

## PARLIAMENTARY PROCEDURE 101

### What is Parliamentary Procedure?

It's a set of rules for conduct at meetings. It allows everyone to be heard and to make decisions without confusion!

Parliamentary procedure has a long history. It originated in the early English Parliaments (discussions of public affairs). It came to America with the first settlers. It became uniform in 1876 when Henry M. Robert published his manual on Parliamentary Law. Rules of Order Newly Revised is the basic handbook of operation for most clubs, organizations and other groups.

### Why is parliamentary procedure important?

Because it's a time-tested method of conducting business at meeting and public gatherings. Parliamentary procedure means democratic rule, flexibility, protection of rights, and a fair hearing for everyone. It can be adapted to fit the needs of any organization.

### Meeting Agendas

Organizations using parliamentary procedure usually follow a fixed agenda. Here's a typical example:

- I. Call to Order  
The chair says, "This meeting will please come to order."
- II. Quorum  
The chair notes if a quorum is present. (A quorum is the number of members that must be present for business to be conducted legally. The actual number is usually stated in the bylaws.)
- III. Minutes  
The secretary reads (or passes out) a record of the last meeting. Some organizations ask that the minutes be approved (using parliamentary procedure).
- IV. Officers' Reports  
Often limited to a report from the treasurer, but others may report at this time.
- V. Committee Reports  
First come reports from standing (permanent) committees, then from special (temporary) committees.
- VI. Special Orders  
Important business previously designated for consideration at this meeting.
- VII. Unfinished Business  
Business left over from previous meetings.

- VIII. New Business  
Introduction of new topics.
- IX. Announcements  
Informing the assembly of other subjects and events.
- X. Adjournment  
The meeting ends by a vote or by general consent (or by chair's decision if time of adjournment was pre-arranged by vote).

## How do members get their say?

They make motions! A motion is a proposal that the board take a stand or take action on some issue. Members can:

- Present motions (make a proposal): "I move"
- Second motions (express support for discussion of another member's motion): "Second"
- Debate motions (give opinions on the motion): "I think..."
- Vote on motions (make a decision): "Aye/Nay/Abstain"

## Motions

There are four general types of motions:

1. Main Motions introduce subjects to the assembly for its consideration. They cannot be made when another motion is before the assembly. They yield to privileged, subsidiary and incidental motions. For example, "I move that we purchase..."
2. Subsidiary Motions change or affect how the main motion is handled. (They are voted on before the main motion.) For example, "I move the question before the board be amended by striking out..."
3. Privileged Motions are most urgent. They concern special or important matters not related to pending business. For example, "I move we adjourn..."
4. Incidental Motions 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..."

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 regains 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 motion. It prevents spending time on a question which 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 altered by striking out, inserting, or both at once. Amendments must relate to the subject as presented in the main motion.
- “*What vote is needed?*” Most require only a majority vote, 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.

## How do I present my motion?

1. Obtain the floor.
  - Wait until the last speaker is finished.
  - Rise and address the chair. Say, “Mr. (or Madam) Chairperson” or “Mr. (or Madam) President.”
  - Give your name. The chair will recognize you by repeating it.
2. Make your motion.
  - Speak clearly and concisely.
  - State your motion affirmatively. Say, “I move that we...” instead of “I move that we do not...”
  - Avoid personalities and stay on the subject.
3. Wait for a second
  - Another member will say, “I second the motion.”
  - Or the chair will call for a second. (“Do I hear a second?”)
  - If there is no second, your motion will not be considered.
4. 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 “board property” and you can’t change it without consent of the members.
5. Expand on your motion.
  - Mover is 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 motion to suspend the rules with a 2/3 vote.
6. Putting the question.
  - The chair asks, “Are you ready for the question?”
  - If there is no more discussion or if a motion to stop debate is adopted, the vote is taken.
  - The chair announces the results.

Voting on a motion occurs by voice, by show of hands, by roll call, by secret ballot, or by general consent.

### 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 table is used to lay something aside temporarily to take care of a more urgent matter. There is always the option to "take from the table" any motion for reconsideration by the assembly.
- A motion to postpone indefinitely is parliamentary strategy – it allows members to dispose of a motion without making a decision for or against. It is useful in a case of a badly chosen main motion for which either a "yes" or "no" vote would have undesirable consequences.

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