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How We Talk about Testing and College Writing: the Revealing Rhetoric of SAT Prep Books

For years, first-year writing instructors have lamented the deep impact that standardized test writing has had on student writing practices, from students' overreliance on the formulaic five-paragraph theme to their inability to conceive of writing as a process and not a finished product. Much like the No Child Left Behind Act augmented these problematic practices by increasing the prevalence of testing, today, we face another challenge: essays on college entrance exams. These include the writing section in the SAT (SAT-W), which asks students to write an effective and well-polished essay that develops and supports a point of view on the topic provided in twenty-five minutes. This essay exam is a particularly important piece of standardized testing for us to study because of the SAT's universality and the unique liminal position that it occupies because it is usually taken between high school and college, claiming to measure a student's ability to flourish and succeed in college based on a demonstration of skills learned in high school. The SAT-W essay should thus be of interest to us as first-year writing instructors because of the claims it makes about measuring college writing ability.

We can see these claims in the many discourses surrounding the SAT Writing section. Some of these strains of discourse have been heavily studied in our field, such as the vibrant discussion in the journal *WPA: Writing Program Administration* and on the WPA listserv about the practice of placing students in or awarding credit for first-year writing classes based on students' SAT-W score. This practice, which is done frequently despite articulate criticism from prominent WPAs, sends a message to students that this exam truly does measure one's ability to write in college, or, worse yet, that writing a single essay and answering a set of multiple choice questions on writing is as helpful to students as completing a first-year writing course. Others have studied and challenged the discourse of College Board, the creators of the SAT, asserts that this exam is a good measure of college writing ability (Mattern, Camera and Kobrin 8). Emily Isaacs and Sean A. Molloy challenged the idea that the SAT-W measures college writing ability by proving that a student's high school GPA was a better predictor of his performance in first-year writing than his SAT-W essay score. Les Perelman also challenged this claim; he found that this exam essay had the highest correlation between number of words and score that he'd ever come across, leading him to conclude that all the exam truly measures is how quickly a student can write (Wertheheimer). These scholars' careful study of the discourse surrounding the SAT-W essay points to several problematic practices that students carry from the test into the first-year writing classroom, most of which revolve around writing a formulaic essay in a single sitting without carefully considering one's audience or rhetorical situation. By studying the discourses

surrounding the SAT-W essay, we can better understand how to address these negative writing practices.

One rich source of discourse on the SAT-W essay that many overlook is the SAT preparation book. The primary aim of these books is to present students with specific writing practices that the authors claim will earn students a higher score on the exam, but in doing so, they also make many claims about what college writing is. Over half of college students report having used SAT prep books to help them prepare for the exam, making these books an important source of information about writing for many of our first-year writing students and perhaps one of the first sources of information about what college writing looks like (Buchmann, Condrón and Roscigno). By closely examining these books, we can get a better sense of the ideas about college writing and appropriate writing practices that students are carrying into our first-year writing classrooms.

In formulating my study of the discourse of SAT prep books, I decided to look at the most recent test preparation books available from the major publishers of this genre, including McGraw-Hill, College Board, CliffsNotes, Princeton Review, and Kaplan, since the ideas of these major publishers were likely to reach the most students. I looked at books that focused solely on the SAT Writing Section as well as books devoted to the entire SAT, analyzing instruction geared toward the essay, specifically. Within these books, I found four particularly important trends in their discussion of the SAT-W essay which served to shape students' writing practice and their conception of college writing: claims that the SAT essay measured college writing ability; descriptions of the audience or graders for the essay; strategies for managing the time given to write the essay; and a formulaic essay format to follow. Though these books frequently claim that they make students better writers, they are only designed to make students standardized test essay writers by providing them with the tools to quickly write a lengthy and coherent essay that proves competence to the SAT graders. By examining the books' discussion of these four topics in particular, we can begin to see that the SAT-W essay is particularly damaging not only because of the types of writing it produces and the writing habits it encourages, but because it also labels this as "college writing."

SAT-W Essay as a Measure of College Writing

I'll begin with the claims these books make about the SAT's ability to measure college writing ability for two reasons. First, every test prep book studied began its discussion of the SAT-W essay with a brief overview of the essay, which often includes an explanation of the essay's aims to measure college writing ability, making this a logical starting point. Second, it is important to understand how test prep books tie the SAT-W essay to college writing in order fully understand the unique threat these discourses pose to student writing practices. In this section, I draw attention to the distinct danger that the SAT-W poses for our first-year writing students because it presents them with a distorted view of what college writing is. If our students believe these books' claims that this essay is indeed an example of college writing, they are more likely to continue the negative writing habits encouraged by these books, which I will discuss in the following sections, into our first-year writing classes.

So what exactly do these books suggest about college writing? The most common claim the books make is that the essay measures college writing ability. College Board's guide states it most explicitly, beginning their chapter on the SAT-W essay by telling readers, "[i]n the essay component of the writing section, the student-written essay assesses your ability to develop and express ideas effectively. It evaluates your ability to do the kind of writing required in college" (99). This idea that a single essay has the capacity to measure writing ability reflects what

George Hillocks in *The Testing Trap* calls our “culture of testing,” which leads us to accept the idea “that tests indicate achievement, intelligence, or aptitude” (14). This assumption that a test does indeed have the capability to measure students’ writing ability goes unchecked, for many of our students who have passed through grade school in an era of heavy state-mandated testing are now proceeding on to a college entrance exam that promises to measure their readiness for college writing.

But, how exactly do these books support the claim that the SAT-W essay serves as a measure of college writing ability? McGraw-Hill’s *Conquering SAT Writing* tells students outright that “most colleges look carefully at your SAT writing score as an indication of how well prepared you are to do college-level writing,” justifying this claim by explaining that “[i]n college, as on the SAT, you will be evaluated in good measure on your ability to write timed expository essays” (7). Though certainly students will take essay exams in college, there are several key differences between those exams and the SAT-W essay. As Les Perelman explained in an interview with NPR, in college, students write exams on material that they’ve studied; the SAT and similar standardized tests are “the only time in a person’s life when they have to write quickly on demand on something they’ve never thought about” (Wertheimer). But, by labeling this essay as an example of “college writing,” we teach students that they can indeed write essays in college on topics they’ve hardly considered, instead of encouraging the deeper thinking and planning that we’d like to see go into their writing in and beyond our first-year writing classes.

While teaching writing for standardized tests is a problem that existed in high schools for decades now – and a problem that should not be ignored by first-year writing instructors – training students to write for the SAT-W essay presents a unique threat to how we teach writing because of the test’s claim that it measures one’s ability to write in college, specifically. It is here in these test prep books that we see this implicit threat of the SAT writing section made explicit: students may mistake this short, one-shot, argumentative essay as the sole genre they will be expected to write in college, and, as Perelman and Hillocks argue in their assessments of essay exams, this form of writing doesn’t match up with our expectations of college writing at all. Even if McGraw-Hill’s assertion that this timed expository essay genre is a common task in college is true, college students are not given a final course grade for the entire semester’s worth of work based on a single 25-minute essay. As Bronwyn T. Williams astutely puts it, “[u]sing a 25-minute writing sample to determine a student’s writing ability ... in the university is like using a person’s ability to back a car down a driveway to determine whether the driver can make it through rush-hour traffic” (154). Therefore, by including such an essay on a “college entrance exam,” we implicitly tell students that it is indeed a good measure of writing ability. The test prep books merely make it easier to see this link by making this claim outright.

And, the suggestion that the SAT-W essay does measure college writing ability is only confirmed for students when universities use SAT scores to place students into or even award them credit for first-year writing classes. Several guides, including McGraw-Hill’s, expose this practice to students, explaining that colleges may “also use [the essay] to place you in an appropriate English class once you’ve been admitted” (7). Though unsettling, it’s no surprise that these books inform students that they could be granted credit for composition classes based on their scores on the SAT-W because doing so incentivizes “gaming” the test, encouraging students seek information from test prep classes, tutors, and books on how to fare successfully on the SAT. Instead of pushing themselves to become better writers, an arduous process, students would rather quickly learn how to succeed on the SAT and therefore earn course credit, saving them time and tuition money but robbing them of the opportunity to learn valuable skills in a first-year writing class.

College Board has addressed claims that the essay section can be gamed with a study they authored which asserts to prove that students who attempt to “game” the SAT-W essay actually become better writers, though this finding is questionable given that College Board determined student writing ability through additional timed essay exams (Mattern, Camera and Kobrin). What we see continually in these books is an attempt to teach students to write in order to succeed on this essay, not to become better writers. A prime example of this can be found in CliffsNotes’ guide to the SAT in a section describing an appropriate writing style for the SAT essay:

Keep your writing concise and to the point. In describing a rainstorm, William Faulkner would spend pages and pages providing dozens of details. Ernest Hemingway, on the other hand, just wrote “it rained.” Both are legitimate styles of writing, but on the SAT, it is important to find a middle ground and provide a few supporting details or examples. (121)

If we’re pushing our students to be neither Faulkner nor Hemingway, we aren’t pushing them to be good writers, just good SAT writers. Despite claiming that the SAT writing section will measure one’s ability to write in college, a claim damaging to our students’ conception of college writing as something that utilizes these standardized test writing practices, the rhetoric of these SAT prep books continually demonstrates that all the SAT Writing Section only truly tests is the ability to write an SAT-W essay.

The Audience for the SAT-W Essay: the Graders

A second, closely related theme that appeared in every SAT prep book I studied was a discussion of the audience for the essay, or, more accurately, the graders. College Board tells students that “SAT readers, who are experienced high school teachers and college professors, receive extensive training and practice in holistic scoring” (104). Every book I studied explained at the very least these basics about the graders, and many went into more detail about the practice of holistically scoring the essays, describing the training process and assuring students that if the two graders give the essay drastically different scores, it will be re-scored by another grader.

We might be tempted to see a glimmer of hope in the test prep books’ discussion of audience. CliffsNotes orders students outright, “Know your audience!” (115). And, McGraw-Hill tells students that “to write well you must know your reader” (11). Yet these books, then, immediately demonstrate the impossibility of knowing one’s audience for the SAT essay. Students are writing to two anonymous readers, whom they will never interact with nor receive feedback from, and these two audience members are reading the essay only to measure the student’s writing ability. This demonstrates what Chris Anson calls the problematic “closed system” of standardized test writing. Anson contends that unlike the typical open systems of writing that are “situated in social practice and therefore context-dependent,” standardized test writing exists in a closed system that encourages students to develop “a narrowly defined set of skills relevant to a specific, artificial genre” (116, 118). For the SAT-W essay, students cannot actually know their audience or situate what they are writing within a context, a pivotal feature of college writing ability that this essay claims to measure. Williams accurately sums up this predicament, commenting that these forms of standardized test writing “disconnect literacy education from human concerns” (154).

What test prep books mean when they tell students to know their audience is to know how that audience will evaluate their writing ability. An important aspect of this, at least for these books, is the amount of time graders will spend looking at student writing. The Princeton Review puts it most colloquially:

Guess how much time is spent reading each essay before assigning it a grade. Ten minutes? Nope. Five minutes? Not quite. One to two minutes. And each reader is allowed to read your essay only once. In that amount of time, there's no way the reader can absorb every little detail about your essay. (184)

Like discussions of holistic grading (which often focus on how graders do not “take off points” for language errors), the time graders spend reading essays is meant to calm student apprehensions about being evaluated on an essay created in only 25 minutes. But, what happens when this type of writing becomes the norm for students, as they are increasingly taught in K-12 to write primarily for standardized tests? And, what happens when these books then encourage students to adopt similar practices for a test that aims to measure college readiness?

I fear that we may be encouraging students to view all writing as existing within this closed system, aimed not at connecting with a human audience but with proving competence to graders, who quickly skim their essays only to evaluate their writing ability. Certainly the research points to this being the case. Addison and McGee's 2010 report in *College Composition and Communication* concludes that high school students are not taught to write for specific purposes and audiences – in other words, for real rhetorical situations they might encounter outside of the classroom – and are instead bound by specific, formulaic patterns created for a few select genres. Applebee and Langer's 2011 report in *English Journal* reached similar conclusions and blamed standardized testing as a reason for this deficiency in students' ability to do any writing outside of writing to prove competence. This is not an unreasonable conclusion; Nancy Sommers' 2005 report found that students had the most success with their writing when they received feedback from interested readers, a scenario that Williams calls “the antithesis of standardized testing” (156). At the very least, writing to anonymous graders who will give them no feedback and spend only a minute looking over their work is certainly not what we want incoming freshmen to imagine as fitting the definition of “college writing.”

The test prep books provided different ideas about what exactly graders look for in the essay in the one to two minutes they spend grading. Kaplan said that graders looked for relevance, insight, persuasiveness, consistence in viewpoint, and whether one made connections beyond one's personal experience, and later devoted an entire page to discussing the merits of varying sentence structure. McGraw-Hill came up with “five basic elements that all good humanities professors expect of good writing,” a list of admirable but somewhat arbitrary qualities: “an interesting, relevant, and consistent point of view; good reasoning; solid support; logical organization; and effective use of language” (11). College Board also devotes a significant chunk of their essay chapter to discussing grading practices, most of which is spent assuring students that graders go through a rigorous training process. These varying claims about what graders look for and the rigor of their training process again casts doubt on the claim that the SAT-W essay is a good measure of college writing ability. Shouldn't English teachers and professors be able to identify “good college writing” without College Board teaching them how to spot it based on specific criteria? This again points to the closed system of the SAT Writing Section and affirms that this test does not measure college writing ability, but SAT-W essay writing ability. Instead of writing in order to reach a knowable human audience, students bring this practice of writing within a closed system to an anonymous audience for the purpose of proving competence into our first-year writing classes.

Strategies for Managing Time on the SAT-W Essay Section

From these discussions of the purpose and audience of the SAT-W essay, which make false claims about the exam measuring college writing ability and training students to write for

an unknowable audience reading only to measure their competence, these test prep books move into a discussion of how to practically approach the essay portion of the SAT Writing Section. I'll divide this discussion of approach into two basic sections: this first section will address the books' instruction on how students should divide up their short twenty-five minutes into discrete steps that somewhat resemble the writing process, and the second section will look at specific elements that these books encourage students to include in their essays. Though it would be an overstatement to suggest that all students take the directives from these books and use them in all writing practices in the future, it is important to remember the increased risk for them doing so in our first-year writing classes given that these books have already labeled this essay as an example of college writing. These habits are also particularly damaging for students given that many of these practices have been continually emphasized in their K-12 writing classrooms, which face increasing pressure to prepare students to write for standardized test essays.

All of the test prep books studied tell students to break up their time to fit three basic phases: prewriting, writing, and editing, generally allowing about fifteen minutes for writing and about five minutes each for prewriting and editing. CliffsNotes puts it most succinctly, telling students, "[u]se your time wisely. Take 5 or 6 minutes to prewrite and organize your thoughts. Take 16 to 18 minutes to write your essay and about 3 or 4 minutes to proofread your essay" (117). Much like their discussions of audience, these sections seem somewhat promising given that there is some semblance of a writing process here, an idea emphasized in many first-year writing classrooms. Yet, as we look closer at the exact practices the books advocate, we see problems with the way these books present the idea of the writing process.

We will begin with their instruction on how to approach prewriting. There are some glimmers of good intentions here; for instance, CliffsNotes tells students that "[m]ost experienced writers know that effective writing requires an organization and planning process" and provides students with a variety of tactics for prewriting including brainstorming, clustering, or outlining (118). However, most test prep books advocate using an outline that the book provides, urging students to begin filling out that outline by first choosing a side. Kaplan walks students through their proposed "planning" stage by providing a hypothetical essay prompt about personal responsibility, urging students to first pick a side, and telling students, "[o]nce you have picked your stance, you must choose examples that support your argument" (124). This approach to writing the essay goes directly against the idea of inquiry emphasized in first-year writing classes; instead of considering all the evidence and formulating an argument based on it, students are urged to pick a stance and then find examples to support it. Time remains an issue here and is perhaps a major factor in these books pushing students to approach the essay this way. Five minutes is not enough time for students to do the kind of careful invention necessary for an argument. In "National and State Writing Tests: The Writing Process Betrayed," Edgar Schuster argues that students are "doomed to superficiality" when "we give [them] topics like [personal responsibility] with a limited time to complete the assignment" (377). Regardless of the cause, the type of planning advocated by these books isn't true invention or even prewriting, simply assembling ideas.

The shortcuts advocated by these books to help students better "assemble" their ideas are also problematic. McGraw-Hill encourages to "prepare" for the test by completing "source summaries" which should "consolidate key lessons from stud[ies] of a book, person, or event" by summarizing "their major themes and connect[ing] each theme to a thesis and a set of details" (18). McGraw-Hill provides pages of "examples" of source summaries, mostly from literary works like *Jane Eyre*, that seem to serve more as banks of information for students to memorize and draw from rather than guides for how to write their own source summaries. Prewriting for

McGraw-Hill students, then, means only choosing a stance, recalling these premade examples, and finding a way to shoehorn them into their essay. Again, this practice is the antithesis of the thoughtful prewriting and planning we'd like to see from students in our first-year writing classes. There is no time for students to carefully consider their argument, their examples, and how to best develop and present them in this model of "prewriting"; there is only time to write an approved outline with canned examples.

The next step that the books advocate is more obvious and straight-forward: writing the actual essay. Kaplan tells students that this step "should take about 15 minutes," because "[t]hat's plenty of time to write three to five solid paragraphs if you work from a written plan" (126). Though many would disagree with this assertion, this is simply all the time students are given to write their essay. Schuster argues that out of the six steps in the writing process that he identifies – planning, conferencing, drafting, revising, editing, proofreading and publishing – this drafting step is the only one that is truly developed by standardized test exams. College Board even recognizes this, telling students that graders are urged to read the SAT-W essay "as first drafts [written] under timed conditions" (104). The problem with this, as Schuster argues, is that we cannot call an exam a measure of writing ability when it only tests students' ability to successfully complete one part of the writing process, drafting, particularly given that "if we practice and solicit feedback, we become better writers" but it's not clear if "we also become better drafters" (378).

The final step, proofreading, is perhaps the most damaging to our students' conception of the writing process. All books urge students to reserve a few minutes at the end of their testing time to go back over their work, mostly to look for local language issues. McGraw-Hill urges students to "[t]hink of [their] nagging English teacher who made [them] do rewrites" and "go through the essay look[ing] for writing errors, skipped words, and lost commas" (111). The most glaring issue here is equating "rewriting" an essay with looking for language errors. First-year writing instructors already face a challenge in encouraging students to truly consider and revise their work; most students choose only to proofread drafts and make superficial changes. Certainly we'd want students to actually revise this rough, first draft instead of simply combing it for errors, but, as Schuster points out, a twenty-five minute essay test only allows time for "proofreading, not re-seeing" (377). In addition to time constraints, there are other practical issues with revising the SAT-W essay, like how to revise a handwritten piece of writing when one is only given the front and back of one lined page to write on. Schuster raises another important point: "Do you care enough to want to revise?" (377). If a student doesn't believe in what the student is writing, the student is not likely to be interested in interrogating and reconfiguring her ideas, particularly on such a high-stakes exam that could determine college acceptance and course placement.

The Current-Traditional Approach to Writing an Essay

Unsurprisingly, perhaps the biggest commonality in these books are the instructions on how to write an essay according to an approved formula. Every publisher pushes their own specific formula and approach – that is, except for College Board, which asserts "there is no formula for writing an effective essay" (103). College Board also tells students that they are welcome to choose their own writing style and "can write an essay that is narrative, expository, persuasive or argumentative" (103). This is a particularly surprising statement given that every other test prep book asserts that the SAT-W essay must be written in a persuasive or argumentative style.

This contradiction between College Board and the other publishers point to the problematic nature of writing to prove competence rather than writing for a real rhetorical situation. As the creator of the essay, College Board builds its test prep book and its instruction on how to write an effective essay from the ideological basis of the exam, whereas every other test prep book builds their strategies from what has worked – in other words, what has gotten students high scores with graders. So, while College Board suggests that narrative or exposition could be appropriate genres for the essay, other publishers have found that successful SAT-W essays are usually argumentative or persuasive, thus, tells students that this is the only way to write an essay. In addition, each chapter concludes with a collection of sample essays meant to serve as “proof” that the publisher’s suggested approach does indeed work to earn students a higher grade. These books lack rhetorical awareness and focus, instead, on reverse engineering the perfect SAT-W essay based on successful essays, a clear effect of the closed system of standardized testing.

This approach is evident in the language the books use; at one point, Kaplan tells students that the “essay should be at least long enough to put you in the running for a good score” (120). Instead of providing students with a discussion about how to compose an essay that is an appropriate length for them to achieve their writing goals, a skill that would develop some rhetorical awareness and be applicable to other writing situations, these books focus solely on giving students the tools to get a higher score on this specific exam. And, length is a common trend in the books’ discussion of the qualities of an effective essay – Kaplan even lists it as one of the three most important features of a successful essay -- along with content and neatness (119). This focus on length is consistent with Les Perelman’s findings on the correlation between word count and score on the SAT-W essay.

Beyond length and genre, most of the features that these books recommend students adopt closely resembles the ideas of current-traditional rhetoric. For every publisher except for College Board, the appropriate format is the five-paragraph essay, complete with an introduction, three body paragraphs (though two is acceptable if you are running short on time), and a conclusion. Within these five paragraphs, students are told by these test prep books to reproduce the standard elements of the current-traditional essay often emphasized in high school: a thesis sentence at the end of the first paragraph that takes a pro or con stance on the prompt, topic sentences, supportive chunks of evidence, and transitions. The way that the books present these ideas again points to a lack of rhetorical awareness. CliffsNotes tells students, “The five-paragraph essay model is the suggested example to follow when writing your essay,” assuming first that students are familiar with this approach and second that it needs no justification – it’s the clear choice (121). The Princeton Review offers an equally compelling explanation of why a conclusion is necessary: “Your essay must have a conclusion. All you need to do in the conclusion is restate your thesis” (187). There are no appeals to why restating a thesis might a rhetorically effective move, only a “because I said so” type of assertion. We can clearly see a link between this approach to teach the “correct” way to write a successful essay and Fanetti’s findings that first-year writing instructors “routinely describe having to spend the first half of their semester *unteaching* the skills and trains students acquired during high school, encouraging initiative, autonomy, and invention, and convincing students that it is OK to stray from the pack” (82). When these tenants of current-traditional rhetoric are presented as the unquestionably “correct” approach: the SAT-W essay, students are likely to carry their approach for this essay, claiming to measure college writing into their future college writing classrooms.

While each book provides its own short list of four or five items that are crucial to include in the SAT-W essay, there are common trends among them: including thesis statements,

specific evidence, transitions, and sentence variation. The emphasis on transition words was particularly surprising to me, with Kaplan, CliffsNotes, and the Princeton Review all devoting significant portions of their chapters to covering lists of acceptable and impressive transition words. Though certainly none of these elements lead to “bad” writing, the reason for including them is not improving the rhetorical effectiveness of the essay. As Williams astutely explains, “[w]hen work is written only to be assessed rather than to communicate ideas, the activity becomes more about ensuring that certain qualities are present (e.g., the use of examples, the complexity of sentences, transition devices, vocabulary) regardless of the overall effect of the piece of writing” (154). Teaching students to write an effective SAT-W essay in 20 pages of instruction necessitates using these shortcuts, but the result is nothing that resembles what we would call “college writing.”

Conclusion

Studying the discourses found in these test prep books about the SAT Writing Section’s essay proved to be an enlightening experience. While I expected to find some of the problematic elements of current-traditional rhetoric present in these books’ approach to writing, the most effective SAT-W essay, I also found that these books presented far more troubling ideologies about writing. In these four major trends of the formulaic approach to the essay, tips on how to manage time during the test, an emphasis on knowing the graders for the exam, and assertions about what the test measures, I found a lack of rhetorical awareness, a weak recasting of the writing process, confusion about what it means to know one’s audience, and, perhaps most troubling of all, a misunderstanding of what college writing *is*.

But, merely lamenting the growing influence of standardized testing and the types of writing practices it encourages for our students is not a productive response. Worse yet, warring against the five-paragraph theme and telling students to abandon all of their prior writing practices can often cause further confusion for our students. Instead, I urge first-year writing instructors to consider how they might address these negative writing practices and views of writing within their classrooms in a way that hones skills of analysis and critical thinking. In my own teaching, I take up calls by Chris Anson and Miles McCrimmon to have students re-examine the rhetorical context of their previous experiences writing for standardized tests. Through an in-class writing assignment and accompanying discussion, I direct students to note the difference between the closed system of standardized test writing and open systems of writing we’ll be using in this first-year writing class: writing where students will know their audience, have a specific purpose beyond “proving competence,” and that will be shaped in order to fit that purpose and audience. These discussions can even lead into productive conversations about the systems of power at work in our education system, enabling me to “expose students to the rhetoric of standardized testing as an object lesson in the state’s ongoing interest in controlling and regulating individual expression, even as we help them master the rules of the game” (McCrimmon 258). While we continue to rally against standardized test essays, we must push for inventive ways to address the negative practices that they encourage in our first-year writing students, continuing our *unteaching* whilst recasting writing as situated within a given context as well as writing for a specific audience.

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