# Three Views of Lunch

Use sociological perspectives to explain everyday behavior.

**S.1.4** "Explain the major theoretical perspectives (paradigms) common to sociology including structural functional, symbolic interaction, and conflict theory. Demonstrate how each perspective sheds light on human social behavior."

NAME _____ DATE _____

## 1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

**YOUR JOB** Circle the name of each sociological perspective. Underline the behavior or condition it helps explain, then number the three explanations 1, 2, and 3.

### What Happens at Lunch?

1. At Westview High, the lunch period lasts 28 minutes. Students form a line, cafeteria workers serve meals, and teachers direct traffic near the doors. Structural functionalism asks how parts of a social setting work together to keep it operating. From this view, lining up is not just a personal habit: it helps workers serve hundreds of students before the bell and lets classmates predict whose turn comes next. A rule can also have unintended effects. If teachers require everyone to enter through one door, the rule may prevent crowding at the counter but create a bottleneck in the hallway.

2. At a corner table, seniors leave an empty chair for a friend. A ninth grader thinks the chair is free and sits down; the seniors exchange looks, and the newcomer moves. Symbolic interactionism focuses on how people build shared meanings through everyday encounters. An empty chair has no fixed social meaning. To the seniors, it signals a place reserved for someone in their group; to the ninth grader, it signals an available seat. Their looks communicate a message without words. This perspective helps explain the move as a response to interpreted signals, not simply to a posted seating rule.

3. Meanwhile, students in regular classes notice that the hot meal line moves slowly. Varsity athletes enter five minutes early on practice days because their coach persuaded the principal to change their release time. Conflict theory examines how unequal power and resources shape social arrangements. The athletes get more time to eat, while other students may have less time for a full meal. When students from regular classes ask the principal to change the policy, they challenge who gets to set the rules. This perspective highlights a struggle over time and access, rather than treating the lunch schedule as equally fair to everyone.

## 2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How would structural functionalism explain the lunch line? What unintended problem might the one-door rule create?

2. How would symbolic interactionism explain why the ninth grader moves from the chair?

3. How does conflict theory explain both the athletes' early release and the other students' request to change it?

4. Both the lunch line and the early-release policy affect students' time to eat. What does structural functionalism reveal about the line that conflict theory reveals about the policy?

## 3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine your school starts an online sign-up system for its two library study rooms. Describe a plausible student behavior, then explain what structural functionalism, symbolic interactionism, and conflict theory would each reveal about the situation. Include a concrete detail for each perspective.

ANSWER KEY

# Three Views of Lunch

HIGH SCHOOL · S.1.4

## PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Circle the name of each sociological perspective. Underline the behavior or condition it helps explain, then number the three explanations 1, 2, and 3. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

## PART 2 · ANSWERS

| # | QUESTION | ANSWER |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | How would structural functionalism explain the lunch line? What unintended problem might the one-door rule create? | **The line helps workers serve students before the bell and makes turns predictable. The one-door rule might create a hallway bottleneck.** |
| 2 | How would symbolic interactionism explain why the ninth grader moves from the chair? | **The ninth grader first reads the empty chair as available, then interprets the seniors' looks as a signal that it is reserved.** |
| 3 | How does conflict theory explain both the athletes' early release and the other students' request to change it? | **The coach's influence gives athletes extra lunch time. Other students challenge that unequal access by asking the principal to change the policy.** |
| 4 | Both the lunch line and the early-release policy affect students' time to eat. What does structural functionalism reveal about the line that conflict theory reveals about the policy? | **Structural functionalism shows how the line coordinates service for many students. Conflict theory shows how the policy gives one group more time because its coach influenced a decision.** |

## PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Students put their names on the online list and wait near a study room. Structural functionalism would see the list as a way to coordinate turns and reduce arguments. Symbolic interactionism would examine how a name beside a time slot becomes a shared signal that the room is claimed, even before anyone enters. Conflict theory would ask whether students with phones can claim slots sooner than students who must wait to use a library computer, giving some groups better access.

Accept other passage-supported explanations that distinguish coordination, shared meanings, and unequal power or access. For Part 3, the behavior may differ from the sample if all three perspectives are applied to the student's scenario.