

2019 Civics Study Guide

I hope this packet finds you well. The Civics exam is a vital part of your citizenship as well as a necessary component for your graduation. Please review this packet as it will help you be fully prepared for the upcoming examination. In its purest form, it is a walkthrough of our country, government, and way of life. Best of luck!

History:

The United States is in North America. Note that we have Canada to the north, Mexico to the south, the Pacific Ocean to the West (leading to East Asia), and the Atlantic Ocean to the East (leading to Western Europe).

We are a nation of 50 states (and some territories including Puerto Rico and Guam) that was established after the Revolutionary war against the tyranny of the British Empire, namely King George III. The original colonists came to US from Europe for religious freedom and were met by what we call Native Americans.

The founders borrowed ideas from European political philosophers including Thomas Hobbes, Charles Montesquieu, and John Locke. The ideas borrowed included the concept of a Separation of Powers, Checks and Balances, a governing document, and the belief that when a government is tyrannical, one can overthrow said government and establish a new one.

After many grievances (27 to be exact as specified in the Declaration of Independence), the colonists were upset with the British overbearing government. The British believed that because of the French and Indian War's funding and protection, that the colonist owed them back. The colonists argued that they were being taxed without representation. Thus commenced the Boston Tea Party, where thousands of leaflets of tea were thrown in the harbor. In retaliation, the British government started quartering soldiers in houses and increased the number of taxes on certain items. Finally, the colonists had enough and formed the Continental Congress. They penned a letter of independence to King George III with four different sections of July 4th, 1776 (*the day we recognize as Independence Day*). Written by Thomas Jefferson, this letter immediately had them cut ties with the British Crown. The British did not recognize this letter and the war began.

The Revolutionary War occurred from 1775 to 1783 after the "Shot heard 'round the world" at Lexington and Concord. The eventual first President, George Washington was the general during the war and saw eventual victory at Yorktown.

During the war, the colonists began to work on fixing the weak government they had. Under the Articles of Confederation, there was a loose collection of independent states with no national currency or standing army. After Shays' Rebellion, the country was convinced it needed a stronger central government. Two groups came to the debate: Federalists vs. Anti-federalists.

The Federalists were for a stronger central government and wanted to ratify the Constitution (our current governing document). Among them were the three authors of the Federalist Papers – Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay. Eventually occurred the Constitutional Convention (meant for creating a new governing document) which crafted the Constitution in 1787, where many influential figures met including the oldest there – Benjamin Franklin. The Constitution they created was and is the "Supreme Law of the Land." In it, it sets up and defines out government. Its first few words itself "We the People..." pushes for a limited government where the people themselves have the final say. Additionally, in 1791, they included the Bill of Rights (the first 10 amendments to the Constitution). Amendments are put in place as a change or addition, and require a high threshold for ratification (2/3 of both houses of congress and 3/4 of the states). Some of the now 27 amendments we have include the first amendment (freedom of speech, press, religion, assembly), 19th amendment (gave women the right to vote), and the 27th amendment (no raising of government salaries during term).

Our government is set up in a federal system – shared power among central and regional government – with local, state, and federal governments. The governments at the state and federal level always meet in their respective capitals. For example, the capital of TN is Nashville, whereas the capital of the US is in Washington D.C. Because of the Great Compromise following the Virginia and New Jersey Plans, the US ended up with a bicameral congress at the federal level. Let's take a look at the three branches of government – Legislative, Executive, and Judicial – and what they do.

1) **Legislative Branch:** This branch (which was established via Article I of the Constitution) in its simplest form is responsible for **making federal laws**. It is made of two houses (modeled after the British parliament): the Senate and the House of Representatives. Each state has 2 senators while the number of representatives is based on the population of the state; hence, states like California or Texas with higher populations have far more representatives than states like North/South Dakota or Wyoming.

Title	Qualifications for Office	Term Length	Examples (TN)
Congressman (435 total members)	1) 25 years old 2) 7 years a US resident 3) Live in the state you wish to represent	2 years	David Kustoff (R) – 8 th Steve Cohen (D) – 9 th
Senator (100 total members)	1) 30 years old 2) 9 years a US resident 3) Live in the state you wish to represent	6 years	Lamar Alexander (R) – Senior Marsha Blackburn (R) – Junior

2) **Executive Branch:** This branch (which was established via Article II of the Constitution) in its simplest form is responsible for enforcing laws. It is headed by a President and his/her cabinet. The President has many roles including Chief Ambassador, Chief Diplomat, and Commander in Chief of the Military (not the Secretary of Defense). The cabinet is made up of the 15 heads of the 15 departments. Each department has the title “secretary” except for the Department of Justice (DOJ) which is headed by the Attorney General. The President serves for 4 year terms and due to the 22nd amendment (put in place after FDR) can only serve for two terms. Some of the crucial members are as follows:

President	Donald Trump (R)
Vice President	Mike Pence (R)
Secretary of State	Mike Pompeo (R)
Secretary of the Treasury	Steve Mnuchin (R)
Secretary of Defense	Mark Esper (R)
Attorney General	William Barr (R)

These members also are in line for the Presidency. If the President dies, the VP takes over. If both are out, surprisingly, the Speaker of the House of Representatives leads. This was put in place after the 25th amendment so that the person who is in charge is more likely to be elected and not appointed.

3) **Judicial Branch:** This branch (which was established via Article III of the Constitution) in its simplest form is responsible for interpreting/reviewing/explaining laws. In the Constitution, only one court was established with Congress in Art. I, Section 8 being given the power to establish lower courts. This court is the Supreme Court which hears cases from both the state and federal side as they are appealed; however, one 1% are ever heard. The court is made up of 9 members. The newest (and most junior) is Brett Kavanaugh, while the Chief Justice is John Roberts.

Over all, the United States has been shaped and formed by many great events, wars, and leaders over its nearly 250-year history. It grew from 13 states to 50 states via acquisitions of purchases such as the Louisiana Purchase by Thomas Jefferson in 1803. For wars, we have as follows: in the 1800s, there was the War of 1812; in the 1900s, there was World War I and II, Korean War, Vietnam War, and Desert Storm; in the 2000s, there has been the War on Terror in Iraq and Afghanistan. There have been great leaders including MLK, Malcolm X, and Rosa Parks fighting for civil rights *and* Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton fighting for women’s rights. There have been great moments as well including the Statue of Liberty coming to New York Harbor as a gift from the French as well as when the US made history by freeing slaves (in the southern states at first) via the Emancipation Proclamation first and the 13th amendment later. Truly the stars and stripes representing the 13 original colonies will continue to proudly wave as we honor it in our actions, deeds, whenever we hear the Star-Spangled banner, or simply whenever we think about the legacy this country exudes.