

Paper #2: Speculative reform

Assigned: February 27

Due: March 6

Length: 5-6 pages (double-spaced, 1-inch margins, 12-point Times New Roman)

Task: Formulate an argument about two reforms for Congress

Context: According to Pew Research, public approval ratings for Congress have been bouncing between 20 and 30 percent over the past three years. In order to raise the esteem in which the public holds the institution, folks in Washington and across the country are considering reforms.

One point that everyone agrees on is that the House of Representatives is the wrong size. But, some argue that the House should be made larger, while others argue that it should be smaller. You need to consider this debate and take a position on it. Should membership in the House be expanded or contracted? Why? What would happen as a result of changing the size of the House?

The other reform that you will discuss is a “wildcard”; you may write on any Congress-related reform.

Guidance: This exercise is more like a traditional essay than the op-ed you wrote. As such, it should follow the traditional structure of an expository, argumentative paper. Follow the norms and conventions of formal writing in standard American English.

A key element of this paper is to make sure that you have fully considered the implications of the reforms you suggest and describe. We talked quite a bit about Congress along several dimensions in class. Be sure to use those dimensions as guidelines as you construct your argument. If you do this, you will be more likely to address the full range of your reforms’ effects. Also, be sure to consider not-so-obvious “spillover” effects. For example, in addition to the day-to-day business of Congress, what else depends on how many members of the House there are?

You should be able to complete this task using just material from the course, i.e., lecture notes, readings, textbook chapters, etc. The focus is on writing, not the vast range of sources you can acquire and use. That said, if you do any outside research, you will need to cite it according to the citation style laid out on page three of the syllabus.

Writing goals

- 1) Construct an argument that is both persuasive and hangs together logically.
- 2) Demonstrate that you have thought through all possible implications of your suggested reforms.
- 3) Use examples to illustrate your points.
- 4) Use the active voice as much as possible.
- 5) Use paragraphs and sentences of effective length in order to convey your argument without losing the reader.