

(New 2/98)

The Legislature meets in two-year sessions. The sessions roughly coincide with the biennial elections at which all of the Assembly seats and half of the Senate seats are up for election. Each two-year session is considered a “regular session.” The California Constitution (Article IV, Section 3) prescribes that the regular session shall begin on the first Monday in December in each even-number year (i.e., following the election the preceding November) and end November 30 two years hence (i.e., after the next election). The sessions are referred to by the two calendar years which they almost encompass (e.g., the session after the elections in 1996 is the 1997–98 regular session—it begins in December 1996 and ends in November 1998.)

Within the constitutionally prescribed dates of convening and adjourning the session, the Legislature has freedom to set its own calendar of meetings and recesses. Generally, however, the Legislature begins meeting in January each year and concludes its work for the year in September. During the year, the Legislature traditionally has scheduled two recesses, an Easter recess of one week and a summer recess of usually four weeks.

In addition to the regular session, the Governor may by proclamation require the Legislature to meet in “special session.” A special session may run concurrently with the Legislature’s normally scheduled meeting time and/or during its recesses. During the special session, the Legislature may only act on subjects specified in the proclamation. To handle both the regular session and a special session at the same time, the Legislature may have to temporarily recess its work in the regular session, convene in the special session and then reconvene the regular session after temporarily recessing the special session. This recessing and reconvening may happen more than once on the same day.

Other than being limited to the subject matter for which it was called, there is no significant difference in process between a regular and special session. However, the effective dates for bills enacted during a special session are somewhat different than those for a regular session. (See Article IV, Section 8 for more details.)