

Federalism: How the Constitution Divides Power

Course: United States Government **Grades:** 9–12 **Time:** ~50 min standard · ~90 min block **Work mode:** Independent · pencil only Social Studies

Start Here

This is a **paper civics investigation** about **federalism** — the way the U.S. Constitution divides government power among a **national** government, the **state** governments, and powers the two levels **share**. You will read short summaries written for this packet, study a diagram, examine a short public-domain constitutional excerpt, and answer questions using a pencil. You do **not** need a computer, a textbook, or the internet — **everything you need is printed in this packet**. Work by yourself and do your best thinking. Write in complete sentences where you are asked to explain. If a question is hard, skip it, keep going, and come back. Reading the passages quietly aloud to yourself is allowed and encouraged. Keep your answers **non-partisan and grounded in the text and examples** — describe how power is *structured*, not which political party or side you prefer.

Standard (~50 min): read Sources A–B and do Questions 1–10, then the CER in Question 11. **Block (~90 min):** also read **Source C** and complete the block add-ons marked **[BLOCK]**, including the extended writing in Question 11.

Start Observe a Source 5 min

In a **federal** system, power is not held by one government alone; it is **divided** and **shared** between a central government and smaller regional governments. Warm up before you read.

1 Read this short public-domain excerpt, then answer below.

Public-domain text — the Tenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution (ratified 1791), quoted in full: "The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people."

Type: primary source, public domain (text of the U.S. Constitution) · Creator: the framers / ratified by the states · Date: 1791 · This is the complete text of the amendment.

Notice: Write **one thing you notice** about who gets the powers that are *not* given to the national government ("the United States").

Predict: Based only on this sentence, **predict one kind of decision** you think a *state* might get to make instead of the national government.

2 Before reading the sources, why do you think a country might choose to **divide** power between a national government and state governments instead of giving it all to one? Give **one reason** in your own words.

Build Read the Sources 10–15 min

Source A — How federalism divides power (written for this packet)

The United States uses **federalism**: a system in which a single country contains two levels of government — one **national** (also called federal) government and many **state** governments — and the Constitution decides which

level may do what. Powers fall into three groups.

Delegated (national) powers. These are powers the Constitution gives to the national government. Examples include coining money, declaring war, raising and maintaining armed forces, running the postal system, and regulating trade between the states and with other nations. Because these jobs affect the whole country, the framers assigned them to one central government so the states would act as one nation.

Reserved (state) powers. These are powers kept by the states. The **Tenth Amendment** says that powers not given to the national government, and not forbidden to the states, are "reserved to the States." Examples commonly include running public schools, issuing driver's and marriage licenses, conducting elections, and setting up local governments. States handle many day-to-day matters closest to residents.

Concurrent (shared) powers. Some powers are held by **both** levels at the same time. Examples include the power to **tax**, to build roads, to borrow money, to make and enforce laws, and to set up courts. Both a state and the national government can, for instance, collect taxes.

Why it is set up this way. The framers had recently broken away from a distant central power and worried that one all-powerful government could threaten liberty. By **dividing power** between national and state levels — and by **sharing** some of it — they aimed to keep any single government from becoming too strong, to let states meet local needs, and still to keep the country unified on national matters.

Type: original explanatory summary · Focus: delegated, reserved, and concurrent powers under U.S. federalism

Source B — A short constitutional excerpt (public domain)

This excerpt is **genuine public-domain text** from the U.S. Constitution. It is the opening of the list of powers given to Congress (the national legislature):

"The Congress shall have Power To lay and collect Taxes, Duties, Imposts and Excises, to pay the Debts and provide for the common Defence and general Welfare of the United States..." —U.S. Constitution, Article I, Section 8

Type: primary source, public domain (U.S. Constitution, Article I, Section 8) · Creator: the framers, ratified by the states · Only the opening portion is shown (...).

Source C — A federal-vs-state scenario [BLOCK]

Read Source C only if you are doing the ~90-minute block version. This is an **original scenario** written for this packet using neutral, well-established civics ideas. It is not about any real current dispute.

Suppose a national law sets a single, uniform safety rule for a product sold across the whole country, while a particular state has passed its own, stricter rule for that same product sold inside that state. A store owner is unsure which rule to follow. In the U.S. system, the Constitution's **Supremacy Clause** (Article VI) makes valid national law the "supreme Law of the Land," so where a valid national law and a state law genuinely conflict on a matter the national government is empowered to regulate, the national law generally controls — but many everyday matters are left to the states, and states keep their reserved powers.

Type: original scenario (illustrative, neutral) · Focus: how shared and divided power can create a national-vs-state question · Not a real case.

Word Bank

federalism

a system dividing power between a national government and state governments.

delegated power

- a power the Constitution gives to the national government (also called an enumerated power).
- reserved power
 - a power kept by the states, per the Tenth Amendment.
- concurrent power
 - a power held by both the national and state governments at the same time.
- national government
 - the central (federal) government of the whole United States.
- state government
 - the government of an individual state.
- Supremacy Clause
 - Article VI text making valid national law the supreme law where it conflicts with state law.
- ratify
 - to formally approve, as the states approved the Constitution and its amendments.
- cause
 - a reason something happens; it comes before an effect.
- effect
 - a result or consequence of a cause.
- fact
 - a statement that can be checked and shown true or false.
- interpretation
 - an explanation of what evidence means; reasoned from facts.
- opinion
 - a personal belief or preference; not proven by evidence.

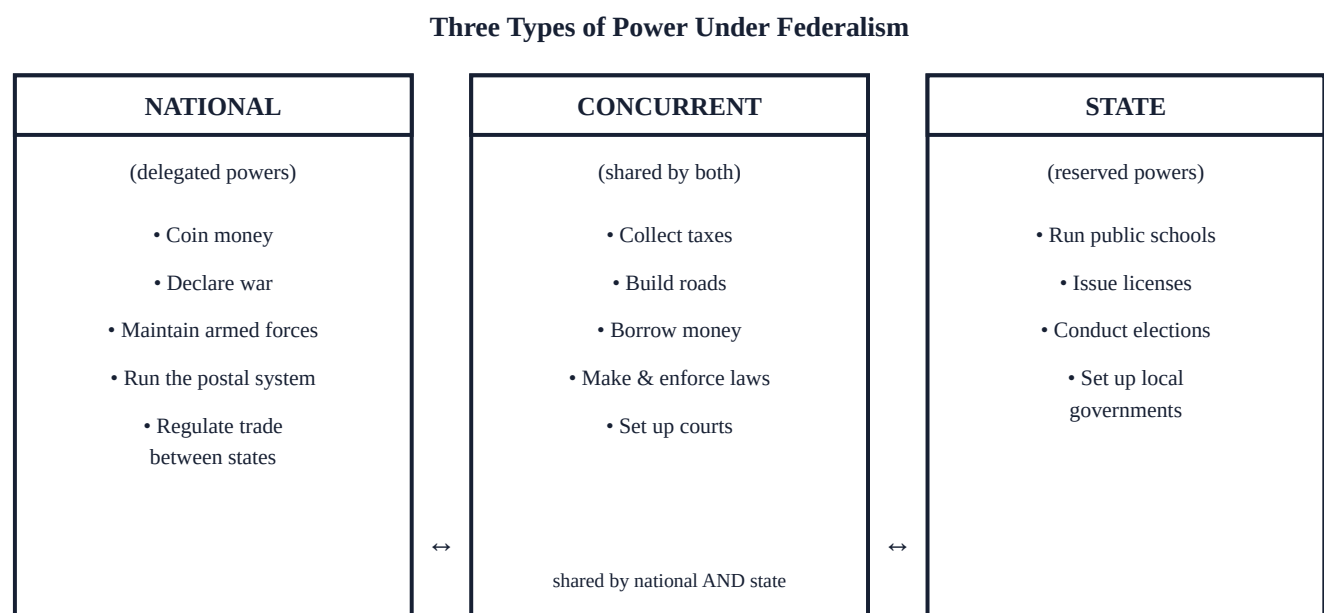


Figure 1. A three-column diagram of federalism: national (delegated) powers on the left, state (reserved) powers on the right, and concurrent (shared) powers in the center held by both levels. All boxes, borders, and labels are black on white so the figure reads clearly in grayscale.

3Using the diagram, list **one power** from each column.

National: _____

Concurrent (shared): _____

State: _____

Apply Analyze the Sources 20–25 min

4Classify the powers. Write **N** (national), **S** (state), or **C** (concurrent/shared) next to each example power. Use Source A and the diagram.

- ____ a) Coin (print) money
- ____ b) Run public schools
- ____ c) Collect taxes
- ____ d) Declare war
- ____ e) Issue driver's and marriage licenses

5Source analysis. Look back at the **Article I, Section 8 excerpt in Source B** and answer.

What does it establish? Which branch of the national government does this text give powers to?

Purpose: Name **one** specific power this excerpt says Congress "shall have."

Type of source (primary or secondary? public domain?): _____

6Why the framers divided power (cause and effect). Use Source A to complete the chain. Write one item on each blank so it reads from *cause* to *dividing power* to *effects*.

Cause (a framer worry)	→ Divide power	→ Effects (name two)
a) _____	Power is split between national and state levels, and some is shared	b) _____
		c) _____

Hint: Source A's last paragraph names a worry (one all-powerful government) and the goals of dividing power (limit any one government, meet local needs, stay unified).

7Explain a cause-and-effect chain. In 2–3 sentences, use Source A to explain **why the framers divided power**: name one cause (a worry or goal) and one effect that dividing power was meant to produce.

8Fact, interpretation, or opinion? Write **F** (fact you can check in the sources), **I** (interpretation reasoned from facts), or **O** (opinion / personal belief).

- ____ a) The Tenth Amendment says powers not given to the national government are reserved to the states.
- ____ b) The framers probably divided power partly because they feared one government becoming too strong.
- ____ c) State governments are more important than the national government.
- ____ d) Both the national and state governments can collect taxes.

9Evaluate a claim using the sources. A student claims: "*Only the national government is allowed to tax; states cannot tax at all.*" Do the sources support this claim?

- Yes — Source A lists taxing as a national-only (delegated) power.
- No — Source A lists taxing as a **concurrent** power, held by **both** the national and state governments.
- The sources never mention taxes.

Explain your choice using one detail from Source A or Source B:

10[BLOCK] Read the scenario. Skip this if you are doing the standard version. Using **Source C**, explain in one or two sentences what happens when a valid **national** law and a **state** law genuinely **conflict** on a matter the national government may regulate — and name the clause that settles it.

Explain Claim–Evidence–Reasoning 10–20 min

Question 11 — Build a source-based argument.

Scenario: A state government sets the rules for its public schools and issues driver's licenses, while the national government coins the money everyone uses and both governments collect taxes. **How does this scenario reflect federalism?** Write a **claim** that states how the scenario shows federalism, support it with **two pieces of evidence** from the sources or diagram, then explain your **reasoning**. Ground your answer in the text and examples, not in opinion.

Sentence stems you may use: "This scenario reflects federalism because power is divided into _____. " "One piece of evidence is... (from Source A / B or the diagram)." "A second piece of evidence is..." "This evidence supports my claim because..."

Claim

Evidence (two pieces)

Reasoning

[BLOCK] Extended writing — add the conflict scenario:

If you are doing the ~90-minute block, extend your argument on the lines below using **Source C**. (1) Describe a situation where a valid **national** law and a **state** law **conflict** on a matter the national government may regulate. (2) Explain which level's law generally controls in that conflict, name the clause that settles it, and explain how this still fits a federal system in which states keep their reserved powers.

Close ACE Wrap-Up 5 min

Articulate

In your own words, explain what **federalism** is, as if teaching a friend who missed today.

Connect

Point to one **national** power and one **state** power from the diagram or Source A, and name a power that is **shared** by both.

Extend

Name one everyday thing in your life (for example a license, a school, or money) and say whether a **national** or **state** government mainly handles it, and why.

Continue Early Finisher optional • ~15 min

If you finish early (no new materials needed):

Sort three more powers. On the back of this page, decide whether each of these belongs to the **national**, **state**, or **concurrent** column, and give a one-line reason for each using Source A: (1) running the postal system, (2) conducting elections, and (3) borrowing money. Use only the sources and the diagram.

Turn in: Hand in this whole packet with your name, class period, and date filled in. Make sure questions 1–11 and the ACE box are answered (skip the items marked [BLOCK] if you did the standard ~50-minute version). The early-finisher task is optional but turn it in too if you did it.

HS_GOV_Federalism_01 — Federalism: How the Constitution Divides Power Student Packet