



# Amending a law: Senate

In Parliament, an amendment is a change to a bill. It allows for a bill to be improved or altered as it progresses through the Parliament. This lesson involves a role-play which demonstrates how amendments to bills are introduced, debated and voted on in the Senate.

**NOTE:** Your class should only undertake this amendment role-play if they passed the bill during the Law-making: Senate role-play. If the bill failed in the law-making role-play it cannot be amended.

## OUTCOMES

By participating in this role-play, students will:

- research and debate current issues
- think critically and find solutions to problems
- prepare and deliver public speeches
- explore the process of law-making
- explore the concept of parliamentary scrutiny
- explore the concept of representation.

## FOCUS QUESTIONS

Generate discussion about the role-play by exploring some of the following questions with your students:

### **Who do the senators represent?**

Each senator represents a state or territory. Each state has 12 senators, and each territory has 2, making a total of 76 senators in the Senate.

### **What was said about this bill in the law-making debate?**

You will need to refer to the previous law-making debate.

### **What steps did the bill go through in the law-making debate?**

The bill was introduced, debated and then voted on. The bill was agreed to at the vote, which means that it may now be amended.

### **Why would you change a bill in the Parliament?**

To improve the bill, so that it works better as a law for Australia.

## TOOLKIT



### SEATING PLAN

How to set up your classroom.



### SCRIPTS AND TEMPLATES

Ready-to-use script sets and a template to create your own scripts.



### VIDEOS

To set the scene for the role-play.



### PHOTOS

A series of photos you can use on a smart board.



### DIAGRAMS

A series of diagrams you can use on a smart board.



### MAKE IT YOURSELF

Instructions for making props and costumes.



### FLOW CHART

Optional tool for running the role-play.

TO DOWNLOAD ITEMS IN  
THE TOOLKIT, GO TO:

[www.peo.gov.au/  
teaching/role-play-  
lesson-plans/amending-  
a-law-senate.html](http://www.peo.gov.au/teaching/role-play-lesson-plans/amending-a-law-senate.html)

## Setting the scene for the role-play

Have students reflect on the previous law-making role-play through class discussion, or by revisiting any work that you may have set about the previous debate. It is important that students understand that this role-play is a continuation of the process that they started in the law-making role-play. You may wish to refer to the ‘setting the scene’ section of the *Law-making: Senate* role-play lesson plan to prepare your students.

## Main activity: Conducting an amendment role-play

### Scripts

The PEO scripts provide a framework for the role-play. The scripts include specific roles that can be assigned to students and indicate what they have to do and say. You can download a full script set or a template, which allows you to write your own script, from the *Toolkit*.

### Choosing an amendment (change to the bill)

Before the role-play can start, your students will need to have at least one idea for an amendment. Amendments are changes to a bill to improve it. However, amendments cannot change the overall intention of the bill. For example, the *No Homework* bill cannot be amended to allow homework to be set one day a week because then the bill would no longer ban homework.

Have your class think about the bill they debated in the law-making role-play. Allow your students to come up with amendments using the following options:

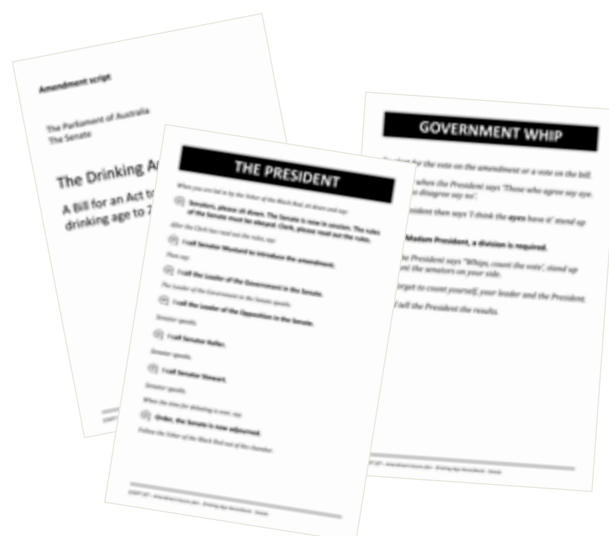
- Brainstorm ideas with the class.
- Ask each team and the Independents to come up with their own amendments.
- Use amendment ideas suggested during the law-making debates.

When students have decided on their amendments they can write them as formal documents using the *Amendment Template* in the *Toolkit*.

The class then meet in their teams to decide if their group will support or oppose the amendment. Students playing the role of Independents will need to decide individually if they will support or oppose the amendment. Students can then write short speeches giving reasons for their support or opposition.



**PHOTOS**  
Available on the PEO website in the *Toolkit*



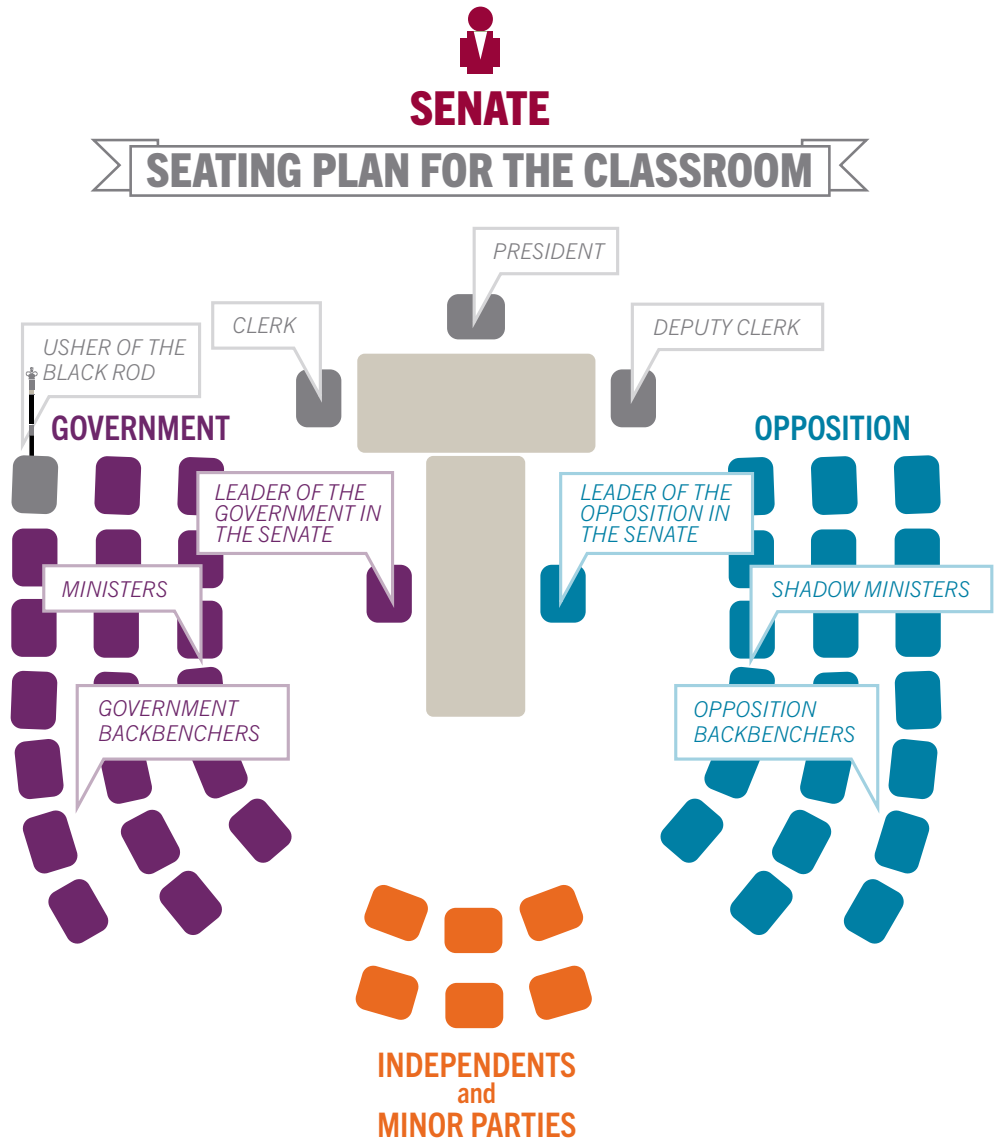
**SCRIPTS AND TEMPLATES**  
Available on the PEO website in the *Toolkit*

### Set-up

Transform the classroom into a chamber by arranging chairs and tables into a horseshoe shape as indicated by the seating plan. The seating plan, as well as diagrams of the chamber, can be downloaded from the *Toolkit*.

### Props and costumes

The Clerk will need a bell. You may like to use other props, such as a Black Rod for the Usher and gowns for the President and Clerks. Instructions for making these are in the *Toolkit*.



**SEATING PLAN**  
Available on the PEOW website in the *Toolkit*



**MAKE IT YOURSELF**  
Available on the PEOW website in the *Toolkit*

## Getting into role

**NOTE:** The students should remain in the roles they were assigned in the previous law-making role-play.

- Divide the class into **government**, **opposition**, **minor parties** and **Independents**. Refer to *Parliament NOW* on the PEO website for the current numbers in the chambers. Use these to work out the proportions for your parliament.  
[www.peo.gov.au/learning/parliament-now.html](http://www.peo.gov.au/learning/parliament-now.html)
- Select a **President** – this is a non-debating role and is generally someone from the government who can exercise authority in the room.
- Select a **Clerk** (pronounced ‘Clark’) and **Usher of the Black Rod** – these are parliamentary officers who do not debate or vote. A teacher may take the role of **Deputy Clerk**. This role does not require active participation, but puts the teacher in a central position in the room so they can assist with the running of the role-play.
- Elect party leaders – the government elects the **Leader of the Government in the Senate** and the opposition elects the **Leader of the Opposition in the Senate**.
- Select a **senator** for each amendment you wish to introduce.
- Choose party **whips** (managers) to count the vote at the end of the debate.



**GOVERNMENT**

**OPPOSITION**

**MINOR PARTIES**

**INDEPENDENTS**



**PRESIDENT** (GOVERNMENT)

**CLERK**

**DEPUTY CLERK** (TEACHER)

**USHER OF THE BLACK ROD**

**LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT  
IN THE SENATE** (ELECTED BY GOVERNMENT)

**LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION  
IN THE SENATE** (ELECTED BY OPPOSITION)

**SENATORS** (TO INTRODUCE AN AMENDMENTS)

**PARTY WHIPS**



## Starting the role-play

1. The Clerk rings the bell and tells the senators to stand.
2. The Usher of the Black Rod leads the President into the chamber, carrying the Black Rod vertically in their right hand.
3. The Usher of the Black Rod announces the President and moves to their seat.
4. The President tells everyone to sit down and begins the session.
5. The Clerk stands and reads the rules of the chamber.
6. A senator introduces the amendment.
7. The President selects senators to make speeches, alternating between the government, opposition, minor parties and Independents. Senators make their speeches in turn.

## Voting on the amendment

8. When the debate is finished, the President leads a 'vote on the voices' (uncounted vote) before declaring the vote.
9. If the opposition lose the vote on the voices, the opposition whip may call for a division (formal counted vote) and the Clerk rings the bell. The President conducts the division with help from the whips and then declares the vote. The President must always vote in a division.

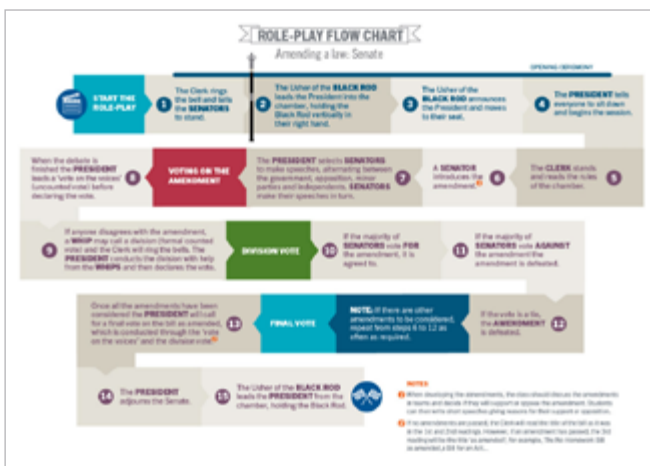
## Division vote

10. If the majority of votes are for the amendment it is agreed to.
11. If the majority of votes are against the amendment the amendment is defeated.
12. If the vote is a tie, the amendment is defeated.

**NOTE: Your class may have more amendments on this bill that they want to consider. If so, do not go to the next step yet. Instead, go back to step 6 and have the Clerk introduce the next amendment in the same way the first amendment was introduced. Repeat the process for as many amendments as you wish.**

## Adjournment

13. The President adjourns the Senate.
14. The Usher of the Black Rod leads the President from the chamber, holding the Black Rod.



**FLOW CHART**  
Available on the PEO website in the *Toolkit*



## Debrief

After the debate, explore the following questions with your students.

### Where would senators get ideas for amendments?

They could talk to their team members, people in their electorate and anyone else in Australia who may be affected by the bill.

### Who would suggest amendments to bills?

Any senator may suggest amendments, but it is often opposition senators, minor party senators or Independents. Unlike government senators, they may not have worked on the bill before it was presented to the Parliament.

## EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

### House of Representatives or Senate

If your class has debated and amended a bill in the House of Representatives and Senate, you may wish to repeat the process, but allow your class to devise its own bill. A bill and speech template is available to download from the *Toolkit*.

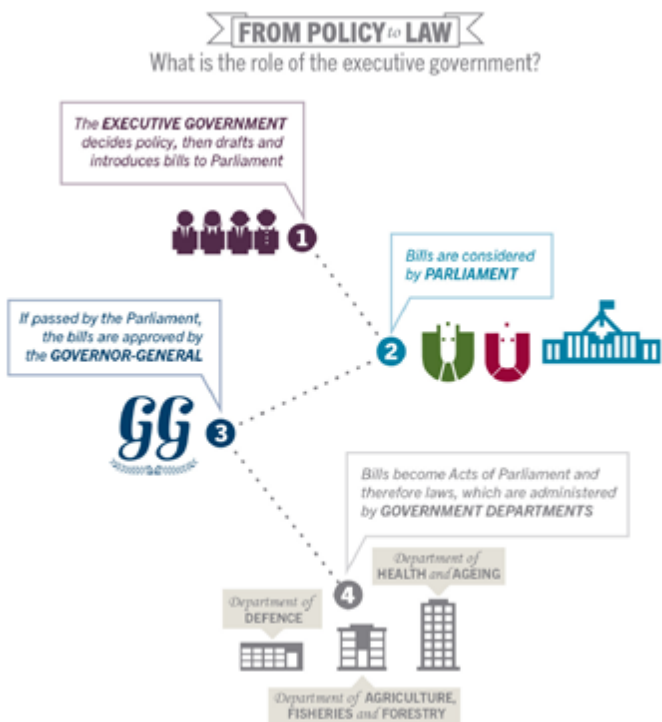
### Committees

Committees investigate issues and bills in more detail than is possible in the chamber. The committee process helps parliamentarians become informed by gathering information from government departments, experts in the field, lobby groups and interested citizens. You might like to conduct a role-play of a committee. To do this, check out the *Committee* role-play lesson plan.

### Question Time

During Question Time in the Parliament, the Prime Minister and ministers are called upon to explain government decisions and actions. The *Question Time* role-play lesson plans will help students understand the purpose of Question Time, in particular how it works to scrutinise (closely examine) the government.

Role-play lesson plans on the PEO website:  
[www.peo.gov.au/teaching/role-play-lesson-plans.html](http://www.peo.gov.au/teaching/role-play-lesson-plans.html)



**DIAGRAMS**  
Available on the PEO website in the *Toolkit*