In drafting the American constitution the Framers are believed to have incorporated some of the best features to a constitution, including the separation of powers. This concept limits the power of the American government through several means, particularly by dividing the powers of the government between three branches in government. Each branch checks the actions of the other and balances their power in some way.

The Legislature (Congress) is responsible for making laws. After a law is proposed as a bill, it is sent to appropriate committees for several stages of discussion, research, and modification. It is then debated in both legislative houses, if the law is passed; it is still subject to further modification and final vote by both houses. Under the system of checks and balances, the president can refuse to sign the bill into law (through the veto power). The legislature can then vote to override the veto. Other checks and balances include legislative powers to impeach public officials, confirm appointments to the executive and judicial branches, and vote on appropriations. In 1987, the Senate rejected President Reagan's nominee, Robert Bork, for a place in the Supreme Court. Another example of the powers of the congress was the impeachment of Bill Clinton in 1998. Congress holds the power to declare war although the Constitution confers on the President to be 'Commander-in-chief 'of the armed forces. This power seems to have fallen into disuse.

The Judiciary applies laws in court. Judges are responsible for the interpretation of laws made by the Congress. The courts attempt to resolve conflicts impartially in order to protect the individual rights guaranteed by the Constitution. The ultimate court of appeals is the Supreme Court. On the federal level, the system of balances empowers Congress to create federal courts, and all federal judges must be appointed by the president and confirmed by the Senate. The courts may exercise the powers of judicial review and injunction. The President holds the power to nominate Supreme Court justices, to nominate federal judges and can refuse court decisions. Clinton was able to make two appointments to the Supreme Court – Ruth Badar Ginsburg in 1993 and Stephen Breyer in 1994. The President also has the power to pardon – President Ford pardoned his predecessor President Nixon. The Legislature has the power to change the size of the Federal Court system and the number of justices within the court. Congress has the power to propose constitutional amendments and can reject Supreme Court nominees; they can also impeach and remove federal judges. However, the Supreme Court has been viewed as countermajoritarian and thus makes decisions that do not reflect the wishes of the public, e.g. the banning of the school prayer.

Executive power is vested in the President. The principal responsibility of the President is to "take care that the laws be faithfully executed." By using these words, the Constitution does not require the President to personally enforce the law; rather, officers subordinate to the President may perform such duties.To ensure that the president could never become too powerful, the Framers made many presidential powers dependent upon the will of Congress. For example, the president is given the power to make treaties with foreign countries, but those treaties must be approved by the Senate by a two-thirds majority. Congress can override the presidential veto and impeach the president; they can also reject the president's appointments. Congress also has the power to conduct investigations into the president's actions and can refuse to pass laws or provide funding that the president requires. The Judiciary can declare executive actions unconstitutional

and has the power to issue warrants. These checks and balances are good; however, if Congress is mostly Republican and the President is a Democrat then not many laws can be passed effectively, causing Gridlock.

Nevertheless, checks and balances prevent any one branch from accumulating too much power and encourage cooperation between branches as well as comprehensive debate on controversial policy issues. Therefore, I believe the system is effective and works.

Advantages and disadvantages of using the FPTP system

The First past the post system is used in British parliamentary elections. Each elector has a single vote, and this is cast, in single member constituencies for one candidate. The winner will be the candidate who has the most votes.

There are many advantages to the FPTP system, the first and foremost being it is familiar with the electorate, it is simple to cast and count the votes and because of this there is no mass movement for change. FPTP usually ensure a one party government and avoids coalitions, 1979 was the last time a government was defeated under a vote of no confidence. First-past-the-post tends to reduce the number of political parties to a greater extent than most other methods, thus making it more likely that a single party will hold a majority of legislative seats. (In the United Kingdom, 18 out of 22 General Elections since 1922 have produced a majority government.)

FPTP generates a strong, stable and single-party government who are able to carry through their election manifesto during their time in office. This electoral system also provides a simple mechanism to vote a government out, this strengthens political accountability and is probably the only system by which the Conservatives can return to power with a workable Commons majority.

The link between MP's and their constituencies can be strong; under many proportional representation systems multi-member constituencies are created which could weaken the link between MP's and their electorate.

And finally the FPTP system encourages political parties to broaden their electoral appeal, in ways this discourages extremism as parties cannot expect to win unless they attract a solid core of mainstream voters in enough seats.

However, there are also many criticisms facing the FPTP system; the number of seats won is often highly disproportional to the number of votes cast. The extent of the voter's choice is limited as there is no opportunity to express more than one preference between candidates on the ballot paper. In many cases the FPTP system usually over-

represents one of the major parties – providing a "winner's bonus" and under-represents the other. There is a systemic bias against one of the main parties, currently the FPTP system works strongly against the Conservatives. Many voters resort to tactical voting, kind of llike "compromising". Voters are pressured to vote for one of the two candidates they predict are most likely to win, even if their true preference is neither, because a vote for any other candidate will be likely to be wasted and have no impact on the final result -"wasted vote syndrome", this is usually shown by falling turnout. Many politicians are elected with a minority of the votes cast, therefore constraining the mandate that they have elected as politicians.

In ultra safe seats, party members effectively "select" the MP therefore giving more power to the local/national party selection panel rather than the voters themselves. This causes the difficulty that all other voters in the constituency can then make no difference to the result, since the winner of the seat is already known in advance. This results in serious feelings of disenfranchisement.

The FPTP system has not proved to be good at promoting a broader political representation for women and ethnic minorities who continue to be grossly under-represented in Parliament.

The FPTP system is currently the system being used in the British parliamentary system and although there are many criticisms against the systems, there have been no major problems with the way the system runs. Britain is still a democracy and has a very strong government as opposed to coalition governments that have been formed under proportional representation, as in Germany. Although the system has it flaws, it seems to be best suited to our country.