

SAT Essay Model Exam 2

Allow 50 minutes to complete the following essay prompt.

As you read the passage below, consider how the authors use

- 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 Nathan K. Lujan and Larry M. Page. “Libraries of Life.”
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- 1 Hidden behind the popular displays at many of your favorite natural history museums — in their basements, back rooms and, increasingly, off-site facilities — sit humanity’s most important libraries of life, holding not books but preserved animal and plant specimens, carefully collected over centuries by thousands of scientist explorers.
- 2 These specimen collections serve as the bedrock of our system of taxonomy — the rules by which we classify life — and are integral to our understanding of the threats, origins and interrelationships of biodiversity. And yet, thanks to budget cutbacks, misplaced ethical critiques, public misconceptions and government regulations that restrict scientists while failing to restrict environmental exploitation, the continued maintenance and growth of these libraries is in danger.
- 3 Though most visitors never know they are there, natural history collections are as critical to modern biologists as libraries are to journalists and historians. Indeed, each museum specimen allows reinterpretation by every person who examines it.
- 4 A taxonomist looking for minute differences between species, and a biogeographer investigating species distributions across a landscape, will find the same specimen valuable for different reasons, as will an evolutionary biologist resolving the interconnectedness and history of life, and an ecologist piecing together the intricate functions of whole ecosystems. These collections

- 5 are particularly critical in today's era of rapid ecological and climate change, providing a unique and vitally important glimpse into ecological conditions of the past.
- 6 In the same way that students of the humanities use new critical approaches to pull novel ideas out of old books, scientists regularly use new technologies — like stable isotope analysis, high-throughput DNA sequencing and X-ray computed tomography — to draw new discoveries from sometimes centuries-old specimens. In October 2014, a Smithsonian botanist and curator named Vicki Funk cataloged recent budgetary and curatorial cutbacks at several of our nation's premier natural history museums, including the Field Museum in Chicago, the California Academy of Sciences and the New York State Museum. The curatorial staff at the Field Museum dropped by almost half, between 2001 and 2014, and that's at a relatively well-funded American institution.
- 7 According to an editorial last November in the journal *Nature*, most natural history collections in Italy are virtually derelict, with up to a third of all specimens lost to neglect. And many tropical countries, which have disproportionately rich biodiversity and booming economies linked to resource extraction, allocate few if any funds for cataloging their natural heritage — shifting greater responsibility to those few European and North American institutions that maintain robust global collections.
- 8 Funding cuts aren't the only threat. In the journal *Science* last April, the Arizona State University ethicist Ben A. Minteer and his co-authors made the dubious claim that scientific specimen collection had significantly contributed to many species' decline and extinction. They recommended that such collections be minimized in favor of nonlethal tissue samples, photographs or other recordings, particularly for species thought to be under threat of extinction.
- 9 They aren't alone. In October 2014, the Harvard entomologist and wildlife photographer received withering public criticism, including at least one death threat, for mentioning in a blog that he had euthanized and preserved a single specimen of the relatively common and widespread Goliath bird-eating spider, which he later deposited in Guyana's natural history museum.

10 We heartily agree that the impact of scientific collections on species should be minimized. But to deny the value of specimens is to accept ignorance of many of the requirements for understanding the evolution, ecology and conservation of biodiversity.

11 To the extent that they can still capture a rich and verifiable record of biodiversity at a single point and time, many biologists already strive to maximize nonlethal sampling techniques, including camera traps, audio recordings and tissue collection. But these tools are often effective only for organisms that can be identified with certainty in the field. What about the estimated 86 percent of all species that remain unknown? And while photographs can record an organism's external appearance, they reveal nothing about its internal anatomy, reproductive state, diseases and genetics.

12 And specimen collection need never threaten extinction. The research, growth and maintenance of scientific collections must be strongly and publicly supported.

13 There is no substitute for collecting and curating specimens for long-term study — not just for scientists studying biodiversity today, but also for future generations, whose need for clues to the spectacular breadth and complexity of unaltered ecosystems will be even greater than our own.

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On a separate sheet of paper, write an essay in which you explain how Nathan Lujan and Larry Page build an argument to persuade their audience that specimen collection is necessary to our understanding of important aspects of biodiversity. In your essay, analyze how Lujan and Page use one or more of the features listed on page 531 (or features of your own choice) to strengthen the logic and persuasiveness of their argument. Be sure that your analysis focuses on the most relevant aspects of the passage.

Your essay should not explain whether you agree with Lujan and Page's claims, but rather explain how the authors build an argument to persuade their audience.

Compare Your Essay

After you write your own essay, read the sample student essays below and mark their strengths and weaknesses. Then look at the explanations on the pages that follow to see how an essay reader may score the writing. Compare your writing with the sample essays so that you can learn from their strengths.

Prompt #2 Sample Essay Score: Advanced—4s

In their article, “Libraries of Life,” Nathan Lujan and Larry Page make a convincing case for preserving specimen collections. Offering readers an organized, well-reasoned argument backed with credible evidence and troubling predictions, the authors persuade readers that preserving these assortments of specimens is important. They begin by acknowledging that most readers don’t even know of the existence of the collections, but by the end of the article, readers would most likely agree with the assessment that specimen collection can provide important information, not the least of which may be to help future generations protect the planet.

The authors open their article with three effective paragraphs that incorporate techniques such as impactful language, subtle predictions, and a relevant analogy. They begin with an element of mystery to draw in the reader, using the word “hidden” as the first word of the article. The reader’s interest is piqued about this secret collection of specimens and he or she will want to know more. Then in the second paragraph, Lujan and Page use powerful phrases such as “the bedrock of our system,” and “integral to our understanding” to convince their audience that the collections are indeed important. By alluding to the “threats, origins and interrelationships of biodiversity” the authors suggest that preserving and continuing to contribute to specimen collections is even essential to our future. The authors criticize government regulations with harsh language such as “restrict,” “failing,” and “exploitation” and “danger.” This word choice, crammed into one sentence, has the effect of bombarding the reader with urgency. Finally, in the third paragraph, the authors create an analogy to help solidify their readers’ understanding of the issue. They tell us that natural history collections are to biologists as libraries are to journalists and historians. In three short paragraphs, Lujan and Page are well on their way to convincing their readers of the importance of specimen collections.

As the article continues, the authors support their claim by presenting specific, concrete examples that illustrate why the world must keep collecting animal and plant specimens. The authors point out that each specimen is valuable in a different way to a variety of people. They write about a taxonomist, a biogeographer, an ecologist, and an evolutionary biologist and all the different ways each would use the collections. By specifying different types of scientists and what they can gain from studying the specimens, the reader is able to visualize the importance of the specimen collections, and see the scientists at work with the specimens. Then the authors go on to give examples of scientific technology that may be found through studying specimens. What is interesting here is that the authors don't say that the technological advances came from the specimens, but they allude to the fact that they could have. The casual reader won't scrutinize the article for such detail, and may well walk away believing that that new technology discussed in the paragraph was a direct result of studying the specimens. This further convinces the reader that preserving specimen collections is beneficial work.

In addition to incorporating effective, specific examples, the authors also employ expert testimony to lend credibility to their argument. The authors share information from a Smithsonian botanist who provides some troubling information about the state of specimen collections. The reader learns that there have been "recent budgetary and curatorial cutbacks at several of our nation's premier natural history museums." The reader has just learned that specimen collections can help with important technological advances, and then is told by a credible source that the future doesn't look good for these collections. Next, the authors go on to refer to an article in the journal *Nature* that suggests that, "most natural history collections in Italy are virtually derelict." The piece of information is meant to represent natural history collections in Europe as a whole. The reader will see that the problem here is global. Using reputable sources and providing the reader with the bigger picture helps put the importance of the situation in context.

To further strengthen their argument, Lujan and Page offer concessions and then follow these with counterarguments. They refer to the argument made by ethicist, Ben Minteer, who claimed that specimen collection had contributed to the decline and extinction of many species. Lujan and Page weaken Minteer's argument by introducing his

idea as a “dubious claim.” The authors do acknowledge the problem of sometimes having to kill living specimens in order to collect them. They provide an example of a scientist who euthanized a bird and was harshly criticized for his actions. They respond with “we heartily agree that the impact of scientific collections on species should be minimized,” following with, “but to deny the value of specimens is to accept ignorance of many of the requirements for understanding the evolution, ecology and conservation of biodiversity.” They further counter that specimen collections will not threaten a species into extinction. This pattern of presenting the opposition and then immediately refuting it leaves the reader even more convinced of the authors’ claim. The authors concede a point in order to gain in the larger argument.

Lujan and Page end their article with a look to the future and an ominous warning. They allude to the fact that future generations may need the information gathered from specimen collections more than any other generation. Using predictions about the future is yet another technique the authors employ to clearly lend power to their claim. Combined with their effective word choice, incorporation of specific illustrations, and use of credible sources, the authors of this article build an argument to persuade their readers to see the importance of specimen collections. The structure, style, and persuasive elements all work to successfully argue their claim.

Explanation of Score

Reading Score: 4 Advanced	
Comprehension	The writer clearly understood the article and the author’s arguments. <i>Introduction contains clear claim and outline of author’s persuasive techniques.</i>
Accuracy	The writer accurately presented facts from the article. <i>All references to information in the article are correct.</i>
Evidence	The writer effectively used evidence, quotations, and paraphrasing to demonstrate an understanding of the article. <i>Effective use of quotations and paraphrasing in each body paragraph.</i>

Analysis Score: 4 Advanced	
Evaluation of evidence	The writer effectively evaluated the author's use of evidence, reasoning, stylistic and persuasive elements. <i>The writer documents the use of "credible evidence and troubling predictions," "impactful language," "a relevant analogy."</i>
Support	The writer supported each claim with evidence from the text and explanations of the significance of that evidence. <i>Use of facts, quotations, and paraphrasing from the article in each body paragraph. Significance of evidence is thoroughly explained.</i>
Focus	The writer stayed focused on the most relevant features of the article in order to address the task of evaluating the author's effectiveness. <i>Focused on author's use of language, effective, specific examples, expert testimony, and concessions. Although the author may use other techniques, the writer has focused on two or three of the most significant.</i>

Writing Score: 4 Advanced	
Strong central claim	The writer clearly presented a central claim: <i>"Offering readers an organized, well-reasoned argument backed with credible evidence and troubling predictions, the authors persuade readers that preserving specimen collections is important."</i>
Organization and progression of ideas	The writer had a clearly organized essay. <i>Essay starts with an introduction that contains the central claim. It continues with body paragraphs, each beginning with a clear topic sentence, each maintaining focus on its subtopic, and each ending with a strong closing sentence. The body paragraphs transition smoothly from one another. The essay ends with a concise conclusion that restates the central claim and most relevant supporting subtopics.</i>
Sentence structure	The writer employed simple, complex, and compound sentences. The writer varied sentence length and style.
Word choice	The writer used synonyms for repeated words, appropriately leveled vocabulary, and accurate terms. <i>Examples of effective word choice from essay: "by alluding to," "has the effect of bombarding the reader with urgency," "a look to the future and an ominous warning."</i>
Style and tone	The writer used a formal essay tone appropriate for the task.
Standard written English	The writer followed conventions such as proper use of punctuation, correctly formed sentences (no run-ons or fragments), and correct grammar and spelling.

Presenting readers with an interesting and perhaps new idea, specimen collections, the authors of the article convince readers of the need for their preservation. The authors alert the reader to the importance of these specimen collections and explains just why they are to be funded.

The authors show the reader that specimen collections are important to a variety of different people. For a variety of different reasons. By mentioning the different purposes separate occupations have for the specimen collections the reader can see for themselves how important the collections are. The reader will most likely agree with the author and want to fund these collections.

The author notes that without the specimen collections the future may face grave threats. This prediction about the future works on the reader and encourages agreement because the reader will think that once the specimen collections are gone, will there be hope for the future. It is through this fear that the author helps gain support for the argument to support specimen collections.

The authors do note that there are other ways of collecting the information gained from specimen collections such as "camera traps, audio recordings, and tissue collection." However, the authors are quick to point out the shortcomings of those other ways and the author continues to argue for the superiority of specimen collections over the other choices.

In conclusion, the authors of the text do a good job of convincing the reader that specimen collections are important and should be funded. The authors leave the reader wondering about the fate of the world when he or she alludes to how future generations will need the information that specimen collections can offer more than previous generations.

Explanation of Score

Reading Score: 2 Partial	
Comprehension	The writer understood the article and the author's arguments to some extent, but needed to go more in depth. <i>Introduction lacks background about the article, as well as an outline of the techniques that will be examined in the essay.</i>
Accuracy	The writer presented some facts from the article, but left some important information out. <i>Writer used vague references instead of the exact information provided in the article.</i>
Evidence	The writer used some evidence, quotations, and paraphrasing to demonstrate an understanding of the article, but should have included more quotations and specific information from the article.

Analysis Score: 2 Partial	
Evaluation of evidence	The writer did not thoroughly evaluate the author's use of evidence, reasoning, stylistic and persuasive elements. <i>Writer does not consistently identify the author's techniques (such as in the second paragraph). Writer does mention the author's use of predictions and concessions in the third and fourth paragraphs, which are more effective. The writer should have included more evidence.</i>
Support	The writer supported each claim with some evidence from the text but did not offer complete explanations of the significance of that evidence. <i>Essay needs significant elaboration and explanation.</i>
Focus	The writer stayed focused on some of the most relevant features of the article in order to address the task of evaluating the author's effectiveness, but missed some important features.

Writing Score: 2 Partial	
Strong central claim	The writer presented his or her central claim in the introduction, but it should be a stronger, more specific sentence: <i>"The authors alert the reader to the importance of these specimen collections and explains just why they are to be funded."</i>
Organization and progression of ideas	The writer had a somewhat clearly organized essay. <i>It starts with an introduction that contains the central claim. It continues with body paragraphs that don't always begin with a clear topic sentence. The body paragraphs do maintain focus on their subtopics. Each body paragraph should end with a strong closing sentence and should incorporate smooth transitions. The essay ends with a concise conclusion that restates the central claim and most relevant supporting subtopics, but is too brief.</i>

Sentence structure	The writer employed mostly simple sentences, but did include some complex and compound sentences. The writer varied sentence length and style at times.
Word choice	The writer used synonyms for repeated words, some appropriately leveled vocabulary, and some accurate terms. In some cases, more advanced vocabulary could have been used. <i>Examples of ineffective word choice from essay: "variety of different people," "For a variety of different reasons."</i>
Style and tone	The writer used a tone that was somewhat appropriate for this task. In some cases, the writer's style and voice could have been more mature/advanced. <i>Examples of ineffective style or tone from essay: "the authors of the text do a good job."</i>
Standard written English	The writer mostly used proper punctuation, correctly formed sentences, and correct grammar and spelling. Some mistakes include fragments, punctuation (commas), and subject-verb agreement.

If your essay did not score a 3 or 4 in all categories, rewrite it. Use comments from your teacher, parents, and friends to improve your writing.