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Parliamentary Procedure Basics



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Parliamentary Procedure

Basic parliamentary procedure provides a road map for meetings. It is meant to help expedite business, ensure legality and protect the rights of the minority.

The most popular “road map” is “Robert’s Rules of Order.” These parliamentary rules were developed by Henry Martyn Robert, an officer in the Army that was asked to preside over a public meeting in his church only to realize he didn’t know how. He left the meeting embarrassed and determined to never attend another meeting. Fortunately, he studied materials available on parliamentary law and developed “Robert’s Rules of Order” to bring order out of chaos for organizations to follow.

Parliamentary Procedure Basics

- The group discusses only one issue at a time.
- All members have equal basic rights to vote and be heard.
- The rights of the minority must be protected.
- No one can speak until recognized by the chair.
- Every member can speak to the issue.
- Majority vote decides an issue.
- Chairperson maintains impartiality unless they must break a tie vote.

FAQs on Parliamentary Procedure

What is a quorum? A quorum is the number of registered voting members who must be present to legally transact business. A quorum is decided upon by the organization as part of its bylaws. A common quorum is the simple majority of the registered membership.

How formal should we be? The formality used in each meeting really depends on the numbers of people involved, the purpose of the meeting, how much time is available and the culture of the group.

What happens if someone abstains from voting? Silence = consent. If someone does not vote, they have given their consent to the overall decision by the group.

Can we discuss more than one thing at a time? No. Only one main motion is allowed to be discussed at a time, but you can put a motion aside if something more urgent comes up.

What are the steps to handling motions?

1. A motion is made by a member of the group.
2. Another member seconds the motion.
3. The chair states the motion.
4. Members debate the motion.
5. The chair puts the motion to a vote.
6. The chair announces the results of the vote.

What is a motion? A motion is a formal proposal to do something. A motion should be phrased in a way to take action or express an opinion.

How do I make a motion? The member should first address the chair, be recognized by the chair and then say, “I move that...” Be precise, and phrase your motions in a way that you agree.

Is it OK to say “so moved” after a suggestion by someone in the group? While these words are often used, this causes a challenge to the secretary whose job is to record the minutes. Try to avoid this practice.

Do you have to agree with the main motion if you second it? No, you do not. Seconding a motion basically allows debate to happen by the group.

What if no one seconds my motion? If there is not a second to a motion, then there should be no debate by the group, the motion is dropped, and the group can move on to the next order of business. The motion “dies for a want of a second.”

How can a motion be amended? There are three basic ways to amend a motion:

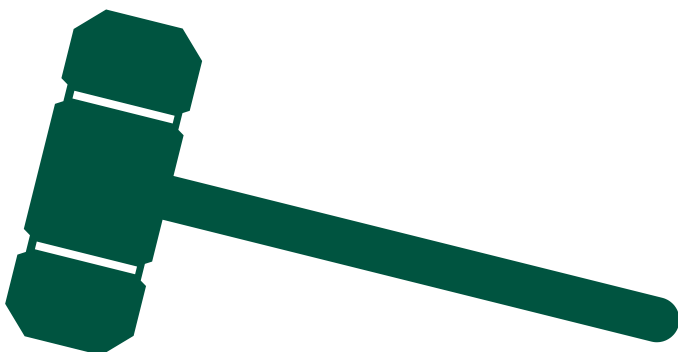
- Move to amend by inserting or adding words or paragraphs.
- Move to amend by striking out (not deleting) words or paragraphs.
- Move to amend by striking out and inserting words or paragraphs.

Can you amend an amendment? Yes, but then you can only amend the inserted/added or struck out words. You cannot amend a separate part of the motion not being covered by the amendment currently being discussed. An amendment can only be amended one time.

How long should debate last? Groups may determine a set amount of time for each issue to help with the length of the meeting. There are no rules on how long debate should last.

What does “question” or “call the question” mean? This is not a motion, but a method of indicating to the chair and the membership that a member is ready to vote. The chair should ask for any additional discussion before taking the vote to ensure all members have the opportunity to discuss the motion.

How do you vote? There are multiple ways to vote but most common is by voice – aye or no. Sometimes the vote is taken by show of hands, by ballot or by roll call. Remember to call for the no votes.



How should the gavel be used at a meeting? The gavel is the symbol of authority. It's to be used in support of self-government and an orderly meeting. The taps of the gavel are:

- 1 tap: signal for all members to be seated, if standing
- 1 tap: follows the announcement of a vote on a motion
- 1 tap: follows the announcement that the meeting is adjourned
- 2 taps: calls the meeting to order
- 3 taps: signals all members to stand series of taps: used to restore order to the meeting

What are the rules governing debate?

- All debate must relate to the subject (must be germane).
- The member who makes the motion has the first right to debate the motion.
- A member may not speak against their own motion but may vote against it.
- A member who seconds a motion does not need to debate in favor of the motion.
- A member cannot debate more than two times on the same motion.
- The presiding officer should call for discussion three times before taking a vote on a debatable motion to ensure that every member has an opportunity to discuss the motion before voting.

Is there a format for a good motion and discussion? Good motions and subsequent discussion should include a beginning statement (introduction) that provides a clear statement of your position, a middle statement (body) that provides evidence to back your position and an ending statement (conclusion) that reinforces your position.

What additional resources are there on parliamentary procedure? The updated editions of “Robert’s Rules of Order” can be purchased online or at most bookstores. Have a copy available to your organization during meetings. Multiple online websites provide a quick reference to “Robert’s Rules of Order” as well.

- The Official Robert’s Rules of Order website – www.robertsrules.com
- Robert’s Rules Online – www.rulesonline.com
- Roberts Rules of Order Quick Reference – www.robertsrules.org



Common Motions

Types of motions are listed below in order of precedence, from highest to lowest. A second motion cannot be accepted unless it has a higher precedence than the motion already before the group.

	Second Required	Debatable	Amendable	Vote Required	Reconsider
Privileged Motions – These motions deal with things related to the comfort of the group or other situations so important they can interrupt business and must be decided immediately without debate.					
Fix the time to adjourn (continue the current meeting another day)	Yes	No	Yes	Majority	Yes
Adjourn (end the meeting)	No	No	No	Chair grants	No
Recess (take a short break)	Yes	No	Yes	Majority	No
Raise a question of privilege (deal with something that affects the comfort of the group)	Yes	No	No	Majority	No
Call for the orders of the day (get the meeting back on schedule)	No	No	No	No vote, demand	No
Subsidiary Motions – these motions propose actions or change to the main motion.					
Lay on the table – stop dealing with the motion to allow something urgent to be dealt with	Yes	No	No	Majority	Negative only (3)
Previous question – end debate on the motion and vote now	Yes	No	No	2/3	Yes
Limit or extend limits of debate – provide certain amount of time for discussion by item or for each speaker	Yes	No	Yes	2/3	Yes
Postpone to a certain time (or definitely) – discuss a motion later in the meeting or put off until next meeting	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority	Yes
Commit or refer – send to committee for their recommendation	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority	Yes
Amend – change the wording on a motion	Yes	Yes (1)	Yes	Majority	Yes
Postpone indefinitely – avoid taking a direct vote on a motion	Yes	Yes	No	Majority	Affirmative only
Main Motions – These motions bring business to the group.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority	Yes

(1) If applied to a debatable motion

(2) Rules of Order – 2/3 vote, standing rules – majority vote

(3) Refer to “Robert’s Rules of Order”

Continued on next page.



Common Motions Continued from previous page.

	Second Required	Debatable	Amendable	Vote Required	Reconsider
Incidental Motions – These motions help the group decide whether something is being done correctly, whether to get more information or how to handle some aspect of the meeting.					
Appeal – overrule a decision of the chair	Yes	Yes (1)	No	Majority	Yes
Division of the Assembly – question the result of a voice vote	No	No	No	No vote, demand	No
Division of a Question – divide a motion into separate parts for debate and vote	Yes	No	Yes	Majority	No
Objection to the consideration of a question – avoid any consideration of a main motion	No	No	No	2/3 (negative)	Negative only
Parliamentary inquiry – ask a question about procedure	No	No	No	Chair answers	No
Point of order – enforce the rules	No	No	No	Normally no vote, chair rules	No
Suspend the rules – do something that violates a rule	Yes	No	No	(2)	No
Withdraw a motion – request permission to withdraw or modify a motion	No (3)	No	No	Majority (3)	Negative only
Other Motions that bring a question to the group – These motions give the group an opportunity to bring items up again and change the group's mind collectively.					
Reconsider – revote on something that was voted on in the current meeting	Yes	Yes (1)	No	Majority	No
Rescind – repeal or strike out a motion that has been adopted	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority with notice, 2/3 or majority of membership (3)	Negative only
Take from the table – resume considering a motion that was laid on the table	Yes	No	No	Majority	No

(1) *If applied to a debatable motion*

(2) *Rules of Order – 2/3 vote, standing rules – majority vote*

(3) *Refer to “Robert’s Rules of Order”*

References

Robert, H., Evans, W., Honemann, D. & Balch, T. (2011). Robert’s rules of order newly revised in brief. 2nd Edition. De Capo Press, Philadelphia, PA.

Robert’s Rules Online – www.rulesonline.com

Robert’s Rules of Order Quick Reference – www.robertsrules.org

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