

Parliamentary Procedure

What is Parliamentary Procedure?

Parliamentary procedure is a set of rules for conducting meetings. It allows for everyone to be heard and to make decisions without confusion.

Today, *Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised* is the basic handbook of operation for most clubs, organizations, and other groups. *Robert's Rules* can be found in most libraries.

A Very Abridged Version of *Robert's Rules*

The degree of order needed at a meeting is dependent upon the size and purpose of the group. The following are some basics of *Robert's Rules of Order*, which may be helpful for groups that need a degree of normality in conducting business.

The Motion

You may make a motion when you want the group to take some action: to send a letter, to accept a report, to hold a special meeting, to spend money for some special purpose, etc. Introduce the motion by saying, "I move that," followed by a statement of the proposal. You cannot discuss the motion until someone has seconded it. This is done to reduce the number of discussions on a subject in which no one else in the group is interested.

The Amendment

Amendments are offered in the same way as a motion. You may offer an amendment when you agree substantially with the motion which has been made but want to make some changes before it is adopted.

Amending the Amendment

Just as a motion may be amended, an amendment may also be changed in the same way. As with the first amendment, the second amendment must relate to the motion and the amendment. It is in order only when it relates to both. No more than two amendments may be made to one motion.

Substitute Motion

The substitute motion is sometimes used when there is a motion and two amendments on the floor in order to save the time of the meeting. If there does not seem to be substantial disagreement with the motion and the two amendments, a substitute motion incorporating all three into one motion may be made and accepted by the chair.

Note: If you disagree with a motion or an amendment, you do not defeat it by trying to change the sense of the motion through amendment. You speak against the motion or amendments and urge the membership to vote against them. Then new motions calling for different action may be made and considered.

Speaking on Motions and Amendments

When you want to speak at a meeting, you raise your hand and ask the chair for the floor. As soon as you are recognized by the chair, you may proceed to speak either for or against the motion or amendments being considered. When several members wish to speak at the same time, these guiding principles should determine the decision of the chairman:

1. The chairman should show preference to the one who made the motion.
2. A member who has not spoken has first choice over one who has already spoken.

If the chairman knows the opinions of members discussing the measure, he/she should alternate between those favoring and those opposing it.

Motion to the Table

If you wish to postpone or end debate on an issue, you may also make a motion to table. Such a motion is not debatable, and if it is seconded by one other member, the motion must be put to an immediate vote by the chair. The chair may discuss the reason for tabling with the member.

Calling a Question

In order to speed up the meeting and eliminate unnecessary discussion, a member can “call the question.” The chair will call for dissent. If you want the motion to be discussed further, raise your hand. If there is no dissent, voting on the motion takes place.

Voting

Voting on a motion can be as formal as using written ballots or as casual as having the chair ask if anyone objects to the motion.

The most common practice is to call for a show of hands or a voice vote of ayes and nays. Only members present at the time may vote unless the rules of the organization allow for proxies or absentee ballots.

A simple majority of votes cast will pass most motions. During elections when more than two candidates are running for an office, your organization rules should specify whether a majority or plurality is necessary. These rules can also call for other requirements depending on the issue on which the vote is held.

When the Chairperson Can Vote

Assuming that the chairperson is a member of the organization, he/she has the right to vote whenever a written or secret ballot is used. With any other method of voting, to protect the impartiality of the chair, he/she should vote only when it will change the outcome.

Point of Information, Of Order

If at any time during the meeting you are confused about the business being discussed or if you want the motion that is being considered more clearly explained, you may rise to ask the chairman for a point of information. After you are recognized, ask for the explanation which you desire. If you disagree with any of the chair’s rulings, or if you believe that the person who is speaking is not talking about the business being considered, you may raise a point of order and state your objection to the chair. The chair then is required to rule one way or another on your point of order.

Note: This section of the *Advisors Handbook* does not pretend to cover all situations or answer all questions. It is meant to introduce you to some basic information which will suit many groups’ needs.