

Grading notes
09/10 essay assignment

Were the 13th 14th, and 15th “real” Constitutional amendments?

You could assess their “realness” in terms of the process used to produce them, or in terms of whether they eventually gained general acceptance and legitimacy as new parts of the Constitution. Many essays took the reasonable approach of saying they were “real” in the legitimacy sense although there was some deficit in the process sense. In any case, the assessment of process needs some argument, and the assessment of legitimacy needs explanation.

Some common points for improvement among the essays:

Keep your focus on using arguments related to those in the assigned reading. Fully relate your arguments to those of the author, or draw directly on those of the author. For example, if you want to talk about the importance of following the law (or constitution), or of popular sovereignty, be sure it’s clear where these ideas intersect with Ackerman’s arguments about how the eventual legitimacy of these Amendments was produced.

Many of the essays could have benefited from making a little more use of the Ackerman “phases” of proposal, triggering, consolidation, etc. to help you explain how the amendments gained legitimacy.

Avoid letting your essay become a mere summary of the reading. Rather, your main job is to construct an argument, or critically analyze an author’s argument.

Remember, your essay can always benefit if you read over your first draft to assess grammar and readability. It’s not just a matter of observing conventions—sometimes poor writing obscures the argument you hope to make, and that’s a shame.