

Desire2Learn Political Science (POS) 4 Practice Test (Sample)

Study Guide



Everything you need from our exam experts!

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Introduction

Preparing for a certification exam can feel overwhelming, but with the right tools, it becomes an opportunity to build confidence, sharpen your skills, and move one step closer to your goals. At Examzify, we believe that effective exam preparation isn't just about memorization, it's about understanding the material, identifying knowledge gaps, and building the test-taking strategies that lead to success.

This guide was designed to help you do exactly that.

Whether you're preparing for a licensing exam, professional certification, or entry-level qualification, this book offers structured practice to reinforce key concepts. You'll find a wide range of multiple-choice questions, each followed by clear explanations to help you understand not just the right answer, but why it's correct.

The content in this guide is based on real-world exam objectives and aligned with the types of questions and topics commonly found on official tests. It's ideal for learners who want to:

- Practice answering questions under realistic conditions,
- Improve accuracy and speed,
- Review explanations to strengthen weak areas, and
- Approach the exam with greater confidence.

We recommend using this book not as a stand-alone study tool, but alongside other resources like flashcards, textbooks, or hands-on training. For best results, we recommend working through each question, reflecting on the explanation provided, and revisiting the topics that challenge you most.

Remember: successful test preparation isn't about getting every question right the first time, it's about learning from your mistakes and improving over time. Stay focused, trust the process, and know that every page you turn brings you closer to success.

Let's begin.

How to Use This Guide

This guide is designed to help you study more effectively and approach your exam with confidence. Whether you're reviewing for the first time or doing a final refresh, here's how to get the most out of your Examzify study guide:

1. Start with a Diagnostic Review

Skim through the questions to get a sense of what you know and what you need to focus on. Your goal is to identify knowledge gaps early.

2. Study in Short, Focused Sessions

Break your study time into manageable blocks (e.g. 30 - 45 minutes). Review a handful of questions, reflect on the explanations.

3. Learn from the Explanations

After answering a question, always read the explanation, even if you got it right. It reinforces key points, corrects misunderstandings, and teaches subtle distinctions between similar answers.

4. Track Your Progress

Use bookmarks or notes (if reading digitally) to mark difficult questions. Revisit these regularly and track improvements over time.

5. Simulate the Real Exam

Once you're comfortable, try taking a full set of questions without pausing. Set a timer and simulate test-day conditions to build confidence and time management skills.

6. Repeat and Review

Don't just study once, repetition builds retention. Re-attempt questions after a few days and revisit explanations to reinforce learning. Pair this guide with other Examzify tools like flashcards, and digital practice tests to strengthen your preparation across formats.

There's no single right way to study, but consistent, thoughtful effort always wins. Use this guide flexibly, adapt the tips above to fit your pace and learning style. You've got this!

Questions

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- 1. Path dependence in public policy refers to what?**
 - A. The idea that historical decisions shape current options and constrain future choices, often through sunk costs and institutional arrangements.**
 - B. The belief that all policy choices are random.**
 - C. The concept that public opinion is the sole driver of policy.**
 - D. The absence of constraints in policy options.**

- 2. Which stage in the political science research cycle involves testing hypotheses with data?**
 - A. Analysis**
 - B. Replication and peer review**
 - C. Question formulation**
 - D. Data collection**

- 3. In which courts are the majority of cases tried?**
 - A. Federal**
 - B. State**
 - C. Appellate**
 - D. District**

- 4. What are constitutional conventions?**
 - A. Written laws that are enforceable by courts.**
 - B. Judicially reviewable rules in the constitution.**
 - C. Unwritten norms guiding political behavior that are not legally enforceable.**
 - D. Treaties that override domestic law.**

- 5. Which accurately describes President Trump's Supreme Court nominations through 2018?**
 - A. Both confirmed with fairly close votes that were mostly along party lines.**
 - B. Trump did not have the opportunity to make any Supreme Court nominations during his first two years in office.**
 - C. One nominee was confirmed, but the other nominee was not confirmed due to late-arising sexual assault allegations.**
 - D. Neither was confirmed due to opposition within the Republican Party.**

- 6. When a court bases a decision on a previous court decision, the principle is _____.**
- A. Originalism**
 - B. Stare decisis**
 - C. Statutory construction**
 - D. Amicus curiae**
- 7. Describe the political science research cycle and its main stages.**
- A. Question formulation, hypothesis development, data collection, analysis, interpretation, and theory building.**
 - B. Observing political events and drawing conclusions.**
 - C. Data collection, analysis, policy implementation, and results dissemination.**
 - D. Election campaigns, governance, policy outcomes.**
- 8. What is political efficacy and how does it affect participation?**
- A. Belief that one's actions can influence politics; higher efficacy increases political participation; low efficacy decreases participation.**
 - B. The level of wealth in a society.**
 - C. The ability of government to enforce laws.**
 - D. The accuracy of polling data.**
- 9. Which action is the most efficient and effective way for a president to shape legislation?**
- A. threatening to veto legislation if it is not changed to the president's liking**
 - B. spending ten minutes on the phone with each legislator in an attempt to win support for the president's policy initiatives**
 - C. shepherding bills the president favors through each step of the legislative process**
 - D. ensuring that the president's legislative agenda does not overlap with the platform of the congressional party in power**

10. Which term describes a judge's flexibility to adapt constitutional interpretation to contemporary issues?

- A. Originalism**
- B. Living Constitution**
- C. Textualism**
- D. Formalism**

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Answers

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1. A
2. A
3. B
4. C
5. A
6. B
7. B
8. A
9. C
10. B

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Explanations

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1. Path dependence in public policy refers to what?

- A. The idea that historical decisions shape current options and constrain future choices, often through sunk costs and institutional arrangements.**
- B. The belief that all policy choices are random.**
- C. The concept that public opinion is the sole driver of policy.**
- D. The absence of constraints in policy options.**

Path dependence in public policy means that decisions made in the past shape what options are available today and limit what can be done in the future. When a path is chosen, sunk costs—money, time, and political capital already invested—make reversing course costly and therefore less likely. Institutional arrangements—laws, agencies, and established routines—create inertia that embeds certain preferences and interests, making changes harder. Together, these forces push the policy environment to stick with familiar options and gradually lock in a particular trajectory. An example helps: once a country builds a comprehensive pension system with specific funding rules and eligibility, those choices shape future budgets and political incentives, making major reform difficult even if circumstances change. This isn't about policy choices being random, or public opinion being the sole driver, or about having no constraints.

2. Which stage in the political science research cycle involves testing hypotheses with data?

- A. Analysis**
- B. Replication and peer review**
- C. Question formulation**
- D. Data collection**

Testing hypotheses with data happens during the analysis stage. This is where you apply statistical methods and data-driven models to determine whether the observed patterns in the data support, contradict, or remain inconclusive regarding your hypotheses. Analysis translates raw data into inferences, using techniques like estimating relationships, assessing significance, and checking robustness of findings. The other stages set things up or verify results: formulating questions or hypotheses happens before data are gathered, data collection is about gathering the information, and replication and peer review focus on validation and reliability rather than the core testing of hypotheses with the data at hand. So, the analysis stage is where the data are used to test the hypotheses.

3. In which courts are the majority of cases tried?

- A. Federal
- B. State**
- C. Appellate
- D. District

Most cases are handled within the state court system, where the vast majority of criminal and civil matters are tried at the local and regional trial level. The federal system covers a narrower range of cases—those involving federal law, constitutional questions, disputes between states, or certain large-scale civil claims—and its trial courts (district courts) handle far fewer matters in comparison. Appellate courts don't conduct trials; they review decisions from lower courts. So, the leading place where most cases are actually tried is in state courts.

4. What are constitutional conventions?

- A. Written laws that are enforceable by courts.
- B. Judicially reviewable rules in the constitution.
- C. Unwritten norms guiding political behavior that are not legally enforceable.**
- D. Treaties that override domestic law.

Constitutional conventions are unwritten norms that guide political behavior and are not legally enforceable. They shape how government operates in practice by setting expectations about what politicians should do, even though courts cannot compel them to act in those ways. This makes conventions flexible and capable of adapting as political norms evolve, while still providing essential guidance for stable governance. For example, conventions help ensure that a government remains responsible to the legislature and to the electorate, such as the idea that a prime minister must have the support of the majority in the lower house or that the head of state acts on the advice of elected ministers. Because these are not enforceable by courts, they rely on political legitimacy and precedent rather than legal penalties. In contrast, written laws are enforceable by courts, and rules that are judicially reviewable are those courts can evaluate against the constitution. Treaties that override domestic law involve international commitments that require domestic implementation; they function differently from internal norms.

5. Which accurately describes President Trump's Supreme Court nominations through 2018?

- A. Both confirmed with fairly close votes that were mostly along party lines.**
- B. Trump did not have the opportunity to make any Supreme Court nominations during his first two years in office.**
- C. One nominee was confirmed, but the other nominee was not confirmed due to late-arising sexual assault allegations.**
- D. Neither was confirmed due to opposition within the Republican Party.**

The key idea here is how presidential Supreme Court picks interact with Senate politics and rule changes to shape the outcome. Two Trump nominees were confirmed through 2018, and both nominations ended in relatively close votes that mostly followed party lines. The first confirmation came after the Senate, then controlled by Republicans, allowed a simple-majority vote for a Supreme Court pick, and the nominee won with a margin of 54-45, aided by a small number of members from the opposition voting in favor. The second nomination faced intense scrutiny and opposition, but still cleared the Senate by a narrow margin, around 50-48, with party-line voting predominating and only a few deviations. This pattern shows how presidential choices for the Court can be confirmed despite controversy, yet within a highly partisan legislative environment where party alignment often dictates the final tally.

6. When a court bases a decision on a previous court decision, the principle is _____.

- A. Originalism**
- B. Stare decisis**
- C. Statutory construction**
- D. Amicus curiae**

Stare decisis is the practice of following prior court decisions when deciding current cases. When a court bases its ruling on a previous decision, it's applying this principle, which helps keep the law stable, predictable, and legitimate. It means courts treat earlier interpretations as guidance for similar situations, so people can rely on consistent outcomes. Sometimes judges distinguish the present facts from those in earlier cases or, in higher courts, may overrule precedent, but the default is to adhere to established rulings. The other terms refer to different ideas: originalism is about interpreting the Constitution as it was understood at the time of its framing; statutory construction is the process of interpreting statutes; amicus curiae refers to a person or group offering information to a court not as a party to the case.

7. Describe the political science research cycle and its main stages.

A. Question formulation, hypothesis development, data collection, analysis, interpretation, and theory building.

B. Observing political events and drawing conclusions.

C. Data collection, analysis, policy implementation, and results dissemination.

D. Election campaigns, governance, policy outcomes.

The main idea tested is how political science research progresses from a question to a broader explanation. The best fit describes a full research cycle: starting with formulating a clear research question, then developing a hypothesis, followed by systematic data collection, analyzing that data, interpreting the findings, and using them to build or refine theory. This sequence shows how researchers move from specific observations to general explanations and testable ideas, rather than jumping straight to conclusions or focusing only on political events. Observing political events and drawing conclusions, while a natural starting point for inquiry, doesn't complete the cycle because it omits the explicit steps of hypothesis development, systematic data gathering, and theory building that give research its structure and rigor. Data collection, analysis, policy implementation, and results dissemination miss the essential stages of framing a question and formulating hypotheses, and they include policy execution—which is more about applying findings than about the iterative research process itself. Election campaigns, governance, policy outcomes describe real-world political activity rather than the methodological sequence researchers follow to produce knowledge.

8. What is political efficacy and how does it affect participation?

A. Belief that one's actions can influence politics; higher efficacy increases political participation; low efficacy decreases participation.

B. The level of wealth in a society.

C. The ability of government to enforce laws.

D. The accuracy of polling data.

Political efficacy is the belief that your actions can influence politics. When people think their vote, voice, or other civic actions can make a difference, they're more likely to participate—voting, contacting officials, volunteering for campaigns, attending meetings, or engaging in political discussions. This sense of effectiveness increases motivation to participate because the effort feels worthwhile and the potential impact seems real. If someone feels their actions won't matter, participation tends to drop. Internal efficacy—confidence in your own ability to understand and engage—often underpins this, and people's experiences, education, and networks can shape how strong that belief is. It's not about wealth, how forcefully a government can enforce laws, or how accurate polling data are.

9. Which action is the most efficient and effective way for a president to shape legislation?
- A. threatening to veto legislation if it is not changed to the president's liking
 - B. spending ten minutes on the phone with each legislator in an attempt to win support for the president's policy initiatives
 - C. shepherding bills the president favors through each step of the legislative process**
 - D. ensuring that the president's legislative agenda does not overlap with the platform of the congressional party in power

Shaping legislation works best when the president actively guides a bill through every step of the process. By shepherding a bill, the president's team drafts it, negotiates changes in committees, builds coalitions on the floor, and resolves differences in conference committees. This approach uses the presidency's built-in leverage—staff expertise, control over scheduling, and the ability to bargain with key lawmakers—to create a clear path from introduction to enactment and to secure broad support. Blunt tools like veto threats can deter or derail bills and are less about moving a specific measure through the chamber, while individual phone calls are impractical for building durable coalitions. Avoiding alignment with the party platform undermines the very coalitions needed for passage. So actively guiding favored bills through the legislative process maximizes both efficiency and effectiveness in shaping law.

10. Which term describes a judge's flexibility to adapt constitutional interpretation to contemporary issues?
- A. Originalism
 - B. Living Constitution**
 - C. Textualism
 - D. Formalism

Interpreting the Constitution in light of evolving society is the idea at work here. The Living Constitution approach treats constitutional meaning as dynamic, allowing judges to adapt interpretations to contemporary issues and circumstances that the framers could not have foreseen. This flexibility helps keep constitutional law relevant as social norms, technologies, and public values change over time. In contrast, originalism anchors meaning to the text and the framers' intent at ratification, offering less room for change. Textualism emphasizes the ordinary meaning of the words themselves at the time of interpretation, which can limit adaptation. Formalism focuses on applying rules in a strictly mechanical way, without weighing broader societal implications, again reducing flexibility.

Next Steps

Congratulations on reaching the final section of this guide. You've taken a meaningful step toward passing your certification exam and advancing your career.

As you continue preparing, remember that consistent practice, review, and self-reflection are key to success. Make time to revisit difficult topics, simulate exam conditions, and track your progress along the way.

If you need help, have suggestions, or want to share feedback, we'd love to hear from you. Reach out to our team at hello@examzify.com.

Or visit your dedicated course page for more study tools and resources:

<https://d2lpos4.examzify.com>

We wish you the very best on your exam journey. You've got this!

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