



Civics is all around us. There is a lot to know about the government and how “We the People” interact with the government and each other. Let’s help each other expand our civic literacy.

On July 27, 2021 during his [opening remarks](#), Representative Bennie Thompson (D-MS), chair of the U.S. House Select Committee to Investigate the January 6th Attack on the United States Capitol, began:



“Let me say a few words at the outset about this Committee’s work and how, as Chairman, I plan to run things. We are going to be guided solely by the facts. The facts of what happened on January 6th, in the run-up to that tragic day, and what has taken place since. That’s what we’re charged to do by House Resolution 503.”

This select committee, assembled to investigate and report on the events at the Capitol on January 6, 2021, will conduct its work by adhering to its specific purpose as outlined in [HR 503](#). As the work of this select committee is underway, it is important to understand more about committees and how committees function in Congress.

The first thing to note is that committees and the committee system are not mentioned anywhere in the [Constitution](#). The creation of a committee, including select committees, requires a vote of approval from the house in which that committee will exist. Committees are the result of a political process and not a constitutional one, though [Article I, Section 5, Subsection 2](#) gives the House the power to decide how to conduct its own business.

[Committees in Congress](#) allow for deliberation and debate with a reduced number of members than the entire chamber. It would be extremely difficult to try and get all 435 members of the [House](#), or all 100 members of the [Senate](#), to come to a decision on an issue of national importance. The committee system allows members of Congress to specialize on issues within a specific policy area.

Committees in Congress

Committee Type	Committee Purpose	Committee Membership
Standing	Permanent legislative panels that consider bills and issues	Members of one house, and both parties
Select	Temporary committee that addresses a specific issue; once that committee’s business is complete, the committee dissolves	Members of one house, and both parties
Special	Performs a special function beyond the authority or capacity of a standing committee	Members of one house, and one party
Joint	Policy exploration with a narrow jurisdiction	Members of the House of Representatives and the Senate
Conference	Temporary committee formed to reconcile differences in legislation passed by both chambers	Members of the House of Representatives and the Senate

To Think and To Do: Visit the [Congress.gov committee page](#) and view the “Special, Select, and Other Committees” section. Choose one select committee to conduct research on. Why was the select committee assembled? What actions has the committee taken so far? Who are the members of the committee? When will the work of the committee conclude?

Learn more about Congress and the committee system.

- [Controlling the Chambers](#), from Civics in Real Life
- [Congressional Committee System](#), from Lou Frey Institute
- [The Importance of Committees](#), from USHistory.org

