Seats and Salaries

Read the constitutional rules for serving in Congress.

USG.C.4.1.B "Identify the constitutional qualifications, terms of office, and compensation for members of the United States of America Congress, including change created by passage of the 17th and 27th Amendments."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline each chamber's age, citizenship, and state-residence rules; circle term lengths; box who sets and pays members' compensation; and label the changes made by the 17th and 27th Amendments with their amendment numbers.

What the Constitution Says About Congress

1. A campaign flyer can promise almost anything, but the Constitution sets the basic entry rules for Congress. A person seeking a seat in the House of Representatives must be at least 25 years old, have been a U.S. citizen for at least seven years, and live in the state when elected. A person seeking a Senate seat must be at least 30, have been a U.S. citizen for at least nine years, and live in the state when elected. Neither set of constitutional rules requires a candidate to live in a particular congressional district.

2. Now consider what voters choose at the ballot box. House members serve two-year terms, so every House seat comes up for election every two years. Senators serve six-year terms, with roughly one-third of Senate seats up for election every two years. Today, voters in each state elect their senators directly. That was not always the rule: before the 17th Amendment was ratified in 1913, state legislatures chose U.S. senators. The amendment shifted that choice to the people of each state. It did not shorten senators' six-year terms or change the age and citizenship requirements.

3. The Constitution also addresses a less visible part of congressional service: pay. Members of both chambers receive compensation set by federal law and paid from the U.S. Treasury. Congress can pass a law changing its members' pay, but the 27th Amendment limits when that change can begin. Ratified in 1992, it says a law varying the compensation of senators and representatives cannot take effect until an election for the House of Representatives has occurred. A pay change therefore cannot take effect immediately after Congress passes it. Voters have a chance to cast ballots in a House election first.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How do the constitutional age and citizenship requirements for the House and Senate differ? What state-residence rule do they share?

2. Compare House and Senate term lengths and how often seats in each chamber come up for election.

3. Who chose senators before the 17th Amendment, and who chooses them under the amendment?

4. Who sets and pays congressional compensation, and when can a change in that compensation take effect under the 27th Amendment?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a five-sentence voter guide about two people who live in the state holding an election: one is 28 and has been a U.S. citizen for eight years; the other is 34 and has been a citizen for ten years. Explain which chamber each may seek, compare the terms, and describe how the 17th and 27th Amendments affect Senate elections and congressional pay.

ANSWER KEY

Seats and Salaries

HIGH SCHOOL · USG.C.4.1.B

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline each chamber's age, citizenship, and state-residence rules; circle term lengths; box who sets and pays members' compensation; and label the changes made by the 17th and 27th Amendments with their amendment numbers. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How do the constitutional age and citizenship requirements for the House and Senate differ? What state-residence rule do they share?	**House members must be at least 25 and citizens for seven years; senators must be at least 30 and citizens for nine years. Both must live in the state when elected.**
2	Compare House and Senate term lengths and how often seats in each chamber come up for election.	**House terms last two years, and every seat comes up every two years. Senate terms last six years, with roughly one-third of seats up every two years.**
3	Who chose senators before the 17th Amendment, and who chooses them under the amendment?	**State legislatures chose senators before the amendment; voters in each state elect them directly under it.**
4	Who sets and pays congressional compensation, and when can a change in that compensation take effect under the 27th Amendment?	**Federal law sets compensation, and the U.S. Treasury pays it. A change cannot take effect until after an election for the House of Representatives.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

At 28 with eight years of citizenship, the first person may seek a House seat but not a Senate seat. At 34 with ten years of citizenship, the second person meets the requirements for either chamber, and both live in the state. House members serve two years, while senators serve six years. Under the 17th Amendment, voters elect senators directly instead of state legislatures choosing them. Under the 27th Amendment, a congressional pay change must wait until after a House election to take effect.

For the voter guide, accept equivalent wording that correctly applies both candidates' qualifications and states both term lengths and amendment changes. The 27th Amendment requires an intervening House election, not a Senate election.