurately reflects the essay's tone.
- ◆ **Organization.** These questions ask about the logic and organization of the essay. Students will be asked about the location and ordering of sentences and the transitions between sentences or paragraphs.
- ◆ **Development.** These questions ask about what the author should do to the essay to improve it. In fact, most Development questions will explicitly phrase the question that way, asking what action the author should take. Common questions include whether the author should add or delete a sentence and whether the essay fulfills a certain goal. All questions dealing with figures and data are Development questions.