



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

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

# Question Time

## in the House of Assembly


**Question Time fulfils one of the most important functions of the Parliament of Tasmania, critical review and scrutiny of the Executive Government. It is a fundamental concept of 'Responsible Government' that the Executive Government be accountable to the Parliament, which in turn, is accountable to the people.**

The Executive Government is subject to scrutiny during Question Time when questions without notice are put to the Ministers. The majority of questions are shared between non-government Members, in proportion to their elected numbers in the House. Questions are addressed to the Minister responsible for the portfolio, with the Premier of Tasmania able to be asked about any portfolio. By convention, the Leader of the Opposition asks the first two questions. Indeed, it is one of the few opportunities in the House, for the Opposition to set the agenda, while the Government reacts to, instead of, leading the agenda.

The purpose of each question is to obtain information or to press for action. While the questions are 'without notice', Ministers try to anticipate the topics and prepare answers in advance. This preparation is vital, for if a Minister misleads the Parliament they could be held in contempt or be removed from the position. Ministers may take questions on notice, and later report back to the House.

Often in Question Time, intense partisan politics is displayed. Opposition questions may stress issues that will embarrass the Government, while Government questions (nicknamed 'Dorothy Dixers') give Ministers an opportunity to favourably explain Government policies and actions. Given the adversarial nature of Question Time, the Chamber can become rowdy. It is the role of the Speaker to ensure Members follow the Standing Orders (written rules) and engage in respectful debate.

Question Time is widely reported by the media, and sometimes is the only business of the Parliament the public hear about, despite Question Time being a short part of the sitting day.



**Task:** Observe Question Time closely and answer the following questions.

### Procedures of Parliament: Question Time and the Standing Orders

The Standing Orders are a set of written rules by which the House must abide. They have evolved over years and can only be altered by a vote of the House itself. It is said, the “House is the master of its own destiny”. How does this self-regulation increase or decrease the potential for transparent debate and scrutiny?

During Question Time the Speaker must remain politically neutral. They oversee procedures rather than participate in questioning. Does this reflect a democratic process? Explain your reasoning.

### Responsible Government: Question Time and the Executive Government

Government backbenchers are allocated a small quota of questions during Question Time. What were some of the issues they raised?

Do you feel the Executive Government clearly explained their actions to the House (and thereby the people of Tasmania)?

If there was no opportunity for Opposition Members to question Government Ministers, what could be the consequences for ‘Responsible Government’?

## Scrutiny: Question Time and His Majesty's Loyal Opposition

The majority of questions are asked by non-Government Members, particularly the Opposition. What were some of the issues they raised?

Which Members were the most vocal during Question Time and why do you think this is?

Do you think the Members who asked questions were satisfied with the answers given? Give reasons why.

## Your Voice: Engage in Parliament

Did the Members asking or answering questions represent your views?  
If yes – how? If not – how could you let them know your opinion?

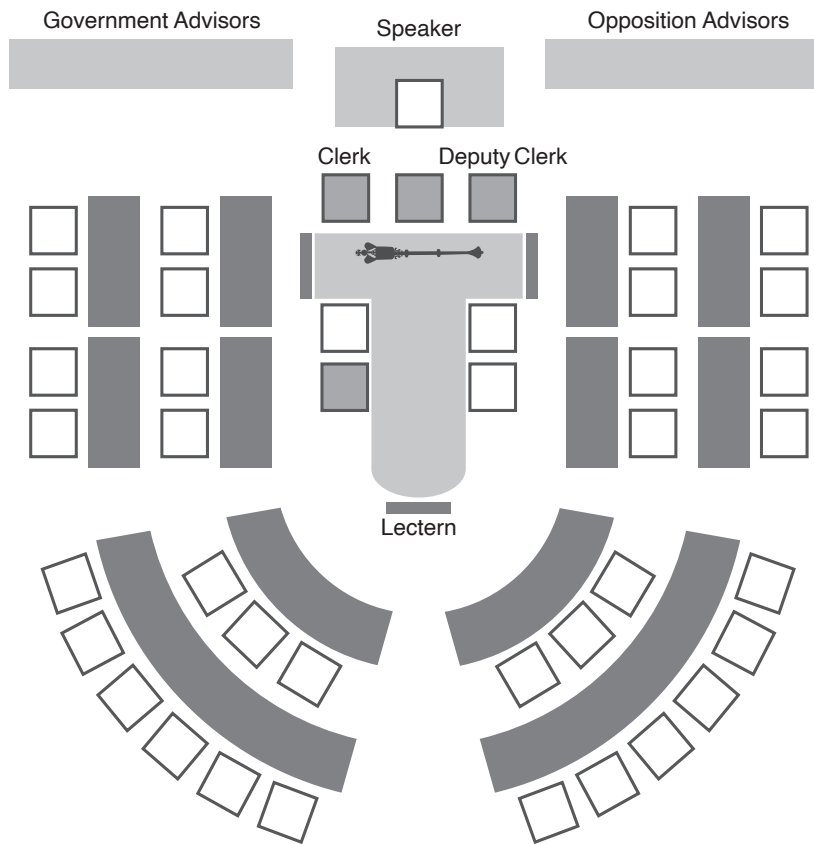
What question would you ask a Minister in order to examine the work they do and hold them responsible?

## Accountable to the People: Question Time and the Media

What role do you think the media play during Question Time and is it important?

**Dig deeper:** Compare what you witnessed in Question Time with the media coverage when you return to school. How does the media depict Question Time and is it accurate? How would you create a news report about what you saw?

**Task:** Mark the locations of your Members of Parliament in the Chamber.



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Party: \_\_\_\_\_

Position/job title: \_\_\_\_\_

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