

INTRODUCTION FOR STUDENTS

➔ WHAT ARE WRITING TEMPLATES?

Most simply stated, templates are models. More specifically, writing templates are skeletal syntactic frameworks—parts of sentences or paragraphs with blanks to fill in with words of your choice. They are valuable because they help the reader understand better what you are saying. They help you, the writer, with organization, and they help you to develop the kinds of sentence, paragraph, and paper structure that strong writers display. They are also a guaranteed tool for getting better scores or grades on standardized writing tests or on class papers. Why do I say “guaranteed”? Because the syntax (the way words are put together in phrases and sentences) is error-free and the diction is at a high level, so the inclusion of the template will improve the way that your writing is received, the impression that will be left with your reader.

➔ WHY DO YOU NEED TEMPLATES?

Templates are needed because most writing teachers and textbooks simply give you advice on how to write. They don't show you exactly *how to do it*. Let's say you are someone who has never played golf and has never seen golf played. You could read a book about how to hit a golf ball, but when you actually tried to do it, you would have a very difficult time. Now what if a teacher not only let you see someone hit a golf ball, but also put his or her arms around yours and guided you through the correct motions? This is exactly the kind of hands-on support that templates can provide.

When you have read and written thousands of papers, you develop these templates. But this process takes a very long time. Using writing templates is a shortcut to that proficiency, a shortcut helpful if you are a non-native speaker of English or if you have not already mastered writing. After using templates a number of times, the syntax will implant itself automatically in your head, and eventually it will become second nature to use these syntactic frameworks.

➔ WHAT ABOUT STANDARDIZED TESTS LIKE THE SAT® AND THE TOEFL®?

Templates impose a structure, so your writing is better organized. In addition, the grammar and vocabulary in the templates automatically elevate the level of your writing. As a result, most student writers benefit from going into the SAT® or TOEFL® armed with a few templates.

While we know that graders and raters of these tests use specific criteria when evaluating, we also know that they read very quickly and develop a holistic impression of a piece of writing—an impression that is significant when assigning a score. We also know that vocabulary and diction are a large part of what goes into the forming of that holistic impression, which is all the more reason to use templates. In fact, some graders report confidentially that they read only the introduction and conclusion, and they may be very impressed by the implicit organization of the introduction, as well as by the template conclusion. Many writing teachers might agree that they do the same thing when reading essays—that they don't need to read the whole paper to know student level or evaluate the writing. As a result, you should go into the SAT® having memorized a **thesis sentence template**, an **introduction/roadmap template**, and a **conclusion template**. For the TOEFL®, you should also have a **summary template**. The work you put into memorizing these will pay off. Don't panic if you can't remember the templates completely; using only part of a template will be of significant value. Before you start writing your essay or even read the question, write your templates either on a computer screen or on one of the pieces of scrap paper given to you. Then read the question and begin your writing.

An *LA Times* editorial writer and test-grader offers this advice: "Prepare a few highly burnished words that can be applied to almost any situation. A prepared sentence or two wouldn't hurt. One essay struck me with its well-wrought line: 'It may be the case, then, that secrecy has its own time and place in our vast world.' I was dazzled by the calm maturity of that sentence until I realized it could well have been composed in advance. No matter. I gave the kid credit for planning" (Klein, "How I Gamed the SAT®," 3 April 2005).

Before we close, a word of caution is in order. With templates, as with clothes, one size does not fit all. That is—you can't just plug your topic into the right place and expect the template to work perfectly. The template is not an intelligent computer. At times you need to change the syntax or the word form (e.g., make an adjective a noun). Usually, this

is pretty obvious and easy to do. However, errors will be made. But even with an error in the syntax, your essay will be superior to what it would have been without using the template.

In conclusion, writing templates will help bridge the gap between you and the advanced writer. They can make you a more confident and better writer, which will serve you well in your work beyond tests and courses.

➔ **HOW DO THE TEMPLATE OPTIONS WORK?**

When there are columns of options, any word in one column can go with any option in another column.

_____	are the	_____	breakfast food.
Croissants		most delicious	
Eggs		best	
Donuts		healthiest	

For instance, in this template there are nine different combinations that can be used. *Croissants* may be used not only with *most delicious*. You have three options with *croissants*, as you do with *donuts* and with *eggs*. You could write:

Croissants **are the** most delicious **breakfast food.**

or

Croissants **are the** best **breakfast food.**

or

Croissants **are the** healthiest **breakfast food.**

Similarly, you could write:

Eggs **are the** most delicious **breakfast food.**

or

Eggs **are the** best **breakfast food.**

or

Eggs **are the** healthiest **breakfast food.**

Or:

Donuts **are the** most delicious **breakfast food.**

or

Donuts **are the** best **breakfast food.**

or

Donuts **are the** healthiest **breakfast food.**