

# AP U.S. Government - Required Documents

Graphic organizer: purpose, key ideas, and where each fits in the AP Gov curriculum

Directions: For each document, record (1) the core argument or purpose, (2) 3-5 key ideas, and (3) how the document connects to AP Gov topics (foundations, federalism, institutions, civil liberties/civil rights). The excerpts are short anchor lines you can use to remember the main idea.

<p><b>Articles of Confederation (1781-1789)</b></p> <p><b>Author:</b> Continental Congress (states)</p> <p><b>Purpose:</b> First U.S. national government after independence; created a league of friendship among states.</p> <p><b>Key points</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Weak central government: no executive, no national courts</li> <li>- Congress could not tax directly; relied on state contributions</li> <li>- No power to regulate interstate/foreign commerce</li> <li>- Amendments required unanimity; major laws required 9/13 states</li> <li>- Shays' Rebellion exposed weaknesses and pushed calls for a stronger Constitution</li> </ul> <p><b>AP Gov connections</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Unit 1: Foundations - why the Constitution replaced the AOC</li> <li>- Federalism - balance of state vs national power</li> <li>- Policy making - capacity to raise revenue and regulate the economy</li> </ul> <p><b>Anchor excerpt</b></p> <p><i>"Each state retains its sovereignty, freedom, and independence..." (Article II)</i></p>	<p><b>Brutus No. 1 (1787)</b></p> <p><b>Author:</b> "Brutus" (Anti-Federalist; likely Robert Yates)</p> <p><b>Purpose:</b> Warns that the proposed Constitution creates a national government too powerful for liberty and state authority.</p> <p><b>Key points</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Argues a large republic will be hard to represent fairly; representatives may become distant from the people</li> <li>- Fears Necessary and Proper + Supremacy Clauses will expand federal power beyond limits</li> <li>- Predicts the judiciary will become dominant through broad interpretation</li> <li>- Calls for a bill of rights and stronger protections for states and individuals</li> </ul> <p><b>AP Gov connections</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Unit 1: Debating the Constitution - Federalists vs Anti-Federalists</li> <li>- Civil liberties - demand for a Bill of Rights</li> <li>- Judiciary - concerns about judicial power and interpretation</li> </ul> <p><b>Anchor excerpt</b></p> <p><i>"In a republic of such vast extent... the legislature cannot represent the inhabitants..."</i></p>
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<p><b>Declaration of Independence (1776)</b></p>	<p><b>Constitution of the United States (1787) + Bill of Rights (1791) + later amendments</b></p>
<p><b>Author:</b> Primarily Thomas Jefferson; committee incl. John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, Roger Sherman, Robert Livingston</p>	<p><b>Author:</b> Constitutional Convention; ratified by states</p>
<p><b>Purpose:</b> Justifies independence by stating natural rights principles and listing grievances against the British king.</p>	<p><b>Purpose:</b> Creates a stronger national government with separated powers, federalism, and a system of checks and balances.</p>
<p><b>Key points</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Natural rights: life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness</li> <li>- Government derives power from consent of the governed</li> <li>- Right of the people to alter or abolish government that violates rights</li> <li>- Lists grievances as evidence of tyranny</li> </ul>	<p><b>Key points</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Popular sovereignty; republicanism; limited government</li> <li>- Separation of powers: legislative, executive, judicial</li> <li>- Checks and balances to prevent tyranny (e.g., veto, impeachment, judicial review)</li> <li>- Federalism: shared power between national and state governments (Supremacy Clause)</li> <li>- Civil liberties: Bill of Rights and later amendments expand rights (e.g., 13th-15th, 19th, 24th, 26th)</li> </ul>
<p><b>AP Gov connections</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Foundations - democratic ideals and legitimacy</li> <li>- Link to civil liberties and civil rights arguments</li> <li>- Use as evidence in FRQs about rights, consent, and political change</li> </ul>	<p><b>AP Gov connections</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Units 1-5: institutions (Congress, presidency, courts, bureaucracy), federalism, elections</li> <li>- Unit 3-4: civil liberties &amp; civil rights via amendments and incorporation</li> <li>- Foundational framework for all required SCOTUS cases</li> </ul>
<p><b>Anchor excerpt</b>  <i>"...all men are created equal... endowed... with certain unalienable Rights..."</i></p>	<p><b>Anchor excerpt</b>  <i>"We the People..." (Preamble)</i></p>

<p><b>Federalist No. 10 (1787-88)</b></p>	<p><b>Federalist No. 51 (1788)</b></p>
<p><b>Author:</b> James Madison (Publius)</p>	<p><b>Author:</b> James Madison (Publius)</p>
<p><b>Purpose:</b> Explains why a large republic is best at controlling the effects of factions.</p>	<p><b>Purpose:</b> Defends separation of powers and checks and balances as protections for liberty.</p>
<p><b>Key points</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Factions are inevitable; removing causes would destroy liberty</li> <li>- Large republic and pluralism make it harder for majority factions to dominate</li> <li>- Representative government refines and enlarges public views</li> </ul>	<p><b>Key points</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Because humans are not angels, government must control itself</li> <li>- Each branch must have a will of its own and tools to check the others</li> <li>- Ambition counteracts ambition; divided government limits tyranny</li> </ul>
<p><b>AP Gov connections</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Foundations - pluralism, republicanism, majority-minority tension</li> <li>- Elections &amp; participation - competing interests and coalition building</li> <li>- Connects to modern debates about polarization and interest groups</li> </ul>	<p><b>AP Gov connections</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Institutions - checks and balances across branches</li> <li>- Policy making - how conflict and negotiation shape outcomes</li> <li>- Connect to SCOTUS and executive-legislative conflicts</li> </ul>
<p><b>Anchor excerpt</b></p> <p><i>"...the causes of faction cannot be removed... relief is only to be sought in the means of controlling its effects."</i></p>	<p><b>Anchor excerpt</b></p> <p><i>"Ambition must be made to counteract ambition."</i></p>

<p><b>Federalist No. 70 (1788)</b></p>	<p><b>Federalist No. 78 (1788)</b></p>
<p><b>Author:</b> Alexander Hamilton (Publius)</p>	<p><b>Author:</b> Alexander Hamilton (Publius)</p>
<p><b>Purpose:</b> Argues for a single, energetic executive to ensure effective governance and accountability.</p>	<p><b>Purpose:</b> Defends an independent judiciary and explains its role in protecting the Constitution.</p>
<p><b>Key points</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Unity in the executive promotes decisiveness and responsibility</li> <li>- Energy in the executive supports enforcement of laws and national security</li> <li>- Plural executive weakens leadership and blurs accountability</li> </ul>	<p><b>Key points</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Judiciary is the least dangerous branch (no purse or sword)</li> <li>- Life tenure supports independence from politics</li> <li>- Courts must interpret the Constitution and invalidate unconstitutional laws (judicial review rationale)</li> </ul>
<p><b>AP Gov connections</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Presidency - formal and informal powers; leadership in crisis</li> <li>- Bureaucracy - executing laws; administrative capacity</li> <li>- Debates about executive power and accountability</li> </ul>	<p><b>AP Gov connections</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Judiciary - judicial review, independence, legitimacy</li> <li>- Civil liberties - courts as protectors of rights</li> <li>- Connects directly to Marbury v. Madison</li> </ul>
<p><b>Anchor excerpt</b></p> <p><i>"Energy in the Executive is a leading character in the definition of good government."</i></p>	<p><b>Anchor excerpt</b></p> <p><i>"...the judiciary... has no influence over either the sword or the purse..."</i></p>

**Letter from Birmingham Jail (1963)**

**Author:** Martin Luther King, Jr.

**Purpose:** Defends nonviolent civil disobedience and explains why waiting for gradual change is unjust.

**Key points**

- Distinguishes just vs unjust laws; moral duty to resist unjust laws nonviolently
- Explains the goals and steps of nonviolent direct action
- Critiques the idea of "waiting" for rights; emphasizes urgency of justice
- Uses constitutional and natural law arguments to justify protest

**AP Gov connections**

- Civil rights - tactics, strategies, and arguments for equality
- First Amendment - protest, assembly, petition
- Links to 14th Amendment Equal Protection and landmark civil rights cases

**Anchor excerpt**

*"Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."*