Think about this for a moment: It is impossible for you to live through a single day without somehow encountering the federal bureaucracy. A bureaucracy is a large, complex administrative structure that handles the everyday business of an organization. The Federal Government is the largest organization in the country. Federal employees deliver the mail, regulate business practices, collect taxes, manage the national forests, conduct American foreign policy, administer Social Security programs—the list goes on and on.

Bureaucrats once used red ribbon, called “red tape” in Britain, to hold their files together. Today, people use the phrase “red tape” to describe the delays and paperwork they face when working with a bureaucracy.

What Is a Bureaucracy?
To many Americans, the word bureaucracy suggests such things as waste, red tape, and delay. While that image is not altogether unfounded, it is quite lopsided. Basically, bureaucracy is an efficient and an effective way to organize people to do work.

Bureaucracies are found wherever there are large organizations. They are found in both the public sector and the private sector in this country. Thus, the United States Air Force, McDonald’s, the Social Security Administration, MTV, your town or city government, and the Roman Catholic Church are all bureaucracies. Even your school is a bureaucracy.

Three Features of a Bureaucracy
In dictionary terms, a bureaucracy is a system of organization built on these three principles: hierarchical authority, job specialization, and formalized rules.

1. Hierarchical authority. The word hierarchical describes any organization that is built as a pyramid, with a chain of command running from the top of the pyramid to the bottom. The few officials and units at the top of the organization have authority over those

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1The term bureaucracy is a combination of the French word bureau, which originally referred to a desk of a government official and later to the place where an official worked, and the suffix -cracy, signifying a type of governmental structure.
officials and units at the larger middle level, who in turn direct the activities of the many at the bottom level.

2. **Job specialization.** Each bureaucrat, or person who works for the organization, has certain defined duties and responsibilities. There is a precise division of labor within the organization.

3. **Formalized rules.** The bureaucracy does its work according to a set of established regulations and procedures.

**The Benefits of a Bureaucracy**

These three features—hierarchical authority, job specialization, and formalized rules—make bureaucracy the most effective way for people to work together on large and complex tasks. The hierarchy can speed action by reducing conflicts over who has the power to make decisions. The higher a person's rank in the organization, the greater the decision-making power he or she has.

Job specialization promotes efficiency because each person in the organization is required to focus on one particular job. Each worker thus gains a set of specialized skills and knowledge. Formalized rules mean that workers can act with some speed and precision because decisions are based on a set of known standards, not on someone's likes, dislikes, or inclinations. These rules also enable work to continue even as some workers leave an organization and new workers are hired to replace them.

Recognize this very important point about public bureaucracies: their bureaucrats hold appointive offices. Bureaucrats are unelected public-policy makers. This is not to say that bureaucracies are undemocratic. However, in a democracy much depends on how effectively the bureaucracy is controlled by those whom the people do elect. Listen to James Madison on the point:

> In framing a government which is to be administered by men over men, the great difficulty lies in this: you must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place oblige it to control itself.

—The Federalist No. 51

**Major Elements of the Federal Bureaucracy**

The federal bureaucracy is all of the agencies, people, and procedures through which the Federal Government operates. It is the means by which the government makes and administers public policy—the sum of its decisions and actions. As the chart on page 417 shows, nearly all of the federal bureaucracy is located in the executive branch.

The Constitution makes the President the chief administrator of the Federal Government. Article II, Section 3 declares that “he shall take Care that the Laws be faithfully executed.” But the Constitution makes only the barest mention of the administrative machinery through which the President is to exercise that power.

Article II does suggest executive departments by giving to the President the power to “require...
A federal agency can be called a commission, bureau, administration, or one of several other names. **Critical Thinking** Why is commission an appropriate name for the SEC, which oversees stock markets?

The names given to the many units that make up the executive branch vary a great deal. The name department is reserved for agencies of Cabinet rank. Beyond the title of department, however, there is little standardized use of titles. Common titles used in the executive branch include agency, administration, commission, corporation, and authority.

The term agency is often used to refer to any governmental body. It is sometimes used to identify a major unit headed by a single administrator of near-cabinet status, such as the Environmental Protection Agency. But so, too, is the title administration; for example, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration and the General Services Administration.

The name commission is usually given to agencies charged with the regulation of business activities, such as the Federal Communications Commission and the Securities and Exchange Commission. Top-ranking officers called commissioners head these units. The same title, however, is given to some investigative, advisory, and reporting bodies, including the Civil Rights Commission and the Federal Election Commission.

Either corporation or authority is the title most often given to those agencies that conduct business-like activities. Corporations and authorities are headed by a board and a manager. Examples include the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation and the Tennessee Valley Authority.

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2Article II, Section 2, Clause 1. There is also a reference to “Heads of Departments” in Clause 2, and to “any Department or Officer” of the government in Article I, Section 8, Clause 18.

3Article II, Section 2, Clauses 1 and 2.

4The chart is adapted from the current edition of the United States Government Manual, published each year by the Office of the Federal Register in the National Archives and Records Administration. The Manual includes a brief description of every agency in each of the three branches of the Federal Government. More than 750 of its now nearly 900 pages are devoted to the executive branch.
The Constitution creates three branches of government

THE LEGISLATIVE BRANCH

Congress
Houses of Congress
Senate and House of Representatives
Legislative Offices and Departments
Architect of the Capitol
General Accounting Office
Government Printing Office
Library of Congress
United States Botanic Garden
Office of Technology Assessment
Congressional Budget Office
Copyright Royalty Tribunal
United States Tax Court

THE EXECUTIVE BRANCH

The President
The Administration
1. Executive Office of the President
2. Executive Departments
3. Independent Agencies

THE JUDICIAL BRANCH

The Supreme Court of the United States
Other Courts
Courts of Appeals
District Courts
Federal Claims Court
Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit
Court of International Trade
Territorial Courts
Court of Appeals for the Armed Forces
Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims
Administrative Office of the United States
Federal Judicial Center

1. Executive Office of the President
   White House Office
   Office of Management and Budget
   Council of Economic Advisers
   National Security Council
   Office of National Drug Control Policy
   Office of the United States Trade Representative
   Council on Environmental Quality
   Office of Science and Technology Policy
   Office of Administration
   Office of the Vice President
   Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives
   Office of Homeland Security

2. Executive Departments
   Department of State
   Department of the Treasury
   Department of Defense
   Department of Justice
   Department of the Interior
   Department of Agriculture
   Department of Commerce
   Department of Labor
   Department of Health and Human Services
   Department of Housing and Urban Development
   Department of Transportation
   Department of Energy
   Department of Education
   Department of Veterans Affairs
   Department of Homeland Security

3. Independent Agencies*
   Central Intelligence Agency
   Commission on Civil Rights
   Commodity Futures Trading Commission
   Consumer Product Safety Commission
   Corporation for National and Community Service
   Equal Employment Opportunity Commission
   Export-Import Bank of the U.S.
   Farm Credit Administration
   Federal Communications Commission
   Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation
   Federal Election Commission
   Federal Housing Finance Board
   Federal Maritime Commission
   Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service
   Federal Reserve System
   Federal Trade Commission
   General Services Administration
   Merit Systems Protection Board
   National Aeronautics and Space Administration
   National Archives and Records Administration
   National Labor Relations Board
   National Labor Relations Board
   National Railroad Passenger Corporation
   Nuclear Regulatory Commission
   Office of Personnel Management
   Peace Corps
   Securities and Exchange Commission
   Selective Service System
   Small Business Administration
   Social Security Administration
   Tennessee Valley Authority
   U.S. Postal Service

*Altogether, there are some 150 independent agencies in the executive branch.

Interpreting Charts Nearly 90 percent of all of the men and women who work for the Federal Government work outside the Washington, D.C., area. According to this chart, which branch makes up the largest share of the federal bureaucracy?
Within each major agency, the same confusing lack of uniformity in the use of names is common. *Bureau* is the name often given to the major elements in a department, but *service, administration, office, branch, and division* are often used for the same purpose. For example, the major units within the Department of Justice include the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the United States Marshals Service, the Drug Enforcement Administration, the Office of the Pardon Attorney, and the Criminal Division.

Many federal agencies are often referred to by their initials. The EPA, IRS, FBI, CIA, FCC, and TVA are but a few of the dozens of familiar examples. A few are also known by nicknames. For example, the Government National Mortgage Association is often called “Ginnie Mae,” and the National Railroad Passenger Corporation is better known as Amtrak.

**Staff and Line Agencies**

The several units that make up any administrative organization can be classified as either staff or line agencies. **Staff agencies** serve in a support capacity. They aid the chief executive and other administrators by offering advice and other assistance in the management of the organization. **Line agencies**, on the other hand, actually perform the tasks for which the organization exists. Congress and the President give the line agencies goals to meet, and the staff agencies help the line agencies meet these goals as effectively as possible through advising, budgeting, purchasing, management, and planning.

Two illustrations of this distinction are the several agencies that make up the Executive Office of the President and, in contrast, the Environmental Protection Agency. The agencies that make up the Executive Office of the President (the White House Office, the National Security Council, the Office of Management and Budget, and others, as you will read in the next section) each exist as staff support to the President. Their primary mission is to assist the President in the exercise of the executive power and in the overall management of the executive branch. They are not operating agencies. That is, they do not actually operate, or administer, public programs.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), on the other hand, has a different mission. It is responsible for the day-to-day enforcement of the many federal antipollution laws. The EPA operates “on the line,” where “the action” is.

This difference between staff agencies and line agencies can help you find your way through the complex federal bureaucracy. The distinction between the two can be oversimplified, however. For example, most line agencies do have staff units to aid them in their line operations. Thus, the EPA’s Office of Civil Rights is a staff unit. Its job is to ensure that the agency’s personnel practices do not violate the Federal Government’s antidiscrimination policies.

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5The use of acronyms can sometimes cause problems. When the old Bureau of the Budget was reorganized in 1970, it was also renamed. It is now the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). However, it was for a time slated to be known as the Bureau of Management and Budget (BOMB).

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**Take It to the Net**

7. Read how different parts of the federal bureaucracy deal with environmental issues. Then choose two agencies and create a diagram or graphic organizer comparing the different roles that they play in United States environmental policy. Use the links provided in the Social Studies area at the following Website for help in completing this activity.

www.phschool.com