

AP Government Supreme Court cases Review Sheet

The College Board explicitly requires you to know all 15 of them. You must:

- Identify each case.
- Understand its constitutional principle.
- Apply its reasoning to new scenarios.

The 15 required Supreme Court cases are at the heart of AP Gov. By learning their facts, principles, and applications, you will be prepared for both multiple-choice and FRQs.

1. *McCulloch v. Maryland* (1819)
2. *United States v. Lopez* (1995)
3. *Baker v. Carr* (1962)
4. *Shaw v. Reno* (1993)
5. *Marbury v. Madison* (1803)
6. *Engel v. Vitale* (1962)
7. *Wisconsin v. Yoder* (1972)
8. *Tinker v. Des Moines* (1969)
9. *New York Times v. United States* (1971)
10. *Schenck v. United States* (1919)
11. *Gideon v. Wainwright* (1963)
12. *Roe v. Wade* (1973)
13. *McDonald v. Chicago* (2010)
14. *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954)
15. *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission* (2010)

Case Summaries and their Significance

The [oyez.org](https://www.oyez.org) links also have key issue questions that will help you.

McCulloch v. Maryland (1819) <https://www.oyez.org/cases/1789-1850/17us316>

- Issue: Can a state tax the federal bank?
- Ruling: States cannot tax federal institutions; established implied powers (Necessary and Proper Clause).
- Exam Use: Federalism, supremacy of federal law.

United States v. Lopez (1995) <https://www.oyez.org/cases/1994/93-1260>

- Issue: Does Congress have power under the Commerce Clause to ban guns near schools?
- Ruling: No — limited federal power; reserved powers to the states.
- Exam Use: Federalism balance, limits of Commerce Clause.

Baker v. Carr (1962) <https://www.oyez.org/cases/1960/6>

- Issue: Can courts decide redistricting disputes?
- Ruling: Yes — established “one person, one vote.”
- Exam Use: Political representation, equal protection.

Shaw v. Reno (1993) <https://www.oyez.org/cases/1992/92-357>

- Issue: Can racial gerrymandering be used to create districts?
- Ruling: No — race cannot be the only factor in drawing districts.
- Exam Use: Civil rights, equal protection.

Marbury v. Madison (1803) <https://www.oyez.org/cases/1789-1850/5us137>

- Issue: Can courts strike down unconstitutional laws?
- Ruling: Yes — established judicial review.
- Exam Use: Judicial branch powers, checks and balances.

Engel v. Vitale (1962) <https://www.oyez.org/cases/1961/468>

- Issue: Can public schools lead prayer?
- Ruling: No — violates Establishment Clause.
- Exam Use: First Amendment, religion and government.

Wisconsin v. Yoder (1972) <https://www.oyez.org/cases/1971/70-110>

- Issue: Can Amish families pull children from school for religious reasons?
- Ruling: Yes — Free Exercise Clause protects them.
- Exam Use: Religious freedom balance.

Tinker v. Des Moines (1969) <https://www.oyez.org/cases/1968/21>

- Issue: Do students have free speech in schools?
- Ruling: Yes — symbolic speech is protected if not disruptive.
- Exam Use: First Amendment, student rights.

New York Times v. United States (1971) <https://www.oyez.org/cases/1970/1873>

- Issue: Can the government censor publication of classified papers?
- Ruling: No — prior restraint violates freedom of press.
- Exam Use: First Amendment, press protections.

Schenck v. United States (1919) <https://www.oyez.org/cases/1900-1940/249us47>

- Issue: Can free speech be restricted during wartime?
- Ruling: Yes — speech creating a “clear and present danger” is not protected.
- Exam Use: Free speech limits, national security.

Gideon v. Wainwright (1963) <https://www.oyez.org/cases/1962/155>

- Issue: Do defendants have the right to an attorney?
- Ruling: Yes — states must provide lawyers in felony cases.
- Exam Use: Sixth Amendment rights.

Roe v. Wade (1973) <https://www.oyez.org/cases/1971/70-18>

- Issue: Is abortion protected under privacy rights?
- Ruling: Yes — based on 14th Amendment’s due process clause.
- Exam Use: Civil liberties, privacy rights.

McDonald v. Chicago (2010) <https://www.oyez.org/cases/2009/08-1521>

- Issue: Does the 2nd Amendment apply to states?
- Ruling: Yes — incorporated via 14th Amendment.
- Exam Use: Gun rights, incorporation doctrine.

Brown v. Board of Education (1954) <https://www.oyez.org/cases/1940-1955/347us483>

- Issue: Is segregation in schools constitutional?
- Ruling: No — “separate but equal” is inherently unequal.
- Exam Use: Civil rights, equal protection.

Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission (2010) <https://www.oyez.org/cases/2008/08-205>

- Issue: Can corporations fund political campaigns?
- Ruling: Yes — political spending is free speech.
- Exam Use: Campaign finance, First Amendment.

How Cases Appear on the Exam

- Multiple-Choice: Apply a case principle to a new scenario.
- FRQ #3 (Case Comparison): Compare one required case to a new case. (20 minutes suggested)
- Argument Essay #4: Use a required case as evidence. (40 minutes suggested)
- Prompt: Should limits on free speech apply to social media?
- Evidence: *Tinker v. Des Moines* (symbolic speech) or *Schenck v. United States* (limits in danger situations).

Memorization Strategies

Group by Theme:

- Judicial Review: *Marbury*
- Federalism: *McCulloch*, *Lopez*.
- Representation: *Baker*, *Shaw*.
- Civil Liberties: *Tinker*, *Engel*, *Yoder*, *NYT*, *Schenck*, *Gideon*, *Roe*, *McDonald*.
- Civil Rights: *Brown*.
- Campaigns/Elections: *Citizens United*.

Common Mistakes

- Confusing *Engel v. Vitale* (establishment clause) with *Wisconsin v. Yoder* (free exercise).
- Forgetting federalism limits in *Lopez* versus expansion of limits in *McCulloch*.
- Mixing up symbolic speech (*Tinker*) and press freedom (*NYT v. U.S.*).

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Q: Do I need to memorize all 15 cases word-for-word?

A: No. You need the facts, ruling, and principle of each.

Q: How many cases will appear on the exam?

A: At least one case comparison FRQ #3, plus multiple-choice applications.

Q: Which cases show up the most?

A: *Brown v. Board*, *McCulloch v. Maryland*, *Citizens United*, and *Tinker*.

Q: Can I use a case in the argument essay #4?

A: Yes. Any of the 15 can serve as evidence.