

The parts of an Act of Parliament

An Act of Parliament contains many parts. The short title of the Act is given at the beginning, along with the Chapter number. The long title includes the description following the short title. There is then a statement that the act has received royal assent, invariably in the form of words beginning: “Be it enacted....”

Each Part of the Act may be divided into one or more chapters, and in that case each chapter will contain one or more sections. Some Parts do not have chapters, but sections only. It is usual to refer to a section, in writing as ‘s.’, for example, ‘s. 20’. Each section will deal with one particular matter or area of the law. A section often consists of several subsections.

Most Acts contain one or more Schedules, which contain further information regarding a particular provision or aspect of a provision. Acts will often refer to sections of other Acts, or whole Acts, which have been repealed, or a regulation or Statutory Instrument which has been revoked. If the list of repeals and revocations is lengthy, this will be in a separate part of the Act, usually towards the end of the document.

Acts will also usually contain a glossary of definitions, in order to ensure that ambiguity is kept to a minimum. Where no glossary is provided, it is a general principle of statutory interpretation that a word is to be given its ordinary, everyday meaning.

As an exercise, why not have a look at the [Theft Act 1968](#). What is its legislative chapter number? How many sections does it contain? Which section defines ‘property’? Look through the list of Acts and sections of Acts which are repealed by the Act: what was the oldest Act to be repealed? As we mentioned earlier, most Acts contain one or more Schedules – what does Schedule 1 of the Theft Act relate to?

Next: Other types of law