

Learning about Legislation #5 - Types of Votes

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Voice vote:

This is the standard kind of vote used in the Senate, per Senate rules, unless a certain number of Senators present ask for a roll call vote. A voice vote is what it sounds like; people just say “Yea” or “Nay” aloud. It is traditionally used for uncontroversial topics, or for issues that have been pre-negotiated. Whenever you see a unanimous vote, chances are it was a voice vote. S.J. Res. 49, the legislative response to the President’s post-Charlottesville comments, was passed unanimously via voice vote in both houses of Congress.

Roll call vote:

This is probably the kind of vote you have in mind when you picture voting in Congress. Each Representative or Senator is called by name, and they have to vote Yea, Nay or Present. Present basically counts as a “no,” but it is a tool used so that a legislator can say “I never voted against <insert popular topic>” even though they didn’t vote for it, either. Whenever you see a vote tally, you know it was a roll call vote.

Votes on voting:

Standard procedure would have a set period of time put aside so that both proponents and opponents of a given bill can debate before the either house of Congress votes on the bill. However, if an issue does not need the allotted time for debate, a member can ask that the “rules be suspended,” so that a vote can be called immediately. Two-thirds of Congresspeople present (for the House), or all of the Senators present (for the Senate) have to vote in favor of suspending the rules, and then a final vote can be held. So yes, the Congress does often vote on whether or not they are ready to take a vote.