

There are five (5) Stages of a Bill:

- First Stage (initiation by way of introduction or presentation)
- Second Stage (during which the general principles of the Bill are debated)
- Third (Committee) Stage (during which the Bill is examined in detail section by section and amendments may be proposed)
- Fourth (Report) Stage (during which amendments arising out of Committee Stage are considered)
- Fifth (Final) Stage (the House discusses whether the Bill constitutes good law).
- The Bill is then sent to the Seanad (if initiated in the Dáil and vice versa if in the Seanad)

What is the First Stage of a Bill?

First Stage of a Bill involves the initiation of a Bill in the Dáil or Seanad by way of introduction or presentation.

What is Second Stage of a Bill?

This is a debate where the general principles of the Bill are considered. This involves the relevant Minister (or Member if it is a PMB) making a speech outlining the key aspects of the legislation and the merits and objectives of the Bill. Members from both the Government and opposition have opportunities to contribute. It is at this point that opposition spokespersons would outline their views on the legislation. When the 2nd stage is finalised an order is made for the Bill to be considered in committee (third) stage.

What is Third Stage of a Bill?

Third Stage (also called 'Committee Stage') of a Bill is the first stage at which members can propose amendments to the text of a Bill as it progresses through the House of which they are a member.

Any Senator can submit amendments at Seanad Committee (Third) Stage.

If a Bill passes Second Stage in the Dáil it will be referred to Committee for consideration, normally a specific Select Committee meeting in a Committee Room or occasionally 'Committee of the whole Dáil' which takes place in the Dáil Chamber.

What is the difference between third stage and Committee?

There is no difference between Third Stage and Committee Stage, in fact, although 'Third Stage' is the heading used in both Dáil and Seanad Standing Orders to cover

the group of standing orders for this stage, 'Committee Stage' is the more commonly used term.

At **Committee** (Third) Stage the Bill is considered section by section followed by the schedules and the long title of Bill. Proposed amendments to each section must be disposed of before the section of the Bill can be decided on. The Chair will call on the proposer to move his/her amendment. A decision is required on each amendment which is in order. Amendments may be grouped together to avoid repetition of the debate. Some of these amendments may relate to a later part of the Bill. The debate on such a group is commenced when the first amendment in the group is reached. At the end of this debate the amendments relating to the section of the Bill being debated are decided on, others within in this group will be decided on when the relevant part of the Bill is reached without further debate.

At **Report** (Fourth) Stage the Bill is considered as a whole. Decisions are made only in respect of amendments proposed and not in respect of the individual provisions of the Bill. As in Committee stage the chair will call upon the proposer to move his/her amendment. Amendments may also be grouped at this stage as in Committee Stage. Members whose amendments are grouped (other than the proposer of the first amendment in the Group) have a limited right of reply on their own amendment.

In the Dáil these Members second contribution to the debate on their amendment is limited to two minutes. The proposer can then open the debate and will be given the opportunity to lose the debate.

In the Seanad, only the proposer has the right to a second contribution.

What is Fourth (Report) Stage of a Bill?

At Fourth (Report) Stage, amendments arising out of Committee Stage are considered. Consideration takes place and decisions are made only in respect of tabled amendments, not on individual provisions of the Bill. Again at Report stage, Standing Orders require that amendments to a Bill must be relevant to the provisions of the Bill and must not conflict with the principle of the Bill as read a second time. The Chair rules on the relevancy of the amendments by reference to the scope and purpose of the Bill.

Report stage amendments must arise from:

1. a point of substance raised in the Committee Stage debate and which, as an amendment, complies with the rules on the admissibility of Report Stage amendments; or
2. a Committee Stage amendment which was discussed in Committee (however, Standing Orders provide that amendments previously rejected in *Committee of the whole Dáil or the whole Seanad* are not in order on Report); or
3. a Committee Stage amendment which was in order for that stage, but which was not reached on account of an allocation of time ('guillotine') motion.

In addition, Standing Orders provide that a new amendment which creates a charge on the public revenue or upon the people may not be proposed, but that the Bill may be recommitted (i.e. considered again in Committee) in respect of such an amendment.

Again, as at Committee Stage, the Chair may decide the grouping of amendments for the purposes of debate. Standing Orders provide that if no amendments have been offered on Report the House sets a day to take Fifth Stage.

What is Fifth Stage of a Bill and can a Member put in amendments to Fifth Stage?

Fifth Stage is the final stage in the passage of the Bill. Only verbal amendments may be made at Fifth Stage. The proposer of the motion, "That the Bill do now pass", may speak to open and close the debate, which is confined to what the Bill actually contains. Members may speak once only on the motion. Standing Orders provide that only verbal amendments may be made to a Bill at this stage.

What happens after the Bill passes in both Houses of the Oireachtas?

On completion of Fifth Stage by the House in which the Bill is initiated, it is sent to the other House, where it appears on the Order Paper for Second Stage consideration. It then goes through second, third (Committee), fourth (Report) and fifth (Final) stages in that House.

If it is passed by the second House without amendment it is sent to the President for signature. However, if it is amended in the second House, it must return to the House in which it was initiated for those amendments to be considered.