

# SAT<sup>®</sup> with Essay

As you read the passage below, consider how Eric Klinenberg 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 Eric Klinenberg, “Viewpoint: Air-Conditioning Will Be the End of Us.” ©2013 by Time Inc. Originally published July 17, 2013.

- 1 Earlier this week, as the temperature in New York City hit the upper 90s and the heat index topped 100, my utility provider issued a heat alert and advised customers to use air-conditioning “wisely.” It was a nice, polite gesture but also an utterly ineffectual one. After all, despite our other green tendencies, most Americans still believe that the wise way to use air conditioners is to crank them up, cooling down every room in the house—or even better, relax in the cold blasts of a movie theater or shopping mall, where someone else pays the bills. Today Americans use twice as much energy for air-conditioning as we did 20 years ago, and more than the rest of the world’s nations combined. As a climate-change adaptation strategy, this is as dumb as it gets.
- 2 I’m hardly against air-conditioning. During heat waves, artificial cooling can save the lives of old, sick and frail people, and epidemiologists have shown that owning an AC unit is one of the strongest predictors of who survives during dangerously hot summer weeks. I’ve long advocated public-health programs that help truly vulnerable people, whether isolated elders in broiling urban apartments or farm workers who toil in sunbaked fields, by giving them easy access to air-conditioning.

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- 3 I also recognize that air conditioners can enhance productivity in offices and make factories safer for workers who might otherwise wilt in searing temperatures. Used conservatively—say, to reduce indoor temperatures to the mid-70s in rooms that, because of shortsighted design, cannot be cooled by cross-ventilation from fans and windows—air conditioners may well generate enough benefits to balance the indisputable, irreversible damage they generate. But in most situations, the case for air-conditioning is made of hot air.
- 4 What's indefensible is our habit of converting homes, offices and massive commercial outlets into igloos on summer days, regardless of how hot it is outdoors. Recently, New York City prohibited stores from pumping arctic air out onto the searing sidewalks in an attempt to lure customers while burning through fossil fuels in suicidal fashion. I can't help but wonder whether cities like New York will ever prohibit stores from cooling their facilities below, say, 70°F. No doubt a law like that would raise even more objections than Mayor Michael Bloomberg's attempt to ban big sodas, but it might well be necessary if we can't turn down the dial on our own.
- 5 I'm skeptical that American businesses and consumers will reduce their use of air-conditioning without new rules and regulations, especially now that natural gas has helped bring down energy bills and the short-term costs of cranking the AC are relatively low. Part of the problem is that in recent decades, the fastest-growing U.S. cities—places like Las Vegas, Phoenix and Austin—have effectively been built on air-conditioning. (This is also true in the Middle East and Asia, and as a result, global energy consumption is soaring precisely when it needs to be lowered.) Throughout the country, most designs for new office, commercial and residential property rely entirely on AC, rather than on time-honored cooling technologies such as shading from trees and cross-ventilation from windows and fans. As a result, there is now an expectation that indoor air will be frigid on even the steamiest days everywhere from the Deep South to the Great West. What's worse, this expectation is spreading to the nations where American culture carries influence; sales of air conditioners rose 20% in India and China last year.

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- 6 Trying to engineer hot weather out of existence rather than adjust our culture of consumption for the age of climate change is one of our biggest environmental blind spots. If you can't stand the heat, you should know that blasting the AC will ultimately make us all even hotter. Let's put our air conditioners on ice before it's too late.

Write an essay in which you explain how Eric Klinenberg builds an argument to persuade his audience that Americans need to greatly reduce their reliance on air-conditioning. In your essay, analyze how Klinenberg uses one or more of the features listed in the box above (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 Klinenberg's claims, but rather explain how Klinenberg builds an argument to persuade his audience.

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## BEGIN YOUR ESSAY HERE.

Although we're having an unseasonably cool May here in New England (and cool for New England is saying something!), in just a few weeks or months time the soundtrack to our lives will become the ambient hummmmmmm of the air conditioner. Who could want anything different, particularly in places like the Eastern United States where, as they say, it's not just the heat; it's the humidity! Well, Eric Klinenberg wants something different — he wants us "to put our air conditioners on ice before it's too late." Cute as the play on words is in this essay's final sentence, the memorable remark is meant as a warning against the dire consequences the world faces if it cannot quell its growing appetite for air conditioning. That combination of playfulness and gravity characterizes much of this essay, which tries to walk the line between warning and alarm. Klinenberg clearly wants us to change our ways and so he musters the evidence to support his claim argument, but he also carefully presents himself as a reasonable, understanding human who gets why we like air conditioning and realizes how large the challenge is. That is why he pleads his audience with reasonable steps on the way to getting rid of the AC.

Klinenberg starts with anecdotal evidence first. In the first paragraph, Klinenberg situates us in a precise locale — New York City, with a heat index of 100 — which lets the reader imagine being there, sweating, shuddering, huffing, surrounded by that special fermented odor New York achieves on a warm day. I am there, and it stinks! But he then asks us not to think about just how we feel. He asks us to think about what it means to bat baste the heat with the

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air conditioning, even if used "wisely." The reality, he points out, is that we are not at all wise in our energy use. We devote twice as much energy to air conditioning than we did 20 years ago. Resulting in domestic language, in order to leave no doubt as to how we should think about the boom in AC use, he makes it simple: "This is as dumb as it gets." So, by implication, is the population boom in cities like Las Vegas, Phoenix, and Austin, which he also lists in the essay as even deeper and more full-body commitments to AC. Worse yet, Klarenberg points out, the U.S. is not alone. He cites the growth of similarly air conditioning dependent cities in the Middle East and Africa, where, we learn air conditioning sales rose 20% in India and China.

Klarenberg is not afraid to be blunt — he calls us "dumb," full of "hot air," and bedeviled by "blind spots" — but he is a smart enough advocate to know that you can't browbeat people into doing something, even if it's best for them. That is why he's careful to ~~reiterate~~ "I'm hardly against air conditioning." He knows that the strongest arguments are those that recognize their limitations and qualify their remarks accordingly. So, he acknowledges that AC saves lives, increases productivity, and just feels good. He also knows that cheaper energy and increased reliance on AC in building design present serious barriers to cutting back on AC. By recognizing these problems, Klarenberg helps bring his readers closer to his position, because they can't simply dismiss him as a dogmatic and extreme environmentalist.

Klarenberg's deftest move is to present his readers with an option in between rewire their homes and businesses into

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freezers and going as natural, as our ancestors did. He would like us to get rid of air conditioners altogether, but he is wise enough to suggest that people could make a real change just by setting the AC to a higher temperature. It's a sound move, because it is half-gestures that will help, without hurting too much, and get people on the path to putting their air conditioners on ice. If I were his editor, I would have suggested he place that recommendation in the first paragraph rather than the third.

All in all, however, Klemberg builds a good argument here. Rather than opposing to extreme cooling, he reaches the reader through a combination of evidence, ~~with~~ sympathy, and common sense. He makes the stakes of our continued unwise use of AC clear, but he also tells his readers he understands, and gives them a first step to take, just turn it down to 70° and no less. Although he wants more, he is a good enough writer to know that making concessions can be pretty cool.