Canada 101

Everything you wanted to know about Canada’s government and elections but were too afraid to ask...

The Parliamentary System

- Canada’s government follows the Parliamentary system structure, a representative government in which an elected assembly legisitates.

- Canada’s national legislature (Parliament) is bicameral, meaning it is split into two chambers: the House of Commons (the House) and the Senate.

Federal Government Structure

HEAD OF STATE

The Monarch

Represented by the Governor General (GG) who is appointed on the advice of the Prime Minister.

LEGISLATIVE BRANCH

Parliament

The Senate

House of Commons

EXECUTIVE BRANCH

Prime Minister (PM)

Cabinet

JUDICIAL BRANCH

Supreme Court of Canada

Created by: Lexie Shah, Jackie Orr, and Mariana Sánchez Ramírez
The Legislative Branch (Parliament)

**The House of Commons**
- 338 Members of Parliament (MPs)
- Each MP is elected and represents a geographical district in Canada called a riding or constituency.

**The Senate**
- 105 Senators
- Senate vacancies are filled by new Senators appointed by the current PM.

The Executive Branch

The PM is both the head of executive branch and an MP in the House. Canadians do not choose the PM when they cast their ballot, they vote for an MP and the corresponding political party earns a seat. The PM is the head of the party that wins the federal election. The PM appoints MPs to serve in Cabinet as Ministers of various portfolios.

The Judiciary Branch

The Judiciary Branch is headed by the Supreme Court of Canada, which is then divided into provincial and federal courts. It is independent of the executive and legislative branches. Federal judges (Justices) are appointed by the GG to interpret Canadian laws and are nonpartisan. There are nine Justices in the Supreme Court including the Chief Justice, the highest-ranking judge in the Court. There is no limit to how long a Justice can sit on the bench.

Sources
https://lop.parl.ca/about/parliament/guidetohoc/index-e.htm
A policy proposal is reviewed by the appropriate Cabinet Ministry, proposed to Cabinet for approval.

If approved, the appropriate Ministry will give drafting instructions to the Department of Justice’s Legislation Section.

The bill is drafted in both English and French, and the responsible Minister approves it.

The Draft Bill is presented to Cabinet, and if approved, the Bill is introduced in Parliament.

Parliament debates and votes on the Bill.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step I</th>
<th>The Origins of a Bill</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A policy proposal is reviewed by the appropriate Cabinet Ministry, proposed to Cabinet for approval.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step II</td>
<td>If approved, the appropriate Ministry will give drafting instructions to the Department of Justice’s Legislation Section.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step III</td>
<td>The bill is drafted in both English and French, and the responsible Minister approves it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step IV</td>
<td>The Draft Bill is presented to Cabinet, and if approved, the Bill is introduced in Parliament.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step V</td>
<td>Parliament debates and votes on the Bill.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How a Bill becomes Law

First Reading

The bill is introduced either in the Senate or House of Commons, and read. No debate occurs. Government bills are typically introduced in the House first.

Second Reading

A second reading occurs in the same Chamber, and members debate and vote on the principle of the Bill.

Committee Stage

The bill is then referred to a committee of the House, where it is analyzed clause-by-clause, who proposes any amendments.

Third Reading

Members vote on the Bill in its final form. If it passes, it goes to the other Chamber, usually the Senate, for passage. The Senate can propose amendments, which the House can accept or reject.

Royal Assent

The Bill is presented to the GG for assent, and it becomes law!

Reporting Stage

Once reviewed by the Committee, it returns to the Chamber, where all Parliamentarians can debate it and can suggest changes. Amendments are voted on and the Bill is voted on.

Sources
https://lop.parl.ca/about/parliament/education/ourcountryourparliament/html_booklet/process-passing-bill-e.html
When is Parliament in session?

- Parliament is not in session year-round.
- There are 3 main sitting periods in each session.
- There's no set length of days for a session and the number of sessions varies.

Do MPs stay in Ottawa year round?

- Session adjournments are called periodically for holidays. Non-sitting days occur on statutory holidays.
- MPs will typically be in Ottawa Monday through Thursday and return to their riding for Friday and the weekend.

What is a proroguing Parliament?

- When a session ends, a recess begins: Parliament is prorogued.

Why is Parliament dissolved?

- Parliament is dissolved for an election by the GG and a date is set for the first session for the next Parliament.

Sources

https://www.ourcommons.ca/About/ProcedureAndPractice3rdEdition/ch_09-e.html
Parliamentary Glossary

- **Backbencher**: MP who is not a Minister and does not sit on the front benches in the House of Commons.
- **Caucus**: group of Senators and MPs from the same political party.
- **Chamber**: the meeting room in which Senators and MPs sit to debate and vote. There is a chamber for the Senate and House of Commons.
- **Hansard**: printed record of MPs' statements in the House.
- **House Leader**: The MP of a party responsible for its management in the House. They determine a schedule of House business through consultation with other parties' House Leaders.
- **Leader of the Official Opposition**: The leader of the political party with the second highest number of seats in the House.
- **Members' Statements**: daily 15-minute period where MPs who are not Ministers can speak on matters important to them.
- **Official Opposition**: the party with the second highest number of seats in the House.
- **Page**: a university student in the Senate or the House who carries messages and delivers documents during sittings of
- **Parliamentarian**: a Senator or MP.
- **Prorogation**: when the GG ends a Parliamentary session but does not dissolve it.
- **Question Period (Senate)**: a period every day when oral questions may be addressed to the Leader of the Government, other ministers, and committee chairs.
- **Question Period (House)**: a time every day in the House when MPs can ask Cabinet Ministers questions about their projects and policy proposals.
- **Red Chamber**: another name for the Senate.
- **Responsible Government**: the executive branch must have the support of the majority in the House to stay in power. If they lose a no confidence vote, they must resign or call an election.
- **Riding**: another word for constituency or electoral district.
- **Table**: placing a document before the Senate, the House, or a committee for consideration.
- **Party Whip**: member responsible for keeping other members of the same party informed about House affairs and ensuring their attendance in the

Sources
https://lop.parl.ca/About/Parliament/Education/glossary-intermediate-students-e.html