Senator in Training

Senate Committees

Learn about some of the Senate’s different committees and create an agenda for a committee.

Words to Know

Committee: A group of legislators assigned to consider issues and legislation concerning a specific area of government responsibility, such as finance, justice, or the armed services. The three main types are standing, special, and joint committees.

Agenda: A list of matters to be discussed at a meeting, a list of aims.

Bill: The primary way by which legislators in the Senate and House of Representatives introduce their ideas and proposals.

An Important Part of the Job

A senator has many responsibilities and roles in making laws. When each Senator is elected into their position they are assigned to work on a committee. A committee is a group of people that focuses and works on one subject area or topic. For the Senate, that means all bills, or proposals for laws, are divided into different topic areas so senators can better focus on those ideas.

The total number of committees and their topics have changed over time. There are three main types of committees. Standing committees are permanent and have jobs that are directed by the Senate’s official rules. Special committees are set up for clearly specific jobs, often in response to big events that need attention. Joint committees bring members of the Senate and House of Representatives together to work on certain issues. Today, there are sixteen standing committees, four special, and four joint committees. Around 3000 bills are sent to the committees each session of Congress!
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Listed below are 5 of the Senate’s committees. Discuss some of the issues you think each committee might focus on based on its name and the definitions below.

1. Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry
2. Commerce, Science, and Transportation
3. Energy and Natural Resources
4. Environment and Public Works
5. Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions

Agriculture: farming
Nutrition: food
Commerce: trade
Public works: public community needs
Pensions: retirement plans

Here are 5 Senators explaining some of the bills they work on. Can you guess what committee they work on?

Last week I was working on a bill that would increase spending on trains. I think better access to trains would help people get to their jobs, travel, and connect cities to areas that are otherwise hard to get to.

Committee ________________________________

I am concerned about how foods for sale are being labeled. The American people deserve clearer and better regulations for information on how serving sizes, allergens, organics, and quality are put on food labels.

Committee ________________________________

Tomorrow I have a meeting about amending the Endangered Species Act. This bill has not been updated since 1992 and we need to make some changes to protect endangered animals in this country.

Committee ________________________________

I just finished drafting a plan to help allow some school libraries to stay open during the summer months. I think it is important students have access to books all year round.

Committee ________________________________

This afternoon I’m editing a bill that will help provide money to low-income families looking to use solar energy in their homes. I think this is a good step towards helping families have access to affordable and clean energy.

Committee ________________________________
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Now it’s your turn to be the Committee Chair, or leader, for the day. Which committee are you in charge of? *Hint: This does not have to be a Senate Committee! Feel free to create a committee about something in your own life to oversee as a leader.*

I am the committee chair for _______________________________________________________.

As a committee chair you should choose at least two other Senators to help you. Who are they?

____________________________________

____________________________________

Think about why you chose this committee. What are some issues that you care about that this committee should work on? Write down at least three ideas here.

____________________________________

____________________________________

____________________________________

Now Senator, it sounds like a lot of work. Do you think you can get it done all at once?

Look at your list again. Try numbering your ideas from most important (1) to least important (3). This will help you decide what you and your committee should focus on first.

Once you’ve made your list, try thinking about how your fellow Senators can help. Put a check mark [✓] next to the idea that you think you would be best at. Then put a triangle [△] and a square [■] next to what you think your fellow Senators might be best at.

As a leader, it is important for you to organize your own work and help to direct others. By thinking about what you should focus on and where others can help you, we think you can get everything done!