

# Removing Analogies From the SAT Was a Bad Idea

When I was preparing for the SAT test in 1996, I had to test myself with several examples of analogies, such as the following question:

Bandage: Blood ::

a) Cable: Bridge    b) Cast: Injury    c) Fort: Army    d) Dam: River

But such preparation is no longer needed for today's students; the analogies section was removed from the SAT in 2005 in favor of a written essay.

The reasoning behind the removal?

According to the College Board—the governing body of the SAT who ditched the analogies:

“[T]hey are less connected to the current high school curriculum. Additionally, some educators have expressed concern that the analogy format encouraged rote memorization of vocabulary words.”

Sigh... It's the kind of specious reasoning promoted by the removal of analogies from the SAT.

First of all, “rote memorization” of vocabulary is not the bogeyman that modern educators make it out to be. In fact, [research is confirming](#) that memorization is a necessary component of so-called “critical thinking”.

Secondly, to all appearances, the writing portion of the SAT has been a failure. Currently, only one-quarter of high school seniors are even proficient in writing. And [according to Columbia University professor and author John McWhorter](#), the

essays on the SAT are largely a perfunctory exercise in b.s.:

*“Well, the verdict is in. It turns out that the essays measure nothing meaningful – or at best, they measure a student’s ability to ‘bullshit on demand’ as [MIT’s Les Perelman puts it](#). Some of this may be that written work is simply incompatible to a standardized test where millions of people must get measured against each other. Evaluators are [encouraged](#) to take as little as two minutes to grade these essays. But that means students regularly get high scores for essays written with no regard for fact – who has time to check? – or that don’t even reflect anything they actually believe or feel. Plus they are told they should write with fancy words to look smart. Something is very wrong here. The SAT, created to identify quality of mind in students regardless of background, is now encouraging students to write in a fake and pretentious way.”*

Third, the fact that these analogies were “less connected to the current high school curriculum” most likely demonstrates a problem with the curriculum, and not the analogies themselves.

At Intellectual Takeout, [we’ve repeatedly pointed out](#) that logic was a fixture of Western education until fairly recently, and was even considered a subject appropriate for students in their early teens. Many homeschoolers today have returned to this tradition, and begin studying a logic curriculum in seventh grade.

Adam Cohen, writing in the *New York Times*, [explained](#) that analogies are a key component of logical thinking:

*“Questions of this sort [the sort of that were on the SAT] are the building blocks of arguments by analogy, which are a mainstay of many disciplines. Philosophers like Aristotle relied on analogies to reason about man and nature. Scientists have long analogized from things they know to things they do not, to form hypotheses and plot experiments.*

*Law is almost entirely dependent on analogies."*

Cohen further argued that removing the analogies from the SAT would lead to an even more "confused citizenry", especially in the political realm:

*"Nowhere are analogies more central than in politics. When Karl Marx wanted to arouse the workers of the world, he compared the proletariat's condition to slavery and, in 'The Communist Manifesto,' urged them to throw off their figurative chains. When Roosevelt argued for a balanced budget, he put it in homespun terms. 'Any government, like any family, can for a year spend a little more than it earns,' he said. 'But you and I know that a continuation of that habit means the poorhouse.'*

*[...]*

*The power of an analogy is that it can persuade people to transfer the feeling of certainty they have about one subject to another subject about which they may not have formed an opinion. But analogies are often undependable. Their weakness is that they rely on the dubious principle that, as one logic textbook puts it, 'because two things are similar in some respects they are similar in some other respects.' An error-producing 'fallacy of weak analogy' results when relevant differences outweigh relevant similarities."*

Fast forward to today, where politics and the news have become increasingly dominated by rather thin analogies, and where every candidate that we don't like is Hitler, or Mussolini, or Machiavelli.

Unfortunately, because of the decline of logic education, I fear that fewer people than ever are equipped to maturely evaluate these analogies.