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Writing Can Be Taught and Assessed

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Writing Can Be Taught and Assessed



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Writing can be assessed. Any skill that can be taught, any skill that can be improved, can be assessed. Effective writing is a fundamental skill and a vital form of communication. And it is critically important to students, individually and collectively, that we continue to value and encourage good writing.

Making the essay optional on the SAT doesn't level the playing field and undermines the importance of good writing skills.

Individually, we judge the merits of writing whenever we read. In an educational setting, technical aspects of writing such as spelling, grammar, vocabulary and punctuation can be evaluated. So too can clarity, organization and analysis. Grading rubrics, outlines, checklists and model essays are some of the available tools to help assess written work.

But writing is a process, and the most beneficial assessment is geared toward improvement rather than just assigning a score or a grade. The process of writing and rewriting takes patience, reflection and perseverance -- skills that are related to academic, professional and personal success. Ongoing assessment helps both teaching and learning, and students should be encouraged to write as frequently as possible with rigorous feedback and opportunities for revision.

The newly revised essay-optional SAT may undermine the importance of good writing skills. Because the essay is no longer mandatory, schools may spend less time and effort on teaching and assessing writing. Additionally, the opt-in essay does not help the stated goal of leveling the playing field but instead continues to perpetuate the bias and inequities inherent in standardized tests. Those who can afford coaching will be most likely to opt in to write the essay and those who cannot will remain at a disadvantage. Since most students lack proficiency in writing, it makes no sense to minimize the significance of this skill on exams. Effective writing is integrally related to critical thinking, communication, mastery of subject matter and problem solving.

It has been said that resilience may be the best predictor of happiness and success. Of all of the academic and test-taking skills, writing, and rewriting, requires resilience.