

# Week 1 Overview

## Important chapters from Digging Deeper on this topic:

- Chapters 3,4 and 10

## What is Access to Information?

- You can look at **access to information** as a right that the public has when it comes to topics that are in the public interest. You have a right to know what public organizations - whether it be governments, publicly traded companies, or government funded organizations - are up to.
  - This means that you have a right to get public records like data, such as crime stats, or written documents, such as government memos, email exchanges, etc. **The Digging Deeper Textbook has a more full list.**
- There are a variety of places where you can get this kind of information from. Some of it is publicly available on websites and databases, so all you need to do is learn how to maneuver the website and it's all there.
  - In other cases, you have to ask for it. Depending on what you're asking for and from what organization/body you are looking to get info from, you may also need to pay a fee

## Methods of getting information

- In class, we talked about a few ways in which you can access information. On the [syllabus](#) under week 1, there are a variety of links you can use to see where you can get public information from
- **If you can't simply access public information from something like a website where everything is posted, there are two main ways to go about getting this information: informal and formal requests**
  - **Informal request** = Information you're looking for has previously been released (usually meaning that someone else has requested by filing a formal request). All you need to do is ask for it (i.e. fill out a form).
  - **Formal request** = Information you're looking for is public, but has **not** been requested before, which means it has to be compiled for you. This means you need to write out a formal request detailing what you're looking for and pay a fee to process it

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### Our first lesson looked at documents already released that you can ask for - and receive - for free

- We covered 2 major portals where you can get information that has already been released:
  1. [Question Period Notes](#) - this portal is on the federal level. The federal government releases, periodically, (2x a year, once in June, once in December) these notes. **Question period notes are written by bureaucrats and given to gov. Officials for question period in the House of Commons.**
  2. [Completed Access-to-Information requests](#): This is information that has been previously released, meaning that someone already asked for it formally, meaning they wrote a request and paid money to get it processed.
    - Since the information has already been released because it was asked for, all you need to do is request it through the government portal for free! **Please note this portal is also on the federal level.** Provinces and cities may/may not have this kind of portal available. Check the links in the syllabus under week 1.

### Getting a headstart on your first assignment...

- If you take a look at the assignment that's due at the end of September, you will notice that it requires you to **complete 5 informal information requests from the federal government using the [completed access-to-information portal](#).** The first lecture went through how to do this - so feel free to get a headstart.
  - When using this portal, you can request whatever you want and whatever is interesting to you. Each of these 5 requests can be on a completely different topic!

### You might remember during the lecture two terms being used: access to information and freedom of information:

- Both of these essentially mean the same thing - making a request for public records. The difference is that one refers to requests made at the federal level, and one refers to requests made at the provincial/municipal level
  - **Access to Information Request (ATIP) = Federal level requests**
  - **Freedom of Information Request (FOI) = Provincial/city level request**