

Question Time

Question time is generally the most lively and politically opportunistic period of each parliamentary sitting day. This is when the Chamber becomes a forum for the opposition in particular, to extract information, to question and to scrutinise the policies and actions of the government. This segment of each sitting day highlights one of the fundamental principles of responsible government, that is, accountability of the Executive Government to the parliament and to the electorate.

Question Time takes place during the time allocated in the parliament's Sessional Orders.

Points of Interest About Question Time

Questions must conform to certain rules in the parliament's *Standing Rules and Orders*. The Speaker has the final authority on admissibility of questions and may edit or disallow a question considered frivolous or offensive

- Questions must relate to matters for which Ministers are officially responsible
- Subject matter which is considered "sub judice" is not permissible
- A response to a question should not include a debate on the subject but instead relevant information
- Question time is not only a time for opposition questioning of the government, government members also ask questions of their Ministers.

Step 1:
The Leader of the Opposition has an opportunity to ask two questions. The Leader of the Opposition may ask questions of either to the Premier or a minister.

Step 2:
The Premier or the minister answers each of the Leader of the Opposition's questions.

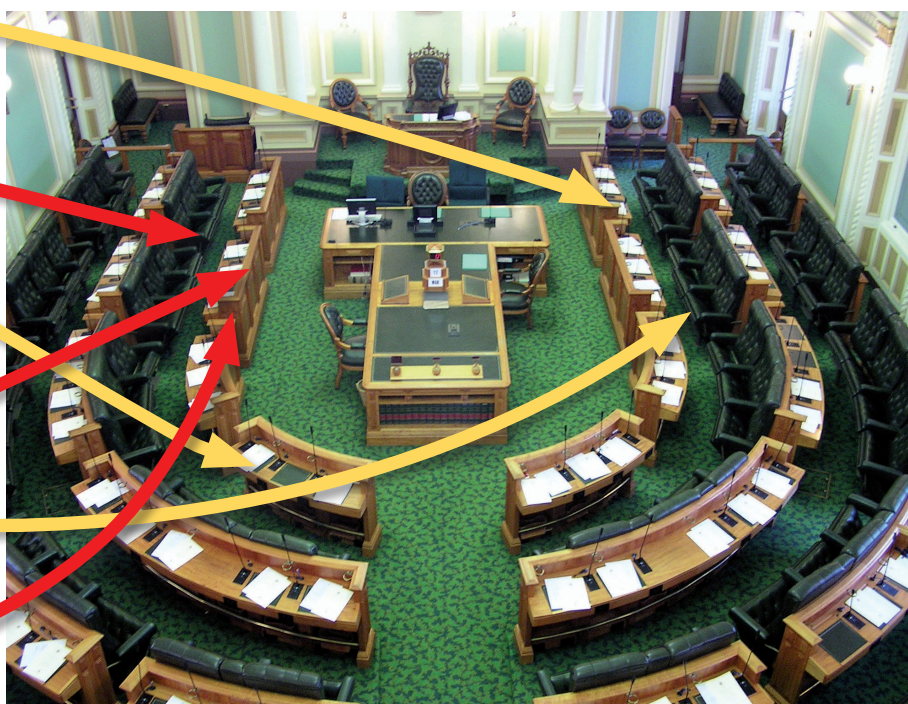
Step 3:
A government member asks a question of the Premier or a minister

Step 4:
The Premier or a minister answers the question.

Step 5:
A non-government member asks a question of the Premier or a minister

Step 6:
The Premier or a minister answers the question.

Step 7:
Return to Step 3



The Legislative Assembly with the order of events during Question Time

Types of Questions

Questions on Notice

Questions on Notice are usually asked when a detailed answer is required. These questions are submitted to the Clerk of the Parliament where they are then published on the parliament's web site and also in the notice paper which is prepared for each sitting day. Departmental staff known as Cabinet Liaison Officers are then responsible for checking these published questions and providing them to the relevant Minister who is required to provide a written answer to the parliament within 30 calendar days.

Questions without Notice

Ministers are asked questions without notice by members of parliament during question time. The first two questions without notice are asked by the Leader of the Opposition. The remaining questions are then asked alternatively by government and non-government members.

If Ministers are unable to produce the required information, then the question may be placed on notice and a written response supplied at a later date. Questions from government members are often referred to as "Dorothy Dix" questions. This term refers to the famous American advice columnist and journalist Dorothy Dix, who was known to write questions to herself for answering.

Standing Rules And Orders

Several *Standing Rules and Orders* apply in relation to questions, in particular Standing Orders 110-115 and 118. Standing Order number 118 states:

118 General rules for answers

The following general rules shall apply to answers:

- (a) in answering a question, a Minister or member shall not debate the subject to which it refers; and
- (b) an answer shall be relevant to the question.