From Wikipedia on statutory construction:

**Textual**

Textual canons are rules of thumb for understanding the words of the text. Some of the canons are still known by their traditional [Latin](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Latin) names.

Plain meaning

When writing statutes, the legislature intends to use ordinary English words in their ordinary senses. The United States Supreme Court discussed the [plain meaning rule](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plain_meaning_rule) in *Caminetti v. United States,* [242 U.S. 470](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Case_citation) (1917), reasoning "[i]t is elementary that the meaning of a statute must, in the first instance, be sought in the language in which the act is framed, and if that is plain... the sole function of the courts is to enforce it according to its terms." And if a statute's language is plain and clear, the Court further warned that "the duty of interpretation does not arise, and the rules which are to aid doubtful meanings need no discussion."

Rule against surplusage

Where one reading of a statute would make one or more parts of the statute redundant and another reading would avoid the redundancy, the other reading is preferred.[*[citation needed](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia%3ACitation_needed%22%20%5Co%20%22Wikipedia%3ACitation%20needed)*]

*Ejusdem generis* ("of the same kinds, class, or nature")

When a list of two or more specific descriptors is followed by more general descriptors, the otherwise wide meaning of the general descriptors must be restricted to the same class, if any, of the specific words that precede them. For example, where "cars, motor bikes, motor powered vehicles" are mentioned, the word "vehicles" would be interpreted in a limited sense (therefore vehicles cannot be interpreted as including airplanes).

*Expressio unius est exclusio alterius* ("the express mention of one thing excludes all others")

Items not on the list are impliedly assumed not to be covered by the statute or a contract term.[[4]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Statutory_interpretation#cite_note-4) However, sometimes a list in a statute is illustrative, not exclusionary. This is usually indicated by a word such as "includes" or "such as."

*In pari materia* ("upon the same matter or subject")

When a statute is ambiguous, its meaning may be determined in light of other statutes on the same subject matter.

*Noscitur a sociis* ("a word is known by the company it keeps")

When a word is ambiguous, its meaning may be determined by reference to the rest of the statute.

*Reddendo singula singulis* or "referring each to each"

"When a will says "I devise and bequeath all my real and personal property to A", the principle of reddendo singula singulis would apply as if it read "I devise all my real property, and bequeath all my personal property, to A", since the word devise is appropriate only to real property and the term bequeath is appropriate only to personal property."[[5]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Statutory_interpretation#cite_note-5)

*Generalia specialibus non derogant* ("the general does not detract from the specific")

Main article: [lex specialis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lex_specialis)

Described in *The Vera Cruz*[[6]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Statutory_interpretation#cite_note-6) as: "Now if anything be certain it is this, that where there are general words in a later Act capable of reasonable and sensible application without extending them to subjects specially dealt with by earlier legislation, you are not to hold that earlier legislation indirectly repealed, altered, or derogated from merely by force of such general words, without any evidence of a particular intention to do so." This means that if a later law and an earlier law are potentially—but not necessarily—in conflict, courts will adopt the reading that does not result in an implied repeal of the earlier statute. Lawmaking bodies usually need to be explicit if they intend to repeal an earlier law.

**Substantive**

Substantive canons instruct the court to favor interpretations that promote certain values or policy results.

"Charming Betsy" Canon

National statute must be construed so as not to conflict with international law. See [*Murray v. The Charming Betsy*](http://bulk.resource.org/courts.gov/c/US/6/6.US.64.html), [6 U.S. (2 Cranch) 64](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Case_citation) (1804): "It has also been observed that an act of Congress ought never to be construed to violate the law of nations if any other possible construction remains..."

Interpretation in Light of Fundamental Values

Statute does not violate fundamental societal values. See, for example, [*Holy Trinity Church v. United States*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Holy_Trinity_Church_v._United_States),[[7]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Statutory_interpretation%22%20%5Cl%20%22cite_note-7) or *Coco v The Queen*.[[8]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Statutory_interpretation#cite_note-8) However, legislation that is intended to be consistent with fundamental rights can be overridden by clear and unambiguous language.[[9]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Statutory_interpretation#cite_note-9)

Rule of Lenity

In construing an ambiguous criminal statute, the court should resolve the ambiguity in favor of the defendant.[[10]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Statutory_interpretation#cite_note-Rule_of_Lenity_-_Economist-10) See *McNally v. United States*, 483 U.S. 350 (1987); See, e.g., Muscarello v. U.S., 524 U.S. 125 (1998) (declining to apply the rule of lenity); Evans v. U.S., 504 U.S. 255 (1992) (Thomas, J., dissenting); Scarborough v. U.S., 431 U.S. 563 (1977) (Stewart, J., dissenting); See *United States v. Santos* (2008).

Avoidance of abrogation of state sovereignty

See *Gregory v. Ashcroft*;[[11]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Statutory_interpretation#cite_note-11) see also *Gonzales v. Oregon*;[[12]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Statutory_interpretation#cite_note-12) see also [*Nevada Dept. of Human Resources v. Hibbs*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nevada_Dept._of_Human_Resources_v._Hibbs),[[13]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Statutory_interpretation#cite_note-13) except where such would deprive the defendant of bedrock, foundational rights that the Federal Government intended to be the minimum floor that the states were not allowed to fall beneath; *Dombrowski v Pfister.*[*[14]*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Statutory_interpretation#cite_note-14)

"Indian" Canon

National statute must be construed in favor of Native Americans. See [*Chickasaw Nation v. United States*](http://www.law.cornell.edu/supct/html/00-507.ZS.html), [534 U.S. 84](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Case_citation) (2001): "statutes are to be construed liberally in favor of Indians with ambiguous provisions interpreted to their benefit." This canon can be likened to the doctrine of [contra proferentem](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Contra_proferentem) in contract law.

**Deference**

Deference canons instruct the court to defer to the interpretation of another institution, such as an administrative agency or Congress. These canons reflect an understanding that the judiciary is not the only branch of government entrusted with constitutional responsibility.

Deference to Administrative Interpretations (US *Chevron* deference)

If a statute administered by an agency is ambiguous with respect to the specific issue, the courts will defer to the agency's reasonable interpretation of the statute. This rule of deference was formulated by the [United States Supreme Court](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Supreme_Court_of_the_United_States) in [*Chevron v. Natural Resources Defense Council*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chevron_U.S.A.%2C_Inc._v._Natural_Resources_Defense_Council%2C_Inc.), [467 U.S. 837 (1984)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Case_citation).

Avoidance Canon (Canon of Constitutional Avoidance)

If a statute is susceptible to more than one reasonable construction, courts should choose an interpretation that avoids raising constitutional problems. In the US, this canon has grown stronger in recent history. The traditional avoidance canon required the court to choose a different interpretation only when one interpretation was actually unconstitutional. The modern avoidance canon tells the court to choose a different interpretation when another interpretation merely raises constitutional doubts.[[15]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Statutory_interpretation#cite_note-15)[[16]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Statutory_interpretation#cite_note-16)

Avoiding Absurdity

The legislature did not intend an absurd or manifestly unjust result.[[17]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Statutory_interpretation#cite_note-17)[[18]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Statutory_interpretation#cite_note-18)

[Clear statement rule](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clear_statement_rule)

When a statute may be interpreted to abridge long-held rights of individuals or states, or make a large policy change, courts will not interpret the statute to make the change unless the legislature clearly stated it. This rule is based on the assumption that the legislature would not make major changes in a vague or unclear way, and to ensure that voters are able to hold the appropriate legislators responsible for the modification.

*Leges posteriores priores contrarias abrogant* (Subsequent laws repeal those before enacted to the contrary, aka "Last in Time")

When two statutes conflict, the one enacted last prevails.

See [implied repeal](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Implied_repeal) and [derogation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Derogation).