# Passage of a Bill

## Bill starting in the House of Commons

- House of Commons
  1. 1 First reading (Commons)
  2. 2 Second reading (Commons)
  3. c Committee stage (Commons)
  4. r Report stage (Commons)
  5. 3 Third reading (Commons)
- House of Lords
  1. 1 First reading (Lords)
  2. 2 Second reading (Lords)
  3. c Committee stage (Lords)
  4. r Report stage (Lords)
  5. 3 Third reading (Lords)
- Consideration of amendments
- Royal Assent

## Bill starting in the House of Lords

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## Guide to the passage of a Bill

A Bill is a proposal for a new law, or a proposal to change an existing law, presented for debate before Parliament.

A Bill can start in the Commons or the Lords and must be approved in the same form by both Houses before becoming an Act (law).

This guide shows the passage of a Bill through Parliament and provides further information about each stage of the process.

- Bill starting in the House of Lords
- Bill starting in the House of Commons

# First reading (Commons)

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## Formal introduction – no debate on the Bill

First reading is the first stage of a Bill's passage through the House of Commons - usually a formality, it takes place without debate.

First reading of a Bill can take place at any time in a parliamentary session.

### What happens at first reading?

The short title of the Bill is read out and is followed by an order for the Bill to be printed.

### What happens after first reading?

The Bill is published as a House of Commons paper for the first time.

The next stage is second reading, the first opportunity for MPs to debate the general principles and themes of the Bill.

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# Second reading (Commons)

## Bill starting in the House of Commons

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## Debate on general principles of the Bill

Second reading is the first opportunity for MPs to debate the main principles of the Bill.

It usually takes place no sooner than two weekends after first reading.

### What happens at second reading?

The Government minister, spokesperson or MP responsible for the Bill opens the second reading debate.

The official Opposition spokesperson responds with their views on the Bill.

The debate continues with other Opposition parties and backbench MPs giving their opinions.

At the end of the debate, the Commons decides whether the Bill should be given its second reading by voting, meaning it can proceed to the next stage.

It is possible for a Bill to have a second reading with no debate - as long as MPs agree to its progress.

## What happens after second reading?

Once second reading is complete the Bill proceeds to committee stage - where each clause (part) and any amendments (proposals for change) to the Bill may be debated.

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# Committee stage (Commons)

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## Line by line examination of the Bill

Committee stage is where detailed examination of the Bill takes place. It usually starts within a couple of weeks of a Bill's second reading, although this is not guaranteed.

Government Bills are usually formally timetabled after they have received a second reading.

### What happens at committee stage?

Most Bills are dealt with in a Public Bill Committee.

If the Bill starts in the Commons the committee is able to take evidence from experts and interest groups from outside Parliament.

Amendments (proposals for change) for discussion are selected by the chairman of the committee and only members of the committee can vote on amendments during committee stage.

Amendments proposed by MPs to the Bill will be published daily and reprinted as a marshalled list of amendments for each day the committee discusses the Bill.

Every clause in the Bill is agreed to, changed or removed from the Bill, although this may happen (particularly under a programme order) without debate.

A minority of Bills are dealt with by a Committee of the whole House (takes place on the floor of the House of Commons), with every MP able to take part. The selection and grouping of amendments in a Committee of the whole House is decided by the Chairman of Ways and Means (Deputy Speaker).

Bills fast tracked through the House of Commons will receive less consideration. Consolidated Fund Bills do not have a committee stage at all.

## What happens after committee stage?

If the Bill has been amended the Bill is reprinted before its next stage.

Once committee stage is finished, the Bill returns to the floor of the House of Commons for its report stage, where the amended Bill can be debated and further amendments proposed.

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# Report stage (Commons)

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## Chance for the whole House to discuss and amend the Bill

Report stage gives MPs an opportunity, on the floor of the House, to consider further amendments (proposals for change) to a Bill which has been examined in committee.

There is no set time period between the end of committee stage and the start of the report stage.

### What happens at report stage?

All MPs may speak and vote - for lengthy or complex Bills the debates may be spread over several days.

All MPs can suggest amendments to the Bill or new clauses (parts) they think should be added.

### What happens after report stage?

Report stage is normally followed immediately by debate on the Bill's third reading.

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# Third reading (Commons)

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## Opportunity for final debate on the Bill

Third reading is the final chance for the Commons to debate the contents of a Bill. It usually takes place immediately after report stage as the next item of business on the same day.

### What happens at third reading?

Debate on the Bill is usually short, and limited to what is actually in the Bill, rather than, as at second reading, what might have been included.

Amendments (proposals for change) cannot be made to a Bill at third reading in the Commons.

At the end of the debate, the House decides (votes on) whether to approve the third reading of the Bill.

## What happens after third reading?

If the Bill started in the Commons it goes to the House of Lords for its first reading.

If the Bill started in the Lords it returns to the House of Lords for consideration of any amendments the Commons has made.

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# First reading (Lords)

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## Formal introduction - no debate on the bill

First reading is the first stage of a bill's passage through the House of Lords - usually a formality, it takes place without debate.

First reading of a bill can take place at any time in a parliamentary session.

### What happens at first reading?

The long title (indicating the content of the bill) is read out by the member of the Lords in charge of the bill.

### What happens after first reading?

Once formally introduced, the bill is printed.

The next stage is second reading - the first opportunity for members of the Lords to debate the main principles and purpose of the bill.

# Second reading (Lords)

## Bill starting in the House of Commons

- House of Commons
    1. 1 First reading (Commons)
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## What is second reading?

Second reading is the first opportunity for members of the Lords to debate the key principles and main purpose of a bill and to flag up any concerns or specific areas where they think amendments (changes) are needed.

### Before second reading takes place

Before a second reading debate takes place, members who would like to speak add their name to a list – the 'speakers list'.

### What happens at second reading?

The government minister, spokesperson or a member of the Lords responsible for the bill opens the second reading debate.

Any member can speak during second reading – this stage can indicate those members particularly interested in a bill, or a specific aspect of it, and those who are most likely to be involved in suggesting changes at later stages.

Second reading debates usually last for a few hours but can sometimes stretch over a couple of days.

## What happens after second reading?

After second reading the bill goes to committee stage – where detailed line by line examination and discussion of amendments takes place.

# Committee stage (Lords)

## Bill starting in the House of Commons

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- Consideration of amendments
- Royal Assent

## What is committee stage?

Committee stage involves detailed line by line examination of the separate parts (clauses and schedules) of a bill. Starting from the front of the bill, members work through to the end. Any member of the Lords can take part.

Usually starting about two weeks after the second reading debate, committee stage generally lasts for up to eight days, but can go on for longer.

### Before committee stage takes place

Before committee stage begins, amendments (changes) are gathered together and placed in order, then published in the 'marshalled list'. Updated lists are produced before the start of each day of committee stage.

## What happens at committee stage?

During committee stage every clause of the bill has to be agreed to and votes on any amendments can take place. All suggested amendments have to be considered, if a member wishes, and members can discuss an issue for as long as they want. The government cannot restrict the subjects under discussion or impose a time limit. This is a key point of difference with procedure in the House of Commons.

## What happens after committee stage?

If the bill has been amended it is reprinted with all the agreed amendments. At the end of committee stage, the bill moves to report stage for further scrutiny.

# Report stage (Lords)

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## What is report stage?

Report stage gives all members of the Lords a further opportunity to examine and make amendments (changes) to a bill.

It usually starts 14 days after committee stage has concluded and can be spread over several days (but is generally shorter than committee stage).

### Before report stage takes place

Before report stage begins, amendments are gathered together and placed in order, then published in the 'marshalled list'. Updated lists are produced before the start of each day of committee stage.

## What happens at report stage?

During report stage detailed examination of the bill continues. Any member of the Lords can take part and votes on any amendments may take place.

## What happens after report stage?

After report stage, the bill is reprinted to include all the agreed amendments. The bill then moves to third reading, a further chance for the Lords to discuss and amend the bill as it nears conclusion.

If the bill is amended it is reprinted to include all the agreed amendments. The bill moves to third reading – the final chance for the Lords to amend the bill.

# Report stage (Lords)

## Bill starting in the House of Commons

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    1. 1 First reading (Commons)
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# Third reading (Lords)

## Bill starting in the House of Commons

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  3. c Committee stage (Lords)
  4. r Report stage (Lords)
  5. 3 Third reading (Lords)
- Consideration of amendments
- Royal Assent

## What is third reading?

Third reading in the Lords is the chance for members to 'tidy up' a bill, concentrating on making sure the eventual law is effective and workable – without loopholes.

### Before third reading takes place

Before third reading, amendments (changes) are gathered together and placed in order, then published in the 'marshalled list'.

### What happens at third reading?

Unlike the House of Commons, amendments can be made at third reading in the House of Lords, provided the issue has not been fully considered and voted on during either committee or report stage.

Amendments at third reading are often used to clarify specific parts of the bill and to allow the government to make good any promises of changes they made at earlier stages of the passage of a bill.

## What happens after third reading?

If the bill started in the Lords, it goes to the House of Commons for its first reading. The Commons reprints the bill with the Lords amendments.

If the bill began in the Commons, it is sent back after third reading in the Lords for consideration of Lords amendments, or, if there have been no amendments in the Lords, is sent to the monarch for royal assent.

# Consideration of amendments

## Bill starting in the House of Commons

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## Each House considers the other's amendments

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

Both Houses must agree on the exact wording of the Bill.

There is no set time period between the third reading of a Bill and consideration of any Commons or Lords amendments.

### 'Ping Pong'

If the Commons makes amendments to the Bill, the Lords must consider them and either agree or disagree to the amendments or make alternative proposals.

If the Lords disagrees with any Commons amendments, or makes alternative proposals, then the Bill is sent back to the Commons.

A Bill may go back and forth between each House ('Ping Pong') until both Houses reach agreement.

## What happens after consideration of amendments?

Once the Commons and Lords agree on the final version of the Bill, it can receive Royal Assent and become an Act of Parliament (the proposals of the Bill now become law).

In exceptional cases, when the two Houses do not reach agreement, the Bill falls. If certain conditions are met, the Commons can use the Parliament Acts to pass the Bill, without the consent of the Lords, in the following session.

# Royal Assent

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## Bill becomes an Act of Parliament

When a Bill has completed all its parliamentary stages in both Houses, it must have Royal Assent before it can become an Act of Parliament (law).

Royal Assent is the Monarch's agreement to make the Bill into an Act and is a formality.

There is no set time period between the consideration of amendments to the Bill and Royal Assent – it can even be a matter of minutes after Ping Pong is complete.

### What happens at Royal Assent?

When Royal Assent has been given to a Bill, the announcement is usually made in both Houses - at a suitable break in each House's proceedings – by the Lord Speaker in the Lords and the Speaker in the Commons.

At prorogation (the formal end to a parliamentary year), Black Rod interrupts the proceedings of the Commons and summons MPs to the Lords Chamber to hear the Lords Commissioners announce Royal Assent for each Bill.

## After Royal Assent

The legislation within the Bill may commence immediately, after a set period or only after a commencement order by a Government minister.

A commencement order is designed to bring into force the whole or part of an Act of Parliament at a date later than the date of the Royal Assent.

If there is no commencement order, the Act will come into force from midnight at the start of the day of the Royal Assent.

The practical implementation of an Act is the responsibility of the appropriate government department, not Parliament.