

# INTRODUCTION

## SECTION 1

The SSAT includes a 25-minute Writing Sample of one to two pages in length. Middle Level students will be asked to write a story starting with a phrase or a sentence provided by the test. Upper Level students will be asked to choose between writing a story and writing an essay in response to a question. The essay topics tend to be broad and varied. In some cases, you will be asked to take a side on an issue (in other words, you will be asked to write a persuasive essay). In some cases, you will be asked to offer a description or show cause and effect (in other words, you will be asked to write an informative essay).

Your story or essay will not be scored, but will be sent to the admissions officer of the schools to which you are applying. Although the Writing Sample will not affect your SSAT score, admissions officers consider your Writing Sample an important component of your application. They will look for a strong writing style free from spelling, punctuation, and grammar mistakes. They will also try to get a sense of who you are as a person. With this in mind, choose subjects you would be comfortable talking about during an interview with a principal or admissions officer. Avoid overly dark, violent, or inappropriate subject matter.

# WRITING BASICS

## SECTION 2

### APPROACHING THE WRITING SAMPLE

Here are some general tips for all students approaching the SSAT Writing Sample. For more specific tips and exercises tailored to your level, work your way through the later sections on creative and essay writing strategies.

#### TIME MANAGEMENT

Regardless of your approach or level, you will need **to budget your time**. Plan to spend no more than a few minutes choosing your prompt, brainstorming, and planning, and save a few minutes at the end to edit. Don't spend too long on any one paragraph.

MANAGING YOUR TIME	
Time	Goal
1 – 2 minutes	Choose your topic and plan your essay or story
4 – 5 minutes	Write your first paragraph
4 – 5 minutes	Write your second paragraph
4 – 5 minutes	Write your third paragraph
4 – 5 minutes	Write your conclusion
2 – 3 minutes	Re-read or edit your essay or story
Total: 25 minutes	Complete essay or story

Here are some more specific guidelines for the length of your Writing Sample:

- Stories should have a beginning (first paragraph), middle (second and third paragraphs), and end (fourth paragraph).
- Essays should have an introduction (first paragraph), body (second and third paragraphs), and conclusion (fourth paragraph).
- Some Upper Level essays will require a five-paragraph format. In that case, reserve four minutes writing time per paragraph.

## **WRITE NEATLY**

Write legibly in either cursive or print, whichever is neater. Neatly cross out any errors you make. Using legible, medium-sized writing, fill up the entirety of the lined pages given. Use the other parts of your student response sheet for your outline and notes. Indent to make sure it is clear where a new paragraph begins. Use standard punctuation and indentation for dialogue. See the section on Cleaning up your Grammar for more information on proper punctuation.

## **BE CONCISE AND SPECIFIC**

Keep your writing clear and to the point. Avoid rambling or repeating yourself. Use specific, precise vocabulary instead of vague words and phrases. Use sophisticated vocabulary, but make sure you use words properly. Use vivid language that incorporates the five senses: sight, smell, taste, touch, and sound.

## **EDIT YOUR WORK**

Remember to edit for spelling, punctuation, and grammar. Read the section on Cleaning up your Grammar for more information.