

POLS1101 AMERICAN GOVERNMENT

EXAM 1 STUDY GUIDE

Multiple Choice

The practice quizzes posted on the course web site are the best way to study for the multiple choice section of the exam. The multiple choice questions are drawn at random from a test bank provided by the publisher of the Essentials of American Government textbook. The questions that appear on the exam are from the same source as the practice quizzes.

Students are strongly encouraged to use the practice quizzes to study for the multiple choice section of the exam.

The multiple choice section has 30 questions in it. Each question is worth 2 points.

Short Answer Questions

I don't intend exams to be mysterious. I'm not out to trick anyone. I want to know how well you understand the information being presented in the course. Read what follows carefully and hopefully it will help. I have attempted to include some humor, but I am very bad at it so I'm sorry if what follows is dull.

General Information

An exam is not a text message, nor is it a discussion over a beer at the pub. I expect your answers to be in formal, grammatically correct English. No slang or trendy abbreviations as I am old and won't understand them and that will be bad for your grade. Professional abbreviations or technical acronyms such as NATO, WTO, NAFTA, and USAID are fine.

Your answers must be legible!!! When in doubt I will assume anything I can't read is the name of character from South Park. That may be nice comic relief for me, but it will be very bad for your grade.

I subject all answers to a "person on the street test". Namely, if I were to stop a person at random on the street and ask them the same question that I asked you, what would they say? This means that I expect you to use the vocabulary of the course in your answers. One of the best ways to demonstrate that you understand the material is a mastery of the technical vocabulary we use in political science. Using the terms incorrectly is also one of the best ways to demonstrate that you don't know the material.

Please be accurate in your examples, dates, historical references, etc. Nothing jumps out at a grader more than a basic factual error. These are red flags that the writer doesn't know the material.

I value parsimony. Remember, I have to grade these exams so don't think that you'll just include everything but the kitchen sink and that will do. In the context of the exam, you won't have time for this anyway. A well-reasoned argument with a selection of supporting facts that demonstrates you know what you're talking about will get a better score than a catalog of everything you've ever learned or found on the internet about something.

Short Answer Questions

Answers should be 1-3 paragraphs and should demonstrate the following:

- A clear knowledge of the basic information relevant to the answer (all of which comes straight from the book and from notes)
- A clear knowledge of how the subject matter in the question is relevant to the wider themes of the course

The short answer sections should be concise, clear, and simple. There is no need for complicated arguments, just provide enough to demonstrate that you know the basic information and that you can apply it to the course.

In general, the short answer questions have right and wrong answers. These are open only to limited interpretation.

You will be asked to answer five short answer questions from a list of between six and eight. Each answer will be graded on a ten point scale as follows:

A (10) – perfect, you have everything I was looking for, great minds think alike

A/B (9) – excellent, you have most of what I was looking for and clearly understood the relevant material

B (8) – solid, you generally know what you are talking about, but you left some important things out

C (7) – average, you can read the textbook and the outlines of the notes and summarize them

D (6) – poor, you apparently did not read the textbook or did not understand it

F (5 or less) – Failure! Your answer is basically wrong. Generally at least some points will be given if the answer seems to be a genuine effort at answering the question. Zero points may be given even when something is written.

Things to study for the SA section:

- What is politics? How does this relate to our understanding of American government?
- What was the economic and political impact of the Civil War on the future of US politics as we have discussed it?
- Why was there no civil war in 1832 when the Nullification Crisis took place?
- What is state nullification and why is the concept significant in American politics before the Civil War?
- In politics, why is it that we can't always get what we want? What does this mean for American politics?
- Explain what is meant by the phrase "the Founding Fathers were men of their age". Why is this important in understanding the Constitution?
- Why is James Madison often called the "Father of the Constitution"?
- What are political institutions and why are they important?
- Briefly describe the tension between representative government and political stability as the Founders saw it.
- Briefly summarize the Anti-Federalist arguments against the ratification of the Constitution.
- Why was Bill of Rights necessary? Be sure to explore practical as well as ideological reasons.
- Why was the decision by Washington to step down as President a significant moment in US history? What lesson does this provide for contemporary political leaders?
- Was secession by the Confederate states legal? Defend your answer using the material from the course. Briefly explain why Progressivism succeeded as a political program.
- Briefly explain why the institutions of the antebellum US failed to prevent the Civil War. What were the key issues, and why did they lead to violence?
- Explain the role of the Alien and Sedition Acts in increasing tensions between the state and federal governments.
- Given the power of historical forces and institutions, does it matter who is president at any given time? Defend your answer with examples from the course thus far.

Sample Answer:

Why did the Founders opt for state ratification conventions rather than using the established process of ratification under the Articles of Confederation?

"While the Founders were among the best educated men of their age, well versed in the political philosophy of the Enlightenment, they were also practical politicians. To have used the process for ratifying amendments under the Articles of Confederation would have required that all 13 colonies unanimously approve of the new Constitution. This was a practical impossibility, notably because Rhode Island opposed all reform that reduced the power of small states. In short, the Founders knew that unanimous ratification would have killed the Constitution and probably ended the United States as a nation.

While the process under the Articles was untenable, the Founders did believe that the people needed to ultimately approve of the significant change in government. The Founders knew that the state legislatures would be unlikely to support a Constitution that transferred power to the federal level. This made ratification by the state legislatures unlikely.

The solution used by the Founders, ratification by nine state ratifying conventions, elegantly solved both problems. The use of ratifying conventions bypassed the state legislatures, making ratification more likely. As this system bypassed the institutions of the Articles, the Founders also bypassed the rule of unanimity. By setting the minimum number of states needed at nine the Founders made it possible for the new Constitution to enter into effect even if states like Rhode Island refused ratification. The Founders solution embodied the art of the possible: a compromise between representative government and the necessity of institutional change."