



Rights and Responsibilities:

What are they and how are they connected?

What are Rights?

Rights are entitlements individuals hold that are protected by law or morality. Rights can be:

- **Positive** – the to do or have something
- **Negative** – the entitlement to be free from something (sometimes called ‘freedoms’).
- **Individual** – belonging to the person.
- **Collective** – belonging to a certain group.

Examples of rights include:

- The right to **vote**.
- The right to **education**.
- The right to **freedom of speech**.

Rights in a Democracy

Rights that enable citizens to participate in governance:

- The right to vote.
- The right to protest.
- The right to stand for election.

Rights that support living freely:

- The right to own property.
- The right to live without discrimination.
- The right to be treated equally.

What are **responsibilities**?

A responsibility is a duty or obligation to act in a certain way, governed by law or morality.

Responsibilities can be:

- **Positive** – the duty to do specific, identified things.
- **Negative** – the duty not to do something.

Responsibilities ensure:

- We respect the rights of others.
- We foster safe and respectful communities.

Rights and Responsibilities are **Connected**

Rights are not absolute; they come with responsibilities and can be taken away if those responsibilities are breached.

Rights and responsibilities are essential for maintaining a just, fair and cohesive society.

Governments also balance rights and responsibilities to protect the greater good.

Freedom of Speech

A Closer Look



Freedom of Speech is the right to express opinions without fear of interference or censorship. It includes:

- **Freedom of thought:** Ability to think independently.
- **Freedom of information:** Accessing and distributing diverse viewpoints and spreading ideas.
- **Freedom of conscience and expression:** Speaking, writing, or broadcasting views.

Freedom of Speech

A Closer Look

When you exercise your **right** to free speech you have a corresponding **responsibility** to respect the rights of other people and to not interfere with the ability of other people to exercise their rights (such as the right to privacy, the right to be free from discrimination or the right to feel safe).

At an **individual level**, this can be achieved by respecting the opinions of others, even if they differ from your own.

Freedom of Speech

A Closer Look

The government also has a **collective responsibility** regarding freedom of speech.

The government must ensure citizens are **free** to express their thoughts, debate ideas and highlight issues regarding those in power.

The Government may also, at times, **limit** and restrict freedom of speech to protect other human rights.

Freedom of Speech

A Closer Look

In Australia freedom of speech is protected by:

- The common law (judge-made-law)
- Statute Law
- International law: Articles 19 and 20 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).

Why Is It Important?

- Enables debate and exchange of ideas.
- Promotes transparency and accountability in government
- Protects democratic freedoms.

How Does the Government Regulate Rights?

Some Government responsibilities include:

- Ensuring citizens are free to express ideas.
- Creating laws that prevent abuses of rights.

Examples:

- **Racial Discrimination Act 1975 (Cth):** Limits acts that offend, insult, or humiliate based on race.

Quiz:



What is the difference between **positive** and **negative** rights?



What law protects Australians from act of racial discrimination?



Why are **responsibilities** important in a democracy?



What responsibilities are tied to freedom of speech?



is a project of

RULE OF LAW

EDUCATION CENTRE

To learn more, check out our resource page at
<https://www.ruleoflaw.org.au/education/informed>