Congressional Committees are a key aspect of the United States' legislative system. A **Committee** is a subordinate group within the House or Senate which is specialized on a certain area of issues. These issues range from agriculture to foreign relations. The first committees were created in 1789 to formalize procedures and rules within the House and Senate.

Before a bill is introduced to Congress, it is often referred to a committee related to the legislation to do research and make amendments. Committees also hold hearings so that non-committee members including interest groups and lobbyists can present information to help make sure members are fully informed. Congressional committees exist both within the House and Senate, as well as within congress as a whole. There are four main types of committees that are within congress:

1. A **Standing Committee** is a permanent committee that continues with each new congress. It is usually the first place a bill is referred to for review and consideration.

2. A **Joint Committee** is also a standing committee, but it is made up of members in both houses. These are meant to conduct investigations and special studies. Joint committees receive a lot of public attention and deal with major concerns such as scandals, taxation, and the economy.

3. A **Conference Committee** is created to resolve conflicts over specific bills in the House and/or Senate. Normally this committee is made up of a mix of House and Senate members from the committees that originally worked with the bill, and this is also another type of joint committee.

4. A **Select (or Special) Committee** is a temporary committee that is created for special situations. For example, a select committee was created to investigate the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001.

**How Committees Function:**
Committees are essentially mini-congresses. First, they receive a bill within their specialized area of expertise and debate it. Research is done by the legislators. Once the committee creates a final version of the bill, often including pork legislation, they then vote on the bill to see if it gets passed on to the entire house. A committee acts in sense as a filter for bills going on to make sure that they are relevant and substantial.