

What is the Constitution?

In May of 1787, representatives from around the country met to write a new constitution for the United States. This document replaced the old Articles of Confederation. Ideas from the Articles of Confederation as well as other earlier documents influenced the framers of the Constitution. Of the 55 representatives, 39 signed the United States Constitution on September 17, 1787. The Constitution of the United States of America, including the Bill of Rights does these things:



- Establishes the structure of the United States government
- Guarantees equality under the law with majority rule and the rights of the minority protected
- Affirms individual worth and dignity of all people
- Protects the fundamental freedoms of religion, speech, press, assembly, and petition

Fact or Opinion

A fact is something that is known to have happened or something that is known to be true. An opinion is someone's best guess, a judgement, or just simply what you think.

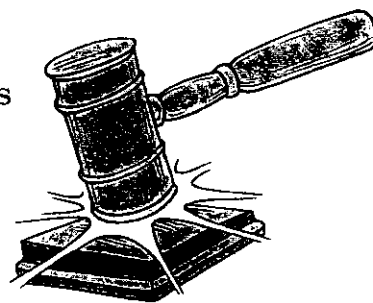
Read the statements below and decide whether they are fact or opinion. Write F for fact and O for opinion.

- ___ 1. American constitutional government is founded on ideas expressed in earlier documents.
- ___ 2. The American constitutional government is the best government in the world.
- ___ 3. The Constitution encourages people to be good citizens.
- ___ 4. The Constitution replaced the Articles of Confederation.
- ___ 5. The Constitution establishes the structure of the United States government.
- ___ 6. The Constitution affirms individual worth and dignity of all people.
- ___ 7. The United States Government is a good example for other governments to follow.



Articles of Confederation

There were several reasons why the national government needed the new constitution. When the American Revolution was over, the national government had adopted the Articles of Confederation, and for a time, this document served as the nation's constitution. This document was sort of the "rule book" on how the nation was to be run. But some leaders felt that the Articles of Confederation had some problems.



The Articles of Confederation required the national legislature to have unanimous approval before they could pass any laws. This made it very difficult to get any work done because many times the states did not agree with each other.

Another reason why the new nation needed a new constitution was that even though the American Revolution was over, the new United States still faced threats from Britain and also Spain. Leaders from many states agreed that they needed to make the national government stronger in order to protect the nation.

Leaders including George Washington, Alexander Hamilton, and James Madison kept urging members of the legislature to change the Articles in order to create a stronger national government. Finally in 1787, 12 states (all but Rhode Island) had named delegates to attend the Philadelphia Convention to revise the Articles of Confederation.

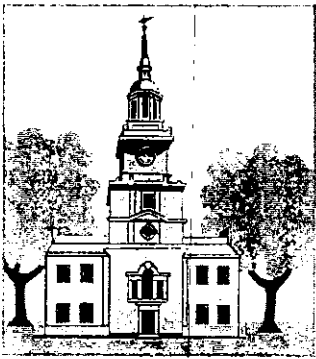
True or False

Label each of these statements. Write T next to each statement that is true. Write F next to each statement that is false.

- ___ 1. The Articles of Confederation were written before the U.S. Constitution.
- ___ 2. The Articles of Confederation did not influence the U.S. Constitution.
- ___ 3. After the American Revolution, the United States faced threats from Britain and Spain.
- ___ 4. Washington, Hamilton, and Madison urged the legislature to change the Articles.
- ___ 5. The Constitutional Convention was held in Washington, D.C.
- ___ 6. The Constitutional Convention met in order to write the Declaration of Independence.



Constitutional Convention



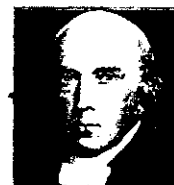
Between May 25 and September 17, 1787, the Constitution of the United States was written. James Madison has often been called the Father of the Constitution. He arrived in Philadelphia for the Convention almost two weeks early so that he could start planning what they needed to get done. He kept detailed notes during the Constitutional Convention. His skills at compromise helped the delegates reach agreement during the difficult process of writing the Constitution of the United States of America.

Another founding father who played an important role at the Constitutional Convention was Benjamin Franklin. He was the oldest delegate at the convention. Franklin urged others to be willing to listen and convinced other members that compromise was important in a free society. He encouraged ratification of the Constitution and hoped that George Washington would become president of the United States under the new Constitution.

George Washington presided over the convention. He also went back to the Virginia Legislature, where he was a representative, and encouraged them to ratify the new Constitution. Eventually all of the states ratified the Constitution—but not before a lot of fussing and fighting!

Match each founding father with his description.

James Madison is called the "Father of the Constitution."



1. Ben Franklin

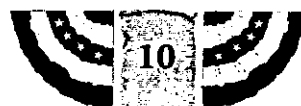
2. George Washington

3. James Madison

- A. "I showed up for the Constitutional Convention two weeks early."
- B. "I was the oldest member at the Constitutional Convention."
- C. "I presided over the Constitutional Convention."



Elbridge Gerry, George Mason, and Edmund Randolph refused to sign the Constitution because they objected to the powers that the Constitution gave the federal government.



The Great Compromise

The Continental Convention was full of many delegates who knew from their own experiences why they needed a new constitution, but couldn't agree on how to make the new government work.

Delegates from many of the small states worried that they would not be fairly represented in the Congress. Delegates from the large states felt that because they had more people, they deserved to have a larger vote in the Congress. Making a compromise solved this problem.

The Connecticut delegates suggested a compromise that settled the problem. Congress would be split into two houses. Each state would have equal representation in the Senate, along with representation in proportion to population in the House of Representatives. This idea was called the Connecticut Compromise because the delegates who presented the idea were from Connecticut, but it was also called the Great Compromise.



WHAT IS THE CONGRESS?

The legislature of the United States is called the Congress. The Congress is divided into the upper house and the lower house. The upper house is called the Senate; the lower house is called the House of Representatives.

Write the cause of each effect. The first one has been done for you.

1. Effect: Delegates met at the Constitutional Convention.

Cause: Citizens of the new United States knew they needed a new Constitution.

2. Effect: All states were given an equal vote in the Senate.

Cause: _____

3. Effect: States were represented in the House of Representatives based on their population.

Cause: _____

4. Effect: The Great Compromise was reached.

Cause: _____

A total of 39 delegates signed the Constitution.

