



QUESTIONS

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INTRODUCTION

The right to seek information and the right to hold the Government accountable are recognized as fundamental to our system of parliamentary government. One of the principal ways by which Members exercise these rights is by asking questions in the House. Questions may be asked orally without notice during Question Period, or they may be submitted in writing with sufficient notice.

A Member who is not satisfied with the answer to an oral question may pursue the matter at greater length during the Adjournment Proceedings, a short question and answer period held at the end of each sitting day, except Fridays. The matter of a written question that has not received a response from the government within 45 days is automatically referred to a standing committee, unless a Member elects to raise it during Adjournment Proceedings.

ORAL QUESTIONS

Conduct of Question Period

Each sitting day, time is set aside for the purpose of asking oral questions.

Pursuant to Standing Order 30(5), "Oral Questions", more commonly known as "Question Period", follows "Statements by Members" and lasts a maximum of 45 minutes.

The Standing Orders specify that each question should be addressed to a Minister or to a designated spokesperson of the Board of Internal Economy. Members may also put questions concerning committees to the respective committee chairs.

DETAILED ARTICLE

Question Period

Guidelines

Guidelines have been established to provide a framework for the Speaker as he or she presides over Question Period. They allow for a fair degree of discretion in allowing questions, and even wider latitude with regard to supplementary questions.

A question asked by a member must be brief, seek information, and direct the question to an important matter of some urgency that is within the administrative responsibility of the Government or of the Minister addressed.

DETAILED ARTICLE

Principles and Guidelines for Oral Questions

Government Replies to Oral Questions

Questions, although customarily addressed to specific Ministers, are directed to the Cabinet as a whole. Members may not insist upon receiving answers nor may they insist that specific Ministers respond to their questions.

In response to a question, a Minister may:

- provide an answer;
- defer an answer;
- explain briefly why an answer cannot be provided at that time; or
- say nothing.

DETAILED ARTICLE

Government Replies to Oral Questions

Supplementary Questions

Members may try to clarify the answer to a question or to obtain further information through the use of supplementary questions. In current practice, an additional question need not be supplementary to the main question. This allows a Member to pose a question on a different topic to a different Minister or allows a party to split a round of questioning between two Members, with each one asking a different question to a different Minister.

Supplementary questions should be precise and direct.

DETAILED ARTICLE

Supplementary Questions

Questions Concerning the Administration of the House

Questions concerning matters of financial or administrative policy affecting the House must be directed to the members of the Board of Internal Economy designated as spokespersons by the Board. These matters are the responsibility of the Board and not of the Government.

Questions Concerning Matters before Committees

Questions seeking information about the schedules and agendas of committees may be directed to the appropriate Chair of a committee. Questions on legislation or on subjects that are before committees are directed to the Ministry and, when appropriately cast, are normally permitted as long as the questioning neither interferes with the committees' work nor anticipates a report of a committee.

QUESTIONS ON THE *ORDER PAPER* (WRITTEN QUESTIONS)

Placing Written Questions on the *Order Paper*

If a question intended to obtain information from the Ministry involves a lengthy, detailed or technical response, a written question must be placed on the *Order Paper*. A Member must give 48 hours' written notice of his or her intention to submit such a question. Each Member may have a maximum of four questions on the *Order Paper* at any one time. Certain restrictions exist on the form and content of written questions. These are based on the Standing Orders and on practice.

The Member giving notice of a written question may request an answer within 45 days and may also ask that oral answers be provided to no more than three of his or her questions on the *Order Paper*. Such questions are identified with an asterisk in the *Order Paper*.

DETAILED ARTICLES

Placing Written Questions on the *Order Paper*

Guidelines for Written Questions

Government Replies to Written Questions

Responses to written questions are provided during Routine Proceedings under the rubric "Questions on the *Order Paper*". When "Questions on the *Order Paper*" is called, a Parliamentary Secretary rises in his or her place to announce which question(s) the Government intends to answer on that particular day.

The Government may answer written questions in one of two ways:

- The Parliamentary Secretary may simply indicate to the House the number (or numbers) of the question(s) being answered. The text of the full response is published in the *Debates* of that day or the Parliamentary Secretary may read the reply, if an oral response has been requested; or
- In the case of questions requiring lengthy or more complex responses, the Government may request that the House make a certain question an "order for return"; that is, the House may order the Government to table a report or return which will serve as a response to the question. The return is tabled in the House and becomes a sessional paper.

The failure of the Government to respond to a written question within 45 days is automatically referred to a standing committee. Within five sitting days of the referral, the Chair of the committee must call a meeting of the committee to consider the Government's failure to respond. The Member in question may submit one further question to the *Order Paper* for each question referred to a committee.

Alternatively, the Member who placed the question on the *Order Paper* may rise in the House under "Questions on the *Order Paper*" and give notice of his or her intention to transfer the question and raise the subject matter during the Adjournment Proceedings. The order referring the matter to committee is then dropped.

DETAILED ARTICLES

Government Replies to Written Questions

Orders for Return

Questions Not Responded to Within 45 Days

Adjournment Proceedings

A Member who wishes to receive more information on a response given to his or her question during Question Period, or whose written question has not been responded to within 45 days, may give notice of his or her intention to raise the subject matter of the question during the Adjournment Proceedings, also referred to as the "late show".

At the commencement of this 30-minute period, from 6:30 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. Monday through Thursday (there are no Adjournment Proceedings on Friday), a motion to adjourn the House is deemed moved and seconded. After debate, the motion to adjourn is deemed carried and the House adjourns.

The adjournment debate, divided into a maximum of three periods of no more than 10 minutes each, is used as a vehicle for brief exchanges (questions from Members and responses from Ministers or Parliamentary Secretaries). Several topics may be debated during each occurrence of the Adjournment Proceedings.

DETAILED ARTICLE

Adjournment Proceedings (Late Show)

MORE INFORMATION – QUESTIONS

House of Commons Procedure and Practice, Robert Marleau & Camille Montpetit, (2000)

Chapter 11, Questions

[Standing Orders of the House of Commons](#)

Chapter V, Questions

Find this and other articles on House of Commons procedure by visiting the *Compendium of Procedure* Web site at <http://www.parl.gc.ca/compendium-e>.

For further information about the procedures of the House of Commons, please contact the Table Research Branch at (613) 996-3611 or by e-mail at trbdrb@parl.gc.ca.

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