

Early Events of the French Revolution (1789)

- The fall of 1788 did not record a very good harvest in France . The winter of the same year was very severe. These problems, combined with the social unrest made for a desperate situation throughout France .
- Lower class farmers were forced to sacrifice what little food they had for payment of taxes. The nobility had more than enough to survive the winter, as well as the clergy. The situation became so desperate that the advisors of Louis XIV (1754-1793), demanded that he do something about the grain crisis.
- Louis neglected to act on this request however he did agree to call together a meeting of the estate-general for the first time formally in 175 years.
- When the legislative first met in May of 1789, the first item on the agenda would be to change the voting system. Each deputy would be allowed to cast a single vote, which would mean that the 3rd estate would have a better advantage over the other two estates. This was particularly so in the absence of individuals within the 1st and 2nd estates.
- The King was informed of the changes to the voting procedure but neglected to act upon them.
- Two individuals, Count Mirabeau-Noble and Priest Sieyes, convinced enough members of their estates to agree to the change in the voting procedure. No longer would the 3rd estate meet as separate bodies but rather would meet as one group to consolidate legislative policies that favour the majority of the people of France .
- Each deputy who took part in the estates general agreed that the old name of the French parliament was inappropriate because of its connotation of inequality. The next item to change was the name of the assembly, which became the National Assembly.
- Each deputy had a book of grievances called their “cahiers” which had been compiled over a century and a half of local districts throughout the country. The tax burden was the predominant concern.
- The membership of the National Assembly began work on a framework for a constitution for France which would be presented to Louis 16th for his review. Listed within the constitution, is a bill of rights.
- On June 20 1789, members of the National Assembly plan to meet for more discussions. They discovered that the doors to their assembly hall had been locked and were under guard. The membership decided to meet at an open-air tennis court at the Palace of Versailles . It was here that the declaration was made, never to disband until a constitution is brought to France (known as the Tennis Court Oath).
- Louis 16th did not attempt to break up the assembly with his Royal guards. Instead he decided to fire some of the ministers who were partly responsible for the defiance of the assembly. The finance minister, Necker, was released from office and many people in France reacted violently.

- On July 14, 1789, a mob of people stormed the old Royal prison in Paris, known as the Bastille. Some of the guards in the prison were killed and all of the prisoners within were released (political prisoners). This act of violence was an indication to Louis that the revolution was beginning to take a bloody turn.
- The Royal Family was also beginning to feel threatened in that they were no longer above the law.
- Louis did not react to the fall of the Bastille; however he made a decision to allow the National Assembly to meet.
- Early in August, 1789 Louis was presented with the first draft of the constitution. He rejected the document.
- The Assembly revised the document and presented to Louis again.
- August 26, 1789, Louis finally accepts a new constitution, which was referred to as “the declaration of the rights of man”. The model for this constitution was created in America in 1776 (declaration of Independence)
- By using this model the deputies of the Assembly could speed up the process of reform in France :
 - Everyone is guaranteed their basic rights and freedoms
 - All citizens of France had the right to formulate laws using elected representatives.
 - No longer would birth rite be required for a person to hold a high public office.
 - A plan to divide the government into three separate powers was also part of the declaration (Montesquieu)
- By September 1789, the people of France are unhappy with the Royal family’s reaction to the constitution, along with their apparent reluctance to bring about reform.
- Louis refused to buy grain for the coming winter and the people are outraged. They react with an event that became known as the “Bread Riots”.
- On October 5, 1789, thousands of people march on the Palace of Versailles demanding an audience with Louis.
- The Bread Riots resulted with Louis, his wife and son all taken as prisoners and put under house arrest, in the old Tuileries Palace .
- Under house arrest, Louis was expected to sign into law every bill that was presented to him.
- With Louis in prison, countries around France were worried about their own monarchies and thus began threatening the French Revolutionaries (Austria , Prussia).

- Nobles in France who feared for their lives abandoned their estates and took their families out of France to any country that would accept them (émigrés).