

# SAT Essay Sample 1

As you read the passage below, consider how Paul Bogard uses

- evidence, such as facts or examples, to support claims.
- reasoning to develop ideas and to connect claims and evidence.
- stylistic or persuasive elements, such as word choice or appeals to emotion, to add power to the ideas expressed.

**Adapted from Paul Bogard, “Let There Be Dark.” ©2012 by Los Angeles Times. Originally published December 21, 2012.**

At my family’s cabin on a Minnesota lake, I knew woods so dark that my hands disappeared before my eyes. I knew night skies in which meteors left smoky trails across sugary spreads of stars. But now, when 8 of 10 children born in the United States will never know a sky dark enough for the Milky Way, I worry we are rapidly losing night’s natural darkness before realizing its worth. This winter solstice, as we cheer the days’ gradual movement back toward light, let us also remember the irreplaceable value of darkness.

All life evolved to the steady rhythm of bright days and dark nights. Today, though, when we feel the closeness of nightfall, we reach quickly for a light switch. And too little darkness, meaning too much artificial light at night, spells trouble for all.

Already the World Health Organization classifies working the night shift as a probable human carcinogen, and the American Medical Association has voiced its unanimous support for “light pollution reduction efforts and glare reduction efforts at both the national and state levels.” Our bodies need darkness to produce the hormone melatonin, which keeps certain cancers from developing, and our bodies need darkness for sleep. Sleep disorders have been linked to diabetes, obesity, cardiovascular disease and depression, and recent research suggests one main cause of “short sleep” is “long light.” Whether we work at night or simply take our tablets, notebooks and smartphones to bed, there isn’t a place for this much artificial light in our lives.

The rest of the world depends on darkness as well, including nocturnal and crepuscular species of birds, insects, mammals, fish and reptiles. Some examples are well known—the 400 species of birds that migrate at night in North America, the sea turtles that come ashore to lay their eggs—and some are not, such as the bats that save American farmers billions in pest control and the moths that pollinate 80% of the world’s flora. Ecological light pollution is like the bulldozer of the night, wrecking habitat and disrupting ecosystems several billion years in the making. Simply put, without darkness, Earth’s ecology would collapse....

In today’s crowded, louder, more fast-paced world, night’s darkness can provide solitude, quiet and stillness, qualities increasingly in short supply. Every religious tradition has considered darkness invaluable for a soulful life, and the chance to witness the universe has inspired artists, philosophers and everyday stargazers since time began. In a world awash with electric light...how would Van Gogh have given the world his “Starry Night”? Who knows what this vision of the night sky might inspire in each of us, in our children or grandchildren?

Yet all over the world, our nights are growing brighter. In the United States and Western Europe, the amount of light in the sky increases an average of about 6% every year. Computer images of the United States at night, based on NASA photographs, show that what was a very dark country as recently as the 1950s is now nearly covered with a blanket of light. Much of this light is wasted energy, which means wasted dollars. Those of us over 35 are perhaps among the last generation to have known truly dark nights. Even the northern lake where I was lucky to spend my summers has seen its darkness diminish.

It doesn't have to be this way. Light pollution is readily within our ability to solve, using new lighting technologies and shielding existing lights. Already, many cities and towns across North America and Europe are changing to LED streetlights, which offer dramatic possibilities for controlling wasted light. Other communities are finding success with simply turning off portions of their public lighting after midnight. Even Paris, the famed "city of light," which already turns off its monument lighting after 1 a.m., will this summer start to require its shops, offices and public buildings to turn off lights after 2 a.m. Though primarily designed to save energy, such reductions in light will also go far in addressing light pollution. But we will never truly address the problem of light pollution until we become aware of the irreplaceable value and beauty of the darkness we are losing.

Write an essay in which you explain how Paul Bogard builds an argument to persuade his audience that natural darkness should be preserved. In your essay, analyze how Bogard uses one or more of the features in the directions that precede the passage (or features of your own choice) to strengthen the logic and persuasiveness of his argument. Be sure that your analysis focuses on the most relevant features of the passage. Your essay should not explain whether you agree with Bogard's claims, but rather explain how Bogard builds an argument to persuade his audience.

## Student Response

In response to our world's growing reliance on artificial light, writer Paul Bogard argues that natural darkness should be preserved in his article "Let There be dark". He effectively builds his argument by using a personal anecdote, allusions to art and history, and rhetorical questions.

Bogard starts his article off by recounting a personal story – a summer spent on a Minnesota lake where there was "woods so dark that [his] hands disappeared before [his] eyes." In telling this brief anecdote, Bogard challenges the audience to remember a time where they could fully amass themselves in natural darkness void of artificial light. By drawing in his readers with a personal encounter about night darkness, the author means to establish the potential for beauty, glamour, and awe-inspiring mystery that genuine darkness can possess. He builds his argument for the preservation of natural darkness by reminiscing for his readers a first-hand encounter that proves the "irreplaceable value of darkness." This anecdote provides a baseline of sorts for readers to find credence with the author's claims.

Bogard's argument is also furthered by his use of allusion to art – Van Gogh's "Starry Night" – and modern history – Paris' reputation as "The City of Light". By first referencing "Starry Night", a painting generally considered to be undoubtedly beautiful, Bogard establishes that the natural magnificence of stars in a dark sky is definite. A world absent of excess artificial light could potentially hold the key to a grand, glorious night sky like Van Gogh's according to

the writer. This urges the readers to weigh the disadvantages of our world consumed by unnatural, vapid lighting. Furthermore, Bogard's alludes to Paris as "the famed 'city of light'". He then goes on to state how Paris has taken steps to exercise more sustainable lighting practices. By doing this, Bogard creates a dichotomy between Paris' traditionally alluded-to name and the reality of what Paris is becoming – no longer "the city of light", but moreso "the city of light...before 2 AM". This furthers his line of argumentation because it shows how steps can be and are being taken to preserve natural darkness. It shows that even a city that is literally famous for being constantly lit can practically address light pollution in a manner that preserves the beauty of both the city itself and the universe as a whole.

Finally, Bogard makes subtle yet efficient use of rhetorical questioning to persuade his audience that natural darkness preservation is essential. He asks the readers to consider "what the vision of the night sky might inspire in each of us, in our children or grandchildren?" in a way that brutally plays to each of our emotions. By asking this question, Bogard draws out heartfelt ponderance from his readers about the affecting power of an untainted night sky. This rhetorical question tugs at the readers' heartstrings; while the reader may have seen an unobscured night skyline before, the possibility that their child or grandchild will never get the chance sways them to see as Bogard sees. This strategy is definitively an appeal to pathos, forcing the audience to directly face an emotionally-charged inquiry that will surely spur some kind of response. By doing this, Bogard develops his argument, adding gutthral power to the idea that the issue of maintaining natural darkness is relevant and multifaceted.

Writing as a reaction to his disappointment that artificial light has largely permeated the prescence of natural darkness, Paul Bogard argues that we must preserve true, unaffected darkness. He builds this claim by making use of a personal anecdote, allusions, and rhetorical questioning.

## SAT Essay Sample 2

As you read the passage below, consider how Dana Gioia uses

- Evidence, such as facts or examples, to support claims.
- Reasoning to develop ideas and to connect claims and evidence.
- Stylistic or persuasive elements, such as word choice or appeals to emotion, to add power to the ideas expressed.

Adapted from Dana Gioia, “Why Literature Matters.” © 2005 by The New York Times Company. Originally published April 10, 2005.

[A] strange thing has happened in the American arts during the past quarter century. While income rose to unforeseen levels, college attendance ballooned, and access to information increased enormously, the interest young Americans showed in the arts—and especially literature—actually diminished.

According to the 2002 Survey of Public Participation in the Arts, a population study designed and commissioned by the National Endowment for the Arts (and executed by the US Bureau of the Census), arts participation by Americans has declined for eight of the nine major forms that are measured. . . . The declines have been most severe among younger adults (ages 18-24). The most worrisome finding in the 2002 study, however, is the declining percentage of Americans, especially young adults, reading literature.

That individuals at a time of crucial intellectual and emotional development bypass the joys and challenges of literature is a troubling trend. If it were true that they substituted histories, biographies, or political works for literature, one might not worry. But book reading of any kind is falling as well.

That such a longstanding and fundamental cultural activity should slip so swiftly, especially among young adults, signifies deep transformations in contemporary life. To call attention to the trend, the Arts Endowment issued the reading portion of the Survey as a separate report, “Reading at Risk: A Survey of Literary Reading in America.”

The decline in reading has consequences that go beyond literature. The significance of reading has become a persistent theme in the business world. The February issue of *Wired* magazine, for example, sketches a new set of mental skills and habits proper to the 21st century, aptitudes decidedly literary in character: not “linear, logical, analytical talents,” author Daniel Pink states, but “the ability to create artistic and emotional beauty, to detect patterns and opportunities, to craft a satisfying narrative.” When asked what kind of talents they like to see in management positions, business leaders consistently set imagination, creativity, and higher-order thinking at the top.

Ironically, the value of reading and the intellectual faculties that it inculcates appear most clearly as active and engaged literacy declines. There is now a growing awareness of the consequences of nonreading to the workplace. In 2001 the National Association of Manufacturers polled its members on skill deficiencies among employees. Among hourly

workers, poor reading skills ranked second, and 38 percent of employers complained that local schools inadequately taught reading comprehension.

The decline of reading is also taking its toll in the civic sphere. . . . A 2003 study of 15- to 26-year-olds' civic knowledge by the National Conference of State Legislatures concluded, "Young people do not understand the ideals of citizenship . . . and their appreciation and support of American democracy is limited."

It is probably no surprise that declining rates of literary reading coincide with declining levels of historical and political awareness among young people. One of the surprising findings of "Reading at Risk" was that literary readers are markedly more civically engaged than nonreaders, scoring two to four times more likely to perform charity work, visit a museum, or attend a sporting event. One reason for their higher social and cultural interactions may lie in the kind of civic and historical knowledge that comes with literary reading. . . .

The evidence of literature's importance to civic, personal, and economic health is too strong to ignore. The decline of literary reading foreshadows serious long-term social and economic problems, and it is time to bring literature and the other arts into discussions of public policy. Libraries, schools, and public agencies do noble work, but addressing the reading issue will require the leadership of politicians and the business community as well. . . .

Reading is not a timeless, universal capability. Advanced literacy is a specific intellectual skill and social habit that depends on a great many educational, cultural, and economic factors. As more Americans lose this capability, our nation becomes less informed, active, and independent-minded. These are not the qualities that a free, innovative, or productive society can afford to lose.

Write an essay in which you explain how Dana Gioia builds an argument to persuade his audience that the decline of reading in America will have a negative effect on society. In your essay, analyze how Gioia uses one or more of the features listed in the box above (or features of your own choice) to strengthen the logic and persuasiveness of his argument. Be sure that your analysis focuses on the most relevant features of the passage.

Your essay should not explain whether you agree with Gioia's claims, but rather explain how Gioia builds an argument to persuade his audience.

### **Student Response**

In the article, "Why Literature Matters" by Dana Gioia, Gioia makes an argument claiming that the levels of interest young Americans have shown in art in recent years have declined and that this trend is a severe problem with broad consequences. Strategies Gioia employs to support his argument include citation of compelling polls, reports made by prominent organizations that have issued studies, and a quotation from a prominent author. Gioia's overall purpose in writing this article appears to be to draw attention towards shortcomings in American participation in the arts. His primary audience would be the American public in general with a significant focus on millennials.

In his introduction paragraph, Gioia employs a distinct contrast with several listed positive changes in American life such as increased college attendance and increases in income, with the focus of his article: the fact that the interest young Americans show in art has declined. This tool is utilized to establish an emphasis on his primary point by highlighting it

as a negative development relative to other changes in American life. This literary tool serves a strong purpose by acting as a vehicle to draw the audience into the principle issue addressed by the writing.

In paragraph 5, Gioia utilizes a synergistic reference to two separate sources of information that serves to provide a stronger compilation of support for his main topic. By citing a quotation from author Daniel Pink who states, that the talents individuals require for success in the 21st Century are not, "linear, logical, analytic talents," but ones that provide, "the ability to create artistic and emotional beauty, to detect patterns and opportunities," and "to craft a satisfying narrative," Gioia is able to build his point with the agreement of a respected individual. He then immediately follows with a statement that business leaders like to see, "imagination, creativity, and higher order thinking" as qualities for individuals in management positions. This dual utilization of claims from two separate sources conveys to Gioia's audience the sense that the skills built through immersion in the arts are vital to succeeding in the modern workplace which aids in logically leading his audience to the conclusion that a loss of experience with the arts may foreshadow troubling results.

In paragraph 6, Gioia follows up on the point established in paragraph 5 by introducing a negative example of the consequences of loss of the arts with a focus on literacy. Gioia cites a 2001 poll on the National Association of American Manufacturers stating that poor reading skills ranked second among its employees surveyed for skill deficiencies while 38% of employees believed local schools inadequately taught reading comprehension. Gioia's presentation of a numerical statistic based on a major employer adds significant logical weight to his argument by providing an example of the effects of a deficit in experience with art and literature. This may affect his audience by providing a more accurate depiction of the true problems caused by disconnection with arts while possibly choosing an example they could personally relate to.

Overall, Gioia provides an strong logical argument that disconnection with the arts is troubling for America. He employs strong logical connections and establishes real-world foundations for his point.