



**Legislative Assembly
Parliament of Victoria**

Fact Sheet A1

A Typical Sitting day in the Assembly

A sitting day in the Legislative Assembly involves debates on a wide range of issues. Different rules apply to each type of debate, including time limits for speeches. The Assembly also deals with administrative matters such as tabling of documents and petitions. See the chart, Outline of business on normal sitting days, in this factsheet.

Meeting times

What will be debated during the day?

Start of the day

Question time

Time for administrative matters

Statements by members

Outline of business on normal sitting days chart

Matters of public importance

Grievance debate

Statements on parliamentary committee reports

Debate on government bills and motions

Adjournment debate

Meeting times

The Legislative Assembly normally meets on a Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday of a sitting week. On a Tuesday, the Assembly starts at 2.00 pm, and on other days, at 9.30 am.

The Assembly breaks for lunch between 1.00 and 2.00 pm and for dinner between 6.30 and 8.00 pm.

What will be debated during the day?

The business of the Legislative Assembly for each sitting day is shown in the notice paper (agenda). Items of business (called orders of the day) are listed in the order they will be considered, but this order often changes during the day.

Start of the day

Every sitting day, bells ring throughout Parliament House to call members to the Chamber for the start of the sitting. Lights near the bells distinguish between bells for the Legislative Assembly (green) and the Legislative Council (red).

When a quorum is present, the Speaker enters the Chamber, led by the Serjeant-at-Arms, who announces, 'Honourable Members — the Speaker'. The Serjeant escorts the Speaker to the chair, and places the mace on the table in the centre of the Chamber.

The Speaker bows to members and the clerks, who bow in return. The Speaker then reads the Lord's Prayer while members stand in their places. After the Prayer, the business of the Assembly begins.

Question time

Officially known as questions without notice, question time begins immediately after the Prayer on a Tuesday and at 2.00 pm on a Wednesday and Thursday. The Speaker asks, 'Are there any questions?' and members stand to attract the Speaker's attention. The first member to stand, traditionally an opposition member, gets to ask the first question.

Question time lasts for 30 minutes or until 10 questions have been answered, whichever is longer.

Find out more: *Fact Sheet B2: Question Time*.

Time for administrative matters

Formal business is a time for the Legislative Assembly to deal with administrative issues. It follows question time on a Tuesday and takes place at the start of other days. It includes:

- notices of motion
- introduction of bills
- tabling of petitions (see *Fact Sheet G1: Petitions*)
- tabling of committee reports
- tabling of other documents to comply with the law
- messages from the Council
- messages from the Governor
- motions by leave.

Statements by members

After formal business, members may make statements on any topic of concern. Members have just 90 seconds to give their statement, and the total time allocated for all members is 30 minutes.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY — GUIDE TO NORMAL SITTING DAYS

(Under Standing and Sessional Orders)

TUESDAY

WEDNESDAY

THURSDAY

	9.30 am	FORMAL BUSINESS Notices, Petitions Documents Committee Reports Messages	9.30 am	FORMAL BUSINESS Notices, Petitions Documents Committee Reports Messages
	9.45 am approx	STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS	9.45 am approx	STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS
	10.15 am approx	MATTER OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE or GRIEVANCE DEBATE <i>(every third sitting Wednesday)</i>	10.15 am approx	GOVERNMENT BUSINESS Notices of Motion Orders of the Day (members debate bills and motions)
	12.15 pm approx	STATEMENTS ON PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE REPORTS		
	12.45 pm approx	GOVERNMENT BUSINESS Notices of Motion Orders of the Day (members debate bills and motions)		
	1.00 pm	Lunch break	1.00 pm	Lunch break
2.00 pm		QUESTION TIME¹	2.00 pm	QUESTION TIME¹
2.40 pm approx		FORMAL BUSINESS Notices, Petitions Documents Committee Reports Messages	2.40 pm approx	GOVERNMENT BUSINESS <i>continued</i>
2.55 pm approx		STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS		
3.25 pm approx		GOVERNMENT BUSINESS Notices of Motion Orders of the Day (members debate bills and motions)		
6.30 pm		Dinner break	6.30 pm	Dinner break
8.00 pm		GOVERNMENT BUSINESS <i>continued</i>	8.00 pm	GOVERNMENT BUSINESS <i>continued</i>
10.00 pm		ADJOURNMENT DEBATE²	10.00 pm	ADJOURNMENT DEBATE²

¹ Question time lasts for 30 minutes or until 10 questions have been answered, whichever is longer.

² The Chair interrupts debate at 10.00 pm. The adjournment debate usually begins immediately afterwards. However, a minister can move to continue the sitting. If the Assembly agrees, the adjournment debate will not start until the Assembly finishes other business for the day.

When the House sits on a Friday the order of business is the same as for a Thursday.

Matters of public importance

Each sitting Wednesday (except when there is a grievance debate) members discuss a matter of public importance immediately after they have finished making statements. Government and opposition members take turns deciding what matter to discuss.

Once decided, a member gives the matter to the Speaker for approval. The discussion lasts two hours. The first government and non-government speakers may speak for 15 minutes maximum. Other members have a maximum of 10 minutes. As the matter of public importance is a discussion, not debate on a motion, members do not vote on it.

Find out more: *Fact Sheet B3: Matters of Public Importance*.

Grievance debate

Every third sitting Wednesday, members debate the question 'That grievances be noted'. Members use the debate to raise concerns about individual constituents or other significant issues. Each member may speak for 15 minutes. The grievance debate lasts for two hours, or until eight members have spoken, whichever is shorter.

Statements on parliamentary committee reports

Each sitting Wednesday, members may make statements about any parliamentary committee report (except some reports of the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee) tabled during the current parliament. Members may speak for up to five minutes. The total time allocated is 30 minutes, or until six members have spoken, whichever is shorter.

Find out more: *Fact Sheet G2: Parliamentary Committees*.

Debate on government bills and motions

Government business consists of legislation and motions introduced by ministers. This takes up the largest portion of the Legislative Assembly's time and includes, for example, debate on bills.

The length of time devoted to debate on each item depends on its urgency, the amount of time available and how many members speak. Often, these matters are negotiated between the parties.

When the debate on an item is finished, members vote. This may be without a count (known as 'on the voices') or, if a member disputes the result, by a division. If a member calls a division, the Clerk rings the bells to summon members to the Chamber.

Traditionally, members moved to opposite sides of the Chamber to vote for or against a question. However, divisions are normally by party vote under current procedures. The independent members each vote, and then the whip of each party casts votes on behalf of all their party members present. The Clerk tallies the votes, and the Chair announces the result. The members voting for and against are recorded in the Votes and Proceedings (minutes). Find out more: *Fact Sheet D1: Divisions*.

Adjournment debate

At 10.00 pm, unless a minister moves a motion to continue the sitting, the Chair interrupts debate, and the Legislative Assembly starts the adjournment debate. The bells ring twice to indicate the start of the debate.

The adjournment debate gives members a chance to raise specific issues with the relevant ministers. Members have three minutes each to raise issues. The total time allocated is 30 minutes, or until 10 members have spoken, whichever is shorter. Ministers then have a chance to respond to any of those issues within 30 minutes.

At the end of the adjournment debate, the Serjeant-at-Arms escorts the Speaker out of the Chamber and the bells ring four times to signal the Assembly is adjourning.

Find out more: *Fact Sheet B5: Adjournment Debate*.

Issued by the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly, October 2010

Fact Sheets

The Legislative Assembly Procedure Office has produced a series of Fact Sheets that explain parliamentary procedure and terminology. All Fact Sheets are available on Parliament's website www.parliament.vic.gov.au or through the Procedure Office.

Contact Details

Procedure Office, Legislative Assembly, Parliament House, Spring Street, East Melbourne, Vic 3002

Phone No: 03 9651 8563 Fax No: 03 9650 7245 Email: assembly@parliament.vic.gov.au