

Resource 3—Learning through role play

Role play encourages students to be active learners through playing specific roles to gain a deeper understanding of the process for creating laws in the ACT. Student will be able to debate real issues that are important to them through a role play.

The role play activity is based on passing a law in the ACT and presents an opportunity to acquaint students with a number of key democratic concepts, including where the ideas for laws come from, how they become law and the role of elected representatives in the passage of legislation.

Planning for the role play

Before completing the role play students will need to be familiar with the Assembly, resources for this include:

- Video—Parliamentary roles in the Assembly <https://www.parliament.act.gov.au/Explore-your-Assembly/videos/parliamentary-officers>
- Posters—The legislative process in the ACT Assembly and Who’s who in the Assembly chamber
- Factsheets—<https://www.parliament.act.gov.au/Explore-your-Assembly/resources/fact-sheets>
 - Structure of the parliament
 - The legislative process

This role play is designed for students to debate a set bill topic and the students will need to prepare a short speech to use during the debate.

The chosen topic forms the basis of a new bill, which is a draft law, once it is passed by the parliament it becomes a law.

Once the students have been introduced to the Assembly roles will need to be allocated so that students can write their speeches on the topic from either an affirmative or negative stance.

In its 30 year history the ACT has only had one government that has held majority in its own right (6th Assembly), all other governments in the ACT have been minority government with the cross bench holding the balance of power.

For the purposes of this role play, and to reflect minority government in the ACT, students should be divided so that:

- there are two Clerks (these are parliamentary officers—not members);
- the Government has one member less than a majority;
- the Crossbench should have a minimum of two members; and
- the opposition is formed from the remaining members.

As an example, for a class of 29 students they could be split as follows:

- 1 Clerk and 1 Deputy Clerk (parliamentary roles, not members); and
- 12 government members, 11 opposition members and 4 cross bench members; or
- other variations are 12 government members, 12 opposition members and 3 cross bench members; or 13 government members, 12 opposition members and 2 cross bench members.

These all represent a 27 Member Assembly (Clerks are not members) and allows the cross bench to hold the balance of power so they can vote with either side to pass a bill with a majority vote which in this example is 14 Members (demonstrating how balance of power works in a parliament with minority government).

Once the parties have been formed students will be able to create their speeches for the bill to be debated.

The role play is a simplified version of the legislative process and concentrates on the “Agreement in Principle” stage as this is where all debate on the merits or otherwise of a bill occurs. It is assumed that the Government has already presented the bill on a previous occasion.

Copies of the role play script will need to be provided for the Speaker, Clerk, Deputy Clerk and leaders of each party (government, opposition, crossbench).

All other members will only need to have their prepared speeches so they can participate when members wishing to contribute to the debate are called on by the Speaker (teacher choice if all student are to be provided with a copy of the script to help them follow the process).

Preparing speeches for the bill debate

Preparing speeches for the debate:

- having determined who is the government, opposition and cross bench members each student will need a piece of paper and pencil. In a preparation for proceeding to the role play allow 5-10 minutes for every student to write a small paragraph on the topic:
 - government members need to write a paragraph in support of the chosen topic;
 - opposition members need to write a paragraph against the chosen topic; and
 - cross bench members can decide for themselves which side to argue. Cross members can act individually (as independents), or they may like to work together as a minor party and all support the same side of the topic. Proceed to setting up the classroom as a parliamentary chamber and commence the role play; and
- the Speaker and two Clerks are the only students who will not need to prepare a speech as part of the role play. The Speaker is generally a government member, however as they are controlling the proceedings they do not participate in the debate.

Every member of the Assembly can introduce bills to the Assembly, and while most bills debated in the Assembly will be government bills which are always presented by ministers, a small number each year are presented by other MLAs, these are known as private member bills.

Parliamentary roles

Speaker

- The Speaker is a member who is then elected by all Assembly members to the position of Speaker on the first sitting day of a new Assembly.
- The Speaker controls the proceedings in the Assembly and is responsible for ensuring that members follow the 280 standing orders (rules) that govern the operation of the Assembly.

- Any members wanting to speak during debate must stand up and Speaker will call on them by name for example “Member Smith”.
- To maintain order, if more than one member is talking at the same time, the Speaker will often say “order” or “order, members”.
- For the purposes of this role play, the Speaker will be conducting the meeting of the parliament, will call on members to speak, maintain order and put the question at the end of the debate for a vote.

Clerk

- The Clerk and Deputy Clerk are parliamentary officers and are not elected. They have an extensive working knowledge of the 280 standing orders and provide advice to the Speaker on sitting days to help enforce these. They also provide independent and impartial parliamentary advice to the Speaker and MLAs. The Clerks are experts on procedure and keep the official record of sitting days, announce each order of business, time debates, ring division bells and count the votes.
- For the purposes of this role play, the Clerk will read out the title of the bill and count votes if a division is called.

Deputy Clerk/Sergeant-at-Arms

- The Deputy Clerk of the Legislative Assembly is also the Serjeant-at-Arms. The Serjeant-at-Arms announces the Speaker and carries in the mace at the start of a sitting day and places it on the stand, large end faces the Government side of the Assembly when placed in the stand.
- Under the Speaker’s direction the Serjeant may be required to escort members who have been acting in a disorderly manner from the chamber.
- For the purposes of this role play, the Deputy Clerk will lead the Speaker into the chamber, carrying a mace (if the students have created one) and count the votes if a division is called.
- Watch the mace being carried into the Legislative Assembly for the ACT at the commencement of a sitting day (select the Assembly tab and in the date field select 2 April 2019)
<http://aod.parliament.act.gov.au/>

Chief Minister

- The Chief Minister is the head of the government. The party with the largest number of members in the Assembly usually forms government.
- The Chief Minister can appoint up to eight members to be ministers (together, they are known as the executive).
- For the purposes of this role play, the Government is in favour of the bill, government members wishing to speak need to think of reasons to support the bill when writing their speech.

Leader of the Opposition

- The Leader of the Opposition is the head of the party that forms opposition. This is usually the party with the second largest number of members in the Assembly.

- The role of the opposition is to scrutinize the government. Opposition members are given shadow ministerial responsibilities. They are called shadow ministers as they are responsible for “shadowing” the portfolio responsibilities held by government ministers.
- The opposition party does not always oppose government bills. Sometimes it agrees with the government to help pass legislation in the Assembly.
- For the purposes of this role play the opposition is against the bill, members of the opposition need to think of reasons why they do not support then bill when writing their speech.

Crossbench

- The members on the crossbench are made up of minor-party members and independents who do not belong to the major parties that usually form the government and the opposition.
- Crossbench members hold the balance of power when there is a minority government.
- For the purposes of this role play, crossbench members can decide their position on the bill and think of reasons either for, or against when writing their speech. Depending on their decision, the bill will either pass or fail to pass (as the crossbench holds the balance of power on the bill).

Members in the chamber

- All members stand when the Speaker enters the chamber, led in by the serjeant-at-arms (with the mace if one has been created);
- After the acknowledgement the Speaker sits, they are the only member in the chamber who does not need to stand to speak once proceedings are underway.
- All other members must stand when they are speaking, all members should start their speech with “Thank you Mr or Madam Speaker” (depending on if there is a male or female speaker in the chair).
- Members may only speak once during the debate. Time limits can be imposed if required.
- Members can show support for speeches by saying “Hear, Hear”; or disagreement with speeches by saying things like “No”, “That’s wrong” or “We disagree”.

Commencing the role play

Setting the scene

The bill topic for debate is called the “Domestic Animals (Cat Registration) Amendment Bill”, this bill will require registration of all cats across the ACT.

The bill is a government bill, they will be arguing the affirmative case, the opposition will be opposing the bill and the cross bench can decide for themselves if they wish to support or oppose the bill.

Teacher to remind members of their roles depending on parties they represent—The government members support the bill, the opposition will not be supporting the bill and crossbench members can decide their own position as they hold the balance of power.

Teacher to outline standing orders for the session (see resource 2—Parliamentary standing orders (rules)). The standing orders could be displayed prominently on a board for reference by the students, alternatively a copy can be supplied to each student for use during the debate.

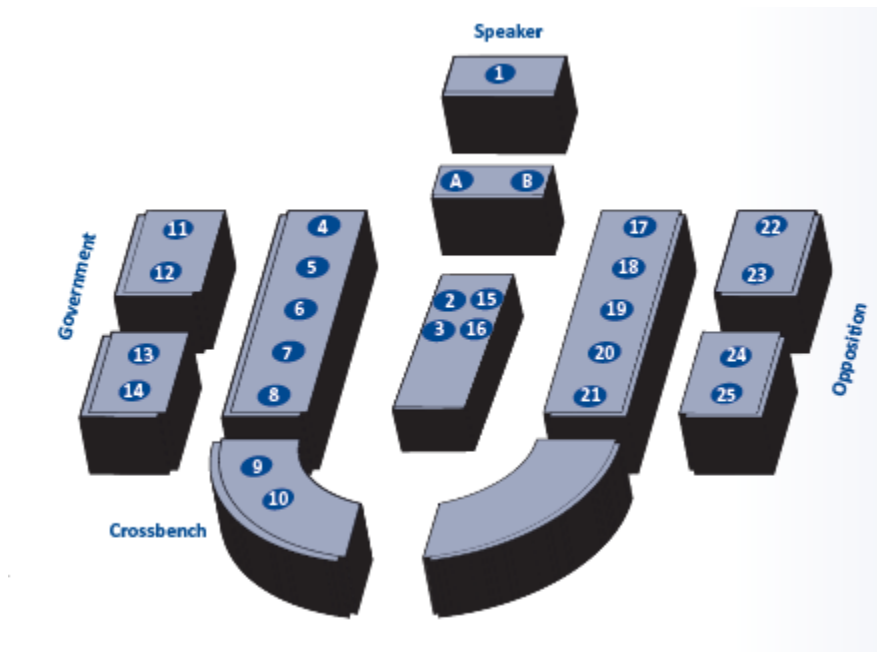
At the end of the bill debate the Speaker will call a vote on each statement. This first vote is always on the voices, the Speaker will say all those in favour say “Aye”, all those against say “No”. They will then make a call on the voices by saying either “I think the ayes have it” **OR** “I think the no’s have it” (see resource 5—Standing order 9).

Any member may disagree with the Speakers ruling and call a formal vote, to do this the member simply need to assert the opposite of what the Speaker has ruled (see resource 5—Standing order 10):

- Speaker ruling “I think the ayes have it”—to dispute a member says “I think the noes have it”;
- Speaker ruling “I think the noes have it”—to dispute a member says “I think the ayes have it”;

A formal count of the votes is known as a division and in this role play is done through a show of hands, the Clerks’ count the votes, give the result to the Speaker to announce (see resource 5—Standing order 10).

Chamber setup



Key

1. Speaker (usually a Government member)
- A-B. Clerk, Deputy Clerk/Serjeant-at-Arms (not members)
- 2-3. Chief Minister, Deputy Chief Minister
- 4-8. Government ministers and 11-14 Government backbenchers
- 9-10. Crossbench (Second unnumbered curved bench also a crossbench if there are more than 25 members)
- 15-16. Opposition Leader, Deputy Opposition Leader
- 17-25. Opposition members

Classroom set-up

Organise the classroom to look like the Assembly chamber. Tables can be used for the Speaker, clerks and leaders, surrounded by chairs in a “U” shape for all other members.

Students move to their positions except for the Speaker and Sergeant-at-Arms, who will enter from a door/corner of the room once all students are standing in their position.

Once everyone is in position and ready to commence the role play, all students should be standing and then the Serjeant-at-Arms and the Speaker can enter the chamber in a procession. Students can sit once the acknowledgement to country is done.