

Instructions for U.S. Supreme Court In-Class Exercise

PURPOSE: In class, assign a Supreme Court case for students to learn about and teach each other about.

To demystify Supreme Court cases, this exercise helps students identify where to find more information online, recognize legal questions at the heart of a particular Supreme Court case, and become familiar with the documents and potential influences on a legal decision. Students, particularly those enrolled in an Introduction to American Politics/Government course, often need to be introduced to websites that contain supporting materials such as *amicus curiae* briefs and *writs of certiorari* that can help them understand the process it takes for a case to make it to the Court.

FOR THE INSTRUCTOR: BEFORE CLASS

- a. Pre-select a set of cases that are pending (Select "Cases" on <https://www.oyez.org/> to view cases that the Supreme Court is considering).
- b. Create a page on your course management site (one students can access in class) where you can list links to cases you will assign to each group, or distribute a hard copy of the list in class.
- c. Either create a page on your course management site (one students can access in class) where you can list the directions, or distribute a hard copy of the directions in class. The latter tends to work better as it can serve as a visual checklist for students.

IN-CLASS DIRECTIONS:

1. Break the class into groups of four or five students (in groups of more than five, individual students tend to become less valued because their work may be taken over by a peer) and walk them through the instructions (online or hard copy).
2. Allow approximately 40 minutes for group work. The time can be shortened if the requirements are reduced (e.g., skim only one argument for or against) or lengthened (such as by reading more examples of the assigned online materials).
3. Allow each group to present their case to the class verbally, approximately 3 minutes per group.

MODIFICATIONS: This exercise is designed for pending cases. It can be modified for cases that have already been decided by adding questions about the justices who decided, how they decided (majority, concurring, or dissenting opinions), and on what grounds.

This activity can be implemented in almost any size class, but for every person to participate, smaller classes are better. Fewer presentations will be made within the class period if the entire group is large, but the work can be completed by every student.