

The background of the entire page is a close-up, slightly blurred image of the American flag. The stars and stripes are clearly visible, with the blue field of stars on the left and the red and white stripes on the right.

# **How to be an Active American Citizen**

**An instructional pamphlet for all those people who enjoy being  
American citizens**

**By Morgen Dieckmann**

**Here's the truth. We live in the greatest country in the world. The United States is a place where everyday people no matter how rich or poor can pursue their dreams. It is a place where the success in your life is determined by your actions and determination, not by your societal class. There is no other place quite like it. There is only one price to living in a country like this and that is- You, an American citizen need to carry out your responsibilities to maintain the way of life possible here in America.**

**No matter who you are and where you come from, as an American citizen you have the right and the responsibility to be an active citizen. This pamphlet provides step by step instructions so you can educate yourself and carry out your responsibilities.**

**Let's be honest living in the United States is pretty great. You may or may not realize how blessed you are to live in a country and have the rights you do. But remember this, freedom isn't free and it is up to all of us to continually pay the price. All in all, it is the best investment you can make.**

**This is the beginning of your journey to become an active American citizen. This pamphlet is not intended to be completed in just a few hours. My hope is that you will take your time working through it to educate yourself as thoroughly as possible and who knows, you may even enjoy what you come to discover.**

**Step one:** Determine that you are an American citizen. You can determine your citizenship by clicking on the following link from the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services.

<http://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/USCIS/Resources/A4en.pdf>

If the answer is yes then you need to complete the steps that are in this pamphlet because it is up to you to help preserve the way of life that is available in America.

**Step Two: It may have happened a long time ago but this is information you need to know**

Learn a little history. Even if you aren't one who enjoys studying history, you should at least see the value of it. Don't worry I won't bore you with an entire overview of American history, just a few key events you must understand.

Why did people start to colonize the New World?

After the discovery of America, Europeans started to settle in the New World in search of religious freedom and relief from a monarch.

Read the Declaration of Independence

This video will give you a little background to why the Declaration of Independence was written.

<http://www.history.com/topics/american-revolution/declaration-of-independence>

After viewing the video you need to read the Declaration of Independence and understand the problems that the Americans had with the British and why they wanted to be an independent nation.

[http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/declaration\\_transcript.html](http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/declaration_transcript.html)

### **American Revolution**

This video provides a brief summary of the American Revolution. By the end of the video you should be able to answer the following questions.

1. Who was fighting against who?
2. Why were they fighting?

<http://www.history.com/topics/american-revolution/american-revolution-history/videos/american-revolution?m=528e394da93ae&s=undefined&f=1&free=false>

Answers:

1. The American militia was fighting against the British army.
2. After the Declaration of Independence and rising tensions between the Americans and the British, the Americans were fighting for independence from Great Britain in order to establish their own government and relinquish the control of King George over the colonies.

After reading the Declaration of Independence and understanding the American Revolution you should understand a couple of things. You understand the foundations of freedom that were so desirable to the colonists and the price that was paid to obtain that freedom. These truths remain evident today. Americans enjoy their freedom, but must be willing to fight for it.

### **The United States Constitution**

The following video provides a little background to the foundation of the Constitution. Ask yourself the following questions.

<http://www.history.com/topics/constitution>

1. Why did the delegates decide to write the Constitution and get rid of the Articles of Confederation?
2. What were some of the main principles that inspired the content of the Constitution?

All in all the biggest concern of the delegate of the Continental Congress was to limit the power of the central government. They came from a government where the king had all the power. They wanted to stay away from that as much as they could. However, as it was mentioned in the video the Articles of Confederation didn't give the government enough power to provide for a united nation. We are the United States of America. Individual states form together to become one nation which is made possible by the U.S. Constitution.

Did you know that the Constitution guarantees your rights as an American citizen? Keep that in mind for later when we will actually read the Constitution.

Okay so you've learned about the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. Both of these documents laid down the foundation for what America is today. If you follow the link you will find a timeline that shows a brief history of the United States. Don't worry, it is brief and should only take around 15- 20 minutes to read all the way through.

<http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0902416.html>

Now you are familiar with some basic American history. What did you learn from that? Hopefully you learned a little history, but along with that, I hope you learned the price that it cost to live in a country like this. America fought and continues to fight to maintain its freedom and allow its citizens to live the American dream.

Now that we have the basics for American history, I encourage you to continue to educate yourself. Whether that means you don't fall asleep in your history class, or research on your own figure out a way to maintain and expand your knowledge of history.

**Tip:** One way that I like to keep up a knowledge of history is by viewing this day in history. Go to <http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history>. You might find out some pretty cool stuff.

### **Step 3: How does the government run and why do you have rights?**

Do you know the answer to this question? It's quite simple. The US Constitution is a piece of paper that tells us Americans how the government should function and what rights the citizens hold. This piece of paper holds a lot of power because it supports the people and the people support it.

Review these Frequently Asked Questions about the Constitution

<http://constitutioncenter.org/learn/educational-resources/constitution-faqs/>

Okay now you know what the Constitution is and what it does, now comes the time where you need to actually read it. That may seem a little daunting so we will take it in sections.

#### **The Preamble**

The preamble is the introduction to the Constitution. It describes the reasons why the Constitution is being written. It starts with We the People and ends before Article 1.

[http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/constitution\\_transcript.html](http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/constitution_transcript.html)

#### **The Articles: The articles explain how the government is set up and how it runs**

##### **Article 1**

This article explains how the legislative branch works. Pay careful attention to this because you may be surprised about the power that Congress has. There are two branches of Congress that include the House of Representatives and the Senate. There are 435 Representatives and 100 Senators. The number of Representatives a state has is determined by its population while all of the states have two Senators.

[http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/constitution\\_transcript.html](http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/constitution_transcript.html)

##### **Article 2**

Now you are going to learn about the executive branch. This includes the duties of the President. It also explains on what grounds the President would be removed from office and the process for carrying that through.

[http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/constitution\\_transcript.html](http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/constitution_transcript.html)

### **Article 3**

This article defines the judicial branch. The judicial branch includes the Supreme Court with the 9 justices. It also defines treason.

[http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/constitution\\_transcript.html](http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/constitution_transcript.html)

### **Article 4**

America is a really unique country because we have individual states that together form one nation. This article explains how the states function as part of a nation.

[http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/constitution\\_transcript.html](http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/constitution_transcript.html)

### **Article 5**

The amendments are additions onto the Constitution that include laws that apply to the whole country. This article explains how amendments are added to the Constitution. The process is very difficult on purpose. That way the Constitution has the ability to change if absolutely necessary, but won't be changed for trivial reasons.

[http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/constitution\\_transcript.html](http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/constitution_transcript.html)

### **Article 6**

This article declares that the Constitution is the Supreme Law of the Land. It is relevant to all Citizens and all government officials are bound by oath to support it.

[http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/constitution\\_transcript.html](http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/constitution_transcript.html)

### **Article 7**

This explains that the Constitution was made into the Supreme Law of the Land on September 7<sup>th</sup> 1787. Basically this article states that the Constitution is legal and valid.

[http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/constitution\\_transcript.html](http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/constitution_transcript.html)

### **The Amendments: The Bill of Rights (amendments 1-10)**

The Bill of Rights includes the first ten amendments and guarantees the individual liberties of all citizens. Read these amendments carefully so that you know your rights.

[http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/bill\\_of\\_rights\\_transcript.html](http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/bill_of_rights_transcript.html)

### **Amendments 11-27**

Amendments 11-27 are also important for you to understand to know what is legal guaranteed by the Constitution.

[http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/bill\\_of\\_rights\\_transcript.html](http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/bill_of_rights_transcript.html)

So you have just read the Constitution. This can be a tiresome but completely necessary step to be an active citizen. While you may not have the Constitution memorized you now know your rights and how your government functions. You can exercise and defend your rights now that you know what they are and hold your government accountable to the document it is meant to support.

## **Now you know a whole lot of information what are you going to do with it?**

**Step 4: Stay up to date on current events:** To be an active citizen you not only need to know your history and your rights, you also need to know what is going on in your community and in the nation. Of course there is the concern about biased media. If reporters are biased how do you know what is fact or fiction? Here's what I recommend. Get your news from at least two different sources. Listen to the facts about the stories that are being reported and formulate your own opinion. Below is a list of the most popular news stations.

1. CNN – it is worldwide famous channel, but watched by a huge population in the US.
2. FOX News – this is second most watched news channel in the US.
3. MSNBC
4. Current TV
5. HLN

When current events take place, it is helpful to discuss them with friends or family. That allows you to see different perspectives and stay well informed.

### **Step 5: Know who's in charge**

Right now without looking it up, do you know who the President is? Vice President? Your state Representatives and Senators? How about the Chief Justice? Knowing who is in charge is very important. Review the following websites to discover the people who work in the government and what kind of things they believe in and stand for.

President and his Cabinet

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/>

The House of Representatives: you should at least be familiar with the representatives of your state and your district.

<http://www.house.gov/representatives/>

Senate: again you should know who the Senators are of your state.

<https://www.senate.gov/>

Supreme Court Justices: at the least know the name of the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court

<http://www.supremecourt.gov/about/biographies.aspx>

These people work for the national government. Along with knowing who these people are, because they work for you, you should know who is running your state government. The following is the website that is a reference for anything you need to know about the government in Idaho.

<http://www.idaho.gov/>

### **Step 6: Vote**

Once you turn 18, you have the right to vote. Voting provides an incredible opportunity for you to have a voice in the government. Before you can vote you need to register. It's pretty simple. All you have to do is fill out a form and send it in. Here's the link to the voting registration for in Idaho.

[http://www.idahovotes.gov/voterreg/vtr\\_reg\\_form.pdf](http://www.idahovotes.gov/voterreg/vtr_reg_form.pdf)

[Remember it is also important that you research the candidates before you vote for them. You should never vote for someone simply because everyone else is voting for them. Have your own opinion and vote for the person who best fits what you believe is important.](#)

### **Step 7: Do you know your stuff?**

When people decide that they want the privilege to become an American citizen they must go through a very long process in order to do so. Part of the process is passing a test that covers American history, government, and geography. The test covers facts that people desiring to become American citizens should know. As someone who was privileged to be born an American citizen, you should be able to pass this test. Below is the link to the United State Citizenship and Immigration Services Naturalization practice tests. I encourage you to go through the practice tests. After all, you should know the answers anyway simply by being an American citizen.

<http://www.uscis.gov/citizenship/quiz/learners/study-test/study-materials-civics-test/naturalization-self-test-1>

**Now you are a more informed citizen and have the knowledge and means to be an active and responsible one. However the information above is just the bare minimum requirements of being an active citizen. There is still so much more you can do.**



## **Step 7: Volunteer**

Because of the freedom's that have been fought for time and time again we all have the chance to follow our dreams. Along the way we should also give back to others by volunteering. People helping out their neighbors in just one of the things that make America a great place to live. There are thousands of ways to give back, all you need to do is figure out something that interests you. Below are just a few ideas to help you get started.

Volunteer opportunities in Idaho

<http://www.serveidaho.gov/volunteer.aspx>

Civil Air Patrol

<http://www.gocivilairpatrol.com/>

American Red Cross

<http://www.redcross.org/>

UNICEF

<http://www.unicefusa.org/>

The Humane Society

<http://www.humanesociety.org/>

Wounded Warrior Project

<http://www.woundedwarriorproject.org/>

These are just a few of the thousands of volunteer opportunities there are to volunteer. You can even find volunteer opportunities that relate to your personal interests. All you have to do is look.

## **Step 8: Consider military or civil service**

There are thousands of career opportunities in the military and civil service. If your ambitions include defending the Constitution and the American way of life consider a career doing exactly that.

Military service: There are 5 branches of the military

Here's a brief overview of the 5 and you can find which one best fits you.

<http://www.todaysmilitary.com/service-branches>

Civil Service: There are numerous careers available.

There are jobs within all 15 government departments that may interest you.

<http://www.usa.gov/directory/federal/index.shtml?id=68060>

Here are some of the few opportunities there are.

The State Department

<http://careers.state.gov/civil-service>

The CIA

<https://www.cia.gov/careers>

The FBI

<https://www.fbijobs.gov/>

**So there you have it; a simple guide to becoming an active American citizen. I hope that you enjoyed this process and learned something along the way. You are privileged to live in the greatest country in the world. However these freedoms must be fought for everyday by ensuring that citizens are informed and active.**

**“Educate and inform the whole mass of the people... They are the only sure reliance for the preservation of our liberty.”**

**Thomas Jefferson**