Bill of Rights

Congress proposed twelve amendments on September 25, 1789. The states ratified these ten on December 15, 1791.

First Amendment
Freedom of religion, speech and the press

Congress cannot set up an official religion or stop people practicing their own, or limit free speech, a free press, the right to gather peacefully and the right to ask the government to put things right.

Second Amendment
The right to keep and bear arms

It says a well-regulated militia is needed for the security of a free state, and that the right of the people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed.

Third Amendment
No soldiers housed in homes

In peacetime, soldiers cannot be housed in anyone's home without the owner's consent; in wartime, only in the way a law sets out.

Fourth Amendment
No unreasonable searches and seizures

People, their homes, papers and belongings are protected from unreasonable searches and seizures. A warrant needs probable cause, given under oath, and must describe the place and what is to be seized.

Fifth Amendment
Due process, and no trial twice for one crime

Outside the armed forces, a grand jury must charge a serious crime. No one can be tried twice for the same offense or made a witness against themselves, or lose life, liberty or property without due process of law. Property taken for public use must be paid for.

Sixth Amendment
A speedy and public trial, with a lawyer

A person accused of a crime has the right to a speedy, public trial by a fair jury from the state and district where the crime happened, to be told the charge, to face the witnesses, to call witnesses and to have a lawyer.

Seventh Amendment
A jury trial in lawsuits

In lawsuits over more than twenty dollars, the right to a trial by jury is kept, and no court of the United States looks again at a fact a jury has decided, except under the rules of the common law.

Eighth Amendment
No excessive bail or cruel and unusual punishment

Bail and fines cannot be excessive, and cruel and unusual punishments are not allowed.

Ninth Amendment
Other rights kept by the people

Listing some rights in the Constitution does not mean the people have no others.

Tenth Amendment
Powers kept by the states and the people

Powers the Constitution does not give the federal government, and does not forbid to the states, belong to the states or to the people.

In plain words, from the National Archives transcription of the Bill of Rights.