

What Freedom of Speech Means to Me

In the First Amendment of the United States' Constitution, freedom of speech is a fairly straightforward concept. To me, it means anyone in the U.S. can say, write, publish, or otherwise communicate to others most anything they desire. I'm very grateful that the service of the brave men and women in the Armed Forces continues to protect this right. Without it, I wouldn't live in a functional democracy.

However, it gets tricky when controversial subjects are mentioned, including abortion, gun control, and Confederate statues. Silencing extremists on these polarizing topics isn't a good answer regardless of our standpoints on their arguments; I support everyone's right to speak. That's the value of free speech: each person and stance can be heard. As Voltaire allegedly once said, "I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it."

Just because I have the right to speak my mind doesn't mean I always should. As someone raised to think before I speak, I believe freedom of speech has an ethical side to consider. It saddens me to see how divided we are as a country and constantly hear everyone's ugly rhetoric. To me, this freedom should be used to kindly share perspectives rather than belittle others.

Besides free speech being a universal right in the U.S., its promotion of evolving opinions is significant to me. A well-rounded population benefits my community with everyone working together on solutions to problems. I find it interesting to think my ideas can cause someone to pause and consider another angle, not necessarily that they must agree.

The right to free speech can be a powerful tool for spreading ideas and communicating with others, despite the complexity of reading between the lines. The ethical and legal sides can sometimes clash or be misunderstood, but overall, I believe the best use of this freedom is sharing viewpoints without hurting others. It can also expose us to different perspectives to contemplate. Freedom of speech is a crucial part of the First Amendment that protects our democracy.