

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### Impartiality of the Speaker

The Speaker strives to act impartially at all times. Both sides of the House rely on the Speaker being above party politics. To assist with their perceived independence, the Speaker does not normally participate in parliamentary debates, nor do they vote in Divisions before the House. Instead they have a casting vote, which is used to decide an issue that has been deadlocked on a tied vote. In return for their service to the House, the Speaker is entitled to the respect and support of all Members.

### The Turbulent History of the Speakership

Today in the House of Assembly, the Office of the Speaker is held in high regard; however, this was not the case in the early days of the Speakership in the United Kingdom. The role, dating from as far back as 1377, saw the Speaker acting as a 'mouthpiece', reporting the House's resolutions to the Monarch. On many occasions, this brought the Speaker dangerously close to the centuries-long battle for supremacy between the Parliament and the Monarch. The Speaker was often personally blamed if they delivered news from the Parliament that the Monarch did not like. This resulted in seven Speakers being beheaded between 1394 and 1535, with others imprisoned, accused of treason or expelled from office. Members became reluctant to accept a role that may result in an early death. Some Speakers required 'gentle persuasion' to accept the post and were physically dragged to the Chair by other Members.

This tradition remains in the House of Assembly today. A newly elected Speaker is dragged (using mock force) to the Chair by two other Members of Parliament. This ceremony reminds the contemporary Members of the Parliament of the great personal risks that former Speakers have taken to allow democracy to flourish.



HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY  
Education Office

# The Speaker of the House of Assembly

**The Speaker is the most important Member of the House of Assembly. The Speaker has four main roles:**

1. Key spokesperson for the House of Assembly
2. Presiding over the sittings of the House of Assembly
3. Administration of the Parliament of Tasmania
4. Representing their electorate.

**As the Speaker represents the House of Assembly, which represents the people of Tasmania, the officeholder is treated with dignity and honour.**



### Electing the Speaker

At the first meeting of a newly elected House of Assembly, a Speaker must be elected from amongst the House's Members, before the House can proceed with any other business. Candidates are nominated, and if multiple nominations are received, a vote by secret ballot follows. The Speaker usually, but not always, comes from the party with the majority support in the House.

A Deputy Speaker is also elected at the beginning of a new Parliament to assist the Speaker with their work. This assistance includes the role of Chair of Committees, a significant role when the House moves to the Committee stage when debating legislation. In the absence of the Speaker, the Deputy Speaker performs their duties.

## The Role and Duties of the Speaker

Sometimes described as the ‘servant of the House’, the role of the Speaker falls into four main categories:

### 1. Key spokesperson for the House of Assembly

The title ‘Speaker’ is derived from their authority to speak on behalf of the House to the Governor of Tasmania, the Legislative Council or persons outside the Parliament.

The Speaker receives delegations from other Parliaments and special visitors on behalf of the House of Assembly. The Speaker also represents the House of Assembly at any official or ceremonial event.

### 2. Presiding over the sittings of the House of Assembly

A major component of the Speaker’s work is to preside over the House of Assembly sittings. While the Speaker is considerate of each Member of the House, their overall loyalty is to the House as a whole, protecting its integrity. When in the Chair, the Speaker ensures that parliamentary procedures are correctly followed, as prescribed in the Tasmanian *Constitution Act 1934* and the House of Assembly’s written rules, the Standing Orders.



The Speaker must maintain order and decorum during debates. The House of Assembly debates are, for the large part, conducted respectfully. However, there are times when debate becomes heated and rowdy. The Standing Orders provide disciplinary powers to enable the Speaker to maintain order during unsettled periods. During debates, the Speaker

makes rulings on any ‘Point of Order’ (objections from Members), with the Speaker’s ruling reflecting the principles of the Standing Orders.

One of the Speaker’s responsibilities is to select the Members wishing to speak, known as giving ‘the call’. The Speaker aims to allocate the call as prescribed in the Standing Orders, promoting democratic debate. While the Government mainly sets the business of the House, the Speaker has scrupulous regard for the rights of the minority to be heard also, thus representing the views of all Tasmanians. It is a crucial part of the

Speaker’s role to ensure that all Members, regardless of their position or time within the House of Assembly, are treated fairly and with respect.

On occasions, the Speaker reminds Members of expectations on their behaviour and language in the Chamber.

To ensure parliamentary proceedings are open and transparent, the House of Assembly’s Public Gallery is always open to visitors. The Speaker’s authority also covers the Public Gallery, with the Speaker monitoring visitors’ behaviour to ensure the Chamber is not interrupted.

### 3. Administration of the Parliament of Tasmania

The Speaker has ultimate responsibility for the House of Assembly’s overall workings and with the President of the Legislative Council, the workings of the Parliament of Tasmania. The Clerk of the House is responsible for the financial operations and day-to-day management of the House of Assembly.

To oversee the House of Assembly’s work, the Speaker is a member of some Parliament of Tasmania Committees. In particular, those Committees whose purpose is concerned with the powers and procedures of the House or the administration of Parliament.



As the ‘servant of the House’, the Speaker ensures that support services for Members of Parliament are operating efficiently, thereby allowing the Members to fulfil their important constitutional and parliamentary responsibilities.

### 4. Representing their electorate

Like all Members of Parliament, the Speaker has an electorate office within their electoral division for their work with constituents. As a representative of the electorate,

constituents or community groups can visit the electorate office to raise personal or local concerns. Like all Members, the Speaker responds to constituents’ letters, phone calls and emails. As a local Member, the Speaker will often be involved in community events in their electorate.