SIMULATION DESIGN

Model Congress: Three Days

The full version: a cost estimate that undercuts the sponsors, and a conference that can fail.

College and high school.

Days one and two below are the one-day and two-day designs, unchanged. The third day is where the outcome is genuinely allowed to fail, and you should say so in advance.

The teaching problem

Students think the floor is where things happen, and they vote their own opinions. Both are wrong and both are correctable in a single period. Legislation happens in committee, and the rule under which a bill reaches the floor usually decides its fate before anyone debates it.

The session

One committee, one real bill, an open amendment process, and recorded roll call votes written on the board where everyone can see them. Each student is a member with a district fact sheet carrying exactly two constraints, and **at least a third of the sheets should put the member's district against the member's party.**

The element that does the teaching

The vote on the rule comes first, and it is the best twelve minutes in the design. Open process or limited amendments? Students arrive with no concept of procedure as power and they discover it immediately, because the members who want the bill changed need an open process and the members who want it passed intact do not. By the time the first amendment is offered, the room understands that the fight was already had.

The whips, and why the role exists

Name two party whips and tell them plainly that their job is to hold their caucus and that you will be reading the board at the end. Without this role students vote their personal views and the session becomes a seminar with a show of hands. With it, the district fact sheets start to bite, because a whip has to decide which member to let defect.

Speaking turns

An opening statement, at least one amendment appearance as sponsor or opponent, and two recorded votes minimum. **Assign the amendments in advance** rather than hoping, so that each one is sponsored by a member whose district sheet explains why.

The bill itself

A real bill is unreadable in a class period and a one-paragraph summary is not a bill. Give them a genuine two-page excerpt with real section numbers and real operative language, and summarize the rest. **Students must amend actual text, by section and line**, or the markup is a conversation about a topic.

The running order

0–10	Opening. The bill, the district fact sheets, the three floor rules.
10–22	**The vote on the rule.** Open amendments or limited. Recorded, on the board.
22–45	Amendments 1 and 2, each sponsored by a named member whose district explains the position.
45–55	**Break.** Ten minutes. The whips work the room.
55–80	Remaining amendments, with the board visible throughout.
80–90	**Final passage, recorded.** The whips account for every defection.
90–100	**Debrief**, read off the board.

Day two

Day one is the markup and ends with the committee print, **which you produce overnight incorporating exactly the amendments that passed, including any that are now internally contradictory. Do not fix the contradictions.**

Day two is floor action on that print, under the rule the committee chose, with a veto threat issued in writing at the start, so the chamber has to decide whether to pass something that will not survive.

Day three

The development on day two is a cost estimate: an independent score showing the bill does roughly half of what its sponsors claimed, or costs twice what they said. It is handed out at the opening and it is aimed at the coalition that formed in the markup.

Day three is conference with a second chamber, staffed by students who were not on the first committee and who have passed their own version, and the conference report has to pass both chambers unamended. **This is the version where a bill is genuinely allowed to die, and it frequently should.**

The trap in this format

The bill nobody can read. If the text is a summary, students amend a topic rather than a statute, and the whole point of a markup is lost. Two pages of genuine operative language, with section and line numbers, is the minimum that works.

Before you publish the agenda

1. Can you say in one sentence what the session is for, without using the word coverage?
2. Does the question genuinely divide the room, and can the body actually decide it?
3. Is every role down for at least two scheduled turns?
4. Have the demanding roles been spread deliberately rather than claimed?
5. Does someone know they are chairing, and have they been briefed?
6. Have the real questions gone out, with a line saying they are the real ones?
7. Is anything artificial about the setup named in the student document?
8. Is there a ten-minute break in the middle for students to find allies, and is the room arranged so they can stand up and move?
9. Is the closing act something the room can watch fail?
10. Is the debrief in the running order, with time of its own?

The three floor rules to read aloud, and a minute-by-minute template, are in Running Order, Floor Rules, and the Day-Of Check on the Class-Based Simulations page. The topics below are defaults. Replace them with whatever is live when you run the session; what should not be replaced is the one structural element in each design that does the teaching.