

The Articles of Confederation (Simplified)

Approved by all 13 states between 1777 and 1781.

The Articles of Confederation has 13 sections called articles. This is a short summary of each article.

Article 1: Created the name of the combined 13 states as The United States of America.

Article 2: State governments still had their own powers that were not listed in the Articles of Confederation.

Article 3: The combined states were responsible for helping to protect each other from attacks.

Article 4: People can travel freely from state to state; however, criminals who left the state where they committed the crime would be sent back for trial.

Article 5: Creates the *Congress of the Confederation*. Each state gets one vote in the congress and can send between 2 and 7 people to participate in the congress.

Article 6: The new central government is responsible for working with other countries, including trade agreements and declaring war. States were required to have trained soldiers who could be ready to fight.

Article 7: States could choose their own military leaders.

Article 8: Each state government had to raise money to give to the new central government.

Article 9: Only the new central government had the power to make declare war, and make peace with foreign countries. The central government was also responsible for assigning Ambassadors to represent the United States in other countries.

Article 10: Created a group called the *Committee of States* who could act for the *Congress of Confederation* when the Congress was not working.

Article 11: Stated that Canada could join the new nation if it wanted.

Article 12: Stated that the new nation agreed to pay for earlier war debts.

Article 13: Declared that the Articles of Confederation were forever and could only be changed by the *Congress of Confederation* and if all the states agreed.

Constitution of the United States (Simplified)

Article 1 – Creates the two parts of Congress. They are responsible for making laws.

Section 1

- A. Creates Congress and the two houses of Congress: the Senate and House of Representatives.

Section 2

- A. Defines the House of Representatives, known as the lower house of Congress.
- B. Must be 25 years old, and serve a term of two years. Must have been a citizen for 7 years.
- C. Each state gets Representatives based on the state's population.
- D. Has a leader called the Speaker of the House.

Section 3

- A. Defines the Senate, known as the upper house of the Congress.
- B. Must be 30 years old, and serve a term of six years. Must have been a citizen for 9 years.
- C. Each state gets two Senators.
- D. Vice-President breaks tie votes.

Section 4

- A. Says that each state may establish its own methods for electing their members of Congress.
- B. Requires that Congress must meet at least once per year.

Section 5

- A. Says that Congress must have a minimum number of members present in order to meet.
- B. Fines may be charged for members who do not show up, and members may be expelled.
- C. Each house must keep a journal to record actions and votes.
- D. Neither house can adjourn without the permission of the other.

Section 6

- A. Establishes that members of Congress will be paid.
- B. They cannot be delayed while traveling to and from Congress.
- C. They cannot hold any other office in the government while in the Congress.

Section 7

- A. Explains how bills become law.

- B. All bills must pass both houses of Congress in the exact same form. That is, the House and the Senate must agree to the same wording on a bill before it is sent to the President.
- C. Bills that pass both houses are sent to the President.
- D. He can either sign the bill, in which case it becomes law, or he can veto it (Veto means that it is not signed to become a law).
- E. If he vetoes a bill, it is sent back to Congress, and if both houses pass it by a two-thirds majority, the bill becomes law despite the President's veto.

Section 8

- A. Gives Congress the power to establish and maintain an army and navy.
- B. Gives Congress the power to establish post offices, to create courts, to regulate commerce (business) between the states, to declare war, and to raise money (through taxes).

Section 9

- A. Cannot be held in jail without a reason of some kind.
- B. Cannot pass laws that make things illegal starting yesterday or last week, etc.
- C. No law can give preference to one state over another
- D. Congress cannot spend money without permission.

Section 10

- A. States can't make their own money, declare war, or tax goods from other states.

Article 2 – Creates the job of President, called the Executive. Responsible for enforcing the laws.

Section 1

- A. Establishes the office of the President and the Vice-President.
- B. Both serve four year terms.
- C. Presidents are elected by the Electoral College.
- D. Must be 35 years old. Must be born in the USA.
- E. Their pay cannot change, up or down, as long as he is in office.

Section 2

- A. The President leads the armed forces.
- B. He has a Cabinet (a group of advisors) to help him. The President can pardon (set free) criminals.
- C. He can make treaties (agreements) with other nations, but 2/3 of the Senate has to approve of the treaty.
- D. Chooses many of the judges and other members of the government.

Section 3

- A. President must give a yearly speech to the nation.

- B. Give suggestions to Congress.
- C. Meet with Ambassadors and other heads of state from other nations.
- D. Ensure the laws of the United States are carried out.

Section 4

- A. Explains how to kick the president out of office, called impeachment.
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Article 3 – Establishes Judges, called the Judiciary. They decide if a law is allowable, or if it goes against the Constitution.

Section 1

- A. Establishes the Supreme Court, the highest court in the United States.
- B. Judges are chosen serve for life, or until they want to retire.

Section 2

- A. Says what cases the Supreme Court must decide.
- B. It also guarantees trial by jury in criminal court.

Section 3

- A. Defines, without any question, the crime of treason (trying to overthrow your country's government or of helping your country's enemies during war).
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Article 4 – States Rights.

Section 1

- A. All states will honor the laws of all other states.

Section 2

- A. Citizens of one state are treated equally and fairly like all citizens of another.
- B. If a person accused of a crime in one state flees to another, he/she will be returned to the state that person fled from.

Section 3

- A. How new states can become part of the United States.
- B. Explains who controls federal lands.

Section 4

- A. Ensures a “Power by the People” government.
 - B. Guarantees that the federal government will protect the states against.
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Article 5 – How to change the Constitution.

- A. 2/3 of the Representatives must vote on the change.
 - B. 2/3 of the Senators must vote on the change.
 - C. 3/4 of the States must vote for the change (34 of 50)
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Article 6 – Concerns the United States.

- A. Guarantees that the Constitution and all laws and treaties of the United States to be the supreme law of the country.
 - B. Requires all officers of the United States and of the states to pledge loyalty to the United States and the Constitution when taking office.
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Article 7 – Explained how the Constitution was agreed to.

- A. Of the original 13 states in the United States, nine had to accept the Constitution before it would officially go into effect.

Source: http://www.atlcomputing.com/aaron/info/easy_constitution.htm

Source: <http://www.shmoop.com/constitution/article-1-section-1.html>

The Bill of Rights (Simplified)

Proposed in 1789 and passed on December 15, 1791

1st Amendment

Protects the people's right to practice religion, to speak freely, to assemble (meet), to bring their concerns to the government, and freedom of the press to publish.

2nd Amendment

Protects the right to own guns.

3rd Amendment

Guarantees that the army cannot force homeowners to give them food and shelter.

4th Amendment

Protects the people from the government improperly taking people, property, or papers, without a valid warrant based on probable cause (good reason).

5th Amendment

Protects people from being held for committing a crime unless they are properly accused, that they may not be tried twice for the same crime, and that you cannot be forced to testify against yourself.

6th Amendment

Guarantees a speedy trial, an impartial jury, and that the accused can confront witnesses against them, and that the accused must be allowed to have a lawyer.

7th Amendment

Guarantees a jury trial in federal civil court cases (A civil court case is a legal disagreement between two or more people). This type of case is normally no longer heard in federal court.

8th Amendment

Guarantees that punishments will be fair, and not cruel, and really large fines cannot be charged.

9th Amendment

Simply a statement that other rights, besides those listed, may exist, and just because they are not listed doesn't mean they can be violated.

10th Amendment

Says that any power not granted to the federal government belongs to the states.

Amendments passed once the Constitution was adopted.

11th Amendment - Enacted on February 7, 1795

Says that a person cannot sue a state in federal court without the state's permission.

12th Amendment - Enacted on June 15, 1804

Redefines how the President and Vice-President are chosen by the Electoral College.

13th Amendment - Enacted on December 6, 1865

Abolished slavery in the entire United States.

14th Amendment - Enacted on July 9, 1868

People have equal rights on both the federal level and the state level.

15th Amendment - Enacted on February 3, 1870

Ensured that a person could not be denied the right to vote because of their race.

16th Amendment - Enacted on February 3, 1913

Allows the United States government to collect income taxes.

17th Amendment - Enacted on April 8, 1913

Changed the choosing of Senators from the state legislatures to the people of the states.

18th Amendment - Enacted on January 16, 1919

Outlawed the sale or manufacture of alcohol in the United States.

19th Amendment - Enacted on August 18, 1920

Ensures that a person cannot be denied the right to vote because of their gender.

20th Amendment - Enacted on January 23, 1933

Set new start dates for the terms of Congress and the President.

21st Amendment - Enacted on December 5, 1933

Reversed the 18th Amendment.

22nd Amendment - Enacted on February 27, 1951

Set a limit on the number of times a President could be elected to 2 four-year terms.

23rd Amendment - Enacted on March 29, 1961

Gives the city of Washington D.C. the right to three voters in Presidential elections.

24th Amendment - Enacted on January 23, 1964

Ensures that people do not have to pay a “tax” in order to vote for an election.

25th Amendment - Enacted on February 10, 1967

Establishes rules for a President who becomes unable to perform his duties while in office.

26th Amendment - Enacted on July 1, 1971

Ensures that any person 18 or over may vote.

27th Amendment - Enacted on May 7, 1992

Any law that increases the pay of legislators may not take effect until after the next election.