

FINAL EXAM INSTRUCTIONS

The purpose of this final exam is to, as closely as possible, guarantee that ALL students understand the strengths and failings of the US government. The test is set up so that students are able to become leaders who are responsible not only for their education, but the education of their peers. Though the basic instructions were stated at the end of Lesson 44, here is a review of the process and grading of the final exam:

Grades – First, the class will receive a single grade for the test. There is no individual grade, every student will receive the same thing. This grade will be derived from an average grade of all of the individual essay answers to the exam question. If any student receives an “NC” on the test then the entire class will receive an “F” for their final exam. In addition, if more than two students receive an “F”, then the entire class will receive an “F” for their final exam. Basically these two rules are to ensure that every student is responsible not just for themselves, but for everyone else. Be strict on this.

Time and Information – Second, give the students at least 20 minutes to write their essays (it’s preferable that it’s closer to 30 minutes). Do not allow them to have anything on their desks (no pre-written essays or notes, no handouts, no binders, etc.). It is ok, however, for them to be using notes or information that might be written on the board.

Discussion – Third, allow the students (depending on your final exam schedule) to have about 30 minutes to discuss the question ON THEIR OWN. This only works if you leave the classroom. If this is not possible at your school, investigate other options (an instructional aide, a “proctor”, a substitute teacher, etc.) where another adult can be present, but it allows you to leave. This aspect of the final exam is crucial. Allow them to write on the board, use textbooks, use their notes, and anything else they can think of. The only rule should be that they are not allowed to leave the classroom.

Essay Question – Fourth, the question. The final exam question is “**Does Democracy Work?**” When you show students this question make sure that they connect it to their own experiences and activities in the class (especially relating it to the Model Congress, Field Trip and GIP issues). Give students a list of topics that they can use as examples for answering this question (e.g., philosopher ideas, democracy/autocracy spectrum, GIP, service requirement, the Constitution, abortion case study, current events stories, political beliefs spectrums, Model Congress, Lobbying Field Trip, Mr. Smith goes to Washington, etc.). Also give them a very rough rubric about what you expect to see in an “A” essay (“I expect to see discussion of at least eight of these items in a coherent and well organized essay”).

Ideas and Suggestions

Though it is best to leave the students alone for as long as possible, it is also a good idea to check-in with them after about 15 minutes to make sure that they are focused and are not wasting their time on minor issues (remember, the entire class gets the same grade). Many students will feel the urge to write an essay on the board that other students can simply copy. Though this may seem like a good idea it rarely works to the advantage of the whole. The problem is that normally high-achieving students will actually write a poorer essay by copying it and, furthermore, if there are errors in the

essay (there ALWAYS are) then everyone makes the same errors and it lowers the collective grade. Strongly discourage this practice and instead encourage students to use the board more as an outline format that allows some flexibility for others to fill in unique information where needed.

Post Final Exam Discussion (for Lesson 45)

When the Government course is finished, there should be three major grades for each student: the course grade, the portfolio grade and the final exam grade. Each of these assessment grades is a metaphor for a type of government system (all three could then be averaged for a final grade in the class):

The course grade is an autocratic grading system. The teacher has designed the assignments and tests, the teacher has graded them, and, based on a teacher-determined scale, has decided on a grade for each student. The fairness of such a system is based on the individual teacher (some are fair and objective, others are arbitrary and unreasonable).

The portfolio grade is a democratic grading system. The student has not only had some say as to what he/she will study and how to go about it, but they have also had a say in their final assessment. The final grade is a combination of a variety of different evaluations, all weighted equally and averaged. Although this grading system takes more time and trust of others, it does allow many equal voices (including the author's)

The final exam grade is a communist/socialist grading system. There is no individual grade. All students are working together to achieve success as a society. Though this system does not give varying grades for "A" students or "C" students, it does guarantee success for everyone, equally. Obviously, "C" or "D" students might see this system as being more fair than "A" students.

Having a discussion about these various grading systems allows students to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of each governmental system on a very personal level – their course grade. Which do they think is the most fair? Which do they think is the most accurate reflection of the work they did for the course? What are the strengths and weaknesses of each? With a thoughtful discussion, the metaphor can unfold in a variety of ways that illuminate nuances and realities of each system (For example: Is a teacher needed to determine the overall grade for the final exam? How many evaluations on the portfolio make it democratic? How could the portfolio become more direct democracy than representative democracy? How could you change a grading system from autocratic to democratic or socialist? Is this possible?).

Though your school schedule may not allow you to have such a discussion after the final exam (with the same students), with some creative thinking you could try to hold it within the time of the final (i.e. give the final the day before the last day, make this post-final question discussion an extra credit question on the final exam itself, etc.)