

## Bill stages: How a Bill becomes Law

The procedure for passing the different types of Bills is broadly similar in both Houses. At a very simple level, a Bill must pass through several stages - in both Houses - to become a law.

The following stages take place in both Houses:

- First reading (formal introduction of the Bill without debate)
- Second reading (general debate)
- Committee stage (detailed examination, debate and amendments. In the House of Commons this stage takes place in a Public Bill Committee.)
- Report stage (opportunity for further amendments)
- Third reading (final chance for debate amendments are possible in the Lords)

When a Bill has passed through both Houses it is returned to the first House (where it started) for the second House's amendments to be considered.

Both Houses must agree on the final text. There may be several rounds of exchanges between the two Houses until agreement is reached on every word of the Bill. Once this happens the Bill proceeds to the next stage: Royal Assent.

- Royal Assent (granted by the monarch)
- Act of Parliament (the proposals of the Bill have now become law)

## Exercise:

Construct and fill out the table below which has the following columns

1. Method by which Parliament can scrutinise the work of the government

e.g. Departmental question time

2. the form of the scrutiny

e.g. asking questions about the work of the department, challenging ideas, suggesting alternative ideas and actions

3. related areas of interest

e.g. the questions are set out on a rota called the "Order of Oral Questions"

COMPLETE THE TABLE BELOW USING THIS HANDOUT AND

OTHER SOURCES BY:

Monday ✓

## Committees

Much of the work of the House of Commons and the House of Lords takes place in committees, made up of around 10 to 50 MPs or Lords. These committees examine issues in detail, from government policy and proposed new laws, to wider topics like the economy.

### Name change for Standing Committees

From the start of the 2006-2007 parliamentary session, Standing Committees have been renamed 'General Committees'. Standing Committees on Bills are now called 'Public Bill Committees' and will have the power to take evidence from officials and experts outside of Parliament.

### Select Committees

Select Committees work in both Houses. They check and report on areas ranging from the work of government departments to economic affairs.

### Joint Committees

Joint Committees are committees consisting of MPs and Lords.

General Committees (including Public Bill Committees)

These committees are unique to the Commons and mainly look at proposed legislation in detail. They include all committees formerly known as Standing Committees.

### Grand Committees

The House of Commons has three Grand Committees which consider matters relating to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Grand Committees in the House of Lords consider Bills outside of the Lords Chamber.

## Report stage

In both Houses the report stage of a Bill's passage through Parliament is an opportunity to consider further amendments to a Bill which has been examined in committee.

### Report stage: House of Commons

After a Public Bill committee has examined a Bill, it reports the Bill with any amendments it has made for consideration by the House as a whole - report stage is also known as 'Consideration'. All MPs may speak and vote - for lengthy or complex Bills the debate may be spread over several days. MPs can suggest amendments to the Bill or new clauses they think should be added. In the House of Commons, the report stage is usually followed immediately (ie as the next item of business) by the Bill's third reading debate.

### Report stage: House of Lords

Although most Bills have their committee stage on the floor of the House in the Lords, a report stage, similar to that in the Commons, still follows 14 days later for long and complex Bills.

# Scrutiny of legislation (and therefore usually of the work of the Executive) by Parliament

criticisms

how it happens

Method of scrutiny	The form of scrutiny	Points of details / additional knowledge / points of interest
Departmental question time	MPs come and ask questions or take questions about departmental strategy.	In the Commons, questions are not asked or proper of nothing; they are added to a register and the order which they are asked in (the oral questions) is computer-determined.
PMQs	MPs come and question the Prime Minister about weekly developments, policies, disagreements, etc.	Routine question, then supplementary question, then a total of six questions. 30 mins every Wed at 12pm.
The work of Select Committees	They work in both Houses and examine the work of government departments or general goings on.	Publish reports.
The work of other Committees	Committees look generally at small issues that concern them and some produce reports with recommendations, some edit legislation directly, and the government respond to the concerns/reports.	Publish reports that govt. responds to.
Debates in the Commons (Readings)	National and international issues, with original votes at the end of the debates.	Lively! Discussion, but "unparliamentary language" is not allowed.



Debates in the Lords (Readings)	Debates are not ended with votes and there is a day set aside for general debates on subjects.	Subjects of topical interest too: and can be discussed for longer - the Lords regulate themselves.
Divisions	At the end of a debate, The Question debated is put to MPs to declare what they think.	Divided into Aye or Nay and counted and their names written down. 'Division List' available in Hansard the day after.
Oral questions	Questions posed to Ministers and the Prime Minister orally often able to be answered quickly and not recorded for future reference, necessarily.	Oral questions can be proposed by other MPs on an MP's behalf - only one per day.
Written questions	Written questions provide an opportunity for MPs <del>not members of the House</del> to write to the Prime Minister or departmental heads and ask longer questions requiring a more in-depth + considered response	In HoL, up to 14 days until answering. Answers + questions printed in Hansard. HoC two days' <del>entering</del> entering 9, 7 day response time
Motion of confidence	Parliament no longer has confidence in government.	
Royal Ascent	Bills have to be given royal ascent to become Acts (i.e. full legislation) - this is no longer done by the Queen but it still means that the Bills can be scrutinised (HoL etc).	Not signed since Queen Victoria reigned - now just a formality.