
AP[®] United States Government and Politics

Sample Student Responses and Scoring Commentary Set 1

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Free-Response Question 1

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Question 1: Concept Application**3 points**

A Describe the Senate procedure at the center of the controversy in the scenario. **1 point****Examples of acceptable responses may include the following:**

- During debate, a senator can use the filibuster to prolong the debate and delay or even prevent a vote on a bill.
- The Senate requires a supermajority to bring debate to an end before a vote can be held on a bill.
- The cloture rule requires that at least sixty senators vote to end debate, which must happen before a bill is brought to the floor for a final vote.

B Explain how the procedure described in part A makes passing legislation more difficult in the Senate compared with the House of Representatives. **1 point****Examples of acceptable responses may include the following:**

- Passing legislation is harder in the Senate because senators can use the filibuster to delay or even prevent a vote on a bill whereas the other chamber has limited debate time that moves the bill through faster.
- Passing legislation in the Senate is harder than in the House because in the Senate it requires a supermajority to invoke cloture. The House lacks a cloture rule and only requires a simple majority to break debate.
- There are strict rules regarding time and relevance in the House, which limit the ability of members to obstruct the passage of legislation. Those same rules do not apply to debate in the Senate.

C Explain how the senators' actions in addressing the election reform bill illustrates the concept of partisanship. **1 point****Examples of acceptable responses may include the following:**

- While the Democrats had a simple majority of the seats in the Senate, strict voting along party lines meant they did not have enough votes to bring about cloture and bring the bill to the floor for a vote.
 - Republicans practiced partisan voting when they voted against ending the filibuster in this scenario. By voting together, they were able to prevent the Democrats from achieving their policy goals even though the Republicans had a minority number of seats in the Senate.
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A. The Senate procedure described at the center of the controversy in the scenario is the filibuster. Essentially, contrary to in the House of Representatives, senators are able to "filibuster," or continue to talk about a bill for as long as they can manage, making it difficult for the debate to ever end, making it so voting on the bill cannot occur due to time running out. This is because since the Senate is much smaller than the House, it was decided that the Senate should have the potential for unlimited debate. A cloture could end a filibuster, but that would require a 2/3 vote, which is often rare.

B. The procedure described in part A makes passing legislation more difficult in the Senate compared with the House of Representatives because in the House, people debating bills have a time limit. This means that once a representative's time is up, they can no longer continue to explain their perspective on the bill. However, in the Senate, since this can go on for as long as the senator can manage (potentially reaching 24 hours, such as the filibusters of Strom Thurmond and Cory Booker), time may run out, making it so senators are unable to vote on the bill. So, in the House, as long as there is a majority vote, a bill can move onto the next stage. However, in the Senate, even if enough people are willing to vote to pass a bill, they may run out of time and be unable to vote on it anyway.

C. The senators' actions in addressing the election reform bill illustrate the concept of partisanship because partisanship involves supporting your own party. The senators' actions in addressing the election reform bill were essentially choosing whether or not they were going to try to filibuster the election reform bill. Given the opportunity, Democrats would've voted to pass the bill. However, most Republicans wouldn't have supported it. Therefore, Republicans made the decision to filibuster. This demonstrates a division between the Republicans and the Democrats, where the Republican senators remained loyal to *their* cause, while the Democratic senators remained loyal to *theirs*. This illustrates the concept of partisanship because Democrats and Republicans in the Senate both made the decision to align themselves with actions that support the values of their party.

A. The Senate has the exclusive ability, as compared to House of Representatives, to use a filibuster. A filibuster is an overtake of the debate by a particular senator for a very long time, thus inhibiting the process or almost entirely blocking the passing of a bill. This political tactic can be used by any party member; however, there is a vote for cloture that can end a filibuster, which allows the majority party to end a filibuster of a senator from a minority party. Thus, the tactic is effective only by the use of a senator from a majority party in the Senate.

B. The representatives in the House of Representatives (HOR) don't have the ability to use a filibuster. There are overall stricter debate rules in the HOR as compared to the Senate. Due to the filibusters, it is more difficult to pass bills in the Senate as compared to passing bills in HOR, where the use of filibusters has been outruled.

C. To use a filibuster, the party of the Senator must also support them in order not to pass the vote for cloture. Thus, the act of a filibuster is a purely partisan action that requires the involvement of the party as a whole in opposition to another party.

The Senate procedure at the center of the controversy was the use of the filibuster, which is a way to continue a debate longer to avoid a final vote.

The filibuster makes it more difficult to pass legislation because it essentially blocks legislation from being passed as it can never reach the final vote.

These actions illustrate the concept of partisanship because it shows how crucial it is for voting separation based on parties is. Without the divide in the voting, the filibuster wouldn't have been used, and the outcome would have been drastically different.

Question 1

Note: Student samples are quoted verbatim and may contain spelling and grammatical errors.

Overview

NEW for 2025: The question overviews can be found in the *Chief Reader Report on Student Responses* on [AP Central](#).

Sample: 1A

Score: 3

Part A Score: 1

Part B Score: 1

Part C Score: 1

The response earned 1 point in Part A. The response states that “senators are able to ‘filibuster,’” or continue to talk about a bill for as long as they can manage, making it difficult for the debate to ever end, making it so voting on the bill cannot occur due to time running out.” This correctly describes the Senate procedure in the scenario.

The response earned 1 point in Part B. The response explains that “in the House, people debating bills have a time limit ... However, in the Senate, ... this can go on for as long as the senator can manage.” This correctly explains how the procedure in part A makes passing legislation more difficult in the Senate compared with the House of Representatives.

The response earned 1 point in Part C. The response states, “Given the opportunity, Democrats would’ve voted to pass the bill. However, most Republicans wouldn’t have supported it. Therefore, Republicans made the decision to filibuster.” Since both parties were acting in their own self-interest, this correctly explains how the use of the filibuster in this scenario on the election reform bill illustrates the concept of partisanship.

Sample: 1B

Score: 2

Part A Score: 1

Part B Score: 1

Part C Score: 0

The response earned 1 point in Part A. The response states, “A filibuster is an overtake of the debate by a particular senator for a very long time, thus inhibiting the process or almost entirely blocking the passing of a bill.” This correctly describes the Senate procedure in the scenario.

The response earned 1 point in Part B. The response states, “There are overall stricter debate rules in the HOR as compared to the Senate. Due to the filibusters, it is more difficult to pass bills in the Senate as compared to passing bills in HOR, where the use of filibusters has been outruled.” This correctly explains how the filibuster makes the passage of a bill more difficult in the Senate than in the House.

Question 1 (continued)

The response earned 0 points in Part C. The response does not correctly explain the partisan action towards the election reform bill mentioned in the prompt. While the response implies there is a general pattern between the filibuster and partisanship, it does not explain how partisanship resulted in a specific action regarding the election reform bill.

Sample: 1C**Score: 1****Part A Score: 1****Part B Score: 0****Part C Score: 0**

The response earned 1 point in Part A. The response accurately states that “the Senate procedure at the center of the controversy was the use of the filibuster, which is a way to continue a debate longer to avoid a final vote.”

The response earned 0 points in Part B. There is no explanation of how the filibuster makes passing legislation more difficult in the Senate than in the House. The response makes no comparison between Senate and House procedures.

The response earned 0 points in Part C since there is no explanation for how the Senators’ actions addressing the reform bill illustrates the concept of partisanship.