THE ARTICLE V BLUEPRINT · CLASSROOM

The Constitutional Convention Simulation

Instructor & Administrator Guide · for college and university courses

A term-long, nonpartisan simulation in which your students become delegates to a constitutional convention — they debate the real provisions of the **current U.S. Constitution** in committee, vote on what to keep, change, or drop, and each writes a Federalist-style paper arguing their case. It drops into an existing constitutional-law, political-science, or civics course as a graded spine, runs at two difficulty levels, grades written work blind to limit bias, collects no personal information about students, and is free (sustained by donations).



▶ **Watch the 30-second overview online** — the video plays on the live guide page.

Want to see it first? Take the interactive tour → — every screen a student and a teacher sees.

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1. For administrators: the short version

If you are a department chair or dean reviewing this for approval, here is what matters, before the pedagogy:

How this protects the institution

- **No student personal data is collected.** Students join with a class code and a handle they invent — no names, no emails, no accounts. There is nothing to breach and nothing to sell. The platform sells no data and runs no advertising.
- **Nonpartisan by design.** The exercise takes no political position. Students work from the **actual U.S. Constitution** and are required to argue multiple sides; the structure rewards reasoning, not any conclusion. (Detailed below — the point most worth your scrutiny, and built to withstand it.)
- **Written work is graded blind, by rubric.** Papers are scored with the author's identity hidden, on anchored rubrics that reward how well a case is argued — never whether the grader agrees — to limit political bias and favoritism (see section 7).
- **The instructor controls everything that becomes public.** Nothing a student writes is published unless the instructor hand-selects it, and only then anonymized and with the student's consent. **No grades are ever published.**
- **Students are never asked for money.** The tool is free and donor-supported; any support request is directed at adults (instructors and the public), never at students.
- **Age is handled by design, not by exclusion.** Because no personal data is collected and the activity runs inside a supervised course, dual-enrolled and younger students can participate without triggering the data-collection concerns that normally attach to minors. At the postsecondary level, student-record rights rest with the student.
- **No cost.** Free to use.

This guide describes a privacy-protective design; it is not a legal opinion. Institutions should apply their own review as they would for any instructional tool.

On nonpartisanship — read this part closely

The subject is the U.S. Constitution, so the first fair question is whether this pushes a political agenda. It does not, and the design is what guarantees it:

- Students debate the **real, current U.S. Constitution** — the actual founding text and its amendments — not anyone's proposed rewrite. The platform that hosts the tool is a constitutional-reform project; it deliberately keeps its own proposals **out** of the classroom so the exercise stays neutral.
- Every committee must debate **all three outcomes** for its provisions — keep, change, drop — and record the reasoning for each.
- The capstone paper may argue **for or against** any provision; a paper defending the existing text is graded exactly like one attacking it.
- Committees are balanced, debate is viewpoint-neutral, and the exercise reaches no official "answer." The output is a record of student reasoning, not a manifesto.
- The Constitution is presented as a **document to stress-test, not a creed to venerate or to tear down** — students are invited to examine it from every side, exactly as the 1787 delegates examined the Articles of Confederation they started from.

The learning outcome is the skill of constitutional reasoning from every side — the same reason moot court and model legislatures are uncontroversial staples of higher education.

2. What the simulation is

Your class becomes a constitutional convention. Working from the **real U.S. Constitution** — its articles, clauses, and amendments — students are seated on topic committees, each given a focused set of actual provisions to debate. They recommend what to keep, change, or drop, and then the whole class ratifies each committee's report. The site serves as the convention floor *and* the official record (its "Madison's Notes"), capturing every argument as it is made.

Then, mirroring history: just as the Federalist Papers were written *after* the 1787 convention to argue for ratification, each student's capstone is a **2,000–3,000-word Federalist-style paper** arguing for or against something the class debated. When the work is in, the instructor closes the convention (freezing the record), students see the final result, and the instructor may publish a curated, anonymized set of results.

💻 **A note on devices.** Students can join, post, and vote from any device, including a phone, and teachers can sign up and create a class from anywhere. But because this exercise involves real writing — committee deliberation and, above all, the 2,000–3,000-word Federalist paper — and, for instructors, a detailed dashboard and gradebook, **a laptop or desktop is strongly recommended for the main work**. Phones and tablets are fine for the lighter steps.

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3. Two difficulty levels

You choose the difficulty at setup by choosing which form of the constitutional text your class works from. Same exercise, two very different cognitive loads:

Level	Text used	What makes it harder/easier	Best for
Foundational	**Plain-language summaries** of each clause	Each provision is already unpacked into clear modern English, so students spend their energy debating the *merits* of what the clause does.	Intro & lower-division civics/government; dual-enrolled sections.
Advanced	The **verbatim operative text** of the Constitution	No scaffolding. Students must parse the actual constitutional language — archaic phrasing and all — and *work out* what a provision does before they can argue it.	Upper-division political science; constitutional-law and law-school courses.

Each committee's workspace shows both forms with a one-click toggle, so an Advanced class can check the plain-language reading when they're stuck — but the Advanced level leads with the raw text on purpose.

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4. Learning objectives

By the end, students can:

- Explain what specific constitutional provisions do and the trade-offs they encode.

- **Read and interpret primary legal text** (emphasized at the Advanced level, where students work from the verbatim operative text).
- Construct and defend a constitutional argument, and engage the strongest version of the opposing argument.
- Distinguish a legal/structural argument from a political/popular one — and recognize when each is driving an outcome.
- Participate in a deliberative, rule-bound decision process and live with its result.
- Write a sustained, evidence-based persuasive essay in the Federalist tradition.

Map these to your own course outcomes as needed; the simulation satisfies argumentation, deliberation, and writing objectives simultaneously.

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5. Committees & assignment

Committees are **topic-based**. A default set of seven (use the number that fits your class — see sizing), each pre-loaded with the real constitutional provisions on its topic:

1. **Rights & Liberties** — speech, religion, press, assembly, arms, equal protection.
2. **Government Structure & Separation of Powers** — the branches, checks, terms of office.
3. **Elections & Democracy** — voting, representation, the Electoral College, suffrage amendments.
4. **Economic & Fiscal** — taxation, spending, commerce, coinage, appropriations.
5. **Justice & Due Process** — search and seizure, jury trial, cruel-and-unusual, habeas corpus.
6. **Federalism & the States** — reserved powers, supremacy, full faith and credit.
7. **Amendment & Emergency Powers** — Article V, habeas suspension, succession, calling forth the militia.

You pick which committees your class runs at setup (check the topics you want); each comes stocked with its relevant clauses, so there is nothing to assemble.

Sizing

The deliberation sweet spot is **5–7 students per committee** — below four the debate is thin, above seven you get free-riders. For a 35-student class, that's about **six committees of six**. A 20-student class

runs four; a 40-student class, six or seven. The tool spreads delegates across the committees up to a per-committee cap.

Assignment — three modes, your choice

Mode	How it works	Best when
Ranked preference DEFAULT	Students rank their top choices; the tool fills committees up to the cap by preference, resolving overflow by lottery. You can override any placement.	You want student agency plus balance. The most true-to-life.
Instructor assigns	You place each student by hand.	You want to engineer balance of viewpoint and ability, or separate cliques.
Random	The tool assigns at random within the caps.	You want speed and a clean “luck of the draw.”

> **Teach the scarcity.** Rights & Elections will be everyone's first pick; the procedural committees will be nobody's. That is not a flaw to hide — it is a lesson. In a real convention or Congress, committee seats are scarce and contested, and you do not always get the one you want. Name it out loud; it is one of the exercise's best civics moments.

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6. What you grade & how

The governing principle: **the platform is the record-keeper; you are the judge; no one grades from memory.** Every post, memo, vote, rationale, and paper is timestamped and attributed, so you grade from a complete record — not from trying to recall what happened in six simultaneous committees.

Component	Weight	What it is
Capstone Federalist paper	**40%**	2,000–3,000-word individual essay, for or against a debated provision.
Committee deliberation	**20%**	Ongoing engagement in committee (graded by exception — see below).
Committee recommendation memo	**15%**	The committee's reasoned keep/change/drop verdict with proposed wording.
Floor-debate participation	**10%**	Engaging other committees' recommendations on the floor.
Ratification rationale	**10%**	A ~300–500-word individual justification of the student's votes.
Peer evaluation (collaboration)	**5%**	Teammates rate contribution and collaboration — not likeability.

Weights are a recommended default; adjust to your course. In the gradebook, each component is scored **0–4** (0 = F, 1 = D, 2 = C, 3 = B, 4 = A), and the tool computes the weighted result as a GPA with a letter grade.

Participation — graded by exception

You cannot eavesdrop on six committees at once, and **volume is a poor proxy for engagement**: a student who agrees and says so in two sharp sentences is not disengaged. So participation is graded by exception, on this 0–4 scale — but with a standing instruction:

Assume every student earns a 3 (full engagement). Lower it only when it is genuinely noticeable that someone checked out. Reserve 4 for standout leadership. You are not scoring 35 people from scratch — you are flagging the few at the edges.

Score	Descriptor
0	Absent / no contribution
1	Token — a single low-effort post
2	Inconsistent / surface-level
3 DEFAULT	Consistent & substantive; engages others
4	Leadership — drives the committee, synthesizes, lifts others

The tool helps by **flagging only the near-silent** — students with essentially no contribution — so your attention goes straight to the handful who might score below 3. It deliberately does **not** rank students by post count, which would punish the concise, the introverted, and multilingual students writing in a second language. The real rigor and differentiation live in the written deliverables, not here.

The capstone paper rubric

Score the paper 0–4 against these dimensions:

- **Thesis & position** — a clear, arguable claim.
- **Command of the text** — accurate, specific engagement with the actual provision debated.
- **Reasoning** — logical, well-developed argument.
- **Counterargument** — engages the *strongest* opposing case, not a straw man.
- **Evidence** — history, precedent, or consequence used to support claims.
- **Writing** — structure, clarity, mechanics.

Memo, rationale, and peer evaluation

- **Recommendation memo** — scored on clarity of the verdict, quality of reasoning, and quality of the proposed wording. It is a **committee grade**; the gradebook lets you set it once and apply it to the whole committee.

- **Ratification rationale** — scored on whether the student justified their votes with reasons grounded in the debate.
- **Peer evaluation** — teammates rate each other on defined collaboration criteria (carried their share, engaged respectfully, helped the committee move forward). It measures contribution, not popularity; it is lightly weighted on purpose.

> **The popularity lesson — taught openly, graded never.** On the floor, students can "second" each other's arguments, and the tool surfaces whose arguments moved the room. A short reflection then asks: *"Was it the strongest argument, or the most popular delegate? When were those the same, and when weren't they?"* Gouverneur Morris — wooden leg and all — spoke more than any delegate in 1787 and penned the final text; influence followed presence and persuasion, not just being right. That gap between being right and being liked is a core civics lesson. It is discussed and reflected on — it never touches a student's grade.

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7. Fair & unbiased grading

A rubric makes grading *consistent in shape* — but a rubric alone does not stop a biased grader, who can still nudge "strength of argument" from a 3 to a 2 for a student whose politics they dislike, or up for a student they favor. So the protection is **structural**, built into how the tool hands written work to the grader. This is as much a safeguard for the institution as it is for the student.

> ### The rule, stated plainly
> **A paper you disagree with, argued well, must score higher than a paper you agree with, argued poorly.** You grade how well the case is made — never whether you agree with it.

Mechanisms that enforce that rule:

1. **Blind grading.** The gradebook has a **blind mode** that hides each author's handle while you grade written work, so you score the essay, not the person. If you don't know whose paper it is, you can't favor it or punish it — the single most effective anti-bias measure.
2. **Anchored rubric bands.** Each number ties to a concrete descriptor (e.g., for Counterargument: "3 = raises a real counterargument but doesn't fully rebut it; 4 = engages the strongest

counterargument and rebuts it with evidence”), so a score is observable and defensible rather than a feeling.

3. **Grade by dimension, not paper-by-paper.** Score every paper's thesis, then every paper's reasoning, and so on. This defeats the “halo effect,” where a strong or liked first impression inflates every later score, and holds the standard steady across the class.
4. **Calibrate first.** Before grading, review one example of a “4” and one of a “2” to set your eye.
5. **A private note per student.** The gradebook gives you a notes field on each student, so an unusually high or low score can carry a one-line reason — a defensible record if a student contests a grade.

Honest limit: no process fully eliminates human bias — a grader may still recognize a writing voice or drift unconsciously. This design makes the fair path the easy path and the biased path effortful and auditable. It is strong mitigation, not a guarantee.

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8. The gradebook

Everything above is held in a **teacher gradebook** inside the tool: one card per student, grouped by committee. Each card **auto-pulls the evidence** — committee posts, floor arguments and the seconds they drew, the student's rationale, their vote record (abstentions flagged), peer rating received, and their paper — and you enter each 0–4 score and any notes right there, with the weighted GPA and letter updating live. A near-silent student is flagged for you. It all persists after the convention closes and **exports to CSV** to drop into Canvas, Blackboard, or a spreadsheet. You never reconstruct a thing from memory.

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9. Week-by-week facilitation (10-week quarter)

A quarter-length spine you run alongside your course. Stretch it across a 15-week semester by widening the deliberation and drafting weeks; compress for a shorter unit. Every step is spelled out so nothing is left to guess. **You control the pace** — the convention advances only when you open each stage from your dashboard.

Week 1 — Framing & difficulty level

YOU DO Introduce the convention; teach the real 1787 sequence — convention first, Federalist Papers after, to win ratification. **Choose your level** (Foundational = plain-language summaries; Advanced = verbatim operative text) and tell students which they'll work from.

STUDENTS Read the overview; create their handle; preview the committee topics.

GRADED —

PITFALL Don't let students treat the Constitution as either sacred or settled; it exists to be examined from every side.

Week 2 — Committee formation

YOU DO Pick the committees your class will run and your assignment mode (ranked-preference recommended). If using preference: let students rank, then form committees — review the result and adjust any placement. Say out loud why the popular committees are capped — seats are scarce.

STUDENTS Read the provisions in play (at the Advanced level this means parsing the verbatim text); submit ranked committee preferences.

GRADED —

PITFALL Don't skip the scarcity conversation — it pre-empts complaints and teaches the lesson.

Weeks 3–4 — Committee deliberation

YOU DO Set a posting expectation across the two weeks. Drop into committees asynchronously; nudge the silent.

STUDENTS Debate their provisions — keep / change / drop, with reasons — in committee.

GRADED Committee deliberation (by exception; score at the end of Week 4 from the record).

PITFALL Resist grading by volume. Check the tool's near-silent flags, confirm, default everyone else to 3.

Week 5 — Recommendation memos

YOU DO Explain the memo: a reasoned keep/change/drop verdict per provision with proposed wording. **Lock** each committee's report when it's ready.

STUDENTS Draft and submit the shared committee memo (divide the sections so contribution is visible).

GRADED Recommendation memo (15%).

PITFALL Require named contributions so one student can't carry a silent group.

Week 6 — Floor debate

YOU DO Open the floor; every committee's locked report is now visible to all. Encourage cross-examination.

STUDENTS Argue for or against other committees' reports; second the arguments that move them.

GRADED Floor-debate participation (10%).

PITFALL Keep it about arguments, not personalities — model it.

Week 7 — Ratification, results & the popularity reflection

YOU DO Open ratification; the class adopts or rejects each committee's report. Use the voting-status panel to chase anyone who hasn't voted before you advance. When the vote closes, the **“What the Convention Decided”** result becomes visible to students.

STUDENTS Vote on each report; write the ~300–500-word rationale for how they voted; complete the peer review.

GRADED Ratification rationale (10%); peer evaluation (5%).

PITFALL Don't let the vote feel arbitrary — the rationale is where they own it.

Weeks 8–9 — Federalist papers (Capstone stage)

YOU DO Open the capstone stage; assign the paper and share the rubric up front. Run a peer-review checkpoint midway.

STUDENTS Draft the 2,000–3,000-word paper for or against a debated provision; the word counter targets the range. Mark it final when done (you can see who hasn't).

GRADED (Paper scored in Week 10.)

PITFALL Push them to engage the strongest counterargument — it's the rubric's backbone.

Week 10 — Submit, close, curate, publish, reflect

YOU DO Grade papers **blind** in the gradebook; **close** the convention (freezes the record); publish the curated, anonymized results. Export grades to CSV.

STUDENTS Submit final papers (with publish-consent choice); view the final record; final reflection.

GRADED Capstone paper (40%).

PITFALL Close *before* publishing so the public record can't shift afterward.

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10. What students & the class keep

After the vote (and again once the convention is closed), students can open **"What the Convention Decided"** — each committee's report marked adopted or rejected with the vote tally, and how their own committee fared. They see the fruit of their work, not just a grade.

The class keeps a permanent record: the ratified result and the full **Madison's Notes** transcript of the debate. You decide what, if anything, becomes public:

- You **hand-pick** which Federalist papers to feature — so a reluctant or weaker student is never exposed.
- Featured essays are **anonymized** and published only with the **student's consent**.
- **No grades are ever published.** What goes public is the class's result, the vote tallies, and the selected essays.
- The result is a shareable page with its own link — suitable to post on a class page, a department site, a student newspaper, or a blog.

11. Free & donor-supported

The tool is free because donations keep it free. Students are **never** asked for money — support and discovery reach adults (instructors and the public), never the classroom. It works through light touches:

- **A credit line on every published results page** — "Created with The Article V Blueprint" — linking back to the main site. This is how your work reaches the wider community: parents, the school, newspaper and blog readers who see what your class produced.
- **An "About & Support" link** for the public who find the results page — who makes it, the donor-supported model, and how to help.

12. Questions administrators ask

Is this politically neutral?

Yes, by design. Students debate the real U.S. Constitution — not a proposed rewrite — and must argue every side; the exercise reaches no official position; a paper defending a provision is graded like one attacking it. See the nonpartisanship box above.

How do you prevent biased or politically slanted grading?

Written work is graded in a blind mode (author's handle hidden), on anchored rubrics that reward how well a case is argued rather than whether the grader agrees, scored dimension-by-dimension, with a notes field on each student. See section 7. It is strong mitigation, honestly described — not a claim that bias is impossible.

What student data is collected?

None that identifies a student — no names, emails, or accounts. Students use a class code and a self-chosen handle. There is no data to sell and none is sold.

What about minors / dual-enrolled students?

Because no personal data is collected and the activity is a supervised part of a college course, age is handled by design rather than exclusion. At the postsecondary level, student-record rights rest with the student. We describe a privacy-protective design, not a legal opinion; apply your institution's own review.

Who owns the student work?

The students. Publishing anything is the instructor's choice, only anonymized, and only with the student's consent.

What if a student posts something offensive?

Nothing is public during the exercise — the convention is visible only to the class and the instructor. The instructor moderates throughout and closes the convention before any curated, consented results are published.

What devices do teachers and students need?

Any device with a browser works, and phones are fine for the lighter steps — signing in, joining a class, short committee posts, and voting. But a **laptop or desktop is strongly recommended for the writing-heavy work**: committee deliberation and especially the Federalist paper for students, and the dashboard, committee management, and gradebook for you. Signing up and creating a class work on any device.

How much extra grading does this create?

Less than it looks. Participation is graded by exception (default 3, flag the few outliers), and every deliverable is collected, attributed, and scored in one gradebook that exports to your LMS.

I teach several periods — how many classes can one teacher run?

As many as you need, with no limit. Each period is its own separate convention, with its own class code, its own delegates, and its own results — nothing crosses between them. You sign in once, then create one class per period (Period 1, Period 2, and so on). On the create page they all stack into a short **“Your classes”** list, so you can jump into any period's dashboard with one click.

Can I see my classes on another computer?

Yes — your class list follows your sign-in. Each class is tied to the email you verify with when you log in, so sign in with that same email on any device (a laptop at home, a tablet, a classroom computer) and your full list is right there. It’s private to you: because it’s keyed to the email Cloudflare verified, no one else can pull up your classes, and students never see it at all. On each computer you use, the list is also kept locally for instant access, so it loads even before the sign-in check finishes. Two practical notes: use the **same email** every time (a different email shows a different list), and each class’s **private teacher link** — shown when you create it, and downloadable — is the ultimate backstop that opens that one class from anywhere, no sign-in needed. Save those links and you’re never locked out.

Does it replace our curriculum?

No — it's a capstone simulation that slots into an existing constitutional-law, political-science, or civics course and enhances it. It competes with nothing you already teach.

What does it cost, and how is it funded?

Nothing to use. It's sustained by donations, and students are never asked for money.

How can we support a tool we value?

Donate, send a short testimonial, or spread the word to colleagues. An “About & Support” link in the published results points the way.

The Article V Blueprint — Classroom Convention. Instructor & Administrator Guide. A nonpartisan, privacy-protective, donor-supported teaching simulation; not legal advice. Institutions should apply their own instructional-tool review.