

Constitution Quiz

Introductory Level

1. The Constitution superseded what document that established the first national government in the United States?
2. Describe what is meant by a federal system of government.
3. What highly respected national leader, retired from public life, almost did not attend the Constitutional Convention?
4. The Federalist papers were written under what pen name and by what three individuals?
5. What three branches constitute the federal government?
6. What do we call the first 10 amendments to the Constitution?
7. What revolutionary patriot became one of the most vocal opponents of the new Constitution, refusing to attend the convention in Philadelphia because he, "smelt a rat"?
8. Name the statesman who wrote a statute for religious freedom for his home state of Virginia that became the prototype of the First Amendment.
9. Through letters to each other, a prominent husband and wife team engaged in spirited debate regarding the Constitution's failure to provide for the rights of women. Who were they?
10. Why was George Washington inaugurated in New York City?

Intermediate Level

1. According to the Connecticut Compromise at the Philadelphia Convention, how was a state's population figured to determine representation in the House of Representatives?
2. True or False. All 13 of the states had to ratify the Bill of Rights before it officially became part of the Constitution.
3. Explain the strategy behind the insistence of James Madison and others that the Constitution be ratified by conventions elected by the people and not by Congress or the state legislatures.
4. The Whiskey Rebellion of 1794 occurred over what new power granted the federal government by the Constitution?
5. Name two official meetings that were important precursors to the Philadelphia Convention.
6. What were some of the weaknesses of the government under the Articles of Confederation?
7. As a foreshadowing of later bitter division in the country, what issue figured prominently in debates in drafting the Constitution?
8. What Supreme Court chief justice can be credited with rendering decisions that greatly added to the power of the federal government in its early days?
9. How does Delaware support its claim to being the first state?
10. Who said, "Our Constitution is in actual operation; everything appears to promise that it will last; but nothing in this world is certain but death and taxes"?

Advanced Level

1. Two of the most respected figures of the Revolution, Thomas Jefferson and John Adams, were not in attendance at the Philadelphia Convention. Why not?
2. Although the United States tried in many ways to distinguish itself from the British monarchy, what musical selection was played at George Washington's inauguration?
3. What broadly applied constitutional power eventually enabled Congress to uphold the Civil Rights Act of 1964?
4. With Federalist sympathy running high in Pennsylvania, how did the Assembly manage a quorum to call for a state ratifying convention?
5. How did American constitutionalism differ from constitutionalism in Europe?
6. When did the Constitution guarantee equality to all Americans?
7. Our knowledge about the Philadelphia Convention is so great because of the copious records kept by what delegate?
8. The first sessions of the Supreme Court were often marred by frequent delays and absences of the justices. Why?
9. What issue is frequently mentioned as a possible subject for a new constitutional convention?
10. In some ways, freedom of the press got off to a rocky start due to what precedent established at the convention?

ANSWERS

Introductory Level

1. The Articles of Confederation.
2. The federal system is a union of the separate states in which the states retain individual sovereignty, but also recognize the sovereignty of a national government.
3. George Washington, plagued by rheumatism, the problems of managing Mt. Vernon, the recent death of his brother, and serious doubts about the success of the convention, faced a difficult decision about traveling to Philadelphia.
4. The Federalist papers were published under the name Publius and were written by Alexander Hamilton, James Madison and John Jay.
5. The three branches of government are: legislative, executive and judicial.
6. The first 10 amendments to the Constitution are known as the Bill of Rights.
7. Patrick Henry.
8. Thomas Jefferson.
9. Abigail and John Adams.
10. New York was still the official capital — Maryland had just ceded land for a federal capital in 1788.

Intermediate Level

1. A state's "official" population consisted of the entire free, or white population plus 3/5 of the slave, or black.
2. False. Only 9 states had to ratify the Bill of Rights for it to become part of the Constitution. Three of the original 13 states, Massachusetts, Georgia, and Connecticut did not ratify the Bill of Rights until 1791, on the 150th anniversary of its submission.
3. Madison knew that the Constitution stood a good chance of failing in the state legislatures, since under the proposed government, state political leaders would potentially lose much of their power.
4. The Whiskey Rebellion was in response to the federal government's power to levy taxes. The whiskey excise was a severe blow to farmers west of the Appalachians, where there was little cash economy. The Rebellion was suppressed by several state militias.
5. The Mt. Vernon Conference and the Annapolis Convention, by opening up discussion on interstate commerce, helped generate support for a more general convention to discuss problems under the Articles of Confederation.
6. Some of the most important weaknesses under the Articles of Confederation were economic: lack of a single national currency; a depleted national treasury; problems of interstate commerce and navigation; and a general lack of power to enforce national law.
7. Slavery, important to the economy of the South, but morally repugnant to some delegates, became a powerful point of compromise in the convention. As part of the Connecticut Compromise, it was agreed that Congress not ban foreign slave trade for 20 years.
8. John Marshall.
9. Delaware became the first state to ratify the Constitution.
10. Benjamin Franklin.

Advanced Level

1. Both men were abroad on foreign missions.
2. "God Save the King."
3. The power to regulate commerce enabled Congress to constitutionally ban segregation in restaurants that served or offered to serve interstate travelers or that received a "substantial portion" of food from out of state.
4. To obtain a quorum, a Philadelphia mob dragged two anti-Federalist members of the Pennsylvania Assembly from their lodgings through the streets of Philadelphia to the Statehouse.
5. American constitutionalism was unique in several important ways, among them: the process of ratification made the people the actual constituent power; the creation of judicial review; and the act of making the Constitution one official document.
6. The Constitution finally guaranteed all of its citizens equal protection under the law with the ratification of the 14th Amendment in 1868.
7. James Madison, who attended and took notes on every speech delivered during every day of the convention.
8. The first sessions of the Supreme Court were attended on a circuit, entailing arduous travel for the justices. As a consequence poor travel conditions caused frequent delays and illnesses.
9. A federal balanced budget amendment.
10. The Philadelphia Convention was closed to reporters and observers, and as part of the official rules, the business of the convention could not be published. The official journal was not made public until 1819; Madison's notes not until 1840. Thomas Jefferson wrote to John Adams: "I am sorry they began their deliberations by so abominable a precedent as that of tying up the tongues of their members." (From "A More Perfect Union": National Archives Trust Fund Board, Washington, D.C., 1978.)