

Directions for Democracy

Name: _____

If at first you don't succeed...

After gaining independence in 1777, the Framers drafted the Articles of Confederation. This document formed a loose organization of 13 separate state governments and a legislative branch with very limited power. It created a government very different from the one we have today. There was no president or executive branch and no national judicial system! But this government didn't work as well as they had hoped, so ten years later they held a convention to revise the Articles. After much debate, the Framers decided to scrap the old plan and start a new one. This new plan became the Constitution we have today.



Writing the Rule Book

A *constitution* is a document that gives instructions for how a government should run. It is kind of like a rule book for creating the laws for an entire country. When the Framers went back to the drawing board, they had many questions to consider:

What is the purpose and function of our new government? What powers should the government have, and what limits should be placed on the government? How do we protect the rights of the people? Can we make a document that will be useful to future generations?

Introducing... The Preamble

The United States Constitution is one of the shortest constitutions in the world! It has a little over 4,500 words and covers only four sheets of paper. It is also the oldest written constitution that is still in use today.

Our Constitution is divided into nine parts. The first paragraph is called the *Preamble*. Its job is to introduce the Constitution, explain what the Constitution is meant to do, and describe the purpose of the new government.



The Constitution on display at the National Archives in Washington, DC.

Breaking It Down: What does each phrase in the Preamble really mean?

We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union,
establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility,
provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare,
and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity,
do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.

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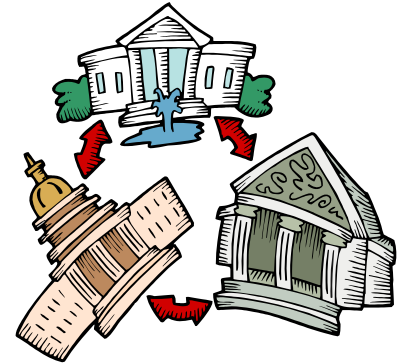
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Organizing a Government

The Preamble is followed by the seven *articles*, or chapters, that give directions for how the government should work. The first four articles cover a lot of information, so they are broken up into *sections*.

Articles I, II, and III show us how the three branches work. They also tell how each branch can keep the other branches from getting too powerful. (We call this the system of *checks and balances*.)

The remaining articles set up other details about the government, including instructions for getting the Constitution *ratified* (passed by the states) and how the original document can be changed through amendments. The Framers knew that they were writing for the people of their day, but they also knew that the Constitution would need to be useful for future citizens.



Constitutional Table of Contents

Section	Answers these questions...
Preamble	What does the Constitution do?
Article I	How does the <i>legislative</i> branch work? What powers do the states have?
Article II	How does the <i>executive</i> branch work?
Article III	How does the <i>judicial</i> branch work?
Article IV	How should the states get along with each other?
Article V	How can the Constitution be amended, or changed?
Article VI	Can the U.S. be in debt? Is federal law superior to state law? What do officials say when they are sworn into office?
Article VII	How did they make the Constitution law?
Amendments	What changes have been made to the Constitution?

Approval By The States

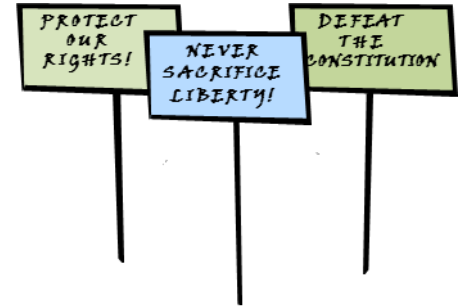


One More Thing...

After the Constitution outlines how the government works, it lists 27 amendments. The *amendments* are changes that were made after the Constitution became law. They are broken down into the Bill of Rights (amendments 1-10) and the later amendments (11-27). An amendment can only become a part of the Constitution if many people support it. Three-fourths (3/4) of the states must approve an amendment before it can be ratified.

Constitutional Conflict

Before the Constitution could take effect, it had to be ratified by the states. Without the first 10 amendments—the Bill of Rights—the Constitution might never have been approved! People disagreed about whether the Constitution did enough to protect peoples' rights. One group, the Federalists, thought the Constitution gave people enough protection. But another group, the Anti-Federalists, feared the national government might become too strong and violate peoples' rights. They threatened to stop the Constitution from being approved unless a list of protected rights was added.



Constitutional Compromise

The two sides compromised by adding the Bill of Rights as the first ten amendments to the Constitution. The rights listed here fall into three categories: individual freedoms, protections against government abuse and power, and rights of people accused of crimes. In the United States, we are used to having these kinds of rights. But in many parts of the world, people live without them.

The Bill of Rights

Here are the ten amendments that saved the Constitution!

1ST AMENDMENT	Guarantees freedom of religion, speech, and the press; the right to assemble peacefully; and the right to petition the government
2ND AMENDMENT	Protects the right to have regulated state militias and the people's right to bear arms
3RD AMENDMENT	Says that the government cannot require people to provide housing for soldiers at peacetime
4TH AMENDMENT	Protects people from unreasonable searches and seizures
5TH AMENDMENT	Declares that no one can be deprived of life, liberty, or property without due process of law
6TH AMENDMENT	Guarantees the right to a trial by jury in criminal cases
7TH AMENDMENT	Guarantees the right to a trial by jury in most civil cases
8TH AMENDMENT	Prohibits excessive bail, fines, and punishments
9TH AMENDMENT	The rights not mentioned in the Constitution belong to the people
10TH AMENDMENT	The powers not given to the national government belong to the states or the people



Voters in Louisiana

Times are Changing

The amendments allow the Constitution to meet the changing needs and attitudes of the country. After the Bill of Rights, 17 more amendments were added to the Constitution. One thing that changed over time was the idea of who could vote. Between 1870 and 1971, five amendments expanded voting rights to different groups of people who could not vote before. Voting rights were given first to African American men, then to women, then to people living in Washington D.C., and finally to people as young as 18 years old.