

Student Success Center

“Discovery Club”

Parliamentary Procedures at a Glance

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Parliamentary law is a system of maintaining order in organizations. It provides an approved and uniform method of conducting meetings in a fair, orderly, and expeditious manner.

Respect for law is a basic characteristic of democratic government. This respect is clearly shown by a willingness to practice an orderly method of procedure in organizations so as to follow the will of the majority, to protect the rights of the minority, and to protect the interests of those absent.

The use of parliamentary procedure in itself, however, does not insure that these ideals will be met. Everyone involved with an organization must also work to create an atmosphere of trust, mutual respect, and shared purpose.

Robert's Rules of Order was written by General Henry M. Robert, a U.S. Army engineer, and published in 1876. His work is still regarded as the basic authority on the subject of parliamentary law. The most recent edition of the work, Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised (1970), is the accepted authority for almost all organizations today. This pamphlet, Fundamentals of Parliamentary Procedure, is based on that book.

General Principles of Parliamentary Procedure

Every member of an organization should be familiar with the following simple rules and customs:

- A. All members have equal rights, privileges, and obligations; rules must be administered impartially.
- B. The minority has rights which must be protected.
- C. Full and free discussion of all motions, reports, and other items of business is a right of all members.
- D. In doing business the simplest and most direct procedure should be used.
- E. Logical precedence governs introduction and disposition of motions.
- F. Only one question can be considered at a time.
- G. Members may not make a motion or speak in debate until they have risen and been recognized by the chair and thus have obtained the floor.

- H. No one may speak more than twice on the same question on the same day without permission of the assembly. No member may speak a second time on the same question if anyone who has not spoken on that question wishes to do so.
- I. Members must not attack or question the motives of other members. Customarily, all remarks are addressed to the presiding officer.
- J. In voting, members have the right to know at all times what motion is before the assembly and what affirmative and negative votes mean.

Parliamentary Terms

Addressing the Chair: Getting the chair's attention by saying, e.g., "Madam Chairwoman," "Mr. Chairman," "Madam President," or "Mr. Moderator."

Agenda: Order of business; program of a business meeting.

Ad Hoc Committee: Committee established for a specific purpose, for a particular case.

Adjourn: To end a meeting.

Announcing the Vote: In announcing the vote on a motion, the chair should:

1. report on the voting itself, stating which side has prevailed;
2. declare that the motion is adopted or lost; and
3. state the effect of the vote or order its execution.

For a voice or rising vote in which no exact count is taken, the chair might say, for example, "The ayes have it, the motion carries, and the brochure will be published." For a vote in which an exact count is taken, the chair might say, "There are 14 in the affirmative and 15 in the negative. The negative has it and the motion is lost. No additional funds will be spent on publicity this semester."

Ballots: Slips of paper for voting.

Carried: Passed or adopted; used in referring to affirmative action on a motion.

Caucus: Private session in advance of a scheduled meeting.

Chair: the chair, chairman, chairwoman: To preside over; the presiding officer.

Chairman/Chairwoman Pro Tem: Presiding officer for the time being.

Commit: To refer to a committee.

Committee of the Whole: Designation of all of the members of an assembly present at a meeting as members of an ad hoc committee; working as a committee of the whole allows an assembly to function informally (e.g., to have unlimited debate).

Convene: To open a session.

Division of the Assembly; a Division: A vote retaken for the purpose of verifying a voice vote or show of hands; a division may be ordered by the chair or by a single member.

Division of the Question: A motion to divide a pending motion into two or more separate questions in order that they may be considered separately.

Election by Acclamation: Election by unanimous consent; used when only one person has been nominated for an office.

Ex-officio: By right of office.

Expunge: To eliminate part of a motion by crossing out or drawing a line around words; one never erases, since the original text may be needed for the minutes.

Germane: Closely related, relevant; amendments and debate must be germane to the question at

hand.

Having the Floor: Having been recognized by the chair to speak.

Immediately Pending Question: The last motion stated by the chair.

In Order: Correct according to rules of parliamentary procedure.

Main Motion: A motion which brings before the assembly some new subject upon which action of the assembly is desired.

Majority: More than half of the votes cast by persons legally entitled to vote, excluding abstentions.

Minutes: Written records of business transacted.

Motion: A proposal by a member, in a meeting, that the assembly take a particular action.

Nominate: To propose an individual for office.

Obtaining the Floor: Securing permission to speak.

Orders of the Day: Agenda for a meeting.

Parliamentarian: Parliamentary adviser to the presiding officer.

Pending Question: A motion awaiting decision.

Plurality: In an election, the largest number of votes given a candidate when three or more candidates are running; a plurality that is not a majority never elects anyone to office except by virtue of a special rule previously adopted.

Point of Information: Request for information concerning a motion.

Precedence: Take Precedence: Priority in rank; to outrank.

Previous Question: Motion which, if adopted, orders an immediate vote.

Proxy: A person authorized to vote for another.

Question of Privilege: A device that permits a request or main motion relating to the rights and privileges of the assembly or any of its members to be brought up for immediate consideration because of its urgency, e.g., a motion to turn the air conditioner up or a motion to close the windows so that people can hear.

Quorum: The minimum number of members who must be present at a meeting for business to be legally transacted.

Recess: A short intermission.

Recognize: To allow someone to obtain the floor in order to speak.

Rescind: To repeal, annul, cancel, or revoke formally.

Resolution: Motion used to express the sentiment of a group, usually beginning with the words "resolved that...."

Rising Vote: A vote taken by having members stand.

Roll Call Vote: A procedure by which the vote of each member is formally recorded in the minutes. Second: To indicate support for consideration of a motion by saying: "I second the motion." Slate: List of candidates.

Unanimous (or General) Consent: A means of taking action on a motion without a formal vote. When a presiding officer perceives that there is little or no opposition to a motion before the assembly, business can often be expedited by the chair's simply calling for objections, if any. If no objection is heard, the motion is adopted; if even one member objects, the motion is brought to a formal vote by the usual procedure.

Voice Vote: A vote taken by having members call out "aye" or "no" at the chair's direction.

Yield: To give the floor to the chair, to another speaker, or to a motion taking precedence over that being considered.

A Standard Agenda

If an organization's established rules do not specify an order of business, parliamentary law provides the following standard agenda for a meeting:

- A. Call to order
- B. Reading and approval of minutes
- C. Reports of officers and standing committees
- D. Reports of ad hoc committees
- E. Unfinished business
- F. New business
- G. Announcements
- H. Adjournment

Transacting Business at a Meeting

- A. Quorum
 - 1. A quorum is the minimum number of members who must be present at a meeting for business to be legally transacted.
 - 2. An organization, in its established rules, may define its own quorum.
 - 3. In the absence of such a provision, the quorum is a majority of the entire membership.
- B. Obtaining the Floor
 - 1. Before a member in an assembly can make a motion or speak in debate, he or she must obtain the floor; that is, the member must be recognized by the chair as having the exclusive right to be heard at that time.
 - 2. If two or more members rise to seek recognition at the same time, the member who rose and addressed the chair first after the floor was yielded is usually entitled to be recognized. A member cannot establish "prior claim" to the floor by rising before it has been yielded.
- C. Introducing Business (Making Motions)
 - 1. Business may be introduced by an individual member or by a committee.
 - 2. Business is always introduced in the form of a motion.
- D. Seconding a Motion
 - 1. After a motion has been made, another member, without rising and obtaining the floor, may second the motion.
 - 2. A second merely implies that the seconder agrees that the motion should come before the assembly and not that he or she necessarily favors the motion.
 - 3. A motion made by a committee requires no second, since its introduction into the assembly has been approved by a majority of the committee.
 - 4. The purpose of a second is to prevent time from being consumed by the assembly having to dispose of a motion that only one person wants to see introduced.
- E. Placing a Motion before the Assembly
 - 1. After a motion has been made and seconded, the chair repeats the motion verbatim, thus placing it before the assembly for debate and action.

2. During the brief interval between the making of a motion and the time when the chair places it before the assembly by restating it, the maker of a motion may modify or withdraw it simply by stating the intention to do so; after the motion has been restated by the chair, it is officially before the assembly and must be dealt with appropriately (e.g., adopted, rejected, postponed).

F. Debate

1. Every member of the assembly has the right to speak on every debatable motion before it is finally acted upon; this right cannot be interfered with except by a motion to limit debate.
2. All discussion must be confined to the immediately pending question and to whether or not it should be adopted.
3. While debate is in progress, amendments or other secondary motions can be introduced and disposed of accordingly.
4. In an organization that has no special rule relating to the length of speeches, a member can speak no longer than 10 minutes unless he or she obtains the consent of the assembly; such permission can be given by unanimous consent or by means of a motion to extend debate. Likewise, debate may be curtailed by a motion to limit debate.
5. No member may speak twice on the same motion at the same meeting as long as any other member who has not spoken on the motion desires to do so.
6. Unless the rules are suspended, a member who has spoken twice on a particular question on the same day has exhausted his or her right to debate that question for that day.
7. During debate, no member can attack or question the motives of another member.
8. The maker of a motion, although allowed to vote against it, is not allowed to speak against it.

G. Amendments

1. As noted above, before a motion has been restated by the chair, the maker has the right to modify his or her motion or to withdraw it entirely. After it has been restated by the chair, however, a motion may be modified only by means of an amendment.
2. There are six ways to amend a motion: a. Add words, phrases, or sentences at the end of a motion; b. Insert words, phrases, or sentences; c. Strike words, phrases, or sentences; d. Strike and insert words, phrases, or sentences; e. Strike and add words, phrases, or sentences; and f. Substitute whole paragraphs or an entire text.
3. Only two amendments (primary and secondary) may be pending on a main motion at any time.
4. Discussion of an amendment must relate only to the amendment, unless the whole motion is involved by substitution.
5. An amendment must be germane to the question under consideration.

H. Voting

1. Unless special rules apply, a majority decides. A majority is more than half of the votes cast by persons legally entitled to vote, excluding blank ballots or abstentions.
2. Unless otherwise provided for, voting is by voice vote.

3. If the presiding officer is a member of the assembly, he or she can vote as any other member does when the vote is by ballot. In other cases, the presiding officer, if a member of the assembly, can (but is not obliged to) vote whenever his or her vote will affect the result; i.e., he or she can vote either to break or to create a tie.
 4. A member has no right to explain his or her vote" during voting since that would be the same as debate at such a time.
 5. Any member may request a division of the assembly if there is uncertainty as to the true result of the vote.
- I. Announcing a Vote
1. In announcing the vote on a motion, the chair should: a. report on the voting itself, stating which side has prevailed; 1~. declare that the motion is adopted or lost; and c. state the effect of the vote or order its execution.
 2. For a voice or rising vote in which no exact count is taken, the chair might say, for example, "The ayes have it, the motion carries, and the brochure will be published." For a vote in which an exact count is taken, the chair might say, "There are 14 in the affirmative and 15 in the negative. The negative has it and the motion is lost. No additional funds will be spent on publicity this semester."
- J. Adjournment
1. A motion to adjourn may be made by any member. It may be made during the consideration of other business, although it may not interrupt a speaker.
 2. A motion to adjourn is not in order when the assembly is engaged in voting or verifying a vote.
 3. If the motion to adjourn is voted down, it may be made again only after the disposition of some business.
 4. The motion to adjourn is out of order when the assembly is arranging for the time and place of the next meeting.
 5. When it appears that there is no further business to be brought before the assembly, the chair, instead of waiting for a motion, may simply adjourn the meeting.

Summary of Steps in Handling a Motion

1. A member rises and addresses the presiding officer.
2. The presiding officer recognizes the member.
3. The member states the motion.
4. Another member seconds the motion.
5. The presiding officer restates the motion, thus placing it before the assembly for consideration.
6. The assembly may discuss the motion if it is debatable and amend the motion if it is amendable.
7. The presiding officer takes the vote.
8. The presiding officer announces the result.

Types of Motions-Definitions and Examples

- A. **Privileged Motions:** Motions which do not relate to the pending question but have to do with matters of such urgency or importance that, without debate, they are allowed to interrupt the consideration of anything else.
1. **Adjourn:** Terminates the meeting. "I move that we adjourn."
 2. **Recess:** Permits a short intermission in a meeting. "I move that we recess for 10 minutes" or ". . . until 2:00" or ". . . until called to order by the chair."
 3. **Raise a question of privilege:** Permits a request or main motion relating to the rights and privileges of the assembly or any of its members to be brought up for immediate consideration because of its urgency. "I rise to a question of privilege affecting the assembly."
 4. **Call for the orders of the day:** Requires that the adopted agenda or order of business be followed. "Mr. Chairman, I call for the orders of the day" or "Madam President, I demand the regular order."
- B. **Subsidiary Motions:** Motions which assist the assembly in treating or disposing of a main motion. They have the effect of hastening action upon, delaying action upon, or modifying the main motion.
1. **Lay on the table:** Lays a pending question aside temporarily when something more urgent has arisen. "I move to lay the question on the table" or "I move that the motion be laid on the table."
 2. **Previous question:** Ends debate and orders an immediate vote. "I move the previous question" or "I move we vote immediately on the motion."
 3. **Limit or extend debate:** Modifies debate by limiting or extending the number or length of speeches. "I move that debate be limited to one speech of two minutes for each member" or "I move that the speaker's time be extended three minutes."
 4. **Postpone to a certain time:** Defers consideration to a definite day, meeting, or hour, or until after some particular event. "I move that the question be postponed until the next meeting" or "I move to postpone the motion until after the address by our guest speaker."
 5. **Refer to a committee:** Gives a motion more detailed attention or permits it to be handled in privacy. "I move to refer the matter to the Program Committee."
 6. **Amend:** Modifies a main motion by inserting, adding, striking, striking and inserting, striking and adding, or substituting some specific language. "I move to amend by adding the words . . ." or "by striking . . ." or "I move to substitute for the pending motion the following:"
 7. **Postpone indefinitely:** Disposes of a question without bringing it to a direct vote. "I move that the motion be postponed indefinitely."
- C. **Main Motion:** A motion which brings business before the assembly and which can be made only while no other motion is pending. "I move we have a banquet."
- D. **Motions that Bring a Question Again Before the Assembly:** Motions which bring up a previously considered question.
1. **Reconsider:** Allows a question previously disposed of to come again before the assembly as if it had not previously been considered. The motion to reconsider can be made only by a member who voted on the prevailing side and only on the same day the original vote was taken. The motion is debatable only if the motion to be reconsidered is itself debatable. "I move to reconsider the vote on the motion relating to the annual banquet."

2. Discharge a committee: Takes a matter out of a committee's hands and places it again before the assembly as a whole. "I move that the committee considering what band to hire for the benefit dance be discharged."
 3. Rescind a motion previously adopted: Voids a motion previously passed. "I move to rescind the motion passed at the last meeting relating to where we will go on the ski trip."
 4. Take from the table: Allows the assembly to resume consideration of a motion previously laid on the table. "I move to take from the table the motion relating to presenting plaques to graduating members."
- E. **Incidental Motions:** Motions which deal with questions of procedure and arise out of another pending motion or item of business. With the exception of the motion to appeal from the ruling of the chair, they are not debatable.
1. Point of information: Inquires as to the facts affecting the business at hand and is directed to the chair or, through the chair, to a member. "I rise to a point of information" or "A point of information, please."
 2. Parliamentary inquiry: Requests the chair's opinion-not a ruling-on a matter of parliamentary procedure as it relates to the business at hand. "I rise to a parliamentary inquiry" or "A parliamentary inquiry, please."
 3. Division of the assembly: Calls for a verification when a member doubts the accuracy of a voice vote or show of hands. "Division!" or "I call for a division."
 4. Division of a question: Permits a motion to be divided into two or more parts in order that they may be considered separately. "I move to divide the motion so that the question of purchasing decorations can be considered separately."
 5. Withdraw a motion: Permits a member to remove his or her question from consideration even after the motion has been restated by the chair. "Mr. Chairman, I move that I be allowed to withdraw the motion."
 6. Objection to consideration: Suppresses business that is undesirable or that might prove damaging to the organization. "Madam President, I object to the consideration of the question."
 7. Suspend the rules: Temporarily sets aside a rule to permit the assembly to take an action it could not otherwise take. "I move to suspend the rules which interfere with considering the motion to hold a get-acquainted happy hour for new members."
 8. Appeal from the ruling of the chair: Challenges a ruling of the chair. A majority vote sustains the ruling. "I appeal from the decision of the chair."
 9. Point of order: Challenges an error in procedure and requires a ruling by the chair. "I rise to a point of order" or "Point of order!"

Precedence of Motions

Since only one question may be considered at a time, the sequence in which motions may be taken up is fixed by parliamentary law.

The main motion is the basic motion and all other legitimate motions are taken up and acted upon before the main motion is finally disposed of. Any privileged motions introduced are of such urgency or importance that they must be promptly acted upon. Subsidiary and incidental

motions which are introduced must be given priority so that the action finally taken on the main motion will accurately reflect the will of the assembly.

Motions that bring a question again before the assembly are similar in status to main motions in that they can be considered only when no other business is pending.

Privileged and subsidiary motions have the highest status and are arranged in an explicit order of precedence. Privileged motions come first in the order of precedence and among themselves have the following ranking: (1) adjourn, (2) recess, (3) raise a question of privilege, and (4) call for the orders of the day. Subsidiary motions follow in the order of precedence and have the following ranking among themselves: (5) lay on the table, (6) previous question, (7) limit or extend debate, (8) postpone to a certain time, (9) refer to a committee, (10) amend, and (11) postpone indefinitely.

Incidental motions are not ranked in the formal order of precedence. Since they arise out of--are "incidental" to--some other pending question, the incidental motions are decided as they arise. An incidental motion would be out of order, however, if it were not legitimately related to the business at hand.