

The Articles of Confederation were written during the American Revolution. Ben Franklin wrote the first draft, but it did not pass because the colonists thought it gave too much power to a central government. After a great deal of discussion and correction, the articles were ratified (approved by vote) in 1781. The Articles were a compromise. The ratified Articles stated that the new nation would be ruled by a congress. Each state had one vote.

According to the Articles, Congress could:

- Conduct foreign affairs
- Make treaties
- Declare war
- Maintain an army and a navy
- Coin money
- Establish post offices

According to the Articles, Congress COULD NOT:

- Could not elect a president of the central government. Thus there was no separation of power at the Federal (central) level. There was a Congress, and 13 states. Anything Congress did had to be approved by 9 of the 13 states.
- Could not enforce laws. Congress could pass laws, but Congress could not force the states to obey those laws, even when delegates from 9 of the 13 states agreed.
- Could not tax the states or the people. Congress could ask the states for money, but Congress could not force the states to give them money. And Congress could not raise money by collecting taxes. Taxation belonged to the states, and each state could make their own taxation laws. Without taxation, it was nearly impossible to run a government.

It was soon obvious that Ben Franklin was right. The Articles were too weak to allow a central government to function. All the states agreed. In 1787, the Constitutional Convention met in Philadelphia. Ben Franklin was a strong supporter, of course. So was George Washington. In 1779, a new document was created. They called it the Constitution.