

Bill of Rights

The first 10 amendments to the Constitution are known as the Bill of Rights. In order to ensure ratification of the Constitution, the Federalists, those who supported the Constitution, agreed to write and submit for ratification a list of amendments that would guarantee certain basic rights; hence the name Bill of Rights.

Amendment	Right	Meaning
First	Freedoms of religion, speech, press, assembly, and petition	The government may not establish an official religion or keep anyone from practicing his/her faith. (This is in reaction to the British government's support of the Anglican Church, or Church of England, as its official church and its occasional persecution of dissenters.) The government may not punish people for expressing their opinions through speeches or printed matter (except in cases of libel and slander); cannot keep people from gathering for peaceful meetings or from asking for an end to injustices.
Second	Right to bear arms	"A well regulated militia being necessary to the security of a free state, the right of the people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed."
Third	Limits on quartering (housing) troops	"No soldier shall in time of peace, be quartered in any house without the consent of the owner; nor in time of war, but in a manner to be proscribed by law." Point out to students how the memory of the British quartering of soldiers in Boston before the Revolution resulted in this amendment.
Fourth	Protection against unlawful search and seizure	The government must get a warrant from a judge authorizing a search and seizure of a person and/or goods. The application for the warrant must show "probable cause" (reasons) why the action is necessary. This amendment was passed in response to colonial writs of assistance issued without cause that allowed British agents to search for smuggled goods before the Revolution.

Amendment	Right	Meaning
Fifth	Due process: rights of an accused in criminal proceeding	This amendment sets up a number of rights that a person has when accused of a crime. Among them is the need for a presentation of evidence before a grand jury, which decides whether there is enough evidence for a trial.
Sixth	Rights to a speedy and fair trial by a jury	In addition to the rights to a speedy and fair trial, this amendment covers the right of a defendant to be told the charges against him/her, have witnesses testify on his/her behalf, and have an attorney.
Seventh	Rights in a civil suit	In a civil lawsuit for damages, either party may request a jury trial and it must be granted.
Eighth	Protection against cruel and unusual punishment	This amendment bans excessively high bail to free someone while the person awaits trial or excessively high fines if a fine is imposed as part of the punishment for a guilty verdict. A cruel and unusual punishment cannot be imposed.
Ninth	Nonenumerated rights: powers reserved to the people	The people have rights that are not listed in the Constitution, but which belong to them as members of a democratic nation.
Tenth	Powers reserved to the states or people	These are the rights not listed in the Constitution as being given to the federal government.