

UK PARLIAMENT JARGON BUSTER



Grow your parliamentary knowledge! Use this time-saving jargon buster to find out what key parliamentary terms really mean.

WORD	DEFINITION
ACT	When a bill is agreed by both the House of Commons and the House of Lords, it is given Royal Assent by the monarch. It then becomes an Act of Parliament and part of UK law.
AMENDMENTS	The name for any changes made to a bill by the House of Commons or House of Lords before it becomes an Act of Parliament.
BACKBENCHER	MPs or members of the Lords who are not government ministers or shadow ministers. They play an important role during debates by checking and challenging ministers with lots of questions.
BILL	An idea for a new law or suggested changes to a law we already have. A bill is debated in both the House of Commons and the House of Lords. Not all bills become law.
CABINET	The Cabinet is part of the government. The Prime Minister chooses people from the governing party to join the Cabinet to run different departments. These people can be MPs or members of the Lords.
CHAMBER	The House of Commons and the House of Lords each have a Chamber. These are the rooms where they meet, debate and make decisions. The Commons Chamber has green benches. The Lords Chamber has red benches.
CONSTITUENCY	The area that is represented by each MP in the House of Commons. People who live in a constituency are known as 'constituents'.
DEBATE	A discussion where Members give their opinions on a topic. They debate important issues affecting the UK.
DEVOLUTION	When some powers were transferred from the UK Parliament to the Northern Ireland Assembly, the Scottish Parliament and the Senedd Cymru/Welsh Parliament.
DIVISION	Division is another word for a vote in UK Parliament. Members divide into one of two lobbies on either side of each Chamber to show they are voting for or against issues.
EVIDENCE	Select committees usually launch each new inquiry into a topic by asking the public for evidence. This is an opportunity for anyone with an interest in the topic, or relevant experience, to share in their views. This evidence helps shape the committees' final reports to the government.

GENERAL ELECTION	General elections are usually held every five years. Each political party publishes a manifesto setting out what they would do if they won the election. The public cast their votes to decide who will represent their constituency in the House of Commons.
GOVERNMENT	The government is responsible for the day to day running of the country, including deciding how to deliver public services.
HANSARD	The full written report of what's said in UK Parliament which is published online daily.
LEGISLATION	The process of making laws, or a set of laws.
MEMBER OF THE LORDS	Most members of the Lords are appointed for their experience and expertise. They use this experience to scrutinise the work of the government, examine bills and investigate public policy through committees.
MINISTERS	MPs and members of the Lords who are appointed by the Prime Minister and given a specific policy area to oversee. Opposition parties appoint shadow ministers to check and challenge government ministers.
MP (MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT)	A person elected by the people in a constituency to represent them in the House of Commons.
OPPOSITION	MPs or members of the Lords that belong to any party that is not the governing party. The largest party in opposition is referred to as The Official Opposition. The Leader of The Opposition appoints a Shadow Cabinet.
PING-PONG	When a bill goes back and forth between the House of Commons and the House of Lords for some time as amendments are made.
PETITION	A written request signed by people asking for action from the government on an issue. It could be on paper or online. If a petition gets lots of support, it may be debated in the House of Commons.
REFERENDUM	A referendum is a public vote on a particular issue and is used to gauge public opinion. While the government does not have to implement the result, they usually do as it represents the view of the majority of those who voted.
SELECT COMMITTEE	Small groups of MPs or members of the Lords set up to look into specific issues through inquiries. Experts and the public may submit evidence to share their views and experiences.
UK PARLIAMENT	Made up of the House of Commons, the House of Lords and the monarch. The two Houses check and challenge the work of government, debate important issues and make sure your voice is heard when decisions are made.
WHIPS	Whips are MPs or members of the Lords who organise their party members' contribution to parliamentary business, including votes. A 'three-line whip' is a vote underlined three times by the Whips which means Members must vote a certain way in that division.

Explore more terms on the UK Parliament Glossary page:
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