

Civics is all around us. There is a lot to know about the government and how “We the People” interact with the government and each other. Let’s help each other expand our civic literacy.

Amendment I

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; 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.



Why can people express themselves? How does the government become aware of people's feelings and desires during a time of crisis? It comes down to the First Amendment.

The First Amendment contains several rights with both a political and social impact. Politically, these rights protect people when they want to have a voice in government. Socially, people may organize to express that voice.

During the Novel Coronavirus/COVID-19 pandemic, individuals have exercised their First Amendment rights in different ways.

People have used their freedom of speech to express their thoughts, feelings, and ideas about how the government has handled the crisis. Individuals have also exercised freedom of assembly to protest against the actions of their state’s stay-at-home orders. The media exercises freedom of the press as they report on the news of the virus, provide updates to their audience and sometimes offer opinions on the pandemic.

The five freedoms in the First Amendment are:

Freedom of speech allows individuals to express their opinions. This includes speech that may criticize the government or government officials.

Freedom of the press allows individuals to publish or print information and news.

Freedom of religious exercise, also known as the free exercise clause, allows individuals to practice their religion freely or to choose not to practice a religion at all.

Freedom of peaceable assembly means that people have the right to gather in groups and hold meetings without government interference. These groups may include people who wish to hold a public protest about their ideas or beliefs.

Freedom of petition means that people have the right to express their concerns to the government and to ask the government to address issues. A petition may formally ask the government for changes in the law. It also may include the signatures of those who support the changes.

To Do and To Think: How does the First Amendment apply to your life during this pandemic? Describe specific examples of how you have seen individuals, the media, or groups exercise their First Amendment rights during this time.

Learn MORE about the Bill of Rights and the five freedoms in the First Amendment. Free registration may be required.

- [The Bill of Rights and Other Amendments](#), from Civics360
- [First Amendment FAQ](#), from Freedom Forum Institute
- [Do I Have a Right?](#), from iCivics

