

Handout 1: discussion sections January 31–February 5 and February 7–12

before discussion section January 31–February 5:

- Read Selection 3 in Appendix 1 (pp. 458–459).
- Write your own argumentative paper on some topic. It should be 200-300 words long, and should (1) clearly state the claim for which you are arguing and (2) clearly give one or more reasons in support of your claim. If you give more than one reason, they should be clearly distinguished, and each reason should appear in a separate paragraph. Here are a couple of successful ways of doing this assignment:

The Constitution should be amended to abolish the electoral college and provide for the president and vice president to be elected directly by popular vote. This would be a good idea for two reasons. First, it is undemocratic for the presidential candidate receiving the most votes not to win the election. But several times in American history, most recently in 2000, the winner of the election actually received fewer votes than a rival candidate. If the electoral college were replaced with a direct popular vote, this would not happen again.

My second reason in support of replacing the electoral college with direct popular vote has to do with the way the current system unfairly causes some citizens to feel that their votes matter less than other citizens' votes, depending on what state they live in. In most presidential elections, there are many states that are "safe" states for one party or the other, in the sense that it is known in advance which candidate will end up receiving those states' electoral votes. For example, in several recent elections, Kansas has been a "safe" state for the Republican candidate. In these elections, voters in Kansas have known that their votes were far less likely to affect the overall outcome than the votes of people living in "swing" states—contested states in which a voter could feel that his or her vote might really make a difference to which candidate ends up receiving his or her state's electoral votes. It is unfair for the residents of some states to feel that their votes matter less than the votes of residents of other states. This unfairness, and the possibility of undemocratic outcomes I described above, would be remedied if the electoral college were replaced by direct popular election.

The NCAA should abolish the shot clock in college basketball. This is because the shot clock places an excessive premium on shooting ability, and robs the game of an important strategic element that was present before the shot clock was introduced. In those earlier days, a team with a small lead could protect this lead by holding on to the ball, with dribbling and passing. To do this successfully for several minutes, teams would adopt relatively sophisticated tactics. One involved players' spreading themselves out as much as possible, so that if one player were double-teamed, there would be another one some distance away that would be free to receive a pass. Another involved players' running around in complicated patterns to use picks and other setups to increase their chances of getting open. These tactics, as I said, could be quite sophisticated—the great North Carolina coach Dean Smith was lauded for the "four corners" strategy that he developed to enable his teams to hold on to the ball without shooting for several minutes. With the introduction of the shot clock, however, this aspect of the game is lost. The game lacks something interesting and complex that it used to have. Abolishing the shot clock would invite this lost part of the game to return.

- Your paragraph(s) must be typed and prepared for turning in. That means that what you turn in should bear your name, the name of your teaching assistant, the date and time of your discussion section, and the date when you are turning it in. You may talk with other people about what you are writing, but you must choose your own topic (not one of the two above, or someone else's), and you must do the work yourself.
- What you turn in will contribute to your homework grade and will be graded for completeness—points will not be deducted for flaws in your argument. This assignment is the beginning of the first paper assignment; your grade for that assignment will be determined by the final product you turn in later in the semester.
- Print four copies of your paper to bring to your discussion section.

in discussion section January 31–February 5:

- You'll turn in one copy of your paper.
- You'll work on your paper with your peers using the other copies of your paper.

before discussion section February 7–12:

- Add to your paper by describing and replying to an objection to the claim for which you are arguing. Here are ways that the sample papers given on the front of this sheet could be enlarged in this way:

In response to my position, it might be said that the electoral college serves an important purpose, by making sure that the president and vice president are chosen by responsible statesmen who, after being chosen by the voters, convene (as a “college”) to carefully decide who the next president and vice president will be. This, presumably, is what the framers had in mind in setting up the electoral college. But this objection is flawed, because even if the electoral college ever did operate in this way, it no longer does. The “electors” who the voters of the states select in a presidential election do not get together and deliberate about who the next president and vice president will be; on the contrary, their role is purely ceremonial. So it is wrong to say that the electoral college serves an important purpose by arranging for responsible statesmen to select the next president and vice president.

In response to my position, it might be said that college basketball is more fun to watch when teams must shoot every 35 seconds rather than being allowed to hold on to the ball for several minutes. In response to this objection, I would point out that if the shot clock were abolished, it is unlikely that teams would hold on to the ball for long periods of time starting at the beginning of the game. Teams will still need to run their offenses to score points. So I would probably be only in the final few minutes of a game that a team might try to extend its possessions rather than shoot. It might be more fun to watch a whole game of short possessions than a whole game of long possessions, but it would be even more fun to watch a game of short possessions, with the extra strategic element of the possibility of some long possessions, if needed, at the end.

- Here I've just stated how the previous two papers might be enlarged. But you should add to the paper you wrote previously, so that what you turn in is your whole paper (up to this point), not just the new material.
- Like what you turned in last week, what you turn in this week will contribute to your homework grade and will be graded for completeness—points will not be deducted for flaws in content. This assignment is a continuation of the first paper assignment, your grade for which will be determined by the final product you turn in later in the semester.
- The same rules apply as before. And, as before, you should print four copies.

in discussion section February 7–12:

- You'll turn in one copy of your paper.
- You'll work on your paper with your classmates using the other copies of your paper.