

Parliamentary Procedure – A matter of order

What is parliamentary procedure?

It is a set of rules for conducting business at meetings and public gatherings. Parliamentary procedure has a long history. It originated in the early English Parliaments. It came to America with the first European settlers. It became uniform in 1876, when Henry M. Robert published his manual on Parliamentary Law. Today, Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised 10th Edition is the basic handbook of operation for many clubs, organizations and other groups.

Why is parliamentary procedure important?

Because it allows everyone to be heard and to make decisions without confusion. Parliamentary procedure means:

- Democratic rule
- Flexibility
- Protection of rights
- A fair hearing for everyone.

It can be adapted to fit the needs of any organization. It is important for everyone to know these basic rules.

Basic Rules

A fixed agenda,

or order of business is generally followed by organizations that use parliamentary procedure. Here's a typical example:

1. Call to order

If a quorum¹ is present, the chair² says, "The meeting will come to order."

2. Minutes

The secretary reads a record of the previous meeting.

3. Officers' reports

This is often limited to a report from the treasurer, but others may report at this time.

4. Committee reports

First come reports from the standing (permanent) committees, then from special (temporary) committees.

5. Special orders

This is important business previously designated for considerations at this meeting.

6. Unfinished business

This is business that has come over from the previous meeting.

7. New Business

New topics are introduced

8. Announcements

These inform the assembly (the people at the meeting) of the other subjects and events.

9. Adjournment

The meeting ends by a vote or by general consent (or by the chair's decision if the time of adjournment was set by an earlier vote).

¹ A quorum is the number or percentage of members that must be present for business to be conducted legally. The actual number is stated in the bylaws.

² The person conducting the meeting.

Basic Rules (cont.)

How do members get their say?

They make motions. A motion is a proposal that the assembly take a stand or take action on some issue. Members have the right to:

- 1. Present motions**
(make a proposal) “I move that...”
- 2. Second motions**
(express support for discussion of another members motion) “Second.”
- 3. Debate motions**
(give opinions on the motions) “I think...”
- 4. Vote on motions**
(make a decision). “All those in favor...”

Basic Rules (cont.)

There are 5 general types of motions:

1. Main motions

These introduce subjects for consideration. They cannot be made when another motion is before the assembly.

2. Subsidiary motions

These change or affect how the main motion is handled. (They are voted on before the main motion.) For example: “I move to amend the motion by striking out...”

3. Privileged motions

These concern special or important matters not related to pending business. In general, they are considered before other types of motions. For example: “I move we adjourn.”

4. Incidental motions

These are questions of procedure that arise out of other motions. They must be considered before the other motion. For example: “I move to suspend the rules for the purpose of...”

5. Motions that bring a question again before the assembly

These enable certain items to be reconsidered. In general, they are brought up when no business is pending. For example: “I move to reconsider...”

Some questions relating to motions:

- **Is it in order?** Your motion must relate to the business at hand and be presented at the right time. It must not be obstructive, frivolous or against the bylaws.
- **May I interrupt the speaker?** Some motions are so important that the speaker may be interrupted to make them. The original speaker gains the floor after the interruption has been attended to.
- **Do I need a second?** Usually, yes. A second indicates that another member would like to consider your motions. It prevents spending time on a question that interests only one person.
- **Is it debatable?** Parliamentary procedure guards the right to free and full debate on most motions. However, some subsidiary, privileged, and incidental motions are not debatable.
- **Can it be amended?** Some motions can be changed by striking out or inserting wording, or both. Amendments must relate to the subject as presented in the main motion.
- **What vote is needed?** Most require only a majority vote (more than half the members present and voting). But, motions concerning the rights of the assembly or its members need a 2/3 vote to be adopted.
- **Can it be reconsidered?** Some motions can be debated again and revoted to give members a chance to change their minds. The motion to reconsider must come from the winning side.

Parliamentary procedure at a glance

Here are some motions you might make, how to make them, and what to expect of the rules.

To do this:	You say this:	May you interrupt the speaker?	Do you need a second?	Is it debatable?	Can it be amended?	What vote is needed?	Can it be reconsidered?
Adjourn meeting	"I move that we adjourn."	No	Yes	No	No	Majority	No
Call an intermission	"I move that we recess for ..."	No	Yes	No *1	Yes	Majority	No
Complain about heat, noise, etc.	"I rise to a question of privilege."	Yes	No	No	No	No vote	No
Temporarily suspend consideration of an issue	"I move to table the motion."	No	Yes	No	No	Majority	No *2
End debate and amendments	"I move the previous question."	No	Yes	No	No	2/3	Yes *3
Postpone discussion for a certain time	"I move to postpone the discussion until..."	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority	Yes
Give closer study of something	"I move to refer the matter to committee."	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority	Yes *4
Amend a motion	"I move to amend the motion by..."	No	Yes	Yes *5	Yes	Majority	Yes
Introduce business	"I move that..."	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority	Yes
The motions listed above are in order of precedence. Below, there is no order.							
Protest breach of rules or conduct	"I rise to a point of order."	Yes	No	No	No	No Vote *6	No
Vote on a ruling of the chair	"I appeal from the chair's decision."	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Majority	Yes
Suspend rules temporarily	"I move to suspend the rules so that..."	No	Yes	Yes	No	2/3	No
Avoid considering an improper matter	"I object to consideration of this motion."	Yes	No	No	No	2/3 *7	Yes *8
Verify a voice vote by having a members stand	"I call for a division," or "Division!"	Yes	No	No	No	No Vote	No
Request information	"Point of information..."	Yes	No	No	No	No Vote	No
Take up a matter previously tabled	"I move to take from the table..."	No	Yes	No	No	Majority	No
Reconsider a hasty action	"I move to reconsider the vote on..."	Yes	Yes	Yes *9	No	Majority	No

Notes to table:

1. Unless moved when no question is pending.
2. Affirmative votes may not be reconsidered.
3. Unless vote on question has begun.
4. Unless the committee has already taken up the subject.
5. Unless the motion to be amended is not debatable.
6. Unless the chair submits to the assembly for decision.
7. A 2/3 vote in negative is needed to prevent consideration of main motion.
8. Only if the main question has not been debated yet.
9. Unless the motion to be reconsidered is not debatable.

How do I present my motion?

Here's what happens when you want a motion considered:

1. You obtain the floor.

- Wait until the previous speaker is finished.
- Rise and address the chair, Say, "Mr. (Madam) Chairperson" or "Mr. (or Madam) President."
- Give you name. The chair will recognize you by repeating it.

2. You make your motion.

- Speak clearly and concisely.
- State your motion affirmatively. Say, "I move that we do..." instead of "I move that we do not..."
- Stay on the subject and avoid personal attacks.

3. You wait for a second.

- Another member will say, "I second the motion."
- Or, the chair will call for a second.
- If there is no second, you motion will not be considered.
- Motions made at the direction of a board or committee (of more than one person) do not require a second.

4. The chair states your motion.

- The chair must say, "It is moved and seconded that we..."
- After this happens, debate or voting can occur.
- Your motion is now "assembly property," and you can't change it without consent of the members.

5. You expand on your motion.

- As the person who made the motion, you are allowed to speak first.
- Direct all comments to the chair.
- Keep to the time limit for speaking.
- You may speak again after all other speakers are finished.
- You may speak a third time by a 2/3 vote.

6. The chair puts the question.

- The chair asks, "are you ready for the question?"
- If there is no more debate, or if a motion to stop debate is adopted, a vote is taken.
- The chair announces the results.

The method of voting on a motion

Depends on the situation and the bylaws of your organization. You may vote by:

Voice

The chair asks those in favor to say “aye” and those opposed to say “no” (for majority votes only). A member may move for an exact count.

Show of hands

Members raise their hands to verify a voice vote, or as an alternative to it. This does not require a count. A member may move for an exact count.

Roll call

If a record of each person’s vote is needed, each member answers “yes,” “no,” or “present” (indicating the choice not to vote) as his or her name is called.

Ballot

Members write their vote on a slip of paper. This is done when secrecy is desired.

General consent

When a motion isn’t likely to be opposed, the chair says, “If there is no objection...” Members show consent by their silence. If someone says “I object, “the matter must be put to a vote.

More about voting

A question (motion) is pending when it has been stated by the chair but not yet voted on.

The last motion stated by the chair is the first pending.

The main motion is always the last voted on.

A motion to lay on the table

This motion is used to lay something aside temporarily to take care of more urgent matter. It should not be used to prevent debate to kill a question.

Members can “take from the table” a motion for reconsideration. This must happen by the end of the current or next session (depending on how soon the next session is scheduled).

A motion to postpone indefinitely

This is parliamentary strategy -- it allows members to dispose of a motion without making a decision for or against. This is useful in case of a badly chosen main motion for which either a “yes” or “no” vote would have undesirable consequences.

Parliamentary procedure helps get things done.

Make motions that are in order

Obtain the floor properly.

Speak clearly and concisely.

Obey the rules of debate.