HOW CONGRESS IS ORGANIZED

A. Congress Convenes

1. Opening Day in the House
   a. On opening day of a new term, a clerk calls the chamber to order and checks the role of newly elected representatives.
   b. The members-to-be choose a Speaker, who takes the oath of office and swears in the rest of the members.
   c. The House elects a clerk, sergeant at arms, doorkeeper, postmaster, and chaplain, and then adopts rules and organizes committees.

2. Opening Day in the Senate-As a continuous body with only one-third new membership each term, the Senate does not undertake extensive organizing. Instead, newly elected and reelected members are sworn in and vacancies are filled.

3. The President's State of the Union Message-In this constitutionally mandated speech, the President reports on the state of the nation, outlines the shape of the administration's policies and plans, and also may recommend specific legislative actions.

B. The Presiding Officers

1. The Speaker of the House is the most influential member of the House of Representatives and has two duties: to preside over all sessions and to keep order.

2. The Speaker is allowed to debate and vote on any matter.
   a. If he or she chooses to vote, a Speaker pro tempore must be appointed temporarily.
   b. The Speaker rarely votes except to cause or break a tie. In the case of a tie, the Speaker is required to vote.

3. According to the Constitution, the president of the Senate is the Vice President of the United States.
   a. The president of the Senate recognizes members, puts questions to a vote, and so on, but may not vote except to break a tie.
   b. In the Vice President's absence, a president pro tempore, who is elected by the Senate and is a member of the majority party, presides.

C. Floor Leaders and Other Party Officers

1. The Floor leaders
   a. The floor leaders in both the House and the Senate consist of a majority and a minority floor leader, chosen by party colleagues.
   b. The assistants of floor leaders are called "whips."

2. The Party Caucus-These are closed meetings of each party in each house and deal with party organization, selection of floor leaders, and committee membership. Understand the committee system and the types of committees in both houses of Congress.
D. Committee Chairpersons

1. The committee chairpersons decide when their committees will meet, which bills they will consider, whether they will hold public hearings, and what witnesses to call.

2. Seniority Rule
   a. By unwritten custom, most important posts are awarded according to length of service.
   b. Criticism of the Seniority Rule—Critics of the seniority rule maintain that the rule ignores ability, discourages young members, and encourages constant reelection of "stale" members; defenders say that the rule ensures experience in key posts and minimizes conflict within the party.

COMMITTEES IN CONGRESS

A. Standing Committees

1. Standing committees are permanent groups to which all similar bills are sent.

2. Today there are 22 standing committees in the House and 16 in the Senate.

3. The Speaker of the House or the president of the Senate is responsible for assigning bills to the appropriate standing committees

B. The House Rules Committee

1. This committee manages the flow of bills for action by the full House by scheduling their consideration.

2. Because the Senate has less formal organization, the majority floor leader controls the appearance of bills on the floor.

C. Select Committees

1. Select committees are special groups set up for specific purposes and for a limited period whose members are appointed by the Speaker or the president of the Senate.

2. Occasionally, a select committee conducts especially important investigations, for example, the Senate Watergate Committee of 1973.

D. Joint and Conference Committees

1. A joint committee is one composed of members from both houses and is organized to deal with issues of common concern; some are permanent, such as the Joint Committee on the Library of Congress, others are temporary.

2. Conference committees are temporary committees, organized to resolve differences in similar bills passed in both houses and to produce a compromise bill acceptable to both houses.
HOW A BILL BECOMES A LAW: THE HOUSE

A. Creating and Introducing Bills

1. Most bills do not originate with members of Congress but in the executive branch, in special interest groups, or with private citizens.

2. All revenue-raising bills begin in the House; all other bills may be introduced in either chamber.

B. Types of Bills and Resolutions

1. Bills-These are proposed laws presented to Congress. Public bills apply to the entire nation; private bills pertain to certain persons or places.

2. Joint Resolutions-These deal with temporary or unusual matters, have the force of law, must be passed by both houses, and must be signed by the President.

3. Concurrent Resolutions-These deal with common concerns of both houses, have the force of law, and do not require the President's signature.

4. Resolutions-These deal with matters concerning either house alone; they usually are concerned with house rules and do not require the President's signature.

C. The First Reading

1. The first reading of a bill consists of the assignment of a house number, a short title, and entry into the House journal and the Congressional Record for the day.

2. The Speaker then refers the bill to the appropriate standing committee for consideration.

D. The Bill in Committee

1. Most committee work is done by subcommittees which investigate, debate, and recommend the fate of particular bills.

2. After subcommittees complete their work, the measure returns to the full committee.
   a. The full committee may report the bill favorably to the full House.
   b. The full committee may refuse to report the bill, or pigeonhole it.
   c. The full committee may report an amended bill.
   d. The full committee may report the bill unfavorably.
   e. The full committee may report an entirely new bill,

E. Rules and Calendars

1. Before reaching the floor of the House, a bill must be placed on one of several calendars, or schedules, for deliberation.

2. In order to be debated on the floor, each bill must receive a rule, or approval for its appearance on the floor (unless the bill is privileged or the rules are suspended).
F. The Bill on the Floor

1. Most important bills are considered in the Committee of the Whole.

2. Debate-Strict rules limit the length of each individual's debate.

3. Voting-A bill requires formal House vote on it and on various amendments that might be attached to it.
   a. Voice votes are the most common.
   b. A standing vote may be demanded if any member thinks the Speaker has erred in judging a voice vote.
   c. One-fifth of a quorum may demand a teller vote.
   d. A roll-call vote may be demanded by one-fifth of the members.

G. Final Steps

1. An approved bill is engrossed, read a third time, voted on again, and signed by the Speaker.

2. A signed bill is then sent to the Senate president

THE BILL IN THE SENATE AND THE FINAL STAGE

A. Introducing the Bill in the Senate

1. Bills are introduced by senators, given a number and title, read twice, and referred to committee.

2. Senate proceedings are less formal than those of the House, have only one calendar for bills, and are called to the floor by the majority floor leader.

B. The Senates Rules for Debate

1. Floor debate is almost unlimited in the Senate.

2. The Filibuster-The filibuster is a tactic used by a minority to "talk a bill to death" on the Senate floor.

3. The Cloture Rule
   a. This is the Senate's check on the filibuster and limits debate, but requires a petition signed by at least 16 senators and approval by at least three-fifths the full Senate.
   b. Many senators hesitate to use the cloture rule for fear that it will limit free debate and it will undermine the effectiveness of the filibuster technique.

C. The Conference Committees

1. If House and Senate versions of a bill differ, a joint conference committee is appointed to achieve a compromise bill acceptable to both houses.
2. Appointees are usually the senior, most powerful members of each committee and the compromises they reach are usually acceptable to both houses.

D. The President Acts

1. A bill passed by both houses goes to the President for his action.

2. The President may sign the bill, veto it, allow the bill to become law by not signing it within ten days of receiving it, or pocket veto the bill by not acting on it before Congress adjourns.