

THE US CONSTITUTION

The US Constitution is the oldest written national constitution. It was written in 1787 and officially adopted by the 13 states which formed the country in 1789. It is often called the 'supreme law' because no other laws may contradict any of its principles and no person or government is exempt from following it. The Constitution has two main sections: the **document** and the **amendments**.

The **document** has never been changed. It lists the reasons why the Constitution was written and specifies the basic form of government. It outlines the powers and duties of each federal branch of government, along with other powers and duties belonging to the states.

Amendments have been added to the Constitution to guarantee specific rights and to solve problems which have arisen since the document was first written. The first ten amendments list the fundamental rights of any American and are known as the 'Bill of Rights'. Added in 1791, they include provisions for freedom of religion, speech and the press, the right of citizens to meet peacefully and the right of any person charged with breaking the law to have a quick trial with a jury.

Other important amendments are the 15th, 19th and 26th amendments, which gave black people, women and 18-year-olds the right to vote.

At present there are 27 amendments and more can be added.



Vocabulary

5 Write adjectives derived from these nouns. Then scan the texts and check.

- | | |
|--------------|---------------|
| 1 president | 5 separation |
| 2 nation | 6 competition |
| 3 politics | 7 strength |
| 4 federation | 8 importance |

Speaking

6 Class discussion. Discuss the following.

- What are the main differences between the US and the British Constitutions?
- Which of the two do you think is better? Why?

Writing

7 Write a paragraph (about 150 words) comparing the British and the US political systems. Highlight the differences between the two systems. Start like this:

There are many differences between the systems of government in Britain and the US.

Links

- 'The USA,' pp. 44-47
- 'Slavery,' pp. 82-83