



National Standards for Civics and Government

What Citizens Need to Know About Government

addresses the Center for Civics Education civics and Government standards for grades 9-12.



Civics and Government Standards and Benchmarks

Standard I—What are civic life, politics, and government?

- A. What is civic life? What is politics? What is government? Why are government and politics necessary? What purposes should government serve? 1. Defining civic life, politics, and government. 2. Necessity of politics and government. 3. The purposes of politics and government.

- *Chapter 1 defines the role of government and defines political systems. Included are links to biographies of different philosophers and their authoritative texts that define government, civics and politics.*
- *Chapter 14 discusses aspects of citizenship in civic life such as the privileges and responsibilities of citizens.*

- B. What are the essential characteristics of limited and unlimited government? 1. Limited and unlimited governments. 2. The rule of law. 3. Civil society and government. 4. The relationship of limited government to political and economic freedom.

- *Chapter 1 defines political systems, including examples of limited and unlimited governments and their origins. This chapter also identifies the sources of law as command, custom and consent.*
- *Chapter 2 describes how the federal system—including a separation of powers and a checks and balances system—works to limit government.*
- *Chapter 3 defines political freedoms and civil liberties as expressed in the U.S. Constitution. Included are links to primary documents such as the Declaration of Independence, the U.S. Constitution and the Bill of Rights.*
- *Chapter 9 discusses the U.S. Bill of Rights and the struggle for political and economic freedoms by minority groups in the United States.*
- *Chapter 13 identifies how individuals can come together in associations to influence the political process. Also included in this chapter are descriptions of the powers associated with a free press and the freedom to assemble.*
- *Chapter 24 identifies economic freedoms with regard to limited government involvement in business.*

- Chapter 25 identifies economic freedoms associated with the free labor market and the right to assemble in unions to negotiate work contracts with employers.

C. What are the nature and purposes of constitutions? 1. Concepts of "constitution." 2. Purposes and uses of constitutions. 3. Conditions under which constitutional government flourishes.

- Chapter 3 presents a broad overview of a constitutional government and uses the U.S. Constitution as an example. Included are links to primary documents such as the U.S. Constitution and the Bill of Rights. The purposes of a constitution are identified. The strengths and weaknesses of the U.S. Constitution to protect individuals are also presented.
- Chapter 9 identifies instances when protections promised in the U.S. Constitution have been disregarded, such as the internment of Japanese-Americans during World War II. The chapter also charts the struggle of minority groups in the United States to obtain constitutional protections such as the 1960s civil rights movement.

D. What are alternative ways of organizing constitutional governments? 1. Shared powers and parliamentary systems. 2. Confederal, federal, and unitary systems. 3. Nature of representation.

- Chapter 1 identifies different forms of governments, including direct popular rule and representative government. Links to the Web sites of the British Parliament and the British Prime Minister are available for comparisons to U.S. counterparts, as are links to Native American tribal governments.
- Chapter 2 describes the separation of power between the federal and state level and discusses the separation of power among the different branches of government. Included are links to the three main branches of government in the United States.
- Chapter 6 describes in detail the nature of representational government by citing the U.S. Congress as an example.

Standard II—What are the foundations of the American political system?

- A. What is the American idea of constitutional government? 1. The American idea of constitutional government. 2. How American constitutional government has shaped the character of American society.

- *Chapter 1 introduces philosophers and historic texts that were influential in formulating the ideologies that would develop into the American political system. Links to important primary documents such as the Code of Hammurabi, the Magna Carta and the English Bill of Rights as well as the complete texts of such influential works as Thomas Hobbes' Leviathan and John Locke's Two Treatises of Government are provided. Other helpful links in this chapter include the texts of the Declaration of Independence, the Articles of Confederation and the U.S. Constitution. Web site links that present overviews of the American Revolution and the Continental Congress are also provided.*
- *Chapter 2 provides an overview of the federal system of government including the concepts of separation of powers and checks and balances, which work to limit government.*
- *Chapter 3 provides an overview of the constitutional system, using the U.S. Constitution as an example.*
- *Chapter 7 sites examples of U.S. Supreme Court cases that have influenced American society. Links to the complete text of these cases are provided.*
- *Chapter 9 presents an overview of the U.S. Bill of Rights and its influence on American society in the context of the civil rights movement. Links to influential Supreme Court cases are provided in the chapter to demonstrate the changing interpretation of the U.S. Constitution.*
- *Chapter 24 provides an overview of the relationship between the U.S. government and business and describes how the government has encouraged commercial activity. Links to such government Web sites as the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office help to illustrate this point.*

- B. What are the distinctive characteristics of American society? 1. Distinctive characteristics of American society. 2. The role of voluntarism in American life. 3. The role of organized groups in political life. 4. Diversity in American society.

- *Chapter 9 describes diversity in American life by providing an overview of the treatment of minorities in American society and the legal battles fought to achieve political and social equality.*

- *Chapter 13 describes how organized groups such as political action committees and lobby groups influence American politics and society.*
- *Chapter 14 describes the impact of immigration on American society in helping to create a diverse population. This chapter also includes links to articles and Web sites about volunteer organizations such as AmeriCorps, USA Freedom Corps and Senior Corps.*
- *Chapter 16 describes how individuals join political parties in order to influence politics and society. The roles of volunteers in political parties are also discussed.*
- *Chapter 22 discusses the role public education has played in shaping American society by providing a history of the American education system.*
- *Chapter 25 explains how workers join unions in order to influence government decisions that would affect labor.*

C. What is American political culture? 1. American national identity and political culture. 2. Character of American political conflict.

- *Chapter 1 identifies values associated with American political culture by tracing the roots of American democracy. Links to the complete texts of the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution are provided.*
- *Chapter 2 traces the early debates over the nature of American political culture by describing the conflict between the Federalists and anti-Federalists. Links in the chapter include the complete texts of all the Federalist Papers and key documents describing the anti-Federalists' response.*
- *Chapter 9 defines the shared ideas and values of American political culture by examining the political conflict over the struggle of minority groups to be included in American political culture. Links to the complete papers of Martin Luther King, Jr. are provided as well as links to influential Supreme Court Decisions.*
- *Chapter 15 describes the political conflict over the right to vote for minority groups and women.*
- *Chapter 16 describes the conflict between political parties in their attempts to shape American political culture by providing an overview of the ideologies of the major political parties in the United States. Links to the official Web sites of the Democratic and Republican parties as well as influential third parties such as the Green Party and the Reform Party are provided.*
- *Chapter 24 describes the political conflict over the amount of government involvement in regulating business.*
- *Chapter 25 describes the political conflict over the government's role in labor/management relations.*

- D. What values and principles are basic to American constitutional democracy? 1. Liberalism and American constitutional democracy. 2. Republicanism and American constitutional democracy. 3. Fundamental values and principles. 4. Conflicts among values and principles in American political and social life. 5. Disparities between ideals and reality in American political and social life.

- *Chapter 1 provides an overview of the Enlightenment-era philosophies that influenced American concepts of liberalism. Links to biographies of famous Enlightenment philosophers as well as the complete texts of their influential works and the texts of influential documents such as the U.S. Constitution and Declaration of Independence are provided. Key concepts and terms such as "democracy" and "republic" are also defined in this chapter.*
- *Chapter 2 defines fundamental principles of American constitutional democracy such as the separation of powers, federalism and the checks and balance system.*
- *Chapter 3 defines political values and fundamental principles of constitutional democracy identified in the U.S. Constitution, such as individual rights and due process. This chapter also examines the disparity between ideals and reality in relation to American civil liberties and identifies ways the government has attempted to balance liberty and security.*
- *Chapter 9 identifies fundamental freedoms guaranteed to all Americans and charts the struggle of minorities to fix the discrepancies between the ideals and realities of American social and political life. The civil rights movement is cited as an example. Links to the complete texts of Supreme Court decisions that were influential in resolving disparities between the ideals and realities of American political and social life are provided. C*
- *Chapter 16 defines the terms "liberal" and "conservative" as it relates to the ideologies of political parties. A comparison between the Republican and Democratic parties is also provided in this chapter.*

Standard III—How does the government established by the constitution embody the purposes, values, and principles of American democracy?

- A. How are power and responsibility distributed, shared, and limited in the government established by the United States Constitution? 1. Distributing governmental power and preventing its abuse. 2. The American federal system.

- *Chapter 2 describes the separation of power in the federal system between the state and national governments and among the varying branches of government.*
- *Chapter 3 describes how the U.S. Constitution divides power between the state and national government and describes how power is divided among the major branches of government. Links to important documents such as the U.S. Constitution are provided.*
- *Chapter 4 describes the role of the president—as defined by the U.S. Constitution—in the federal system, including the power to veto legislation and appoint judges. Web links to the White House and presidential libraries are provided.*
- *Chapter 6 describes the powers and limitations of Congress as defined by the U.S. Constitution, including the power to impeach the president and to approve presidential appointments.*
- *Chapter 7 describes the role of the Justice system in the balance of power as defined in the U.S. Constitution, including the power to declare a law unconstitutional. Web links to the U.S. Supreme Court and other influential judicial courts are provided.*
- *Chapter 10 describes the relationship between the state and national governments. Web links are provided for all 50 state government home pages.*
- *Chapter 11 describes the relationship between local, state and national governments. Web links are provided for all city and county governments throughout the United States.*

B. How is the national government organized and what does it do? 1. The institutions of the national government. 2. Major responsibilities of the national government in domestic and foreign policy. 3. Financing government through taxation.

- *Chapter 2 defines the major organizations of the U.S. government under a federal system. Included is an overview of concepts such as the separation of powers and the checks and balance system.*
- *Chapter 3 describes the organization of the U.S. government as defined by the U.S. Constitution. A link to the complete text of the U.S. Constitution is provided.*
- *Chapter 4 describes the role of the executive branch of government as defined by the U.S. Constitution including the power to veto legislation and make appointments to the judiciary and cabinet departments.*
- *Chapter 5 describes the role of the president's cabinet in advising the president and implementing legislation and executive orders. Web links are provided for the home pages of all the cabinet level departments.*
- *Chapter 6 describes the purposes, organization and functions of both branches of the U.S. Congress as defined by the U.S. Constitution. Web links to the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate as well as all the major congressional committees are provided.*

- *Chapter 7 provides an overview of the judicial branch of government including its role in interpreting the Constitution and presiding over civil and criminal cases. Web links to the U.S. Supreme Court and all major federal court agencies are provided.*
- *Chapter 8 describes the role of the different agencies in the vast governmental bureaucracy that has been created in the United States. Included is an overview of the major governmental regulatory agencies with Web links to the major agencies, such as the Federal Communications Commission, the Food and Drug Administration and the Social Security Administration.*
- *Chapter 12 describes the issues involved in taxation and government spending. A history of taxation is provided as well as a definition of the sources of revenue for the federal, state and local governments. Web links to the U.S. Department of the Treasury and the Internal Revenue Service are provided.*
- *Chapter 28 describes the role of the government in defining and carrying out U.S. foreign policy. Included are Web links to governmental agencies involved in foreign policy such as the Department of State and the Central Intelligence Agency. A Web link to all the U.S. embassies is also provided.*

- C. How are state and local governments organized and what do they do? 1. The constitutional status of state and local governments. 2. Organization of state and local governments. 3. Major responsibilities of state and local governments.

- *Chapter 10 provides an overview of state governments. The constitutional status, organization and major responsibilities of state governments are discussed. Included is a Web link to all 50 state government home pages.*
- *Chapter 11 provides an overview of local governments. The constitutional status, organization and major responsibilities of local governments as well as a description of different forms of local governments—mayoral, commission and city council—are discussed. Web links to all available county and city government home pages are provided.*

- D. What is the place of law in the American constitutional system? 1. The place of law in American society. 2. Judicial protection of the rights of individuals.

- *Chapter 7 defines the role of the judiciary in the American constitutional system. Descriptions of the trial processes for civil and criminal court cases are provided along with definitions of judicial concepts such as due process and judicial review. Web links to the Supreme Court and other federal court agencies as well as the complete text of key Supreme Court decisions are provided.*
- *Chapter 9 describes instances when judicial protections have been denied to minorities and describes instances when these protections have been extended to minorities. Influential Supreme Court decisions are cited as examples, with links to the complete text of the decisions.*

E. How does the American political system provide for choice and opportunities for participation? 1. The public agenda. 2. Public opinion and behavior of the electorate. 3. Political communication: television, radio, the press, and political persuasion. 4. Political parties, campaigns, and elections. 5. Associations and groups. 6. Forming and carrying out public policy.

- *Chapter 4 describes the roll of the president in setting the public agenda through the use of the media.*
- *Chapter 13 describes the role interest groups and the media play in setting public agenda through the lobbying of politicians and the influence of press coverage and opinion polls. The relationship between the president and the press is discussed. The accuracy of public opinion polls is debated in this chapter. Attempts to reform campaign finance laws are also discussed and current newspaper and magazine articles on these issues are provided.*
- *Chapter 15 describes the election process and the importance of voting is stressed. Voting patterns and the role of the electoral college are also discussed.*
- *Chapter 16 describes how political parties influence the public agenda and provides a thorough overview of the campaign process. A description of how individuals can get involved in political parties and influence political party platforms are discussed. The influence of the press on the campaign trail is also discussed. A description of how technology—such as radio, television and the Internet—influences political campaigns is provided. Web links for such issues as the influence of television on the presidential debates are included for further information. The role of third parties and independent candidates and Web links to the major political parties and influential third parties are also provided in this chapter.*

- *Chapter 18 provides an overview of environmental issues that have been a major focus of public attention. Such events as the formation of the National Parks system and the Exxon Valdez oil spill are discussed and Web links are provided for further information.*
- *Chapter 20 examines health care issues, such as health insurance and patient rights, that have been key components of the public agenda.*
- *Chapter 22 describes key educational issues, such as universal public education, segregation and school violence that have influenced voters.*

Standard IV—What is the relationship of the United States to other nations and to world affairs?

- A. How is the world organized politically? 1. Nation-states. 2. Interactions among nation-states. 3. International organizations.

- *Chapter 1 defines the concept of nation-states and identifies how it is controlled by government. The complete texts of such influential philosophical works as Machiavelli's *The Prince* and Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* are provided for further research.*
- *Chapter 24 describes how vital international trade has become to the U.S. economy. Web links to international organizations such as the North American Free Trade Agreement are provided.*
- *Chapter 28 provides a detailed overview of U.S. foreign policy issues. Included are descriptions of how the U.S. interacts with other nations and international organizations. Web links to important international organizations such as the United Nations, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, the Organization of American States and the International Monetary Fund are provided, along with a description of U.S. involvement in these and other international organizations.*

- B. How do the domestic politics and constitutional principles of the United States affect its relations with the world? 1. The historical context of United States foreign policy. 2. Making and implementing United States foreign policy. 3. The ends and means of United States foreign policy.

- *Chapter 27 provides an overview of U.S. foreign policy as it relates to national defense matters. Links to the complete texts of key defense treaties are provided.*

- Chapter 28 provides a brief history of U.S. foreign policy from the American Revolution through the post-Cold War era. Included are descriptions of how foreign policy is formulated and how it is influenced by those inside and outside of government. Web links to international organizations such as the Group of Eight, the World Trade Organization and the World Bank are provided. Articles from newspapers and magazines are available to identify current issues of national interest.

C. How has the United States influenced other nations, and how have other nations influenced American politics and society? 1. Impact of the American concept of democracy and individual rights on the world. 2. Political developments. 3. Economic, technological, and cultural developments. 4. Demographic and environmental developments. 5. United States and international organizations.

- Chapter 1 describes how the United States was influenced by European ideologies during the early formation of the country. Links to the complete works of famous European philosophers such as Rene Descartes and Jean Jacques Rousseau are provided.

- Chapter 14 describes the impact of major demographic trends such as immigration on the United States.

- Chapter 18 explores issues related to the environment and provides a history of major environmental issues with Web and article links provided for further research.

- Chapter 24 describes the influences of technological and economic developments on the United States and the world. Web links to international trade agreements such as the North American Free Trade Agreement are provided.

- Chapter 27 describes the impact of the United States on the world through military involvements from the American Revolution to the U.S. War on Terrorism. Web links related to these topics provide further details.

- Chapter 28 describes the impact of U.S. foreign policy decisions on the world and the impact of global events, such as the Cold War, on the United States. The roles of the United States in international organizations such as the United Nations and the World Bank are discussed and Web links to these and other organizations are provided.

Standard V—What are the roles of the citizen in American democracy?

A. What is citizenship? 1. The meaning of citizenship in the United States. 2. Becoming a citizen.

- Chapter 14 defines citizenship and explains the distinction between citizens and aliens. The naturalization process is discussed and a Web link to the Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services that furnishes information and resources on obtaining citizenship is provided.

B. What are the rights of citizens? 1. Personal rights. 2. Political rights. 3. Economic rights. 4. Relationships among personal, political, and economic rights. 5. Scope and limits of rights.

- Chapter 3 identifies rights guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution. Limits to these rights during wartime are discussed. Links to Web sites and articles from newspapers and magazines provide specific examples of when limits have been placed on personal, political and economic rights.

- Chapter 9 provides an overview of personal, political and economic rights defined by the U.S. Constitution and Bill of Rights. Links to the complete texts of these documents are provided. The civil rights movement is highlighted to describe the struggle for personal, political and economic rights and an expansion of the scope of these rights to minority groups is discussed. Privacy rights are also discussed in this chapter.

- Chapter 24 describes economic rights in the context of American business. Links to articles from newspapers and magazines are provided for further research.

- Chapter 25 describes economic rights in the context of the American labor movement. Web links are provided on issues such as affirmative action to provide more detail.

C. What are the responsibilities of citizens? 1. Personal responsibilities. 2. Civic responsibilities.

- Chapter 14 lists the obligatory and voluntary responsibilities of all citizens. Links to Web sites and related articles are provided for further research.

- Chapter 15 identifies the responsibility of citizens to vote in elections and describes the voting process. Web links to sites such as the Federal Election Commission, which describes the voting registration process, are provided.

D. What civic dispositions or traits of private and public character are important to the preservation and improvement of American constitutional democracy? 1. Dispositions that lead the citizen to be an independent member of society. 2. Dispositions that foster respect for individual worth

and human dignity. 3. Dispositions that incline the citizen to public affairs.
4. Dispositions that facilitate thoughtful and effective participation in public affairs.

- *Chapter 9 describes the dispositions of individuals that fostered respect for individual worth and human dignity and cites the leaders of the civil rights movement as examples. Web links provide biographies of influential Americans such as Susan B. Anthony and Martin Luther King, Jr.*
- *Chapter 14 identifies the individual responsibilities of American citizens. Web links to volunteer organizations, such as AmeriCorps and Senior Corps are provided.*
- *Chapter 17 identifies ethical issues involved in politics. Specific lapses in judgments by politicians and the consequences of those actions are cited as examples.*

E. How can citizens take part in civic life? 1. The relationship between politics and the attainment of individual and public goals. 2. The difference between political and social participation. 3. Forms of political participation. 4. Political leadership and careers in public service. 5. Knowledge and participation.

- *Chapter 4 defines the requirements for becoming the President of the United States and identifies the duties of the position. A link to the Web site of the White House is provided.*
- *Chapter 5 profiles the cabinet level departments of the executive branch of government and identifies the functions of the offices. Web links are provided to each cabinet department and careers in public service can be explored.*
- *Chapter 6 identifies the requirements and duties of congresspersons and identifies their role in leading the country. Web links to both the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate are provided and careers in public service can be explored.*
- *Chapter 9 provides a historical overview of the civil rights movement as an example of how individuals took part in civic life and made a contribution to American constitutional democracy. Web links provide biographies of influential Americans such as Susan B. Anthony and Martin Luther King, Jr.*
- *Chapter 14 identifies ways in which citizens can participate in civic life. Web links are provided to organizations such as AmeriCorps and USA Freedom Corps that encourage community volunteerism.*
- *Chapter 15 identifies ways in which citizens can participate in civic life through the voting process. The voting process is described and Web links provide information on voting registration and other issues pertaining to voting.*

- Chapter 16 describes how individuals can participate in civic life through membership in political parties and involvement in the campaign process. Web links to major political parties such as the Republican Party, the Democratic Party and the Green Party are provided.