SAT Prompt

As you read the passage below, consider how Paul Bogard uses

* 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 Paul Bogard, “Let There Be Dark.” ©2012 by Los Angeles Times. Originally published December 21, 2012.

At my family’s cabin on a Minnesota lake, I knew woods so dark that my hands disappeared before my eyes. I knew night skies in which meteors left smoky trails across sugary spreads of stars. But now, when 8 of 10 children born in the United States will never know a sky dark enough for the Milky Way, I worry we are rapidly losing night’s natural darkness before realizing its worth. This winter solstice, as we cheer the days’ gradual movement back toward light, let us also remember the irreplaceable value of darkness.

All life evolved to the steady rhythm of bright days and dark nights. Today, though, when we feel the closeness of nightfall, we reach quickly for a light switch. And too little darkness, meaning too much artificial light at night, spells trouble for all.

Already the World Health Organization classifies working the night shift as a probable human carcinogen, and the American Medical Association has voiced its unanimous support for “light pollution reduction efforts and glare reduction efforts at both the national and state levels.” Our bodies need darkness to produce the hormone melatonin, which keeps certain cancers from developing, and our bodies need darkness for sleep. Sleep disorders have been linked to diabetes, obesity, cardiovascular disease and depression, and recent research suggests one main cause of “short sleep” is “long light.” Whether we work at night or simply take our tablets, notebooks and smartphones to bed, there isn’t a place for this much artificial light in our lives.

The rest of the world depends on darkness as well, including nocturnal and crepuscular species of birds, insects, mammals, fish and reptiles. Some examples are well known—the 400 species of birds that migrate at night in North America, the sea turtles that come ashore to lay their eggs—and some are not, such as the bats that save American farmers billions in pest control and the moths that pollinate 80% of the world’s flora. Ecological light pollution is like the bulldozer of the night, wrecking habitat and disrupting ecosystems several billion years in the making. Simply put, without darkness, Earth’s ecology would collapse....

In today’s crowded, louder, more fast-paced world, night’s darkness can provide solitude, quiet and stillness, qualities increasingly in short supply. Every religious tradition has considered darkness invaluable for a soulful life, and the chance to witness the universe has inspired artists, philosophers and everyday stargazers since time began. In a world awash with electric light...how would Van Gogh have given the world his “Starry Night”? Who knows what this vision of the night sky might inspire in each of us, in our children or grandchildren?

Yet all over the world, our nights are growing brighter. In the United States and Western Europe, the amount of light in the sky increases an average of about 6% every year. Computer images of the United States at night, based on NASA photographs, show that what was a very dark country as recently as the 1950s is now nearly covered with a blanket of light. Much of this light is wasted energy, which means wasted dollars. Those of us over 35 are perhaps among the last generation to have known truly dark nights. Even the northern lake where I was lucky to spend my summers has seen its darkness diminish.

It doesn’t have to be this way. Light pollution is readily within our ability to solve, using new lighting technologies and shielding existing lights. Already, many cities and towns across North America and Europe are changing to LED streetlights, which offer dramatic possibilities for controlling wasted light. Other communities are finding success with simply turning off portions of their public lighting after midnight. Even Paris, the famed “city of light,” which already turns off its monument lighting after 1 a.m., will this summer start to require its shops, offices and public buildings to turn off lights after 2 a.m. Though primarily designed to save energy, such reductions in light will also go far in addressing light pollution. But we will never truly address the problem of light pollution until we become aware of the irreplaceable value and beauty of the darkness we are losing.

Write an essay in which you explain how Paul Bogard builds an argument to persuade his audience that natural darkness should be preserved. In your essay, analyze how Bogard uses one or more of the features in the directions that precede the passage (or features of your own choice) to strengthen the logic and persuasiveness of his argument. Be sure that your analysis focuses on the most relevant features of the passage.

Your essay should not explain whether you agree with Bogard’s claims, but rather explain how Bogard builds an argument to persuade his audience.

**Sample Student Essay #1**

EXPAND ALL  |  COLLAPSE ALL

Sample 1 Scores: 2 1 1

In “Let there be dark,” Paul Bogard talks about the importance of darkness.

Darkness is essential to humans. Bogard states, “Our bodies need darkness to produce the hormone melatonin, which keeps certain cancers from developing, and our bodies need darkness for sleep, sleep. Sleep disorders have been linked to diabetes, obesity, cardiovascular disease and depression and recent research suggests are main cause of “short sleep” is “long light.” Whether we work at night or simply take our tablets, notebooks and smartphones to bed, there isn’t a place for this much artificial light in our lives.” (Bogard 2). Here, Bogard talks about the importance of darkness to humans. Humans need darkness to sleep in order to be healthy.

Animals also need darkness. Bogard states, “The rest of the world depends on darkness as well, including nocturnal and crepuscular species of birds, insects, mammals, fish and reptiles. Some examples are well known—the 400 species of birds that migrate at night in North America, the sea turtles that come ashore to lay their eggs—and some are not, such as the bats that save American farmers billions in pest control and the moths that pollinate 80% of the world’s flora. Ecological light pollution is like the bulldozer of the night, wrecking habitat and disrupting ecosystems several billion years in the making. Simply put, without darkness, Earth’s ecology would collapse...” (Bogard 2). Here Bogard explains that animals, too, need darkness to survive.

This response scored a 2/1/1.

Reading—2: This response demonstrates some comprehension of Bogard’s text. Although this essay consists almost entirely of two quotations taken directly from the passage, the writer does show an understanding of two of Bogard’s main points—darkness is crucial to humans and to animals—by selecting and briefly summarizing two important lines of text. However, the writer demonstrates no deeper understanding of the passage’s main ideas or important details. Overall, this response demonstrates partially successful reading comprehension.

Analysis—1: The response demonstrates no understanding of the analytical task. The writer does not attempt to analyze Bogard’s use of evidence, reasoning, or stylistic or persuasive elements. Instead, the writer merely cites two sentences from the passage, and offers a brief restatement of each point. Overall, this paper demonstrates inadequate analysis.

Writing—1: This essay demonstrates little cohesion and inadequate skill in the use and control of language. The essay begins with a very broad central claim (In “Let there be dark,” Paul Bogard talks about the importance of darkness) but otherwise lacks a recognizable introduction and conclusion. The writer’s two main ideas are separated into two separate paragraphs, but because there is little original writing here, there is no clear evidence of the writer’s ability to logically order or advance ideas. There is also little evidence of the writer’s ability to vary sentence structure. Overall, this essay does not provide enough evidence of writing ability to warrant a score higher than a 1.

**Sample Student Essay #2**

Sample 5 Scores: 3 3 3

In Paul Bogard’s article “Let there be dark” he’s building an arguement to persuade his audience to preserve natural darkness. Bogard builds his arguement in a few different ways. Bogard uses a personal story, appeals to people’s emotions, and states benefits of natural darkness.

By using a personal story Bogard allows his audience to connect to him. If his audience can relate or even understand his story they will be more willing to agree with him. The personal story also shows that the issue of preserving natural darkness isn’t just another topic to write about but something that he is actually passionate for. In his personal story Bogard uses great imagery making the audience picture what he saw and maybe make them want to experience it too.

Bogard uses pathos by stating examples that appeal to people’s emotions. In the article he wrote“Those of us over 35 are perhaps among the last generation to have known truly dark nights.” This statement appeals more to the younger generations emotion. By stating this people who are younger then 35 might feel that they were robbed of the oppurtunity to experience the real beauty of natural darkness. This would proably help his younger audience to agree with him because they might want the chance to see the real beauty of natural darkness.

Bogard writes about the benefits that natural darkness actually produces. In the article he talks about how darkens actually helps the body produce a hormone that keeps certain cancers from developing. He also includes how darkness helps and is neccessary for certain animals. These examples will help his audience see that he is arguing for some benefical for people. This also helps appeal to an audience that might not care for the beauty of darkness but care for their own personal health.

Bogard uses different features in order to persuade his audience. The different features also help him in appealing to a broader audience.

This response scored a 3/3/3.

Reading—3: This response demonstrates effective understanding of the passage, with increasing evidence as the response continues. In the second paragraph, the writer discusses the personal experience of the night sky that Bogard draws on; although the writer does not recount the experience itself, it is nevertheless clear that the writer understands the story of Bogard’s youth. In the next paragraph, the writer cites and discusses a generational claim that Bogard makes, again demonstrating comprehension. Finally, the writer discusses general points Bogard makes about darkness’s usefulness for both animals and humans, although again, the writer makes a vague reference that darkness helps and is neccessary for certain animals without offering any of specific textual examples that Bogard provides. However, across the whole of this essay, the writer demonstrates effective understanding of the text’s central idea (he’s building an arguement to persuade his audience to preserve natural darkness) and important details.

Analysis—3: The writer demonstrates an understanding of the analytical task by first identifying three ways Bogard builds his argument (Bogard uses a personal story, appeals to people’s emotions, and states benefits of natural darkness) and then developing each point in turn. In the response’s body paragraphs, the writer moves beyond mere assertions to a competent evaluation of how pieces of evidence, reasoning, or stylistic or persuasive elements contribute to the argument. For example, in the response’s discussion of the personal story Bogard opens with, the writer argues not only that the story allows his audience to connect to him but also explains the importance of such connection (If his audience can relate or even understand his story they will be more willing to agree with him). The writer also contends that the use of this personal story shows Bogard’s passion and that the imagery included in the story makes the audience picture what he saw and maybe make them want to experience it too. The response could have made a stronger point had the writer elaborated on the potential effects of making the audience want to share Bogard’s experience. Nevertheless, in this example and others like it in the response, the writer exhibits effective analysis of the source text using relevant and sufficient support.

Writing—3: This essay is mostly cohesive and demonstrates mostly effective control of language. The brief introduction establishes the writer’s central idea and sets up the essay’s three points. The essay then follows a clear, if formulaic, format. In each paragraph, the writer demonstrates a progression of ideas, integrating quotations or examples from the source text into the analysis and connecting ideas logically (Bogard uses pathos by stating examples that appeal to people’s emotions. In the article he wrote “Those of us over 35 are perhaps among the last generation to have known truly dark nights.” This statement appeals more to the younger generations emotion. By stating this...). Sentence structure is varied, and some precise phrasing is used to convey ideas (robbed of the oppurtunity, their own personal health). Language control on the whole is good, although there are a few minor errors (These examples will help his audience see that he is arguing for some benefical for people) that do not detract materially from the quality of writing. Overall, the response demonstrates proficient writing.

**Sample Student Essay #3**

Sample 7 Scores: 4 3 4

Paul Bogard, a respected and passionate writer, offers a convincing argument on the importance of allowing more darkness to fill the earth for distinct health and ecological reasons. With light providing as such a huge factor in daily life, we sometimes forget that darkness can have more healing abilities, and allows nature to return to a nonartificial, primitive state. Bogard uses personal observation for credibility, stirring feelings, and startling facts to deliver a powerful argument.

Throughout the passage, Bogard remains nostalgic about his childhood: “At my family’s cabin on a Minnesota lake, I knew woods so dark that my hands disappeared before my eyes. I knew night skies in which meteors left smoky trails across sugary spreads of stars....This winter solstice, as we cheer the days’ gradual movement back toward light, let us also remember the irreplaceable value of darkness.” The description of nature and the stunningly beautiful imagery creates a feeling of deep respect for the darkness. We share in Bogard’s view and as a result, Bogard has undeniable credibility. Bogard knows the power of darkness and through his childhood memories, we lean our ears to listen to him.

Even though credibility makes many appearences throughout the passage, it would have no real meaning without evoking emotion. Bogard strikes the people who disagree with him when he says, “Our bodies need darkness to produce the hormone melatonin, which keeps certain cancers from developing and our bodies need darkness for sleep. Sleep disorders have been linked to diabetes, obesity, cardiovascular disease and depression, and recent research suggests one main cause of ‘short sleep’ is ‘long light’.” Bogard’s statement dissolves any doubt, but builds up new feeling. We finally see the true importance of allowing our world to temporarily succumb to darkness. Through the emotion Bogard evokes, we suddenly feel defensive in preserving the darkness for the sake of our mental and physical health. Bogard even makes us think about the future generations: “In a world awash with electric light...how would Van Gogh have given the world his ‘starry night’? Who knows what this vision of the night sky must inspire in each of us, in our children or grandchildren?”

In order to achieve proper credibility and stir emotion, undeniable facts must reside in passage. Bogard has completed his research, and uses it to further his case: “The rest of the world depends on darkness as well, including nocturnal and crepuscular species of birds, insects, mammals, fish, and reptiles. Some examples are well known—the 400 species of birds that migrate at night in North America, the sea turtles that come to lay their eggs—and some are not, such as the bats that save American farmers billions in pest control and the moths that pollinate 80% of the world’s flora.” Using the facts about animals, Bogard extends the argument beyond humans, allowing us to see that darkness does not only have an impact on us, but all of nature. Bogard then says, “In the United States and Western Europe, the amount of light in the sky increases an average of about 6% every year.... Much of this light is wasted energy, which means wasted dollars. Those of us over 35 are perhaps among the last generation to have known truly dark nights.” However, Bogard extends the facts to offer various solutions to wasted and excessive light, such as changing LED streetlights and reducing the use of lights in public buildings and homes during the night. Bogard builds up our world, and then breaks it down in our minds with his writing: “Simply put, without darkness, Earth’s ecology would collapse....”

We can still save our world according to Bogard. We must see the strength and beauty in the darkness, and remember how our world survived without lights. Light can be acceptable, but too much of it can prove worse than permanent darkness.

This response scored a 4/3/4.

Reading—4: This response demonstrates thorough comprehension of Bogard’s text. The writer captures the central idea of the source passage (the importance of allowing more darkness to fill the earth for distinct health and ecological reasons) and accurately quotes and paraphrases many important details from the passage. Moreover, the writer demonstrates an understanding of how these ideas and details interrelate. In the third body paragraph, for example, the writer shows the movement of Bogard’s argument from humans to animals and from problems to solutions (Using facts about animals, Bogard extends the argument beyond humans... Bogard extends the facts to offer various solutions). The response is free of errors of fact and interpretation. Overall, this response demonstrates advanced reading comprehension.

Analysis—3: The writer demonstrates an understanding of the analytical task by analyzing three ways Bogard builds his argument (personal observation for credibility, stirring feelings, and startling facts to deliver a powerful argument). Throughout the response, the writer discusses Bogard’s use of these three elements and is able to move past asserting their significance to deliver an effective analysis of the effects of these techniques on Bogard’s audience. Effective analysis is evident in the first body paragraph in which the writer discusses the audience’s possible reaction to reading about Bogard’s experience with darkness as a child (Bogard knows the power of darkness and through his childhood memories, we lean our ears to listen to him). In the second body paragraph, the writer contends that Bogard’s statement dissolves any doubt, but builds up new feeling. We finally see the true importance of allowing our world to temporarily succumb to darkness. Through the emotion Bogard evokes, we suddenly feel defensive in preserving the darkness for the sake of our mental and physical health. These points of analysis would have been stronger had the writer elaborated on how they work to build Bogard’s argument. However, the writer competently evaluates Bogard’s use of personal observation, emotions, and facts and provides relevant and sufficient support for each claim, demonstrating effective analysis.

Writing—4: The writer demonstrates highly effective use and command of language in this cohesive response. The response includes a precise central claim (Bogard uses personal observation for credibility, stirring feelings, and startling facts to deliver a powerful argument), and each of the subsequent paragraphs remains focused on one of the topics set forth in that central claim. There is a deliberate progression of ideas both within paragraphs and throughout the response. Moreover, the response demonstrates precise word choice and sophisticated turns of phrase (temporarily succumb to darkness, remains nostalgic about his childhood, dissolves any doubt). The concluding paragraph develops the essay rather than just restating what has been said and is also successful for its precise word choice and complex sentence structures (We must see the strength and beauty in the darkness, and remember how our world survived without lights. Light can be acceptable, but too much of it can prove worse than permanent darkness). Although there are occasional missteps where the writer overreaches with language (In order to achieve proper credibility and stir emotion, undeniable facts must reside in the passage), overall, this response demonstrates advanced writing skill.