

POLITICAL SCIENCE 1101
SAMPLE SHORT ANSWERS
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Below is a range of answers to the following short answer question, ranging from high A to low F. Carefully read and compare each answer and my analysis of each to get an idea of how to prepare to answer the essay questions on the actual exams.

1. Question: Identify, describe, and tell the importance of the following: The Mayflower Compact

This answer is as close to perfect as it gets. It is well-organized and easy to understand; it includes every speck of relevant information about the Mayflower Compact; It includes not only all the relevant information to be found in the Course Outline but details mentioned only in class (and for this particular question, there was a lot in class that wasn't on the outline). It links in the Mayflower Compact to other events past and future in good cause-and-effect fashion. It leaves out nothing, and it doesn't include anything that doesn't belong. Finally, it tells the importance of the Mayflower Compact (which the question expressly requires) by noting it as a good example of the social contract and as influential in later American political thought. This is as good as it gets.

10 points (and more, if I could).

ANSWER 1

This is a very high-A answer.

Where, when, and how does government originate? These are major questions. Two theories are that of the organic society and the social contract. The organic model holds that government grew out of relationships between individuals in the dawn of humanity and that we've never been without it. The social contract theory, developed by thinkers such as Hobbes and Locke, holds that the people themselves deliberately come together at an identifiable moment and voluntarily agree to create a government, giving up some of their natural liberties in exchange for a degree of security.

The Mayflower Compact is an example of the social contract. The Separatists, or Pilgrims, wished to settle in America in order to be able to follow their own religious beliefs. They received authorization from the English king/crown to settle in the region known as Virginia, but landed north of that region, in present-day Massachusetts. Being without any legal authorization to be there (and so in a state of nature, the period of existence prior to the social contract described by Hobbes), they agreed among themselves to create a government over themselves to have just and reasonable powers of government over them for the general good of the colony. This was an actual social contract, and it formed the basis of the Plymouth Colony. For the Separatists and America, then, the social contract wasn't just a theory but an actual fact, and later American history reflected that idea. The Fundamental Orders of Connecticut was a later, similar social contract, and the Declaration of Independence itself set forth the terms of the contract as Americans (or at least author Thomas Jefferson) understood them. The Articles of Confederation and then the Constitution were the documents attempting to set up America's government in accord with the terms of the Contract as described in the Declaration of Independence.

ANSWER 2
This is an A answer.

This is still a very solid answer. It has left off a few details here and there. The biggest difference is that the student hasn't related the Mayflower Compact forward to the Declaration of Independence, the Articles of Confederation, or the Constitution. Nevertheless, it's still a very good answer.

9 or 10 points.

The Mayflower Compact was a compact or agreement between the Pilgrims who settled Plymouth. When they arrived at the coast of present-day Massachusetts they lacked authority to settle there. As a result that made an agreement among themselves to establish a government that would possess the authority to enact just and reasonable laws for the good of the colony. This was a real-world example of the social contract being written about by Hobbes and Locke whereby the community actually agrees to create a government (as opposed to the organic theory that declares government has always been around and simply evolves along with the community). Because of this, the social contract has been the dominant theory for Americans of how government originates and where its power comes from.

ANSWER 3
This is a B answer.

This answer is still fundamentally correct, but it leaves out still more details. Like answer 2 above, it fails to connect the Mayflower Compact forward to the Declaration of Independence, the Articles of Confederation, or the Constitution, although it does tie the Mayflower Compact in to the social contract theory.

8 points.

The Mayflower compact was an agreement by which the Separatists established a government over themselves. This was an example of the social contract, the idea that the people of a community make a conscious deliberate decision at a particular point in time to establish a government. The Mayflower Compact is a major reason why Americans prefer the social contract theory to the organic theory, which states that the origins of government are lost in the mists of time and has been around as long as people have.

This answer is identical to the superb Answer 1 above, with one huge exception; it omits the passage that tells the importance of the Mayflower Compact, i.e. how it illustrated an important idea (the social contract) or how it influenced or reflected subsequent developments (i.e., the Declaration of Independence, the Articles of Confederation, and the Constitution). Since the instructions require the student to “identify, describe, and tell the importance” of the term, this student has failed to follow the instructions and left out a crucial part of the answer, no matter how good the rest of it is, immediately knocking down from a high A to a C. This is one of the most common mistakes that students make on short answer questions. Be careful that you don’t make it!

7 points.

ANSWER 4

This is a C answer. It’s a variation on Answer 1 above.

Where, when, and how does government originate? These are major questions. Two theories are that of the organic society and the social contract. The organic model holds that government grew out of relationships between individuals in the dawn of humanity and that we’ve never been without it. The social contract theory, developed by thinkers such as Hobbes and Locke, holds that the people themselves deliberately come together at an identifiable moment and voluntarily agree to create a government, giving up some of their natural liberties in exchange for a degree of security.

The Mayflower Compact is an example of the social contract. The Separatists, or Pilgrims, wished to settle in America in order to be able to follow their own religious beliefs. They received authorization from the English king/crown to settle in the region known as Virginia, but landed north of that region, in present-day Massachusetts. Being without any legal authorization to be there (and so in a state of nature, the period of existence prior to the social contract described by Hobbes), they agreed among themselves to create a government over themselves to have just and reasonable powers of government over them for the general good of the colony. This was an actual social contract, and it formed the basis of the Plymouth Colony. For the Separatists, then, the social contract wasn’t just a theory but an actual fact.

This answer starts leaving out some fundamental things, such as when and why the Mayflower Compact was written. The student simply assumed I would know she was talking about the Separatists, but I never assume anything when reading an answer—it's the student's job to tell me. Additionally, the student mentions Massachusetts in passing, implying that it was the people of the colony of Massachusetts who wrote the Compact, but that's wrong. While explaining the Mayflower Compact's importance to a degree (i.e. the idea of the social contract), the student doesn't take it as far as answer 1 did, instead leaving it more like answers 2. Furthermore, in attempting to link the Compact to later developments, the student wrongly confuses the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution.

6 or 7 points.

This answer leaves out a lot of fundamentals and does little to relate the Mayflower Compact to the larger picture, although it does include the hugely important point that it was an early example of the idea of the social contract.

5 or 6 points.

ANSWER 5

This is a borderline-C answer.

The Mayflower Compact was one of the first times when a group of people came together to voluntarily create a government. The government they created was to have the power to establish laws for the good of the entire colony of Massachusetts and that the people agreed to abide by those laws. This is the idea of the consent of the governed that Thomas Jefferson wrote about in the Constitution. When people come together to establish a government, this is called the social contract.

ANSWER 6

This is a borderline D answer.

The Mayflower Compact was an agreement reached by the Pilgrims to govern themselves. This was an early example of the people themselves agreeing to create a government or the social contract.

<p><i>This answer is like the one just above, except that it leaves out that critical “importance” aspect. Maybe it implies that aspect, but the student needs to come right out and say it, and he hasn’t done that here.</i></p> <p><i>4 points.</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;">ANSWER 7 <i>This is an F answer.</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">The Mayflower Compact was an agreement reached by the Pilgrims to govern themselves.</p>
<p><i>This answer is strange in that the only thing it does is to tell the importance of the Mayflower Compact, without identifying or describing it at all. In that regard it’s the opposite of Answer 4 above.</i></p> <p><i>3 points.</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;">ANSWER 8 <i>This is an F answer.</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">The Mayflower Compact showed that Americans liked the idea of the social contract..</p>
<p><i>This is as stripped down as it gets, omitting the importance of and any relation to the social contract, the Declaration of Independence, or the Constitution. The statement isn’t even entirely correct—the Mayflower Compact was an agreement among Pilgrim Separatists of the Plymouth Colony, not of neighboring Massachusetts.</i></p> <p><i>3 points.</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;">ANSWER 9 <i>This is an F answer.</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">The Mayflower Compact was an agreement reached by citizens of Massachusetts.</p>

The only positive thing about this answer is that it does correctly identify the Mayflower Compact as an agreement, although the student fails to tell me who reached this agreement or when or why they reached it. The student fails to relate the Mayflower Compact to the idea of the social contract and the importance of that idea to the American understanding of the nature and role of government, or to link it forward to the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. And what are the federalism, the filibuster and the veto doing here?

2 or 3 points.

ANSWER 10
This is an F answer.

The Mayflower Compact was a compact or agreement. It took place in Connecticut. Other such agreements included agreements about federalism. If an agreement is not reached there can be a filibuster or a veto.

This answer is similar to Answer 8 but even more deficient.

2 points.

ANSWER 11
This is an F answer.

The Mayflower Compact had a big impact on American government.

Does this answer even need comment? You have your choice of questions (if this isn't a makeup exam), and this is the best you've got?

1 point, tops.

ANSWER 12
This is an F answer.

The Mayflower Compact was issued by the Thomas Jefferson in 1776. It was very important.

You have had every possible short answer question in your possession (along with, on the Course Outline, a lot of the information needed to answer each and every one of those questions) since the very first day of class. Is there any excuse for this? Zero points.

ANSWER 13
This is an F answer.

[nothing in the bluebook but a blank page where a short answer is supposed to be]