

Breaking Down the Bill of Rights

To help make the Bill of Rights easier to understand, the text from each amendment is divided up to show:

- The “actor” (the person or entity doing the primary action in the sentence).
- The “action” (the primary verb(s) in the sentence).
- The “object/recipient” (what or who is being acted upon in the sentence).
- “Details/conditions/exceptions” (extra information about how, where, when, or why the action is taking place).

In the Bill of Rights, sometimes the “actor” is implied. To help make it clear who is doing what, sentences in passive voice have been changed to active voice. (See step 2 for the first example of this.)

The Bill of Rights also uses many negatives (such as “no,” “not”) and reversals (such as “but,” “without”) that can be difficult to keep track of but that shape the meaning of the text significantly. These words have been bolded in the text shown here.

(_____) indicates an implied (unstated) text element.

Directions:

1. Fill in any blanks in the first four columns.
2. Use the fifth column to jot down a few words to summarize the rights of the people outlined by each amendment.
3. In the last two columns, list the verbs that relate to what the government *should* and *should not* do.
4. Look for patterns in the verbs you collected and answer the final three questions under the chart.

	Actor	Action	The object/recipient (What? Who?)	Details/conditions/exceptions (How? Where? When? Why?)	Summarize the rights of the people outlined by each amendment	What verbs (if any) are used to describe what the government (or its laws) <i>should</i> do?	What verbs (if any) are used to describe what the government (or its laws) <i>should not</i> do?

1	Congress	shall make	no law	respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof (of religion) or abridging the freedom of speech or of the press or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances	<i>Religion</i> <i>Free speech</i> <i>Freedom of press</i> <i>Right to assemble</i>	<i>redress</i>	<i>make</i> <i>prohibit</i> <i>abridge</i>
2	(the government)	shall not infringe	_____	of the people to keep and bear arms (because) a well regulated Militia, (is) necessary to the security of a free State			
3	(_____) (_____)	shall quarter	no soldier	in time of peace, in any house, without the consent of the Owner nor in time of war, but in a manner to be prescribed by law			

4	(the government)	shall not _____ and shall _____	The right no warrants	of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures but upon probably cause, supported by Oath or affirmation, and particularly describing the place to be searched, and the persons or things to be searched.			
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5	(_____) (_____)	shall hold	no person	to answer for a capital, or otherwise infamous crime, unless on a presentment or indictment of a Grand Jury, except in cases arising in the land or naval forces, or in the Militia, when in actual service in time of War or public danger			
		nor					
		shall subject/put	any person	for the same offence twice, in jeopardy of life or limb			
		nor					
		shall compel	(any person)	in any criminal case to be a witness against himself			
		nor					
		(shall) deprive					
		nor	(any person)	of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law			
		shall take					
			private property	for public use, without just compensation			

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6	the accused	shall enjoy	_____	<p>In all criminal prosecutions</p> <p>to a speedy and public trial,</p> <p>by an impartial jury of the State and district wherein the crime shall have been committed, which district shall have been previously ascertained by law,</p> <p>and</p> <p>to be informed of the nature and cause of the accusation</p> <p>(and)</p> <p>to be confronted with witnesses against him</p> <p>(and)</p> <p>to have compulsory process for obtaining witnesses in his favor,</p> <p>and to have the Assistance of Counsel for his defence</p>			
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9	(the government)	shall not construe	The enumeration	in the Constitution, _____ _____			
10	(the government)	reserves	powers not delegated nor (_____) prohibited	to the United States by the Constitution by it (_____) to the States to the States respectively, or to the people			

What kinds of verbs are used to describe what the government *should* do? Did the authors of the Bill of Rights use verbs with positive or negative connotations when describing what governments should do?

What kinds of verbs are used to describe what the government *should not* do? Did the authors of the Bill of Rights use verbs with positive or negative connotations when describing what government should not do?

How does this relate to the purpose of the Bill of Rights?