

RAFT Writing Strategy

A Research-Backed Tool for Thinking, Writing, and Communicating Like a Political Scientist

What is RAFT — and why does it matter in a Government class? Most writing assignments ask you to write to an invisible reader about an abstract topic. RAFT changes that. Every time you use RAFT, you step into a real role, write to a real audience, in a real format, about a real political question. That is exactly what senators, lawyers, journalists, and policy analysts do every single day. RAFT does not just make writing more interesting — it makes it more accurate, more purposeful, and more powerful.

Stronger Arguments

When you know exactly who you are writing to, you automatically choose better evidence and sharper language to persuade them.

Real-World Relevance

Government writing is always audience-driven. Policy memos, op-eds, legal briefs, and campaign speeches all require the same four RAFT decisions.

Deeper Content Mastery

Writing crystallizes thinking. When you have to explain a policy position to a specific person in a specific format, you discover very quickly what you do and do not understand.

The Four Elements of RAFT

Every RAFT assignment is built around four decisions. Learn these four letters and you will always know what to ask yourself before you begin writing.

R

R — Role: Who are you as the writer?

Your role is the perspective or position you are writing from. It is not always your own voice. In a Government class, you might write as a sitting senator, a Supreme Court justice issuing a dissent, a first-time voter explaining your choice, a constitutional law professor, a presidential speechwriter, or a civil rights attorney. Your role determines your authority, your language, and what evidence you are most likely to use. Before you write a single sentence, ask: what does this person know, believe, and want to accomplish?

A

A — Audience: Who are you writing to?

Your audience is the specific person or group your piece is directed at. Not your teacher — the actual reader inside the scenario. In a Government class, your audience might be a hostile Senate committee,

your home-state constituents, the American public, a federal judge, a local school board, or a foreign diplomat. Your audience determines how formal your language is, which evidence will be most persuasive, and how much background you need to explain. A senator does not explain what the First Amendment is to a federal judge. She might explain it very carefully to a worried parent.

F

F — Format: What type of writing is this?

Format is the genre or structure of your piece. The format determines length, tone, organization, and convention. In a Government class, this might be a policy memo, an op-ed column, a dissenting Supreme Court opinion, a floor speech, a persuasive letter, an executive order, a campaign advertisement script, or a position paper. Each format has its own rules and expectations. An op-ed opens with a hook and uses accessible language. A legal brief cites precedent and structures arguments formally. Matching your format to your role and audience is a major part of what makes writing feel authentic.

T

T — Topic: What are you writing about?

The topic is the specific political question, policy issue, or civic problem your writing addresses. In a Government class, topics come directly from your course content: immigration policy, the balance of powers, campaign finance, voting rights, executive authority, foreign policy decisions, constitutional interpretation, and more. Your topic should be narrow enough to address well in the assigned length — not 'government spending' but 'the proposed increase to the federal minimum wage.'

How to Use RAFT: Step by Step

Follow these steps every time you receive a RAFT prompt — or every time you create your own.

**Step
1**

Read the Prompt — Then Decode It

Before you write anything, read the RAFT prompt carefully and identify all four elements. Underline or circle R, A, F, and T. If the prompt only gives you one or two elements, you will need to choose the others. Write all four at the top of your paper before you begin drafting.

**Step
2**

Research Your Role

Spend two to three minutes thinking deeply about your role. Ask yourself: What does this person care about? What do they already know? What language do they typically use? What would embarrass or discredit them? In Government, a senator running for re-election sounds different from a lame-duck senator who no longer needs votes. These distinctions matter.

Step 3	Analyze Your Audience Now think just as carefully about your audience. What does this audience already believe? What would convince them — or what would turn them off? What evidence will they find credible? The evidence a federal judge finds convincing is different from what a newspaper reader finds convincing. Audience analysis is one of the most transferable skills you will develop in this class.
Step 4	Build a Claim for Your Role and Audience Before you draft, write one sentence that states your position. This is your claim — the central argument your entire piece will support. Make it specific. 'The Electoral College should be abolished' is a claim. 'The Electoral College is complicated' is not. Your claim should be something your audience could disagree with, and something your role would plausibly argue.
Step 5	Select Evidence That Fits Your Role AND Audience Now choose your supporting evidence. Great RAFT responses select evidence that is appropriate to both the role and the audience — not just evidence that happens to be true. A senator cites constituent surveys and economic data. A Supreme Court justice cites legal precedent and constitutional text. Use the most persuasive evidence available to you, and make sure you explain — in your own words — exactly how it supports your claim.
Step 6	Draft Using the Format's Conventions Write your draft in the correct format. If you are writing an op-ed, open with a hook — a striking fact, a brief anecdote, or a pointed question. If you are writing a policy memo, use formal headers and direct language. If you are writing a floor speech, use rhetoric and repetition. Staying true to the format is what separates a RAFT response that feels real from one that just feels like an essay with a label on top.
Step 7	Revise for Role, Audience, and Format After you finish your draft, read it once for each of the four RAFT elements. Ask: does every sentence sound like someone in this role would say it? Does it address the actual audience? Does it follow the conventions of this format? Does it stay focused on the topic? One revision pass focused specifically on audience — imagining yourself as the reader — will improve almost every piece of writing you produce.

RAFT in the Government Classroom: Example Prompts

These examples show how RAFT applies directly to Federal Government content.

Role	Audience	Format	Topic / Prompt
U.S. Senator seeking re-election	Home-state constituents	<i>Town hall speech</i>	A recent Senate vote on immigration reform — defend your vote to skeptical voters
ACLU staff attorney	Federal district court judge	<i>Legal brief</i>	A state voter ID law that you argue violates the 14th Amendment
White House budget director	Congressional Budget Committee	<i>Policy memo</i>	Proposed cuts to the Department of Education — justify the decision with data
Political journalist	General newspaper readership	<i>Op-ed column</i>	The growing influence of Super PACs on congressional elections
Dissenting Supreme Court justice	The American public	<i>Dissenting opinion</i>	A 5-4 majority ruling that you believe was wrongly decided
First-time voter	A younger sibling who is skeptical about voting	<i>Personal letter</i>	Why voting in local elections matters more than most people realize

How RAFT Builds Writing Literacy

Writing Readiness Skill	How RAFT Develops It
Writing a clear claim	Your role demands a clear position. No role — senator, attorney, or journalist — gets away with vague writing. RAFT forces a specific claim every time.
Supporting that claim with evidence	Your audience determines which evidence works. Choosing evidence for a specific reader teaches you to evaluate sources, not just collect them.

Explaining how evidence proves the point	Your format requires you to connect evidence to argument explicitly — especially in memos, briefs, and op-eds, where readers expect the analysis, not just the facts.
Paraphrasing rather than copying	Because you are writing in a role, copying text from a source sounds false. RAFT naturally pushes you to re-express ideas in your character's voice.
Quoting briefly and correctly	Knowing your audience helps you decide when a quote is more powerful than a paraphrase — and when it slows your piece down. Both skills develop through practice.
Organizing a short response logically	Every format has an organizational logic. Op-eds open with hooks. Memos lead with the recommendation. Speeches build to a call to action. Learning formats teaches structure.
Answering the question directly and fully	Your topic is the question. Your role is the person answering it. RAFT eliminates vague non-answers because there is always a person with a position on the line.
Revising for clarity	Revising with your audience in mind — 'Would the judge understand this? Would the constituent believe this?' — is one of the most powerful revision strategies that exists.

Common Mistakes — And How to Fix Them

What Looks Like a RAFT Response But Isn't	What Actually Works
Writing a generic essay and just labeling it with the role at the top	Stay in character from the first sentence. Your opening line should immediately sound like the person you are playing.
Ignoring the audience — writing as if no one is reading	Every sentence should be shaped by who you are writing to. After you draft, re-read from your audience's perspective and mark anything that would confuse or lose them.
Choosing any evidence that supports your claim, regardless of format	A senator does not cite academic journal articles in a floor speech. A lawyer does not cite an op-ed in a brief. Match your evidence type to your role and format.

Treating the format as decoration rather than structure	Format determines how you open, organize, and close. Research the conventions of your format before you draft — a policy memo and a persuasive letter have very different structures.
Writing a one-paragraph response for a format that requires more	A legal brief, a policy memo, and an op-ed are multi-paragraph genres. Honor the length that the format requires — brevity that loses completeness is not a virtue here.