



07 HOW TO Find Bills

Bills are published in two series: House of Commons (HC) and House of Lords (HL).

Prior to the 1986/87 parliamentary session, Lords bills were not published as a separate sequence, but were included in the House of Lords Papers series.

The passage of a bill through Parliament

A bill may start in either house, regardless of whether it is a Lords or Commons bill. The stages through which a bill passes, with a few minor exceptions, are largely the same whether introduced in the HL or the HC. A bill usually fails if it doesn't pass through all of the stages before the end of a parliamentary session; however they can be re-introduced into the next session where the process starts all over again.

1. **First Reading** : the bills formal introduction into the House. It is not published at this stage.
2. **Second Reading** : the second reading takes place after the first printing of the bill. The general principles of the bill are debated on the floor of the House, but there are no amendments at this stage.
3. **Committee Stage** : the printed bill is debated clause by clause. This is usually in a Public Bill Committee, but can be a Select Committee or a committee of the whole House.
4. **Report Stage** : the bill is printed again to include all the amendments made at committee stage. This is an opportunity for MPs not on the committees to move for amendments. The House can also amend changes made at committee stage.
5. **Third Reading** – in the Commons this is merely a formal stage with no further amendments allowed, and little or no debate. In the Lords further amendments can be made at this stage.
6. The bill is then passed to the other House, and stages 1-5 are repeated.
7. **Royal Assent** – when both Houses agree to the text of a bill it is submitted to the Crown. This is a formal procedure where permission is given for the bill to become law, and it becomes an Act.

Tracking current bills is best done by using the parliament website <http://services.parliament.uk/bills/> .This website also contains an archive going back to the 2001/2002 session.

Identifying bills

A new bill numbering sequence starts at the beginning of each parliamentary session. When a bill is reprinted it is issued with a new number. This is to be found on the bottom left-hand corner of the front page. For Commons bills the format is **Bill 34**, for Lords bills the format is **HL Bill 34**. However, HL appearing after the title of a bill means that it started its passage in the House of Lords, not that it is a Lords print of a bill.

The first printing of government bills is usually accompanied by a separately printed explanatory memorandum. There are some exceptions to this, such as Appropriation and Consolidation Bills.



Finding the number of a bill

The Law Society Library keeps copies of bills on microfiche and on Public Information Online (PIO) (subscription database). To find bills on microfiche you will need to know the bill number. For pre-1979/80 bills you'll need the volume and page numbers of the microfiche.

- 1801 → The Law Society Library has the *Index to House of Commons Parliamentary Papers* on CD-ROM from 1801 to present. This can be used to identify bill numbers and the volume and page numbers of the microfiche if needed.
- 1801 → The microfiche parliamentary papers have an index at the end of each session.
- 1910 → 1969 Printed indexes *to Bills, Estimates, Reports* etc. are kept behind the Library enquiry desk at Bay N7. These give microfiche volume and page numbers.
- 1910 → HMSO/TSO catalogues are kept at Bay F1. These which contain lists of HC and HL Bills with their bill numbers.
- 1983/84 → *House of Commons Sessional Information Digest* at Bay E7. These contain list of bills for that particular session which includes the bill numbers and details of the stages the bills reached in both Houses.

Locating Bills

Commons bills from 1801 to 2016 and Lords bills from 1984/85 to 2016 can be found in the Law Society Library microfiche collection. Lords bills for 1984/85 and 1985/86 are part of the House of Lords paper series, thereafter they are a separate series. We also hold them on PIO (subscription database) for HL from 1956 and HC from 2006.

Microfiches are held in filing cabinets at the following locations within the Library:

1801→1881 (to vol. LI)	Cabinet B	Next to Bay 42
1881 (from vol. LII)→1914	Cabinet D	Next to Bay 41
1914→1985/86	Cabinet C	Between Bays 54 and 55
1985/86→2004/05	Cabinet G	Between Bays 58 and 59
2004/05 →	Cabinet I	Between Bays 60 and 61

Internet

The most recent printed versions of bills from the 2001/2002 parliamentary session onwards are mostly available on the Parliament website at <http://services.parliament.uk/bills/>