Changing the Rules

Read how the Constitution is organized and changed.

9-12.GOV.8 "Describe the structure of the Constitution and the process to amend it."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline the Constitution's major parts, circle the article that explains how to amend it, and number the proposal and ratification stages 1 and 2.

A Longer Presidential Term?

1. Imagine a proposal to change the president's term from four years to six. A regular law cannot rewrite that rule because Article II of the Constitution sets the president's four-year term. The Constitution begins with a Preamble that states its broad purposes, including establishing justice. Its main text has seven articles that organize the national government and set other ground rules. Article I establishes Congress and its lawmaking powers. Article II establishes the executive branch, led by the president. Article III establishes the federal judicial branch, headed by the Supreme Court. This layout separates major powers among branches.

2. The remaining articles connect those branches to a larger system. Article IV addresses relations among states, while Article V explains how to amend the Constitution. Article VI makes the Constitution and federal laws made under it the supreme law of the land. Article VII explains how the original Constitution would be ratified. After the articles come amendments, changes added to the original text. The first ten amendments are called the Bill of Rights. They protect liberties such as freedom of speech. Later amendments include the Twenty-Second, which limits how many times a person may be elected president.

3. To replace the four-year term with a six-year term, supporters would need an amendment under Article V. One way to propose it is a two-thirds vote in each house of Congress. Another is a convention called by Congress after two-thirds of state legislatures request one. A proposed amendment becomes part of the Constitution only after three-fourths of the states ratify it, either through their legislatures or through state conventions, as Congress directs. The president does not sign or veto amendments. These high thresholds make constitutional change harder than passing an ordinary law, so a new term would require broad agreement across states.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How does the Constitution's organization explain why changing the president's term requires an amendment instead of an ordinary law?

2. Describe the different roles of the Preamble, the articles, and the amendments.

3. Compare the two ways to propose an amendment described in the passage.

4. After an amendment is proposed, how can it become part of the Constitution, and who chooses the ratification method?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Propose an amendment about an issue not discussed in the passage. In one paragraph of 70 to 95 words, state its rule, explain where it would fit in the Constitution, describe one effect on people, and give one valid path for proposing and ratifying it.

ANSWER KEY

Changing the Rules

HIGH SCHOOL · 9-12.GOV.8

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline the Constitution's major parts, circle the article that explains how to amend it, and number the proposal and ratification stages 1 and 2. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How does the Constitution's organization explain why changing the president's term requires an amendment instead of an ordinary law?	**Article II sets the four-year term, so changing it requires an amendment through the process in Article V.**
2	Describe the different roles of the Preamble, the articles, and the amendments.	**The Preamble states broad purposes. The seven articles organize the government and set other ground rules. Amendments are changes added to the original text.**
3	Compare the two ways to propose an amendment described in the passage.	**An amendment can be proposed by a two-thirds vote in each house of Congress or by a convention called after two-thirds of state legislatures request one.**
4	After an amendment is proposed, how can it become part of the Constitution, and who chooses the ratification method?	**Three-fourths of the states must ratify it through state legislatures or state conventions. Congress chooses which method to use.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

I propose an amendment guaranteeing every household access to safe drinking water. It would be added after the existing amendments, not inserted into an article about a branch of government. This rule could give families a constitutional basis to challenge a government policy that leaves their tap water unsafe. Congress could propose the amendment with a two-thirds vote in each house. Congress could then choose ratification by state legislatures, and three-fourths of the states would have to approve it before it became part of the Constitution.

Accept any issue not discussed in the passage if the proposed rule and its effect are clear. The response must place the change among the amendments and accurately describe one Article V proposal path and one ratification path.