

TEXT SUMMARY

The Constitution has lasted more than 200 years because it has changed with the times. Many of its words and their meanings are the same, but some words have been changed, eliminated, or added—and some of the meanings have been modified as well. The alterations to the Constitution have occurred in two ways: either through formal or informal **amendments**, or changes.

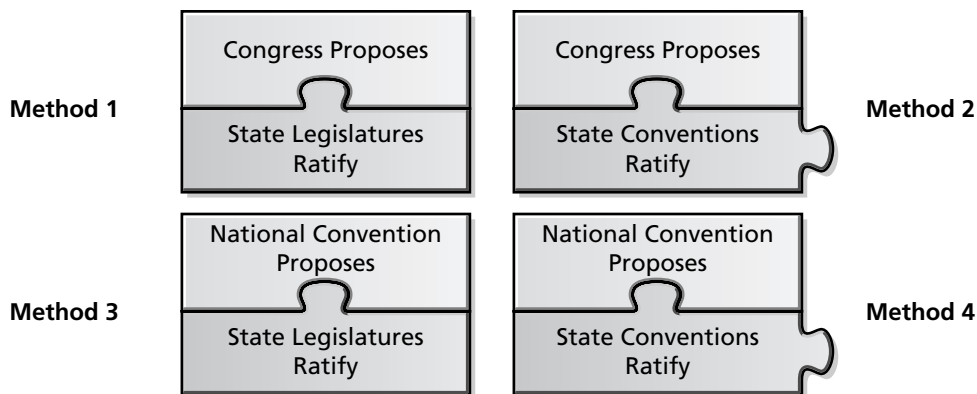
A **formal amendment** is a change to the Constitution's written words. The Framers created four ways to make such changes. (See the Graphic Summary.) The Framers followed the principle of federalism in creating these methods. First, amendments are proposed, or suggested,

at a national level—either by Congress or at a national convention. Then they are ratified at the State level—either in the State legislatures or by State conventions. Method 1 has been used for all but one of the 27 amendments.

The first ten amendments are the **Bill of Rights**. Congress proposed all of them in 1789 because many people refused to support the Constitution unless the Federal Government protected these basic rights. The States approved these ten amendments in 1791. The other 17 amendments became part of the Constitution one at a time.

THE BIG IDEA

The Framers of the Constitution prepared for changing times by providing for the document's formal amendment.

GRAPHIC SUMMARY: Methods of Formal Amendment

Each of the methods of formally amending the Constitution is based on the principle of federalism.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What is a formal amendment to the Constitution?
2. **Diagram Skills** Which two bodies may ratify formal amendments to the Constitution?