

UNDERSTANDING THE PARTS OF THE CONSTITUTION (Excerpts)

The Preamble

The first sentence of the Constitution is called the preamble.

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 Blessing of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity. Do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.

The preamble does not grant or restrict powers. It explains the purpose of the Constitution and sets the stage for the first 7 articles and the first 10 amendments, known as the Bill of Rights, that follow.

Articles of the Constitution

The main body of the Constitution is made up of seven articles. The Articles explain how the government works. They also carefully describe the rules for electing government officials, like Senators and the President.

The Constitution is based on the separation of powers. It divides power between the three separate branches of the government. They are the legislative, judicial, and executive branches.

Article I

The role of the legislative branch is discussed in Article I. The legislative branch includes the House of Representatives and the Senate. Together they are called Congress. Members of the House of Representatives are often referred to as members of Congress, but Senators are always called Senators.

Article II

Rules for how the President and the Vice President are elected are defined in Article II. It also defines the responsibilities and powers of the President and the executive branch.

Article III

The judicial branch includes the Supreme Court and lower courts. Article III states that Supreme Court Judges can hold office for life, unless they are removed, impeached, or convicted of a crime. It also says that anyone accused of committing a federal crime has the right to a trial by jury.

Source: www.scholastic.com

Bill of Rights

The United States Constitution has 27 Amendments. The first 10 Amendments to the Constitution are called the Bill of Rights. The Bill of Rights was **ratified**, or approved, in 1791. It outlines the basic rights and freedoms of American citizens.

Amendment 1

The First Amendment protects the rights of every American. It defines the freedoms of religion, speech, and press. Most Americans believe that the First Amendment guarantees their most important rights.

Amendment 2

The Second Amendment guarantees Americans the right to bear arms, or own guns.

Amendment 3

The Third Amendment prevents the government from forcing citizens to shelter soldiers in their homes.

Amendment 4

The Fourth Amendment protects the privacy of American citizens. It **prohibits**, or prevents, unnecessary or unreasonable searches of a person's property.

Amendment 5

In the Fifth Amendment, all Americans are guaranteed the right to a fair and legal trial. It also protects someone from testifying against him- or herself under oath.

Amendment 6

A right to a speedy trial is guaranteed in the Sixth Amendment.

Amendment 7

The Seventh Amendment guarantees the right to a trial by jury in **civil**, or private, legal cases where damages are more than \$20. Civil cases solve disputes between citizens.

Amendment 8

Unreasonable bail or fines and cruel and unusual punishment are prohibited in the Eighth Amendment.

Amendment 9

The Ninth Amendment recognizes that Americans have rights that are not listed in the Constitution.

Amendment 10

The Tenth Amendment says that the powers not given to the United States government by the Constitution belong to the states or to the people.

Other Amendments were added to the Constitution over the years, and more may be added later. The Constitution currently contains 27 amendments.