

Kaplan SAT Score-Raising Book Club for Teens

Kaplan now offers SAT review with a new twist—activities based on teen favorite fiction and nonfiction to help develop skills that will help students score higher on the Critical Reading and Writing sections of the SAT.

This guide offers three new SAT score-raising activities based on *My Sister's Keeper*. Kaplan also offers guides for *Waiting for Snow in Havana*, *Between a Rock and a Hard Place*, and *Angela's Ashes*.

If you're looking for other original ways to incorporate SAT prep into the classroom or an SAT study group, check out the following titles on www.simonsays.com:

- *Frankenstein: An SAT Score-Raising Classic* (074325578X, \$6.99)
- *Wuthering Heights: An SAT Score-Raising Classic* (0743261992, \$7.99)
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Happy studying--and don't forget to check back each month for all-new SAT activities!

Kaplan SAT Score-Raising Book Club

My Sister's Keeper

Writing Activity

On the Writing section of the SAT, you'll be asked to write an essay in response to a specific prompt. You'll be given one or two quotes related to a general topic, a specific question for you to answer, and writing instructions.

One of the requirements of the essay is to develop your point of view with reasons and examples. This is where books such as *My Sister's Keeper* can help you out. You can use events, themes, and characters from the book to support your answer to the prompt's question.

Make Your Answer Clear

The essay question you'll see on the SAT will be general and open-ended. Don't worry about trying to determine the correct answer to the question. As far as the scorers are concerned, there is no correct or incorrect answer. Therefore, don't spend a great deal of time trying to decide how to answer the question. Instead, spend a few minutes of planning time choosing a position on the issue and generating ideas to support your position.

Try it out with the sample prompt below.

Instructions:

Take 25 minutes to read the following prompt and write an essay in response. Before you start to write, take a few minutes to plan out what you're going to say. Use *My Sister's Keeper* as a source for examples to support your point of view. Also, leave a minute or two at the end to proofread what you've written.

Consider carefully the following quotation and assignment below.

| |
|---|
| <p>Happiness is not so much in having as sharing. We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give. Norman MacEwan</p> |
|---|

Assignment:

In your opinion, does happiness come more from giving and sharing than from acquiring and receiving? Write an essay that conveys your point of view and supports your position. Use reasoning and examples from the arts, literature, current events, or your own experience and observation.

How the Essay Is Scored

Two trained readers will evaluate your essay, each giving it a score from 1 - 6, for a total of 1 - 12 points possible. The readers score each essay holistically, meaning that they read it quickly for an overall impression and assign it a score. They don't count the number of examples you have or the number of grammatical errors you made. However, scorers will consider the following four main factors:

- Does the essay address the assignment?
- Is there a clear introduction, middle, and end?
- Are the ideas developed sufficiently?
- Is the essay easy to read? Is it engaging?

You can use the rubric below to get a better understanding of how the essay is scored. You can also use it to score your own practice essays.

| | Assignment | Organization | Detail | Writing |
|-------------------------|---|--|--|--|
| A 6 essay has... | fully addressed the assignment | clear focus, apparent organization, and smooth transitions | outstanding reasoning and ideas that are amply supported with detailed and relevant examples | clear and engaging language, varied sentence structure, and few if any errors |
| A 5 essay has... | effectively addressed the assignment | focus, apparent organization, and effective transitions | effective reasoning and ideas that are supported with mostly detailed and relevant examples | clear language, variety in word choice and sentence structure, and few or no errors |
| A 4 essay has... | addressed the assignment | general organization and focus with some transitions | competent reasoning and ideas that are adequately supported with examples | generally effective word choice, some variety in sentence structure, and some errors |
| A 3 essay has... | somewhat addressed the assignment | limited organization and focus with few transitions | some reasoning and ideas that are somewhat supported with examples | occasionally effective word choice, little or no variety in sentence structure, and some errors that affect clarity |
| A 2 essay has... | partially addressed the assignment | poor organization and focus | weak reasoning and ideas that are insufficiently supported | limited word choice, problems with sentence structure, and errors that affect clarity |
| A 1 essay has... | failed to meaningfully address the assignment | little or no focus and organization | little or no reasoning and ideas with little or no support | serious errors in word choice, several problems with sentence structure, and multiple errors that seriously affect clarity |

Sample Essays and Scores

Read the sample essays and reader's scores below. Then score your own essay using the SAT reader's guidelines. If you have time, switch essays with a partner and score each other's essays. Don't worry if you feel like your essay isn't quite top-notch—now is the time to get feedback, practice, and improve before Test Day!

For extra practice, revise one of the low-scoring essays below, incorporating what you've learned from reading the scoring guidelines and evaluating your own essay.

Sample Essay 1

The saying is that "It's always better to give than to receive." When I was growing up, I always heard that rite around Christmas time. I think my parents wanted me to not be so focused on being greedy about getting all of these presents. But that's a popular saying that isn't necessarily true. You can be just as happy getting things.

The book My Sister's Keeper is all about one sister who has to keep giving and giving to her older sister. When she's born her parents give her cord blood for her sister's leukemia. Then later she has to donate more things. This part of the book sounded really painful and awful.

Now her parents want her to give up a kidney even though her sister is probably going to die soon anyway. It sure doesn't seem like there's much hope for her. The book is all about how the younger sister tries to convince a court that she shouldn't have to donate the kidney. The younger sister would be happier if for once she could stop giving everything to her older sister and have her own life. She would feel awful if something bad happened to her sister, though. She probably won't be happy either way.

You just can't say what makes another person happy.

Reader's Score: 2

Sample Essay 2

The pursuit of happiness is one of the rights laid out in the Declaration of Independence, but it does not provide a definition of happiness or directions on how to have it. Instead, you must find your own path to happiness. For me, the path to happiness must begin with how I treat other people. Nothing makes me feel better than sharing with others, such as sharing a laugh or sharing a meal or my good fortune.

Just like most people my age, I love to shop for things. It's fun to go to the mall and pick out the latest style in shoes or jeans, or just to pick up something small like earrings or a bracelet. But the pleasure I get from these is quite short.

It's nice but I don't get any real happiness from having the boots that the magazines say are "in" right now. My real happiness comes from what I give to my friends and my family. When I help my younger brother with his homework, I feel a sense of satisfaction. When I helped my neighbor rake her yard, I felt a sense of community. And when I volunteered at the food bank, I never had felt so rewarded.

A person who found happiness from giving is a fictional character, the younger sister Anna in My Sister's Keeper. Anna was born to help save her sister from dying from leukemia, and that is the roll she fulfills until she reaches 13. All of a sudden Kate needs a kidney transplant, and Anna is in some ways wanting to have her own life. Through most of the book, it seems like it is Anna who wants to stop giving, but in fact it was Kate who asked her sister to do something to end her suffering. So by seeking to make her own medical decisions and possibly end her sister's life by not giving her a kidney, Anna was in fact trying to give her sister the gift that she had asked for. That gift was release. But Anna was miserable because she had always defined herself by her relationship with Kate. She can't imagine life without her. So Anna might have had her own life if it had turned out that she didn't donate a kidney, but she wouldn't have been happy.

I really enjoyed the story of My Sister's Keeper because it reinforced what I think about family and giving. I'd like to think that I would try to be like Anna if I had a sister with a similar illness. I know that giving is the thing that brings me happiness more than anything.

Reader's Score: 4

Sample Essay 3

Happiness is an emotion that is hard to define, and what makes one person happy might make the next person miserable. While I believe that it is true that giving to others and serving others is an important source of happiness, I also believe that giving to yourself is key to being happy. After all, you can't care for others unless you also care for yourself.

The novel My Sister's Keeper, by Jodi Picoult, offers several examples of the need to have a balance between giving to others and taking care of yourself. In the novel, a family is torn apart because of the sacrifices one child is asked to make for another. One child—Anna—was conceived to save another child—Kate. Kate, the oldest child, developed a severe form of leukemia, and the parents decided to have another child for the purpose of saving their eldest. When Anna was born, her role as Kate's giver began. The blood from her umbilical cord was immediately used for a procedure to help Kate fight off the cancer. Anna continues to give to her sister over the years, undergoing multiple procedures that include a painful bone marrow donation.

Anna is in many ways happy to give to her sister; in fact, she mostly identifies herself in relationship to her sister. However, Anna has rarely been able to give to herself. She cannot pursue her intense interest in hockey because it would mean being away from Kate. Indeed, she cannot pursue any interests that would take her away from Kate. The conflict between Anna's desire to give to her sister and her need to give to herself culminates in the novel, as Anna seeks to be medically emancipated from her parents instead of donating a kidney to possibly save her sister's life. She cannot be happy existing solely to give to her sister, nor can Kate continue to receive Anna's sacrifice of self. As it turns out, it is Kate, not Anna, who truly pushed for an end to the procedures to save her life.

In addition, the sacrifices of the parents show that happiness comes from giving to other as well as giving to yourself. For instance, Kate's mother is wholly consumed with saving her eldest child. Everything that she does is for Kate, to the point of ignoring the needs of her other children, her marriage, and herself. When she and her husband finally have a moment alone between one of Kate's procedures, they have nothing to talk about outside of Kate. They have put all of their energy and gifts there, and the stress this puts on them and their marriage is clear.

It is noble and worthwhile to give to others and to sacrifice for the sake of others. However, this type of giving is not at all sustainable unless you also give to yourself. You cannot take care of others if you completely ignore your own needs. As the examples of Anna, Kate, and their parents make clear, a balance between giving to yourself and giving to others is necessary.

Reader's Score: 5

Kaplan SAT Score-Raising Book Club

My Sister's Keeper

Critical Reading Activity (Teacher's Notes)

1. Go through the beginning instructional text with students, emphasizing the hints in the three bullet points.
2. Give students six to seven minutes to independently read the first passage and answer its accompanying questions.
3. Before handing out the answers and explanations for the second passage, have students discuss their answers with a partner. Tell them to come to agreement about the best answer for each question. If they disagree about a particular question, they should go back to the passage and make a case supporting their opinion of the best answer.
4. Have student pairs answer the question that follows each answer explanation.
5. For additional practice, have students try to think like the Test Maker. Ask students to write three additional questions using the second passage in this activity. Then have student pairs answer each other's questions.

Answers to Wrong Answer Choice Questions

1. These are the “abnormal results” that “sometimes indicate an autoimmune disease” (lines 5-6), not leukemia.
2. Although Dr. Farquod does mention the need for an additional test, the test is not the purpose of the comparison. The purpose of the comparison is to give Kate's parents a simple understanding of what is happening in their child's body.
3. Both (A) and (B) use common definitions for *draw*, but neither definition makes sense in the context of *drawing blood*.
4. (E) is a misused detail. Brian, the narrator's husband, does ask, “Is she...is she going to die?” in line 20, but this is not directly related to the narrator's response to the information Dr. Farquod has given them.
5. (A) is an opposite wrong answer. The memory suggests that the narrator had previously thought that her child was healthy.
6. (B) is beyond the passage's scope. The passage focuses on Kate's illness and her parent's reaction to the news, not on a physical description of Brian.
7. Both (C) and (E) are opposite answers.

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My Sister's Keeper Critical Reading Activity

Some of the Critical Reading passages on the SAT may deal with technical topics—such as astronomy, computer science, or archeology—that can seem rather intimidating. When you see such a passage, it is important to remember that the answer is *always* in the passage or directly connected to something in the passage. In other words, you don't need any previous knowledge about a particular subject to correctly answer Critical Reading questions.

Keep these hints in mind when you're dealing with a passage on a challenging topic:

- Focus on the big picture and don't get caught up in the details. The questions will tell you which details you'll need to return to the passage to research.
- Don't spend a lot of time trying to decipher heavy technical language or jargon during your first read through a passage. It's quite likely that you won't need anything beyond a loose understanding of what the technical language means.
- Mark up the passage. Underline or circle key phrases that help you keep track of what's going on in each paragraph.

Now try answering a set of questions about a passage loaded with technical terms.

Directions: Use what is stated and implied in the passage and introductory material below to answer questions 1-7. For each question, circle the best answer from the given choices.

Questions 1-7 refer to the following passage.

The following is excerpted from a novel which focuses on the story of a family coming to terms with a child's serious illness. In this passage, the parents—Sara and Brian—are first informed of their two-year-old daughter Kate's illness.

Suddenly Dr. Farquard, whom we have not seen for hours, comes into the room. "I hear there was a little problem with the coagulopathy panel." She pulls up a chair in front of us. "Kate's complete blood count had some abnormal results. Her white blood count is very low—1.3. Her hemoglobin is 7.5, her hematocrit is 18.4, her platelets are 81,000, and her neutrophils are 0.6. Numbers like that sometimes indicate an autoimmune disease. But Kate's also presenting with twelve percent promyelocytes, and five percent blasts, and that suggests a leukemic syndrome."

"Leukemic," I repeat. The word is runny, slippery, like the white of an egg.

line
(5)

line Dr. Farquad nods. "Leukemia is a blood cancer."
(10) Brian only stares at her, his eyes fixed. "What does that mean?"
"Think of bone marrow as a childcare center for developing cells. Healthy bodies
make blood cells that stay in the marrow until they're mature enough to go out and fight
disease or clot or carry oxygen or whatever it is that they're supposed to do. In a person
with leukemia, the childcare-center doors are opened too early. Immature blood cells
(15) wind up circulating, unable to do their job. It's not always odd to see promyelocytes in a
CBC, but when we checked Kate's under a microscope, we could see abnormalities." She
looks in turn at each of us. "I'll need to do a bone marrow aspiration to confirm this, but
it seems that Kate has acute promyelocytic leukemia."

My tongue is pinned by the weight of the question that, a moment later, Brian
(20) forces out of his own throat: "Is she...is she going to die?"
I want to shake Dr. Farquad. I want to tell her I will draw the blood for the coag
panel myself from Kate's arms if it means she will take back what she said. "APL is a
very rare subgroup of myeloid leukemia. Only about twelve hundred people a year are
diagnosed with it. The rate of survival for APL patients is twenty to thirty percent, if
(25) treatment starts immediately."
I push the numbers out of my head and instead sink my teeth into the rest of her
sentence. "There's a treatment," I repeat.
"Yes. With aggressive treatment, myeloid leukemias carry a survival prognosis
of nine months to three years."
(30) Last week I had stood in the doorway of Kate's bedroom, watching her clutch a
satin security blanket in her sleep, a shred of fabric she was rarely without. *You mark my
words*, I had whispered to Brian. *She'll never give that up. I'm going to have to sew it into the
lining of her wedding dress.*
"We'll need to do the bone marrow aspiration. We'll sedate her with a light
(35) general anesthetic. And we can draw the coag panel while she's asleep." The doctor
leans forward, sympathetic. "You need to know that kids beat the odds. Every single
day."
"Okay," Brian says. He claps his hands together, as if he is gearing up for a
football game. "Okay."
(40) Kate pulls her head away from my shirt. Her cheeks are flushed, her expression
wary.
This is a mistake. This is someone else's unfortunate vial of blood that the doctor
has analyzed. Look at my child, at the shine of her flyaway curls and the butterfly light
of her smile—this is not the face of someone dying by degrees.
(45) I have only known her for two years. But if you took every memory, every
moment, if you stretched them end to end—they'd reach forever.

From *My Sister's Keeper*, by Jodi Picoult, 2004

1. The first paragraph suggests that the strongest indicator that Kate has a leukemic syndrome is
 - (A) a low white blood count
 - (B) the hematocrit result
 - (C) her hemoglobin numbers
 - (D) her level of platelets
 - (E) her percentage of promyelocytes and blasts

2. Dr. Farquad compares bone marrow to a childcare center (lines 11-14) in order to
 - (A) explain how Kate developed leukemia
 - (B) emphasize the seriousness of Kate's condition
 - (C) persuade Brian and the narrator that Kate must undergo additional tests
 - (D) underscore that leukemia is a childhood disease
 - (E) help Brian and the narrator understand the basics of the disease Kate may have

3. The word "draw" in line 21 most nearly means
 - (A) sketch
 - (B) attract
 - (C) take
 - (D) examine
 - (E) replace

4. In lines 26-27, the author suggests that the narrator of this passage
 - (A) is unconcerned with the statistics that Dr. Farquad has cited
 - (B) wants to focus on the possibility that procedures will help her daughter
 - (C) is reassured by the statistics presented by Dr. Farquad
 - (D) has misunderstood Dr. Farquad's explanation
 - (E) is upset that her husband thinks their child might die

5. The memory described in lines 30-33 primarily serves to
- (A) suggest that the narrator had previously known that her child's health was threatened
 - (B) identify the hopes that the narrator has for her daughter's future
 - (C) contrast with Dr. Farquad's prognosis for Kate's survival
 - (D) show that the narrator believes her daughter will beat the odds
 - (E) compare the narrator's emotions to her husband's emotions
6. The author most likely describes Brian "as if he is gearing up for a football game" (lines 38-39) in order to
- (A) imply that Brian is mentally preparing himself to face Kate's illness and hope for a successful treatment
 - (B) suggest that Brian's physical strength is impressive
 - (C) show Brian's sense of shock upon hearing of his daughter's illness
 - (D) emphasize Brian's eagerness to begin the bone marrow aspiration immediately
 - (E) display Brian's enthusiasm for Dr. Farquad's recommended course of action
7. The narrator's response to Kate's diagnosis could best be described as
- (A) anger
 - (B) disbelief
 - (C) acceptance
 - (D) self-doubt
 - (E) relief

Answers

Directions: Check your responses with the answers and explanations below. Being able to identify and eliminate wrong answer choices is an important test-taking skill, so each answer explanation also includes a question about wrong answer choices.

1. (E)

In the first paragraph, Dr. Farquad explains the results of Kate’s blood tests. The last sentence of the paragraph provides the answer: “But Kate’s also presenting with twelve percent promyelocytes, and five percent blasts, and that suggests a leukemic syndrome” (lines 6-7). Even though you may have no idea what promyelocytes and blasts are, you do know that they are connected to the diagnosis of leukemia.

The other four answer choices are also mentioned in the first paragraph. What makes these answers incorrect? _____

2. (E)

Dr. Farquad makes the comparison in direct response to Brian’s question, “What does that mean?” (line 10). She is using the comparison to give Kate’s parents a basic understanding of what happens to the blood cells of a person with leukemia.

What makes choice (C) incorrect? _____

3. (C)

When a vocabulary question uses a common word, the correct answer is usually a secondary definition. Remember that the definition you choose must make sense in the context of the sentence. Here, the narrator means that she would be willing to take Kate’s blood herself.

Which answer choices have definitions for *draw* that are not correct in this context?

4. (B)

Oftentimes, the answer to a question will lie just before or after the lines cited in the question. Here, the answer is given in the next sentence: “‘There’s a treatment,’ I repeat” (line 27). The mother chooses to focus on the possibility of treatment, not on the possibility of Kate’s death.

Which wrong answer choice is a misused detail from another part of the passage? _____

5. (C)

Check the lines just before the referenced sections. Dr Farquad has just explained that “myeloid leukemias carry a survival prognosis of nine months to three years” (lines 28-29). This memory of imagining Kate’s wedding dress is a stark contrast to the news that Kate may only have a few months to live.

Some wrong answer choices are opposite the correct answer. Which wrong answer choice here is opposite? _____

6. (A)

As with many questions, the answer is indicated in the lines that come just before the referenced description. In lines 34-37, Dr. Farquad outlines the first steps of Kate’s treatment and encourages the parents that “kids beat the odds.” Brian is preparing himself to face Kate’s situation in a positive way.

Some wrong answer choices are beyond the scope of the passage, presenting an inference that is not connected to the events or topic of the passage. Which answer choice is beyond the scope of the passage? _____

7. (B)

This question does not provide a line reference, but from the order of the questions you can guess that the information you need is toward the end of the passage. In lines 42-44, the narrator tries to tell herself that Kate’s diagnosis is a mistake.

Which wrong answer choices are opposite the correct answer? _____

Think Like the Test Maker

One of the best ways to prepare for the SAT is to practice thinking like the people who write the exam. Now that you've answered some test-like questions about a passage from *My Sister's Keeper*, try your hand at actually writing a few questions and answer choices.

Read the passage below, and then write three questions—one that deals with vocabulary, one that asks about a straightforward detail in the passage, and one that requires an inference. Write the one correct answer choice and four wrong answer choices for each of your questions. Then trade with a partner to see how well you can answer the questions from another "Test Maker."

The following is excerpted from a novel which focuses on the story of a family coming to terms with a child's serious illness. In this passage, the parents — Sara and Brian — are first told what their two-year-old daughter Kate's illness is.

line
(5) Thirty-six hours after Kate is officially diagnosed with APL, Brian and I are given an opportunity to ask questions. Kate messes with glitter glue with a child-life specialist while we meet with a team of doctors, nurses, and psychiatrists. The nurses, I have already learned, are the ones who give us the answers we're desperate for. Unlike the doctors, who fidget like they need to be somewhere else, the nurses patiently answer us as if we are the first set of parents to ever have this kind of meeting with them, instead of the thousandth. "The thing about leukemia," one nurse explains, "is that we haven't even inserted a needle for the first treatment when we're thinking three treatments down the line. This particular illness carries a pretty poor prognosis, so we need to be
(10) thinking ahead to what happens next. What makes APL a little trickier is that it's a chemoresistant disease."

"What's that?" Brian asks.

(15) "Normally, with myelogenous leukemias, as long as the organs hold up, you can potentially reinduce the patient into remission every time there's a relapse. You're exhausting their body, but you know it will respond to treatment over and over. However, with APL, once you've offered a given therapy, you usually can't rely upon it again. And to date, there's only so much we can do."

"Are you saying," Brian swallows. "Are you saying she's going to die?"

(20) "I'm saying there are no guarantees."

"So what do you do?"

(25) A different nurse answers. "Kate will start a week of chemotherapy, in the hopes that we can kill off the diseased cells and put her into remission. She'll most likely have nausea and vomiting, which we'll try to keep to a minimum with antiemetics. She'll lose her hair."

At this, a tiny cry escapes me. This is such a small thing, and yet it's the banner that will let others know what's wrong with Kate. Only six months ago, she had her first haircut; the gold ringlets curled like coins on the floor of the SuperCuts.

(30) “She may develop diarrhea. There’s a very good chance that, with her own immune system laid low, she will get an infection that will require hospitalization. Chemo may cause developmental delays, as well. She’ll have a course of consolidation chemotherapy about two weeks after that, and then a few courses of maintenance therapy. The exact number will depend on the results we get from periodic bone marrow aspirations.”

“Then what?” Brian asks.

(35) “Then we watch her,” Dr. Chance replies. “With APL, you’ll want to be vigilant for signs of relapse. She’ll have to come into the ER if she has any hemorrhaging, fever, cough, or infection. And as far as further treatment, she’ll have some options. The idea is to get Kate’s body producing healthy bone marrow. In the unlikely event that we achieve molecular remission with chemo, we can retrieve Kate’s own cells and reinstill them—an autologous harvest. If she relapses, we may try to transplant someone else’s marrow into Kate’s to produce blood cells. Does Kate have any siblings?”

“A brother,” I say. A thought dawns, a horrible one. “Could he have this, too?”

(40) “It’s very unlikely. But he may wind up being a match for an allogenic transplant. If not, we’ll put Kate on the national registry for MUD—a matched, unrelated donor. However, getting a transplant from a stranger who’s a match is much more dangerous than getting one from a relative—the risk of mortality greatly increases.”

(50) The information is endless, a series of darts thrown so fast I cannot feel them sting anymore. We are told: *Do not think; just give your child up to us, because otherwise she’s going to die.* For every answer they give us, we have another question.

Will her hair grow back?

Will she ever go to school?

Can she play with friends?

Did this happen because of where we live?

(55) *Did this happen because of who we are?*

“What will it be like,” I hear myself ask, “if she dies?”

(60) Dr. Chance looks at me. “It depends on what she succumbs to,” he explains. If it’s infection, she’ll be in respiratory distress and on a ventilator. If it’s hemorrhage, she’ll bleed out after losing consciousness. If it’s organ failure, the characteristics will vary depending on the system in distress. Often there’s a combination of all of these.”

“Will she know what’s happening,” I ask, when what I really mean is, *How will I survive this?*

(65) “Mrs. Fitzgerald,” he says, as if he has heard my unspoken question, “of the twenty children here today, ten will be dead in a few years. I don’t know which group Kate will be in.”

From *My Sister’s Keeper*, by Jodi Picoult, 2004

Kaplan SAT Score-Raising Book Club

My Sister's Keeper

Improving Paragraphs Activity (Teacher's Notes)

1. As a class, go over the tips for the Improving Paragraphs questions on the Writing section of the SAT.
2. Give students one minute to read the sample essay. Then discuss the four common errors and work through the first four Improving Sentences questions together, making sure that students understand each error. Remind students to return to the passage to understand the context of a sentence.
3. Hand out the second set of practice questions, and give students five minutes to independently work through the sentences.
4. Before handing out the answers and explanations, have students discuss their answers with a partner. Tell them to come to agreement about the best answer for each question.
5. Hand the answers and explanations out to the student pairs.
6. To give students additional practice with the types of errors they examined today, ask them to write a paragraph about their response to *My Sister's Keeper*. Tell them to include at least one error in each of the following categories: wordiness, transitions, modifiers, and organization. Then have students exchange paragraphs with a partner and correct each other's errors.

Kaplan SAT Score-Raising Book Club

My Sister's Keeper

Improving Paragraphs Activity

At the end of the multiple-choice Writing section of the SAT, you'll be asked to read a draft of a short essay—usually three to five paragraphs—and then answer six Improving Paragraphs questions that address some of the ways to improve the essay.

Here are some general tips for approaching the Improving Paragraphs essay:

- Read the essay quickly, keeping your mind on the main idea and noting the general topic of each paragraph.
- Don't let yourself get caught up in the details of the essay. The questions will deal more with grammar, style, and organization than with critical reading skills.
- If you see an error, circle or underline it, but don't stop to think about it. The essay will contain some stylistic errors that do not come up in the questions.
- Context is important, so go back to the passage to answer each question.

Below is a short example of an Improving Paragraphs essay. Read through the essay, and then work through the example questions on the following pages.

(1) I recently read a book that motivated me to change something about my life. (2) That book is *My Sister's Keeper*, by Jodi Picoult. (3) The book by Picoult involves a lot of issues about family and health. (4) Throughout the book, you believe that Kate, the daughter who is suffering from severe leukemia, will die. (5) In the end her life is saved through an organ transplant.

(6) I had never really thought about being an organ donor before, but the issue came up again when I finally got my driver's license. (7) In my state, you can choose to be a donor right there on your license. (8) After thinking about it for awhile, I decided that it was something I wanted to do. (9) Usually I'm able to make decisions quickly. (10) If I'm ever in a horrible accident and there's no chance for me to live, I'd like some parts of me to go on living. (11) No longer useful to me, saving someone else's life could be the purpose of my heart or liver or kidney, just as it happened in the book.

Wordiness

The SAT values language that is concise and direct, so you can expect to see some Writing questions that ask you to improve a wordy sentence. On the Improving Paragraphs section, this often means determining the best way to combine two sentences.

Here are three guidelines for sentences that are wordy:

- When possible, eliminate any repetitive words or phrases that do not add meaning to the sentences.
- When possible, use the active voice instead of the passive voice.
- Do not eliminate information that is essential to the meaning of the sentence.

Keep these rules in mind as you answer the sample question below.

1. Which of the following is the best version of the underlined portion of sentence 2 and sentence 3 (reproduced below)?

That book is My Sister's Keeper, by Jodi Picoult. The book by Picoult involves a lot of issues about family and health.

- (A) It is a book that
- (B) This book, Jodi Picoult's *My Sister's Keeper*,
- (C) The book called *My Sister's Keeper* that I like that Jodi Picoult wrote
- (D) Jodi Picoult wrote the book *My Sister's Keeper*, and it
- (E) I liked *My Sister's Keeper*, which was written by Jodi Picoult, and it

Transitions

In addition to making sentences more concise, you also may need to select the correct transition. Consider the relationship between the ideas in the sentence or sentences. Are the ideas similar or contrasting? Is there a cause-and-effect relationship? To answer these questions, return to the passage and reread the sentence before the sentence listed in the question.

Try the sample transition question below.

2. Which of the following should be inserted at the beginning of sentence 5 (reproduced below)?

In the end her life is saved through an organ transplant.

- (A) Indeed,
- (B) As a result,
- (C) Although
- (D) However,
- (E) Likewise,

Modifiers

As a rule, descriptive words and phrases should appear in the sentence as close as possible to the thing or person they describe. Use this rule to answer the next question.

3. Of the following, which is the best version of the underlined portion of sentence 11 (reproduced below)?
- No longer useful to me, saving someone else's life could be the purpose of my heart or liver or kidney, just as it happened in the book.*
- (A) (As it is now)
 - (B) I would be able to save someone else's life with my heart or liver or kidney
 - (C) someone else's life could be saved by my heart or liver or kidney
 - (D) my heart or liver or kidney could be used to save someone else's life
 - (E) the purpose of saving someone else's life could be achieved by my heart or liver or kidney

Organization

At least one Improving Paragraphs question will ask you about an entire paragraph or the essay as a whole. You may be asked to select the best sentence to add to a paragraph, or you may need to choose an off-topic sentence to cut from the essay.

To answer organization questions, call on your critical reading skills. Identify the main idea of the essay and the topic of each paragraph. If a sentence is not related to the main idea or topic, then it should not be in the essay.

Try the following sample question:

4. Deleting which of the following sentences would improve the second paragraph?
- (A) Sentence 7
 - (B) Sentence 8
 - (C) Sentence 9
 - (D) Sentence 10
 - (E) Sentence 11

The next page provides a full-length Improving Paragraphs essay, along with six practice questions.

Directions: Some portions of the essay below need to be revised. Read the essay and determine the best answer for questions 5-10 that follow.

(1) Every so often, I'll read a book that affects me long after I've finished the final page. (2) Jodi Picoult's book *My Sister's Keeper* is one of those books. (3) I had to stay up until the early hours of the morning to finish it. (4) Before I reached the final pages, I had no idea how everything would end up in the book. (5) It wasn't at all clear to me what Anna would decide; perhaps that was because Anna didn't seem to be entirely sure, either. (6) More importantly, I didn't know what I wanted to happen. (7) Usually I have a very clear picture of what the "perfect ending" of a book should be, I had no such picture with *My Sister's Keeper*.

(8) On one hand, I sympathized with Anna. (9) Of course she longed to have her own, normal life, to be valued by her parents for more than the genetic traits that made her a match for her ailing sister. (10) An impossible weight for such a young person to bear, Anna struggled between wanting her own life and wanting to save her sister's life.

(11) Throughout her long illness, Kate seemed to have such a strong and caring spirit. (12) For me, the most touching passages were the mother's early chapters that described the heartache of learning that Kate had a disease that would likely be fatal.

(13) The ending surprised me, as I'm sure it did most readers. (14) I can't call it a perfect ending, especially since it involved so much loss. (15) Sometimes I enjoy a good cry at the end of a dramatic story. (16) Though it has been months since I finished the book, I continue to revisit the ethical and moral questions raised by Kate and Anna's situation. (17) I have not resolved these questions that were brought up for myself, and I'm eager to discuss the issues with friends who have also read the book. (18) There may be no perfect answers to the questions raised by the novel, but I for one am glad to be asking them of myself.

5. What is the best way to combine sentences 3 and 4 (reproduced below)?

I had to stay up until the early hours of the morning to finish it. Before I reached the final pages, I had no idea how everything would end up in the book.

(A) Until the final pages of the book, which I had to stay up for the early hours of the morning to finish, the ending of the book was not at all apparent to me.

(B) I had no idea how it would be finished in the final pages, having to stay up until the early hours of the morning for the book to be ended.

(C) I had to stay up until the early hours of the morning to finish the book, having no idea how everything would end until I reached the final pages.

(D) Staying up until the early hours, I had no idea how everything would be ended.

(E) It was not until I had to stay up until the early hours of the morning to reach the final pages of the book and finish it that I had any idea of how everything ended in the book.

6. Which is the best version of the underlined segment of sentence 7 (reproduced below)?

Usually I have a very clear picture of what the “perfect ending” of a book should be, I had no such picture with My Sister’s Keeper.

- (A) (As it is now)
- (B) should be, but I had
- (C) should be, however there was
- (D) should be because I had
- (E) should be, even though I had

7. What is the best version of sentence 10 (reproduced below)?

An impossible weight for such a young person to bear, Anna struggled between wanting her own life and wanting to save her sister’s life.

- (A) (As it is now)
- (B) Anna’s struggle between wanting her own life and wanting to save her sister’s life seemed an impossible weight for such a young person to bear.
- (C) Between wanting her own life and wanting to save her sister’s life, an impossible weight struggled for Anna, such a young person to bear.
- (D) Struggling between wanting her own life as a young person and wanting to save her sister’s life, a seemingly impossible weight for Anna to bear.
- (E) Wanting her own life and wanting to save her sister’s life, Anna struggled between an impossible weight for such a young person to bear.

8. Of the following, which is the best sentence to insert at the beginning of the third paragraph?

- (A) On the other hand, I wanted so much for Kate to live.
- (B) Of course, Kate is also an important character.
- (C) However, I also felt a great deal of sympathy for the parents.
- (D) In addition, Kate had many unfair burdens to bear.
- (E) While Anna had problems, Kate’s troubles were much more serious.

9. Which revision most appropriately shortens sentence 17 (reproduced below)?

I have not resolved these questions that were brought up for myself, and I am eager to discuss the issues with friends who have also read the book.

- (A) Delete “that were brought up”.
- (B) Delete “for myself”.
- (C) Delete “who have also read the book”.
- (D) Delete “am eager to”.
- (E) Replace “the issues” with “it”.

10. Removing which of the following sentences would improve the final paragraph?

- (A) Sentence 13
- (B) Sentence 15
- (C) Sentence 16
- (D) Sentence 17
- (E) Sentence 18

Answers

1. (B)

The most concise version is (B). Though it is shorter, (A) is not correct because it omits important information—the title and author of the book.

2. (D)

The preceding sentence states that it is expected that Kate will die. Sentence 5 contrasts this information—she actually lives. (D) is the only contrasting transition that creates a complete sentence. (C) forms a sentence fragment.

3. (D)

The introductory descriptive phrase *No longer useful to me* describes the writer's *heart or liver or kidney*, so (D) is the only word order that makes sense.

4. (C)

The main idea of this paragraph is the writer's decision to become an organ donor. The speed with which she typically makes decisions, the topic of sentence 9, is not related to this main idea.

5. (C)

Only (C) eliminates some of the repetitiveness of the original without introducing a new error. (A) uses an incorrect preposition. (B) unnecessarily uses the passive voice. (D) eliminates the cause-and-effect relationship that is suggested by the original sentence. (E) continues the style error of wordiness.

6. (B)

The two ideas in the sentence contrast each other, so the contrasting conjunction *but* is correct. (C) also uses a contrasting transition, but this choice creates a run-on sentence.

7. (B)

Only (B) correctly orders the words. (A) makes it sound as though Anna is the *impossible weight*. (C) incorrectly makes *an impossible weight* the subject of the sentence. (D) is a fragment. (E) incorrectly uses *between*.

8. (A)

The essay as a whole is about the writer's response to *My Sister's Keeper*. The second paragraph begins *On one hand* and explains why the writer sympathized with Anna. The third paragraph explains why the writer sympathized with Kate, so (A) is the best fit.

9. (A)

The phrase *that were brought up* is an unnecessary repetition of *raised by Kate and Anna's situation* from the previous sentence. (B), (C), and (D) would all remove information important to the meaning of the sentence. (E) would create a pronoun error.

10. (B)

The final paragraph focuses on the writer's lingering response to the end of the book. Sentence 15, a general statement about the writer's response to sad stories, pulls the reader away from this focus.