Key Points

- The U.S. Constitution reflects several historical influences, including the Magna Carta, the English Bill of Rights, and the French-Indian Wars.
- The Articles of Confederation were a precursor to the Constitution but failed because they did not allow the federal government to impose direct taxes, reserved too much power to the states, and required unanimous approval for amendments.
- The U.S. Constitution contains seven articles. The articles deal with the organization, operation, and powers of the federal government, and 27 amendments that deal with various rights that people have (primarily in their dealings with government).
- Constitutional law is a product not only of the Constitution but also of the Supreme Court cases interpreting the Constitution.
- The Constitution is only one source of U.S. law. Other sources include state and federal cases and statutes and state constitutions.

Chapter Outline

Historical Background
- Magna Carta
- English Bill of Rights
- Declaration of Independence
- Articles of Confederation
- The Constitutional Convention

The U.S. Constitution
- Preamble
- Articles
- Amendments

The Constitution and Case Law
- How Case Law Originates
- The Court Syllabus
- Locating Supreme Court Cases

How to Read a Supreme Court Case
- Become Familiar with the Terminology Used by the Court
- Distinguish the Syllabus and Editorial Enhancements from the Court's Opinion
- Distinguish the Majority Opinion from Concurring and Dissenting Opinions
- Identify the Case Name and Citation
- Identify the Various Parts of the Court's Opinion

The Constitution and Other Sources of U.S. Law
- Statutory Law
- State Constitutions
- Case Law

Web Links

http://constitution.org/c5/index.php

This site is the home page for the Constitution Society, a private, nonprofit organization.
http://www.findlaw.com
This general legal site allows you to access the full text of cases found in the chapters and provides numerous other legal resources.

http://www.lawguru.com/lawlinks/Constitutions/
This site provides a link to state constitutions.

http://www.archives.gov
This site for the National Archives contains more information about the founders of the Constitution and the constitutional convention.

http://www.abanet.org
This site for the American Bar Association contains information on a variety of subjects including legal ethics.

Selected Legal Vocabulary

Review the following important terms. If you cannot explain and/or define a term, check its meaning in a legal dictionary such as http://dictionary.lp.findlaw.com/.

Articles of Confederation
Declaration of Independence
bicameral
federalists
antifederalists
ratified
case law
opinion
published
case brief
syllabus
parallel citation
headnotes
majority opinion
plurality opinion
concurring opinion
dissenting opinion
per curiam opinion
stare decisis

Supplemental Activity

The National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) is an independent federal agency that preserves our nation’s history. This agency maintains the original founding documents. View these documents online at http://www.archives.gov/national_archives_experience/charters/charters.html.