Role Play: Debating a Bill

Setup:

Roles

The Speaker:
- An elected Member of Parliament. One of the first things a new Parliament does is to elect a Speaker
- Like a referee. The Speaker must know the more than 400 Standing Orders (rules of the House) and must make sure that Members obey them
- The most important rule is that when members make speeches nobody is to interrupt. If there are interruptions the Speaker says “order” or “the house will come to order” and there must be quiet. When the Speaker catches someone out of order they can be put on a call. The Speaker will say “The Member for ….. is on one call.” If that person is put on call 3 times by the Speaker, the Speaker stands and puts them on call once more, they will be ordered to leave the chamber.
- If anyone wants to make a speech they stand up and say “Mr/Madam Speaker”. The Speaker will call on them, they move to the table to make the speech. In the course of their speech, they only address the Speaker, not any other Members

Clerks of the Assembly
- There are two Clerks, along with Deputy Clerks and Clerk Assistants. The Clerks work for Parliament and are not elected. They are legal experts and know all of the Standing Orders and help the Speaker maintain the rules. They can’t speak, vote or take sides in debates.
  - In the chamber they usually wear robes. As well as being experts on procedure, advising the Speaker and Members and keeping records, the Clerk will read the name of a bill, ring division bells and lower and raise the bars of the house when it is time to vote

Serjeant-At-Arms
- Not an elected member, the Serjeant is the Speaker’s officer and is responsible for order and security in the Chamber, acting sometimes like a bouncer or police officer. If the Speaker orders someone out for misbehaving the Serjeant-At-Arms will escort them out
- The Serjeant has ceremonial roles which may include such things as leading Members of Parliament in processions.
- The Serjeant carries in the Mace and places it on the Table, head facing the Government side.
Premier
- The Leader of the Government, the Premier will choose which Bill will be debated and speak for the Bill
- The Government is in favour of the Bill, and Government Members who will speak need to think of reasons for this Bill.

Opposition Leader
- The Opposition is against the Bill
- In the second reading they will ask that the debate be adjourned. This means that they want to put the debate off until later so they can prepare their case to speak against the Bill. Members of the Opposition need to think of reasons against the Bill.

Minister of Education
- Sits at the table and is responsible for bringing in the Bill.
- The Minister will introduce the Bill and speak in favour of it. The Minister can talk as long as they like when bringing in a bill, as the Minister’s second reading speech will be the main statement of why the Government feels the bill is needed.
- In an actual debate, other Members will get 20 minutes to speak with a possible 10 minute extension

Shadow Minister for Education
- The Opposition spokesperson on this area, they will speak against the Bill.

Government and Opposition Whips
- If a division is called, the two Whips from each side count the numbers sitting (voting) on both the Government and on the Opposition side and reports these to the Speaker
- A division is a vote in which the Members in favour move to sit on the Government benches, while those against sit on the Opposition benches.
- Votes are usually taken “on the voices”, Members simply saying “Aye” or “No”. However, if a Member calls for a division, bells are rung for five minutes throughout the Parliament to summon Members. When they stop no other Members are allowed into the Chamber and the count is taken. In the role play the bells will not need to be rung that long.

Members of Parliament
- In the role play, everybody else is a Member of Parliament. Members can be Government, Opposition or Independent Members.
- If there is time they can also speak for or against the Bill
- Members usually show support for speeches that they agree with by saying “Hear Hear”
- Members often show their opposition to speeches by saying such things as “No”, or “Rubbish”.
ROLE PLAY: PASSING A BILL

1. The beginning of the Parliamentary Day

Members standing in front of Seats, Serjeant-At-Arms, Clerks and Speaker stand outside. Serjeant-at-Arms carries Mace leads Speaker into chamber:

Serjeant-at-Arms: Honourable Members – the Speaker.

Serjeant-at-Arms places Mace on table, head facing the Government side, and takes seat.

Speaker takes her/his seat – nods to members on the right side, nods to members on the left. The Speaker then reads the prayer and acknowledges country.

The Speaker: Almighty God, We humbly beseech thee to vouchsafe by blessing upon this Parliament, direct and prosper our deliberations to the advancement of thy glory and the true welfare of the people of our state and Australia, Amen.

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners, the Gadigal People of the Eora Nation. We also acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the lands we represent and thank them for their custodianship of country.

The Speaker then sits. All Members sit.

Premier stands.

The Speaker: I call on the Honourable the Premier.

The Premier: Mr/Madam Speaker. I move that a bill be introduced for an Act - the Homework Abolition Bill.

Speaker: The Question is that leave be given to bring in the Bill."
All of that opinion say 'Aye' – to the contrary 'No'. I think the 'Ayes' have it, the 'Ayes' have it.

Premier: Mr/Madam Speaker - I bring up the Bill.

Premier hands copy of Bill to Clerk.

Clerk: Reads the Short Title of the Bill.

Premier: Mr/Madam Speaker: I move that this Bill now be agreed to in principle.

Premier makes speech

Speaker: The Honourable the Leader of the Opposition

Leader of the Opposition makes speech.
Speaker: The Question is that this Bill now be agreed to in principle. The Honourable the Minister for Education.

Minister makes speech.

Speaker: The Question is that this Bill now be agreed to in principle. The Honourable the Shadow Minister for Education.

Shadow Minister makes speech.

Other Members now jump for the call, the Speaker calls on one from Government side

Speaker: The Question is that this Bill now be agreed to in principle. The Honourable the Member

Government member makes speech

Members jump for the call again and the Speaker now calls on one from Opposition side

Speaker: The Question is that this Bill now be agreed to in principle. The Honourable the Member

Opposition member makes speech.

Members jump for the call again and the Speaker now calls on one from each side until all members that want to say something have spoken.

Speaker: The time for debate has expired. The Honourable the Premier in reply.

Premier speaks again, summarising the Government case and speaking against Opposition arguments.

Speaker: The Question is that this Bill now be agreed to in principle. All of that opinion say 'Aye', to the contrary 'No'. I think the 'Ayes' / ‘Noes’ have it.

(If time permits a division may be called for – in which case the following occurs):

A Member: Mr / Madam Speaker – I think the ‘Noes / Ayes’ have it. (Whichever is the opposite to the way the Speaker just ruled).

Speaker: A Division is called for. Ring the Bells.

Government members move to the right of the Chair, Opposition members to the left, Independents as they choose. When the Bells finish the speaker appoints the Whips to count the numbers on each side and report back to him/her. The Speaker then announces the results:
Speaker: Ayes ___ Noes __
The question is carried / not carried.

Speaker: I call on the Honourable the Premier.

Premier: Mr/Madam Speaker - On behalf of the Premier, I move that this Parliament now adjourns.

Speaker: The Question is that this Parliament now adjourns.
All of that opinion say 'Aye' – to the contrary 'No'.
I think the 'Ayes' have it, the 'Ayes' have it.
This Parliament now stands adjourned until a date to be determined.

2. Introducing a Bill

Notice of Motion put by the Minister. (In the real parliament this will happen after question time and many other procedures such as Ministerial Statements and petitions).

Minister: Mr / Madam Speaker.
Speaker: I call on the Minister for Education.
Minister: Mr/Madam Speaker I move a Bill to ........... (subject of bill).
Minister puts Bill on table

(Give each person in a role a copy of the Bill)

First Reading (the Bill is introduced in the House)
Minister: Mr / Madam Speaker.
Speaker: I call on the Minister for Education.
Minister: Mr / Madam Speaker I put the Bill.
Clerk: Stands and reads name of bill

Second Reading (the House will debate the Bill)
Minister: Mr / Madam Speaker
Speaker: I call on the Minister for Education.
Minister: Mr / Madam Speaker I move that the Bill be read a second time. I believe that we should....... (gives reasons why bill should be introduced)
Leader of Opposition: Mr / Madam Speaker

Speaker: I call on the leader of the Opposition
Leader of Opposition: Mr / Madam Speaker I move that debate be adjourned

(Debate on Bill is usually adjourned at this point for some days. In this role play, continue on)
Second Reading Debate resumes:
Shadow Minister: Mr / Madam Speaker

Speaker: I call upon the Shadow Minister for Education.

Shadow Minister: Mr / Madam Speaker, I wish to oppose this bill. I believe that ..... (gives reasons against introducing this Bill)

Premier: Mr / Madam Speaker.

Speaker: I call on the Premier.

Premier: Mr / Madam Speaker, I believe that ..... (gives reasons for supporting Bill)

Leader of Opposition: Mr / Madam Speaker.

Speaker: I call on the Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of Opposition: Mr / Madam Speaker, the Opposition opposes this bill because we believe ...... (gives reasons against introducing Bill)

The debate continues and the Speaker can call on more Members to speak, alternating between the Government side and the Opposition side. Independent Members may also get the call. Members should “jump” to their feet to attract the Speaker’s attention and indicate that they wish to speak. They cannot call out to attract the Speaker’s attention, however.

The debate is ended by the Speaker when time has run out.

Speaker: The time for debate has expired.

(After the Second Reading, in the real parliament, the House may go into Committee of the Whole. The Speaker leaves the Chair and the Chairperson of Committees takes over. The Bill is examined clause by clause by members now in Committee. Amendments may be proposed and voted on – successful ones become part of the Bill. When this is completed the House resumes and Committee action is reported and voted upon.

Vote and Third Reading Debate:

At the end of the second reading a vote is taken. If passed, the Bill may then be debated again (immediately or at a later time) but less extensively than in the Second Reading stage.
Sometimes there is no debate at the Third reading stage, just another vote. In the role play, the two stages are combined and there is just one vote. Notice that the vote is first taken “on the voices” but, because a Member disputes the result, it is then taken again as a division.

Minister: Mr / Madam Speaker.

Speaker: I call on the Minister for Education.

Minister: Mr / Madam Speaker, I move that the Bill be read a third time.

Clerk: reads name of bill.
Speaker: I put the Bill, those in favour say ‘aye’.

Members in favour: “Aye.”

Speaker: Those against say ‘no’.

Members against: “No.”

Speaker: I think the ayes have it - the ayes have it.

Opposition Member: Mr / Madam Speaker.

Speaker: I call on ____________

Opposition Member: No, the No’s have it. I call for a division.

Speaker: Division called for. Ring the bells.

The bells are usually rung by the Clerks for 5 minutes. Members who are voting YES will move to sit on the Government side; those members voting NO move to sit on the Opposition side.

At the end of the time, the Speaker says:

Speaker: Lock the doors.

Clerk shuts the bars to the House to stop late members entering.

Speaker: I call on the Teller for the Ayes and the Teller for the Nos.

The Whips come to front and together count both sides and then report to the Speaker.

Speaker: The Ayes have __. The Nos have ____________.

I declare the bill carried / lost (depending on result).

The Clerk raises the bars.

THE BILL IS PASSED (OR NOT PASSED) AND THE DEBATE ENDS.
Some Final Notes

In reality, because they have the numbers, the Government always wins the vote in the Legislative Assembly but the Opposition often calls for a division anyway so they have evidence of what the Government Members voted for and they put the pressure on Members, especially with contentious issues, trying to split the government.

What happens next?
The Bill goes through the same process in the Legislative Council. Sometimes it may not be carried in Upper House because the government usually does not have a majority. Bills will sometimes be amended in the Upper House, in which case both Houses exchange messages or managers meet in order to reach agreement. If agreement is not reached the Bill may be set aside or (very rarely) put to a referendum of the people. If it is not amended, or if the Lower House has agreed to the amendments, the bill is then returned to the House of Origin, the Clerk certifies the Bill and it is taken to the Governor who – after being satisfied that all the correct procedures have been carried out - signs the Royal Assent. The Bill becomes an Act of Parliament and will become a law of New South Wales.

What happens if either House does not pass a Bill?
A Bill can be defeated in either house at the Second or Third Readings stage. This means it cannot go any further. Sometimes it may be presented later, perhaps in a different form or in another session of Parliament.

A Bill can originate in any House.
Most Bills can be introduced first to either House. If they are passed there, they then go to the other house. The only type of Bills that can’t originate in the Upper House are Money Bills such as the Budget.