

Anatomy of the Constitution

Name: _____

How Do They Govern?

The U.S. Constitution is the document that creates our nation's government. The contents of the Constitution create the three branches of our government and give directions for how the federal government works. (It does this with a little over 4,500 words covering only four sheets of paper!) Although the Constitution was written in 1787, over 220 years ago, it still guides our officials in running our country today. It is the oldest written constitution in the world that is still in use.



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

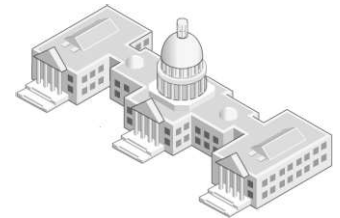


Introducing... The Preamble

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 first three words of the Constitution—"We the People"—contain the important idea of **self-government**.

Creating Congress: Article I

Article I is the first and longest part of the Constitution. It creates the legislative branch of our government. *Legislative* means law-making. This section is the longest because the people who wrote the Constitution believed that a legislative branch is very important in a government that represents the citizens. Members of the *legislature*, or law-making body, are responsible for turning citizens' wants and needs into laws.



Represent Me!

The legislative branch makes our government a representative democracy. In a *representative democracy*, citizens elect people to represent their needs and concerns in government. Article I creates a legislature called Congress and divides it into two parts: the Senate and the House of Representatives. Article I describes how Congress should be organized, tells what qualifications legislators must have, and says how often Congress should hold elections and meet as a group. It also describes other details of operation that each house of Congress gets to decide for itself.



	The Senate	The House of Representatives
Qualifications	You must be at least 30 years old, been a U.S. citizen for at least 9 years, and live in the state you represent	You must be at least 25 years old, been a U.S. citizen for at least 7 years, and live in the state you represent.
Size	2 senators per state = 100 total	Number per state depends on population = 435 total (in 2011)
They represent...	the interests of the citizens in the entire state for 6 years per term.	the interests of the citizens who live in the district they represent within the state for 2 years per term.
Special Duties	The Senate acts as a court during impeachments.	All bills that raise money must start in the House of Representatives.
Role in Lawmaking	A bill must be approved by BOTH houses of Congress before it can go to the President to become a law.	

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The Powers of Congress

Article I lists the powers Congress has. Even though Congress is a law-making body, it is not allowed to make laws about anything that's not on this list:

- Collect taxes
- Borrow money and pay debts
- Make rules for how to become a citizen
- Regulate *commerce* (trade) with other nations, between the states, and with Indian tribes
- Coin money and punish counterfeiters
- Establish post offices
- Give patents to new inventions
- Create the lower federal courts
- Punish pirates
- Declare war and support an army and navy
- Make any other laws that are "necessary and proper" to carry out the powers in this list.



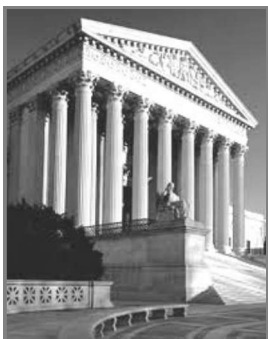
Creating the President: Article II

Article II of the Constitution describes the job of the executive branch. This branch *executes*, or carries out, laws. The president heads this branch, which also includes the vice president and many departments in charge of carrying out the government's day-to-day business. Article II describes who qualifies to be the president, what powers the office has, and what happens if a president misbehaves! It also explains the Electoral College, which is the process of how the president is selected.

Presidential Powers

The overall job of the executive branch is to carry out and enforce laws, but Article II gives the president a list of specific duties:

- Act as the commander-in-chief of the armed forces
- Maintain a *cabinet* of advisors who run the 15 executive departments like the State Department and the Treasury
- Grant pardons in all federal criminal offenses, and *reprieves* (postpone punishments like executions)
- Negotiate treaties with other countries
- Appoint ambassadors, Supreme Court Justices and federal court judges, and Cabinet members
- Make a State of the Union address to Congress
- Represent the United States when dealing with foreign countries
- Make sure that laws are carried out (*executed*)



The U.S. Supreme Court in Washington, DC

Creating the Courts: Article III

Here come the judges! Article III creates the judicial branch. The judicial branch interprets laws to decide what they mean and whether they have been followed in specific cases.

Article III creates the Supreme Court and authorizes Congress to create federal courts below the Supreme Court. These are courts that deal with United States laws, not state laws. Article III also gives directions about what kinds of cases the Supreme Court and federal courts can hear. Under Article III, federal judges are appointed, not elected. They stay on the bench until they retire, die, or are removed for bad behavior. Article III also guarantees trial by jury for criminal cases and explains the crime of treason.