



Prepped & Polished, LLC

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Hi. I'm Terri, with Prepped & Polished, in South Natick, Massachusetts. Today, I'm going to share some tips with you on how to showcase your writing skills by crafting a superior response to the SSAT creative prompt. Starting last testing year, a new structure was introduced for the middle and upper-level SSAT writing prompts. For the middle level, a student has a choice of two creative prompts from which he'll select one and answer one.

Here are two samples: 'I looked into its eyes and suddenly . . .' or, 'The classroom was empty.' The upper level has a choice of two prompts, one creative and one essay. Here's a sample creative prompt: He couldn't believe they wanted his help. Using these sentences as your first line, your task is to write a story, real or imagined, using these sentences as your first line in 25 minutes. Students now have the ability to write two pages rather than just one.

Tip Number 1: Pre-write your response. Practice writing a creative essay in advance that could be adapted to a variety of prompts. A lot of students ask me, "Can I prepare for a creative prompt?" and you can. Think of a story that you've been itching to write or an accomplishment that you'd like an admissions officer to know about you. Research a favorite subject. For example, '. . . and then she came in the door.' That prompt could enable you to write a variety of stories about almost anything you choose. It could be about a teacher, a friend, a sibling, a principal, a detective, a mother or a father. Here are some other examples of creative prompts: 'He was sure there was an exit somewhere.' 'I knew it was dangerous, but . . .' 'It all started off Friday.' 'The silence was deafening.' 'He was hanging by a thread.' The possibilities are endless.

Tip Number 2: Use a clear structure. Plots of stories can be divided into 5 basic parts. First, you have the exposition; this is the background, and the setting and situation of the story. Then there's the rising action where characters try to solve a problem or conflict. That leads to the climax; that's the critical point where the tension of the story reaches a peak. Then there's the falling action where the tension decreases and the conflict begins to be settled. Finally the resolution, where the conflict is resolved and there's a solution to the problem. In 25 minutes, it might be difficult to wrap up the story in a neat package and have a final, complete resolution. You can show that the characters are beginning to change, that they're beginning to see things differently.



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Tip Number 3: Decide what point of view and tense that you will use. The first person uses 'I'. The third person uses 'he', 'she', 'it', or 'they'. Decide what tense, past, present, or future, you will use for your story, and be consistent. Writing in the present, 'I see', 'I do', 'I go' can be a bit awkward, but sometimes, it's an effective way of presenting the story.

Tip Number 4: Your story should use effective vocabulary and good imagery. Your goal is clear, lively writing that uses imagery, which is the 5 senses; figurative language like similes, metaphors, personification; and well-chosen vocabulary that shows rather than tells. Use exciting verbs to empower your writing. For example, 'The pitiful defendant got on her knees and asked for mercy.' Substitute 'asked' for 'pleaded for mercy'. Instead of 'Linda was scared', you could write her, 'Hands were clammy', or 'Her body was quivering like a bowl of Jell-O'. Avoid 'he said, she said'. Reveal a character's tone. 'He asked contemptuously', or you could say 'She snorted in amusement'. Check for overused words like 'things' and 'stuff'.

Tip Number 5: Use effective grammar, punctuation, and sentence structure. When you proofread, look for the two most common pitfalls which are sentence fragments and run-on sentences. A sentence fragment is part of a sentence that is punctuated as if it were a complete sentence. For example, 'On that morning, I sat in my usual spot on the old wooden stool in the corner of my mother's kitchen.' That fragment lacks a subject or verb. We can correct that by saying, 'On that morning, I sat in my usual spot, on the old wooden stool in the corner of my mother's kitchen.' Run-on sentences are two complete sentences that run together as if they are one. If there's two independent clauses in one sentence, you must make them into two sentences separated with a period, joined with a comma and a coordinating conjunction: And, but, or, nor, for, so, and yet, or connected with a semicolon.

For example, here's a run-on sentence: 'Michael Jordan played for the Chicago Bulls he was the team's star player'; definitely a run-on sentence. Here are 3 ways you could correct that: You could add a period and a capital letter. You could put a comma and a coordinating conjunction 'and', or a semicolon and have a lower case 'H'. Then you would eliminate the problem of a run-on sentence.



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The best way to excel on the creative prompt is to read a wide selection of materials to increase your vocabulary; this will enable you to select just the right word whenever you need it. Reading your favorite authors empowers you to improve your writing skills and develop your own writing style and language.

Here's a bonus tip for you: Do not underestimate the power of your writing sample. Schools use the writing sample as an indication of how well you write under controlled conditions, to estimate your academic capability to perform in an independent setting, and to compare your performance with other applicants for admission or with your current academic record. Bottom line, the essay is often used as the final judgment. I hope these tips today will help you to write your best creative response on the SSAT. Good luck.