

# Activity booklet

## Three levels of government flashcards



# Purpose

The Three levels of government flashcards can be used in different ways to explore the concept of three levels of government: federal, state and local.

The cards consist of **30 different examples** of services and issues that are the responsibilities of the different levels of government.

There are also some services and issues that are the responsibility of **more than one** level of government, providing opportunities to consider some of the complexities of governance.

A **key has been provided**, listing the different issues and services alongside the level of government that has the most responsibility for law-making in response to that particular area.

# About the levels of government: **Federal**

The federal parliament (also known as the Commonwealth or Australian Parliament) has power over services and matters that **affect the whole country**.

Section 51 of the Australian Constitution gives the Australian Parliament exclusive powers. Only the federal parliament can make laws about **exclusive matters**.

There are some powers which are concurrent (shared), meaning that both federal and state parliament can make laws about these matters, for example taxation.



# About the levels of government: **State**

The state parliament has the power to make laws on **all matters that are not exclusively the responsibility of the federal parliament.**

Sometimes the state or territory can choose to hand over (refer) a power to the Commonwealth. Or sometimes the Commonwealth may give the states money for particular services.



# About the levels of government: Local

The local government, called city and shire councils, are usually responsible for garbage collections, local parks and gardens, libraries, swimming pools and sporting facilities.

What the local government is and isn't responsible for is decided by state parliament. **State parliament can decide to give local governments more or less power**, or may even in some circumstances take a local government's role for a period of time.

This is because local government has no constitutional independence.

Local councils make local laws, but these laws cannot duplicate or contradict a federal or state law.



# Answer Key

1 *Trains: State*

2 *Marriage: Federal*

3 *School crossing: Local*

4 *Police: State*

5 *Foreign affairs: Federal*

6 *Culture festivals: Local*

7 *Import/export: Federal*

8 *Melbourne Museum: State*

9 *Schools: State*

10 *Building permits: Local*

11 *University: Federal*

12 *Recycling: Local*

13 *Roads: State*

14 *Internet: Federal*

15 *Parking: Local*

16 *Pet registration: Local*

17 *Driver's license: State*

18 *Airport: Federal*

19 *Buses: State*

20 *Hospitals: State*

21 *Tax: Federal*

22 *Water: State*

23 *Libraries: Local*

24 *Parks and gardens: Local*

25 *Waste: State*

26 *Armed forces: Federal*

27 *Public holidays: State*

28 *Kindergartens: State*

29 *Immigration: Federal*

30 *Swimming pools: Local*

# Activity 1: Mapping the levels

The Mapping the levels activity has students consider what are the everyday services they come in contact with and which level of government might be most responsible for that service. This activity can be done individually, as a small group or as a class.

Students can make a list of services by:

- Using the flashcards to work out which ones they use and where, and/or how frequently
- Walking around the school making a list of services or facilities they think might be the responsibility of someone outside the school
- Walking around the neighbourhood (If the class has permission to do so) and making a list of services or facilities they think might be the responsibility of someone outside the school
- Making a list of services or facilities the students come into contact with over a couple of days or a week



Once the students have developed their lists, they can classify them into the different levels of government and compare the services identified and levels of government with other students in the class. You might like students to add the following categories:

- Private company
- Concurrent (shared responsibility between two or three levels)
- Unsure

**Extension:** For an additional challenge, students could either make or use maps of the area to document the different levels and the services and could also, for example, create overlay maps.



## Activity 2: Who am I?

In this classic version of ‘Who am I?’ students take one of the flashcards at random. This activity can be done in pairs, small groups or as a class.

The student selects a card and can either:

- Show the class/group the card, but not look at the card themselves. The student asks the class/group questions and tries to guess the level of government and/or service, or
- Can look at the card and not show the class/group. The student answers questions from class/group as they try to guess the level of government and/or service.

The questions should be closed (yes or no answers) to determine which service is listed. Some questions to get students started might include:

- “Am I managed by state government?”
- “Am I managed by more than one level of government?”
- “Would I go to the council for this service?”

## Activity 3: To Privatisise or Not?

Some services don't always remain the responsibility of government and are privatised, for example, sections of the telecommunication, banking, energy, and air travel sectors have been transferred to private ownership.

There also those services that might include a mix of government-managed and private-owned facilities, such as in aged care. Students could use the flashcards to consider which services, if any, they would privatise and possible reasons for or against doing so.

**Extension:** There are plenty of newspaper articles examining the different perspectives on the privatisation of the State Electricity Commission and the proposed reinstatement of this service during the 2022 election campaign.

The discussion of privatisation can also form the basis of a research project looking at historic examples of privatisation and economic reasons for privatisation. Students could then complete a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats analysis with their findings.

# Activity 4: Plus, Minus, Interesting (PMI)

The Plus, Minus, Interesting (PMI) activity uses the established thinking routine to respond to the question:

**What if we added or removed a level of government?**

To complete the activity:

- Students first complete a PMI for each of the three levels of government
- You could split the class up into three groups, each working on a different level, or you could have students working in groups of three each on a different level. In both cases students would share their thoughts at the end
- Based on their PMI analysis, students decide how many levels of government they think would be best. For example, they may prefer to remove one or two levels of government or add one or multiple levels, providing arguments for their decisions.

- Students redistribute the services and areas of responsibility according to which levels they think might be the most appropriate to manage that service or responsibility
- Students may also choose to add, remove or distribute services or areas of responsibilities

In this exercise, students consider all the flashcards, however, you may wish to allocate groups different services and then ask students to compare the benefits and limitations of each level of government having responsibility for that service.

## Activity 5: Service Scramble

Imagine a world where the federal government was responsible for kerbside bin collection, or the local council was in charge of immigration, and state government had the sole responsibility for roads.

In this hypothetical situation, students place the flashcards under one or more of the three levels of government.

An exercise in justification, the students should provide their reasons for where they have placed each card.

Students can explore what the world might look like under the hypothetical scenario; what might be easier and what might become more complicated.

## Activity 6: Snap

Like the traditional game, these quick-fire rounds of snap will keep students on their toes:

- Students sit in small groups and deal out all the cards
- Students then take turns to place the flashcards in a pile one at a time
- When two cards in a row show services from the same level of government, for example taxes and hospitals, the first student to “snap” their hand on the pile gets to collect all the cards
- The students continue to play rounds until one student holds all the cards

You may wish to nominate some students as arbitrators if students disagree about the level of government, or add a fourth category to the game, multiple levels of government or concurrent (shared) responsibilities.

Alternatively, negotiating with students a list of which level of government is most responsible for each service would also resolve any disagreements.

# Activity 7: Corners

This activity has students moving around the room.

- Designate a corner or area of the room to each level of government; federal, state, local and concurrent (shared) / unsure
- Hold up a card and ask the students to move to the corner with the level of government they think is responsible for the service on the card
- Ask students in each corner why they picked that particular level of government. Students might like to include examples in their explanations using a thinking routine such as ‘What makes you say that?’
- You may like to limit how often students stand in the ‘unsure’ space

**Extension:** For an extra degree of difficulty, you may wish to include the option for concurrent powers or between two options (or in the middle for all three) if they think a service might be the responsibility of more than one level of government.



If you wish to run the activity as a competition, those students who chose incorrectly (or in the case of the complex examples, the least correct response) can be eliminated.

- The rounds continue until a small group, or a single student, remain
- While the remaining students continue on with more examples, you might like the eliminated students to use thinking routines such as ‘Headlines’ or ‘Take note’ to help with their observations.

## Activity 8: Two levels of government

Some jurisdictions don't have three levels of government. For example, New Zealand and England have two levels of government. The ACT is also a useful case study as the ACT government does both the roles of the state and local government.

This activity asks students to reflect on the purpose and benefits for each of the levels of government. You may like students to work individually, in pairs, in small groups or as a whole class.

- Students categorise the cards into the different levels of government they think are responsible for the service
- One level of government is then removed. This could be done randomly, students could choose which level they think is unnecessary, or different groups or individuals can have different levels removed

- Students must then reassign the services and responsibilities to the two remaining levels of government, and provide reasons for their decisions
- Students can explain their decisions to the class as a way of further discussing how and why the three levels of government have different responsibilities and manage different services

# Useful resources

The thinking routines 'I used to think...now I think' or '3-2-1 Bridge' can be used after the activities for students to reflect on and consolidate their understanding.

## Thinking routines and useful links

There are several Harvard Project Zero Thinking routines (<https://pz.harvard.edu/thinking-routines>) that can be used with the Three levels of government flashcards. Below are just a few:

- 3-2-1 Bridge
- Headlines
- I used to think...now I think
- Take note
- What Makes you say that

**Additional resources** along with additional copies of the Three Levels of Government flashcards can be found at [vicparl.news/3L-Flashcards](http://vicparl.news/3L-Flashcards) or by using the QR code.

