



ORDER OF BUSINESS OF SITTINGS

INTRODUCTION

In order to understand the operations of the Senate, it is helpful to know how Senate sittings are scheduled and organized.

SITTING TIMES

The Senate normally meets on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays, in the afternoon. The Senate may also meet on Mondays and Fridays. While the Rules state that Monday sittings start at 2 p.m., it is more common for them to actually start at a later time, typically at 6 p.m., by order of the Senate. Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday sittings start at 2 p.m. However, Thursday sittings have sometimes started at 1:30 p.m., by order of the Senate. Friday sittings start at 9 a.m. or at a later time ordered by the Senate.

Although the Senate may sit until midnight on Mondays through Thursdays and until 4 p.m. on Fridays, the usual practice is for the Senate to sit several hours to complete its work, and then adjourn to allow committees to meet. Committees are not authorized to meet while the Senate is sitting, but the Senate's schedule is usually arranged to give them a reasonable amount of time to carry out their work.¹ For instance, a sessional order is often adopted to set an earlier adjournment time on Wednesdays to allow committees to meet.

If the Senate is still sitting at 6 p.m., the *Rules of the Senate* require that the sitting be suspended until 8 p.m. to allow for dinner.² If only a small amount of business remains at 6 p.m., the Senate may continue to sit, with leave, until business is finished.

The Senate does not have a fixed calendar of sitting days throughout the year but does tend to follow the sitting cycle of the House of Commons, with a few additional sittings before the winter and summer adjournments.

START OF A SITTING

The bells calling the senators to the chamber ring for 15 minutes before the time set for the scheduled meeting. The Speaker enters the Senate Chamber at the time the sitting is set to start, whether a quorum is present or not. Fifteen senators, including the Speaker, constitute a quorum.³ Once a quorum is present, the bells stop ringing and the Speaker reads the prayers.⁴

ORDER OF BUSINESS OF A SITTING

The organization of business in the Senate follows the accepted parliamentary principle that the parliamentarians, in this case senators, should be given adequate notice of the business they will be asked to consider. This is done by means of notices of motions and notices of inquiries, and by placing newly-introduced bills and new committee reports on the Order Paper for a future sitting. The *Order Paper and Notice Paper* is the Senate's agenda for its sittings and includes all items that could be considered at a particular sitting or at future sittings.

A typical sitting of the Senate is structured in the following order:⁵

- Senators' Statements
- Routine Proceedings
- Question Period
- Delayed Answers
- Orders of the Day
- Items on the Notice Paper:
 - Notices of Motions
 - Notices of Inquiries

SENATORS' STATEMENTS⁶

After prayers, the Speaker calls for Senators' Statements, at which time a senator may bring any matter of public interest to the attention of the Senate and speak for a maximum of three minutes. A period of 15 minutes (in recent years, extended to 18 minutes by order of the Senate) is allowed for Senators' Statements, unless the Senate gives leave (unanimous consent) for an extension. At the request of the Leader of the Government, the Leader of the Opposition or the leader or facilitator of any other recognized party or recognized parliamentary group, the time for Senators' Statements may be extended by 15 minutes to pay tribute to a senator or former senator. The senator to whom tribute has been paid can respond afterwards.⁷

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

Routine Proceedings provide an opportunity for the government and individual senators to present bills and committee reports to the Senate, and to give notice of items that they are proposing for consideration. In addition, documents and reports that do not require consideration by the Senate may be tabled for information purposes.

Debate is not permitted during Routine Proceedings unless leave is given by the Senate. Routine Proceedings lasts a maximum of 30 minutes and is comprised of the following items:⁸

1. Tabling of Documents
2. Presenting or Tabling Reports from Committees
3. Government Notices of Motions
4. Government Notices of Inquiries
5. Introduction and First Reading of Government Bills
6. Introduction and First Reading of Senate Public Bills
7. First Reading of Commons Public Bills
8. Reading of Petitions for Private Bills
9. Introduction and First Reading of Private Bills
10. Tabling of Reports from Interparliamentary Delegations
11. Notices of Motions
12. Notices of Inquiries
13. Tabling of Petitions

QUESTION PERIOD⁹

During Question Period, which lasts 30 minutes, senators may ask a question of:

- the Leader of the Government about any matter relating to public affairs;
- any senator who is a minister about their ministerial responsibilities; or
- the chair of a committee about the activities of the committee.

DELAYED ANSWERS¹⁰

Delayed answers are written responses tabled in the Senate by the government to either:

- senators' oral questions requiring more detail than it was possible to provide during Question Period; or
- senators' written questions appearing on the *Order Paper and Notice Paper*.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

The Orders of the Day constitute the agenda of a Senate sitting and list the items that the Senate has ordered for consideration. Items on the Orders of the Day for each sitting day are published in the *Order Paper and Notice Paper*. With certain exceptions, such as an emergency debate or a question of privilege, the Senate cannot consider and debate an item unless it is on the *Order Paper and Notice Paper*.

The Orders of the Day are divided into two broad categories: Government Business and Other Business. Each category is further divided as follows:

Government Business

- Bills – Messages from the House of Commons
- Bills – Third Reading
- Bills – Reports of Committees
- Bills – Second Reading
- Reports of Committees – Other
- Motions
- Inquiries
- Other

Other Business

- Bills – Messages from the House of Commons
- Senate Public Bills – Third Reading
- Commons Public Bills – Third Reading
- Private Bills – Third Reading
- Senate Public Bills – Reports of Committees
- Commons Public Bills – Reports of Committees
- Private Bills – Reports of Committees
- Senate Public Bills – Second Reading
- Commons Public Bills – Second Reading
- Private Bills – Second Reading
- Reports of Committees – Other
- Motions
- Inquiries
- Other

Government Business has priority over all other business of the Senate, and the Leader of the Government or the deputy leader may, without leave, change the order in which items of Government Business are to be considered.¹¹ The “Other Business” section contains all items such as bills, committee reports, motions and inquiries that are non-governmental initiatives. Once the Senate has gone past an item, it may only return to it with leave.

NOTICE PAPER

The Notice Paper contains motions and inquiries of individual senators for which notice has been given, but debate has not started. Once the Senate has completed the Orders of the Day, the Speaker will call motions and inquiries in the order that they are listed on the Notice Paper. When the Speaker calls an item, the senator who has given notice may speak to it or postpone debate to another sitting by asking that the item “stand.” Once a senator has spoken to an inquiry or a motion and the debate is adjourned, the item is placed on the Order Paper under the appropriate heading of Other Business.

A notice of motion or of inquiry may be withdrawn without leave by the senator who has given notice.¹² However, once debate on an inquiry has started or a motion has been moved, the item may only be withdrawn with leave of the Senate.¹³

THE 15-DAY RULE AND CONSIDERATION OF “OTHER BUSINESS” AND ITEMS ON THE NOTICE PAPER¹⁴

An item of Other Business on the Order Paper or Notice Paper that is called and stood during 15 sitting days is dropped from the *Order Paper and Notice Paper*. This means that some activity on the item must happen during the 15-day period for the item to remain on the Order Paper. A senator who has started to speak on an item of Other Business or any motion or inquiry on the Notice Paper can only adjourn the debate once in their name for the balance of time remaining,¹⁵ unless leave is granted to re-adjourn the debate in their name.

CHAMBER PUBLICATIONS

Three publications record the work of the Senate:

- The *Order Paper and Notice Paper* constitutes the agenda for the sitting and lists all business before the Senate. It is printed in bilingual format after each sitting for the following sitting.
- The *Journals of the Senate* are the permanent official record of all the proceedings and decisions taken during a sitting of the Senate. They are available in bilingual format a few hours after the sitting.
- The *Debates of the Senate* (Hansard) are a substantially verbatim transcript of everything said during a sitting of the Senate. They are available in both languages the day after the sitting.

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ON THE ORDER OF BUSINESS

[Senate Procedure in Practice](#) (Chapter 4)

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ON OTHER POINTS COVERED IN THIS NOTE

[Senate Procedural Note No. 5, Legislative Process](#)

[Senate Procedural Note No. 9, The Speaker of the Senate](#)

[Senate Procedural Note No. 13, Chamber Documents](#)

[Senate Procedural Note No. 14, Leave of the Senate](#)

References

¹ Rule 12-18(1).

² Rule 3-3(1).

³ Rule 3-7(1).

⁴ Rule 4-1.

⁵ Variations to this outline of a typical sitting are possible, subject to the Rules and decisions of the Senate.

⁶ Rule 4-2.

⁷ Rule 4-3.

⁸ Rule 4-5.

⁹ Rules 4-7, 4-8 and 4-9.

¹⁰ Rules 4-9 and 4-10.

¹¹ Rules 4-13(1) and 4-13(3).

¹² Rule 5-10(2).

¹³ Rule 5-10(1).

¹⁴ Rule 4-15(2).

¹⁵ Rule 4-15(3).