

AP Gov't & Politics test information/hints

Format:

Multiple choice 60 questions 45 minutes

Free response 4 questions 100 minutes – you must answer each of the four.

All four questions are weighted equally even though each may have a different scoring scale.

Suggestions for Multiple Choice:

- Do not panic if you come across difficult questions. The test is supposed to have some very hard questions so they can tell the difference between more and less prepared students.
- Use at least two go-throughs on the test. On your first run answer only the questions you are sure of. Then go back and do the other you didn't know. Often times you will get hints or your memory will be jogged by the questions you did know.
 - Circle and **EXCEPT** questions so you can remind yourself you are looking for a FALSE statement for the answer. You can write on the test.
- Do not change an answer unless you are sure it is wrong. Make sure erasers are clear.
 - If a multiple choice question is left blank, no points are deducted. Since $\frac{1}{4}$ of a point is deducted for incorrect answers, students should avoid making random guesses. Students may benefit from educated guesses though.
- Students can and should make marks on the multiple choice test itself in order to keep track of the choices that they have eliminated.
 - Keep your eye on the clock. You have 45 minutes to answer 60 questions

Suggestions for free response:

- On the **free response** section, students should answer the easiest of the 4 questions first. Questions can be answered in any order.
 - Free response answers on this exam do not need to be structured as formally as on other AP Exams** due to the 100 minute/4 mandatory question format.
- The free response section generally includes one stimulus based question. Such a question might include a map, a graph, a table, or chart for students to analyze.
 - highlight the verbs in the question that tell you what to do.
- tailor the answer to what's called for.
 - Identify says list; discuss, explain,
 - describe calls for more elaboration
- Students should write legibly – the readers read all day long (maybe 70 essays/hour) for an entire week in some obscure state. Help them out. They will feel better about you and your answer.
 - Don't torture the reader.** Students should use pen. Some students use pencil and don't seem to care it is hard to read.
- If the question calls for a traditional thesis-body-conclusion answer, students should use paragraphs. Reading a two page answer that has just one paragraph is difficult.
 - Be substantive in a **non formal manner**.

•Students should avoid putting the thesis in the conclusion. It should be at the end of the first paragraph so the reader know what the supporting evidence supports while he/she is reading it.

•If there is a yes/no question the student should answer it. They don't have to worry about a "right" answer because the question is designed to allow for either a yes or no response with support as long as it is supported.

•**Write what you know.** You get points for what is correct and no deductions are taken for what is wrong. Even if you write just a thesis you may receive some points for partial credit. If you "hang tough" and think of something you will probably get some credit.

•"Explain" means to tell why, not to give examples. Examples will support a point, but they should not be the point. Students should make the point and then back it up with examples.

•Students should avoid silly analogies like the bureaucracy is like Bart Simpson.

•Read the question carefully and analytically

Marking the question can be helpful

•Bracket the thesis idea or core of the question

•Underline operative words: define, analyze, evaluate

•Circle words that delimit the scope of the question –

Like dates (1980), or numbers (two of the following)

•Does the question require a definition?

•Answer completely with substantive examples and analysis.

•This is poly sci not history. Avoid historical narrative.

•Two specific focused and relevant examples are better than a laundry list of situations, cases or names w/o elaboration.

•Linkages are important to demonstrate knowledge and understanding. Link topics and ideas together, don't let them stand unconnected.

•When possible cite specific contemporary examples.

•Essays should start with an explicit thesis. The thesis should be more than a restatement of the question. Be clear and decisive.

Students need to demonstrate a sophistication of reflecting awareness of BOTH sides of the issue. Always consider the other side of the case. College level analysis assume that the student understands and will articulate BOTH sides of the issue.

•Use the correct vocabulary. Buzz words are important when used correctly.

•Do not "data dump" like dropping authors' names unless you are going to also give the gist of the author's argument.

•Do not preach or moralize. This is an essay not an editorial. One sides and moralistic essays are not viewed well by AP readers.

•Cover each point required in the question and include a summary only if you have time.

There are three types of free response questions:

•directed response

•list and discuss

and

•traditional

Directed Response type question:

The US constitution has endured for more than two hundred years as the framework of government.

The meaning has changed both by formal and informal methods.

a. identify two formal methods for adding amendments to the Constitution

- b. describe two informal methods that have been used to change the meaning of the Constitution. Provide one specific example for each informal method you described.
- c. Explain why informal methods are used more often than the formal amendment process.

Here are some tip offs:

- a. use of letters for tasks to be accomplished
- b. there is no minimal length but it is **crucial** to have enough support. Use **examples** when possible.
- c. highlight the verbs in the question that tell you what to do. Tailor your answer to the verbs. Identify asks for mere listing but “discuss,” “explain,” or “describe” call for more.
- d. To answer this, jot down the letter for each part and then **do what the question calls for, no more**. This type of question does **not** require an introduction, thesis or conclusion. You get **zero** points for those.

Example:

- a. formal
 1. Congress can propose by 2/3 vote w/ ratification by _ states
 2. Congress can propose by 2/3 vote w/ratification by _ state conventions
- b. informal
 1. judicial interpretation. Wording the const is vague requiring clarification, clarification is performed by the courts. Example clarifying the 14th amendment striking down segregation
 2. Congressional clarification – const is broadly stated so Congress can pass laws – Judiciary Act of 1789 establishing the federal court system. With the creation of the lower courts the const didn’t change but the way gov’t was conducted did.
- c. Informal methods are used more than formal because of practicalities. Super majorities are required for amendments and difficult to get. The const has been amended only 27 times and the first 10 were right away. Look at the trouble to pass the flag burning amendment. Informal methods do not require supermajorities and so are easier to obtain.

List and discuss type of question:

Elections in the US are characterized by low voter turnout. Discuss TWO demographic characteristics associated with non voting and THREE institutional obstacles associated with non voting.

Here are some suggestions for this type of question

- a. there are no letter for what’s to be accomplished, instead numbers are given.
- b. It is PERFECTLY ACCEPTABLE and in fact DESIRABLE to use a list or bullet format. Just list a factor and discuss it.
- c. This type of question does not require an introduction, thesis, or conclusion. you get ZERO points for those.
- d. Although there is no minimum length of answer it is crucial that you support your answer with EXAMPLES.
- e. Highlight the verbs in the question that tell you what to do. Tailor your answer to what the verbs want you to do. Identify asks for mere listing but “discuss,” “explain,” or “describe” call for more.

Here is an example

Demographic characteristics of non voting

1. level of education. There is a strong correlation between education level and voting. College graduates are more likely to vote than high school dropouts.
2. race. whites are more likely to vote than nonwhites. Among non whites turnout for blacks is higher than for Hispanics – due to language and citizenship issues.

Institutional obstacles

1. registration – the biggest institutional barrier. Many people don’t vote because they are not registered. Since registration is req’d in 49 of 50 states many unregistered don’t vote who otherwise might.
2. long ballot. when voters are faced with voting for ...make a sample long list... the task seems too daunting. Factor in then initiatives and referenda, and citizens feel overwhelmed.
3. too many elections. citizens feel overwhelmed by the prospect of voting in special elections, primary elections, runoff elections, and general elections. This turns off voters. The US has more elections than any other democratic country.

Traditional type question

The traditional type question asks for an explanation and analysis.

Here is an example:

The contention that American political parties have been in decline in the past 30 years is challenged by some scholars who suggest instead that parties are resurgent. Which position do you take? Provide arguments that support your position, and provide evidence to support your analysis

Here are some suggestions:

- a. keep the introduction SHORT. Since you do not score any points for an introduction, one or two sentences AT MOST will suffice. Just state the thesis and the points that are to be covered.
- b. Keep your sentences simple and to the point. Long drawn out sentences with complicated dependent clauses are difficult for the reader to follow.
- c. Unless the structure of the question requires it, granting concessions to the other point of view is too time consuming. **Devote your time to supporting the thesis.**
- d. If the question does not specify how many items of supporting evidence to include, use three. You are better off supporting three points in some detail than one point with lots of detail.
- e. Depending on the structure of the question, you may not need a conclusion at all. Frequently, you will receive ZERO points for including one.

Here is a model answer

American political parties have been in decline for the past 30 years. This is due to the expansion of primary elections, the increase in the percentage of independents, and the rise of ticket splitting.

In the past the main source of party strength was the party's hold over the nomination of candidates for political office. Party bosses had tremendous influence over office holders because, if the latter did not "toe the line," they could be denied nomination for their offices. Now, it is the people and not the bosses who control nominations through direct primary elections. Consequently officials must pay attention to the needs of the constituents and not just the party bosses.

Another sign of party decline is the increase of independents. In the past 30 years, the number of independents has risen considerably to about 33% of the voting public. This increase has been accompanied by a decrease of those who see themselves as strong republicans or strong democrats. In terms of sheer numbers, party strength is declining.

Finally the rise of ticket splitting has weakened parties. Voter now vote for the person and not the party more than before. This is shown in the increase in divided government where one party holds the Congress and the other holds the presidency. Nixon, Ford, Reagan, and Bush I were Republican presidents with at least one house of Congress being Democratic. Clinton was a Democratic president who faced Republican majorities for six of eight years. The American people seem to intentionally do this as an additional check and balance on political institutions. This results in weak parties which have difficulty enacting policy.

Key Words use in AP gov't essay questions:

Analyze: break into separate parts and discuss, examine, or interpret each part.

Compare: examine two or more things. Identify similarities and differences. Comparisons generally ask for similarities more than differences.

Contrast: show differences. Set in opposition.

Criticize: Make judgments. Evaluate comparative worth. Criticism often involves analysis.

Define: Give the meaning; usually a meaning specific to the course or subject. Determine the precise limits of the term to be defined. Explain the exact meaning. Definitions are usually short.

Describe: Give a detailed account. Make a picture with words. List characteristics, qualities and parts.

Discuss: Consider and debate or argue the pros and cons of an issue. Write about any conflict. Compare and contrast.

Enumerate: List several ideas, aspects, events, things, qualities, reasons, etc.

Evaluate: Give your opinion or cite the opinion of an expert. Include evidence to support the evaluation.

Illustrate: Give concrete examples. Explain clearly by using comparisons or examples.

Interpret: Comment upon, give examples, describe relationships. Explain the meaning. Describe, then evaluate.

Outline: Describe the main ideas, characteristics or events. Does not necessarily mean "write a Roman numeral/letter outline."

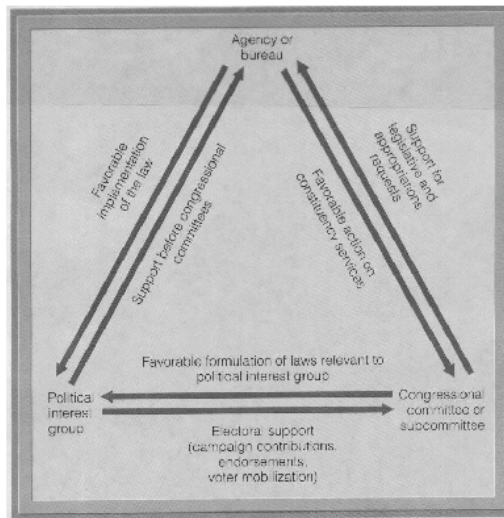
Prove: Support with facts – especially facts presented in class or in the text.

State: explain precisely.

Summarize: Give a brief, condensed account. Include conclusions. Avoid unnecessary details.

Trace: Show the order of events or progress of a subject or event.

Subgovernments / “Iron Triangles”



Attach:

Vocabulary and key terms