

Command of Evidence

Students' abilities to analyze source texts and, more broadly, to understand and make effective use of evidence in reading and writing are widely recognized as central to college and career readiness. National curriculum surveys conducted by the College Board and others demonstrate that postsecondary instructors rate high in importance such capacities as summarizing a text's central argument or main idea, identifying rhetorical strategies used in a text, and recognizing logical flaws in an author's argument, as well as writing analyses and evaluations of texts, using supporting details and examples, and developing a logical argument. Institutions such as Duke University, Cornell University, Texas A&M University, and the University of California, Berkeley have devoted considerable resources to developing the skills of source analysis and evidence use in their students.”¹

The redesigned SAT® prominently emphasizes source analysis and evidence use throughout the Evidence-Based Reading and Writing section and in the Essay. The SAT Reading Test not only requires students to answer questions based on what is stated and implied in texts (both passages and graphics) across a range of content areas but also includes a number of questions asking students to determine which portion of a text best supports the answer to a given question. The SAT Writing and Language Test includes selected-response questions asking students to develop, support, and refine claims and ideas in multiparagraph passages (some of which are associated with one or more graphics) and to add, revise, or delete information in accordance with rhetorical purpose and accuracy (as, for example, when students are asked to verify or improve a passage's explanation of a data table). In the SAT Essay, students are required to analyze a provided source text to determine how the author builds an argument to persuade an audience through the use of evidence, reasoning, and/or stylistic and persuasive devices (and potentially other aspects of the text identified by students themselves) and then to write a cogent and clear analysis supported by critical reasoning and evidence drawn from the source.

The following brief passage excerpts and sample questions help illustrate two important ways in which students are asked to demonstrate a command of evidence on the redesigned SAT.

READING TEST

In the Reading examples below, students must first reach the most supportable conclusion about a text and then determine the strongest textual support for that conclusion. (Note that, for convenience, the lines cited in the first question in the pair are highlighted in the passage excerpt, and the lines cited in the second question in the pair are reprinted below each answer choice; in an actual test, students would have to refer back to the passage, which has numbered lines. See also the complete passage at the end of this document for the full context in which these skills are measured.)

The pair of questions is based on a passage from a text in the Great Global Conversation.

. . . The North Carolina ratification convention: “No one need be afraid that officers who commit oppression will pass with immunity.” “Prosecutions of impeachments will seldom fail to agitate the passions of the whole community,” said Hamilton in the *Federalist Papers*, number 65. “We divide into parties more or less friendly or inimical to the accused.” I do not mean political parties in that sense.

The drawing of political lines goes to the motivation behind impeachment; but impeachment must proceed within the confines of the constitutional term “high crime[s] and misdemeanors.” Of the impeachment process, it was Woodrow Wilson who said that “Nothing short of the grossest offenses against the plain law of the land will suffice to give them speed and effectiveness. Indignation so great as to overgrow party interest may secure a conviction; but nothing else can.” [. . .]

Adapted from a speech delivered by Congresswoman Barbara Jordan of Texas on July 25, 1974, as a member of the Judiciary Committee of the United States House of Representatives.

In lines 49-54 (“Prosecutions . . . sense”), what is the most likely reason Jordan draws a distinction between two types of “parties”?

- A) To counter the suggestion that impeachment is or should be about partisan politics
- B) To disagree with Hamilton’s claim that impeachment proceedings excite passions
- C) To contend that Hamilton was too timid in his support for the concept of impeachment
- D) To argue that impeachment cases are decided more on the basis of politics than on justice

Which choice provides the best evidence for the answer to the previous question?

- A) Lines 13-17 (“It . . . office”)

It is wrong, I suggest, it is a misreading of the Constitution for any member here to assert that for a member to vote for an article of impeachment means that that member must be convinced that the President should be removed from office.

- B) Lines 20-24 (“The division . . . astute”)

The division between the two branches of the legislature, the House and the Senate, assigning to the one the right to accuse and to the other the right to judge—the framers of this Constitution were very astute.

- C) Lines 55-58 (“The drawing . . . misdemeanors”)

The drawing of political lines goes to the motivation behind impeachment; but impeachment must proceed within the confines of the constitutional term “high crime[s] and misdemeanors.”

- D) Lines 65-68 (“Congress . . . transportation”)

Congress has a lot to do: appropriations, tax reform, health insurance, campaign finance reform, housing, environmental protection, energy sufficiency, mass transportation.

The first of the two questions asks students to analyze a distinction that Barbara Jordan draws in her speech between two types of “parties”: the informal associations to which Alexander Hamilton refers and formal, organized political parties such as the modern-day Republican and Democratic parties. The best answer to this question is choice A. Jordan anticipates that listeners to her speech might misinterpret her use of Hamilton’s quotation as suggesting that she thinks impeachment is essentially a tool of organized political parties to achieve partisan ends, with one party attacking and another defending the president. In the above excerpt of her speech and in the larger reading passage, Jordan makes clear that she thinks impeachment should be reserved only for the most serious of offenses — ones that should rankle people of any political affiliation.

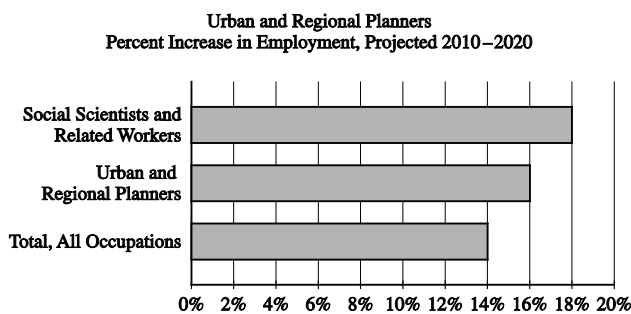
The second question asks students to determine which of four portions of the passage provides the best textual evidence for the answer to the

previous question, thereby demonstrating their command of evidence. In this case, choice C provides the best support because the lines cited in choice C help emphasize Jordan’s point that impeachment is so serious that its use must be reserved for high crimes and misdemeanors, not for merely political gains. In these sorts of questions, students make explicit their reasoning as they read and comprehend text.

WRITING AND LANGUAGE TEST

In the Writing and Language example below, students must determine which choice accurately represents data presented graphically and adjust the text of an associated passage as needed to ensure that the writer’s claim about the data is factually correct. (Note that in the actual test, the question and the tested portion of the passage would be linked by a common question number. See also the complete passage at the end of this document for the full context in which this skill is measured.)

[. . .] Transportation planners perform critical work within the broader field of urban and regional planning. As of 2010, there were approximately 40,300 urban and regional planners employed in the United States. The United States Bureau of Labor Statistics forecasts steady job growth in this field, projecting that 16 percent of new jobs in all occupations will be related to urban and regional planning. Population growth and concerns about environmental sustainability are expected to spur the need for transportation planning professionals.



Adapted from United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, Employment Projections Program. “All occupations” includes all occupations in the United States economy.

(The following question relates to the underlined portion in the excerpt above.)

Which choice completes the sentence with accurate data based on the above graph?

- A) NO CHANGE
- B) warning, however, that job growth in urban and regional planning will slow to 14 percent by 2020.
- C) predicting that employment of urban and regional planners will increase 16 percent between 2010 and 2020.
- D) indicating that 14 to 18 percent of urban and regional planning positions will remain unfilled.

This question asks students to analyze data displayed graphically and to integrate that information with information presented in text — specifically, to determine which of four interpretations of the graph is accurate and to revise the passage’s wording as needed. The best answer here is choice C, as the graph establishes that the number of jobs in urban and regional planning will likely increase by 16 percent between 2010 and 2020. The other answer choices misstate the data in the graph in one way or another. The focus in a question such as this is not simply on understanding information in a data display, as important as that can be, but rather on demonstrating a broad command of evidence by synthesizing information and ideas expressed in two different mediums (graphics and words).

SAMPLE PASSAGE: READING

This passage is adapted from a speech delivered by Congresswoman Barbara Jordan of Texas on July 25, 1974, as a member of the Judiciary Committee of the United States House of Representatives. In the passage, Jordan discusses how and when a United States president may be impeached, or charged with serious offenses, while in office. Jordan’s speech was delivered in the context of impeachment hearings against then president Richard M. Nixon.

Today, I am an inquisitor. An hyperbole would not be fictional and would not overstate the solemnness that I feel right now. My faith in the Constitution is whole; it is complete; it is total. And I am not going to sit here and be an idle spectator to the diminution, the subversion, the destruction, of the Constitution.

“Who can so properly be the inquisitors for the nation as the representatives of the nation themselves?” “The subjects of its jurisdiction are those offenses which proceed from the misconduct of public men.”* And that’s what we’re talking about. In other words, [the jurisdiction comes] from the abuse or violation of some public trust.

It is wrong, I suggest, it is a misreading of the Constitution for any member here to assert that for a member to vote for an article of impeachment means that that member must be convinced that the President should be removed from office. The Constitution doesn’t say that. The powers relating to impeachment are an essential check in the hands of the body of the legislature against and upon the encroachments of the executive. The division between the two branches of the legislature, the House and the Senate, assigning to the one the right to accuse and to the other the right to judge—the framers of this Constitution were very astute. They did not make the accusers and the judges . . . the same person.

We know the nature of impeachment. We’ve been talking about it a while now. It is chiefly designed for the President and his high ministers to somehow be called into account. It is designed to “bridle” the executive if he engages in excesses. “It is designed as a method of national inquest into the conduct of public men.”* The framers confided in the Congress the power, if need be, to remove the President in order to strike a delicate balance between a President swollen with power and grown

tyrannical, and preservation of the independence of the executive.

The nature of impeachment: a narrowly channeled exception to the separation of powers maxim. The Federal Convention of 1787 said that. It limited impeachment to high crimes and misdemeanors, and discounted and opposed the term “maladministration.” “It is to be used only for great misdemeanors,” so it was said in the North Carolina ratification convention. And in the Virginia ratification convention: “We do not trust our liberty to a particular branch. We need one branch to check the other.”

. . . The North Carolina ratification convention: “No one need be afraid that officers who commit oppression will pass with immunity.” “Prosecutions of impeachments will seldom fail to agitate the passions of the whole community,” said Hamilton in the Federalist Papers, number 65. “We divide into parties more or less friendly or inimical to the accused.”* I do not mean political parties in that sense.

The drawing of political lines goes to the motivation behind impeachment; but impeachment must proceed within the confines of the constitutional term “high crime[s] and misdemeanors.” Of the impeachment process, it was Woodrow Wilson who said that “Nothing short of the grossest offenses against the plain law of the land will suffice to give them speed and effectiveness. Indignation so great as to overgrow party interest may secure a conviction; but nothing else can.”

Common sense would be revolted if we engaged upon this process for petty reasons. Congress has a lot to do: appropriations, tax reform, health insurance, campaign finance reform, housing, environmental protection, energy sufficiency, mass transportation. Pettiness cannot be allowed to stand in the face of such overwhelming problems. So today we’re not being petty. We’re trying to be big, because the task we have before us is a big one.

* Jordan quotes from *Federalist* No. 65, an essay by Alexander Hamilton, published in 1788, on the powers of the United States Senate, including the power to decide cases of impeachment against a president of the United States.

SAMPLE PASSAGE: WRITING AND LANGUAGE

NOTE: In an actual test, the following passage would contain additional questions.

A Life in Traffic

A subway system is expanded to provide service to a growing suburb. A bike-sharing program is adopted to encourage nonmotorized transportation. Stoplight timing is coordinated to alleviate rush hour traffic jams in a congested downtown area. When any one of these changes occurs, it is likely the result of careful analysis conducted by transportation planners.

The work of transportation planners generally includes evaluating current transportation needs, assessing the effectiveness of existing facilities, and improving those facilities or designing new ones. Most transportation planners work in or near cities, but some are employed in rural areas. Say, for example, a large factory is built on the outskirts of a small town. Traffic to and from that location would increase at the beginning and end of work shifts. The transportation planner's job might involve conducting a traffic count to determine the daily number of vehicles traveling on the road to the new factory. If analysis of the traffic count indicates that there is more traffic than the current design of the road can efficiently accommodate, the transportation planner might recommend widening the road to add another lane.

Transportation planners work closely with a number of community stakeholders, such as government officials and other interested organizations and individuals. For instance, representatives from the local public health department might provide input in designing a network of trails and sidewalks to encourage people to walk more. Members of the Chamber of Commerce might share suggestions about designing transportation and parking facilities to support local businesses.

People who pursue careers in transportation planning have a wide variety of educational backgrounds. A two-year degree in transportation technology may be sufficient for some entry-level jobs in the field. Most jobs, however, require at least a bachelor's degree; majors of transportation planners are varied, including fields such as urban studies, civil engineering, geography, or transportation and logistics management. For many positions in the field, a master's degree is required.

Transportation planners perform critical work within the broader field of urban and regional planning. As of 2010, there were approximately 40,300 urban and regional planners employed in the United States. The United States Bureau of Labor Statistics forecasts steady job growth in this field, projecting that 16 percent of new jobs in all occupations will be related to urban and regional planning. Population growth and concerns about environmental sustainability are expected to spur the need for transportation planning professionals.

NOTE

- 1 College Board, *College Board Standards for College Success: English Language Arts* (New York: Author, 2006), http://www.collegeboard.com/prod_downloads/about/association/academic/english-language-arts_cbscs.pdf; Mary Seburn, Sara Frain, and David T. Conley, *Job Training Programs Curriculum Study* (Eugene, OR: Educational Policy Improvement Center, 2013), <http://www.nagb.org/content/nagb/assets/documents/what-we-do/preparedness-research/judgmental-standard-setting-studies/job-training-programs-curriculum-study.pdf>; Achieve, Inc., The Education Trust, and Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, *The American Diploma Project: Ready or Not: Creating a High School Diploma that Counts* (Washington, DC: Achieve, Inc., 2004), <http://www.achieve.org/files/ReadyorNot.pdf>; YoungKoung Kim, Andrew Wiley, and Sheryl Packman, *National Curriculum Survey on English and Mathematics* (New York: The College Board, 2012), 7–15, <https://research.collegeboard.org/sites/default/files/publications/2012/7/researchreport-2011-13-curriculum-survey-english-mathematics.pdf>; “Working with Sources,” Duke University Thompson Writing Program, accessed January 10, 2014, <http://twp.duke.edu/writing-studio/resources/working-with-sources>; “Critically Analyzing Information Sources,” Cornell University Library, accessed January 10, 2014, <http://guides.library.cornell.edu/content.php?pid=318835&sid=2612843>; “Critically Analyzing Information Sources,” Texas A&M University Libraries, accessed January 10, 2014, <http://library.tamu.edu/help/help-yourself/using-materials-services/critically-analyzing-information-sources.html>; “Critical Evaluation of Resources,” University of California, Berkeley Library, last modified November 2009, <http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/instruct/guides/evaluation.html>.