



Checks and Balances

When the Framers separated the legislative, executive, and judicial powers among three different branches, they were still concerned that each branch might abuse its power. The Framers of the Constitution did not think separating the powers would be enough. They were afraid that problems would arise like those described on the Power Problems chart. They decided that they also needed to make sure that the legislative, executive, and judicial powers were given to other branches as a check on power.

Under the system of checks and balances, the branches are given authority to challenge each others use of power. For instance, the president has the power to veto a law passed by Congress. In this way, no branch can carry out its functions/powers without some cooperation from the other branches. Thus, the “checking power” is a way one branch of government can limit the power of the other branches of government. The system of checks and balances makes sure that one branch does not become too powerful and prevents abuse of power that might result if a single branch were in complete control.



How a Bill Becomes a Law

Writing a Bill

Someone has an idea.

A member of Congress agrees with the idea and writes a proposal for the law which is called a "bill."



Going to Committee

The bill is sent to a committee that analyzes and discusses the bill.

The committee may re-write the bill, accept it as it is, or do nothing (table the bill).



Getting a Majority of Votes

When the committee sends the bill back, Congress votes on it.

If the bill started in the House, the House votes first. If it passes it moves on to the Senate.

If the bill started in the Senate, the Senate votes first. If the bill passes the Senate it goes to the House of Representatives.



Getting the President's Signature

If the bill passes in both houses of Congress, it is sent to the President.

If the President signs the bill it becomes law.

If the President vetoes the bill, it can only become a law if Congress overrides the veto with a 2/3 vote.