

A Summary of the US Constitution

The Preamble

The Preamble lists the reasons that the 13 original colonies separated from their mother country, and became an independent nation.

We the People of the United States,
in Order to form a more perfect Union,
establish Justice, *make good government & laws*
insure domestic Tranquility, *peace in our homes*
provide for the common defense, *national security*
promote the general Welfare, *healthy communities*
and secure the Blessings of Liberty *freedom*
to ourselves and our Posterity, *family & friends*
do ordain and establish *give authority*
this Constitution *the supreme law of the land*
for the United States of America.



The Seven Articles of the US Constitution

The Constitution is our plan for government. The Articles of the Constitution talk about the duties of the three main parts of government: the Executive Branch, the Legislative Branch, and the Judicial Branch. The articles also talk about the separate powers of the Federal and State government, and how to change the Constitution.

Article 1: Legislative Branch: the U.S. Congress makes the laws for the United States. Congress has two parts, called "Houses," the House of Representatives and the Senate.

Article 2: Executive Branch: the President, Vice-President, Cabinet, and Departments under the Cabinet Secretaries carry out the laws made by Congress.

Article 3: Judicial Branch: the Supreme Court decides court cases according to US Constitution. The courts under the Supreme Court decide criminal and civil court cases according to the correct federal, state, and local laws.

Article 4: States' powers: States have the power to make and carry out their own laws. State laws that are related to the people and problems of their area. States respect other states laws and work together with other states to fix regional problems.

Article 5: Amendments: The Constitution can be changed. New amendments can be added to the US Constitution with the approval by a two-thirds vote in each house of Congress (67, 281) and three-fourth vote by the states (38).

Article 6: Federal powers: The Constitution and federal laws are higher than state and local laws. All laws must agree with the US Constitution.

Article 7: Ratification: The Constitution was presented to George Washington and the men at the Constitutional Convention on September 17, 1787, Representatives from twelve out of the thirteen original states signed the Constitution. From September 1787 to July 1788, the states meet, talked about, and finally voted to approve the Constitution.

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The Twenty-seven Amendments to the US Constitution

1st People have freedom of religion, freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of assembly, and the right to petition the Government. 1791.

2nd People have the right to have a weapon to protect themselves. 1791.

3rd Soldiers cannot take or live in a person's house. 1791.

4th The government cannot arrest a person or search their property unless there is "probable cause." 1791.

5th The government must follow the law (due process) before punishing a person. 1791.

6th A person has the right to a fair and speedy trial by a jury. 1791.

7th A person has the right to a jury trial for civil cases. 1791.

8th The government cannot demand excessive bail or fines, or any cruel and unusual punishment. 1791.

9th The Constitution does not include all of the rights of the people and the states. 1791.

10th Any powers that the Constitution does not give to the federal government belong to the states. 1791.

11th Citizens cannot sue states in federal courts. (There are some exceptions). 1795.

12th The President and Vice President are elected on a party ticket. 1804.

13th Slavery is illegal in the United States. 1865.

14th Every person born in the USA is a citizen. An immigrant can become a naturalized citizen. 1868

15th All US male citizens have the right to vote. 1870.

16th Congress can tax income. 1913.

17th The people can elect US Senators. 1913.

18th Alcohol is illegal. (Prohibition). 1919.

19th All US female citizens have the right to vote. 1920.

20th The President is inaugurated in January. Congress begins to meet in January. 1933.

21st Alcohol is legal. Each state can make laws about making, selling, and drinking alcohol. 1933.

22nd The President cannot serve for more than two terms. 1951.

23rd The US Citizens in the District of Columbia have the right to vote for President. 1961.

24th It is illegal to make a citizen pay a voting fee or take a reading test to vote. 1964.

25th If the president dies or cannot serve, the vice-president becomes president. If both die, the Speaker of the House becomes president. 1967.

26th US citizens who are 18 years old or older have the right to vote. 1971.

27th Congress must limit when and how much its members are paid. 1992.