

What is parliamentary procedure?

Parliamentary procedure is a set of rules that is used to run meetings. It allows for discussion and debate among members, ensuring that all opinions are heard. Using this set of rules also allows members to make decisions (vote) on fraternity, chapter, or association business while ensuring that meetings are conducted efficiently.

What is *Robert's Rules of Order*?

The basis for parliamentary procedure is *Robert's Rules of Order*. *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised* is a handbook that outlines the principles of parliamentary procedure.

Why do we use parliamentary procedure?

Parliamentary procedure assures the orderly transaction of business with equality and fairness where the majority rules and the rights of the minority are protected. The presiding officer should be familiar with and follow the principles of parliamentary procedure to assure that the rights of all members are respected and that the meeting proceeds in a timely and orderly fashion. Members have the right to vote and debate. Debate on any issue is open only after a specific motion is made. The vote is taken upon the completion of the debate. Voting members should be familiar with parliamentary procedure, be knowledgeable of bylaws and/or standing rules, be courteous to speakers, weigh the pros and cons of any issue before voting, and uphold majority opinions while respecting the rights of the minority.

Basic rules of parliamentary procedure

- The rights of the organization supersede the rights of the individual members.
- All members are equal and their rights are equal.
- A quorum must be present to do business.
- The majority rules (unless specified otherwise in governing documents).
- Silence is consent.
- One question at a time and one speaker at a time.
- Debatable motions must receive full debate.
- Once a question is decided, it is not in order to bring up the same motion or one essentially like it at the same meeting.
- Personal remarks in debate are always out of order.

Motions

“Motions are the tools used to introduce business in a meeting. No business can be introduced without a motion.” – *Robert's Rules in Plain English* by Doris P. Zimmerman

- **Main:** Proposal that a certain action be taken or an opinion be expressed by the organization.
- **Secondary:** Made while the main motion is on the floor and before the vote is taken.
 - Subsidiary motions relate directly to the motion on the floor. They may change the wording, send it to a committee, or delay it. They are designed to expedite

business by disposing of the pending motion rather than by adopting or rejecting it.

- Privileged motions are motions of an emergency nature, such as calling to adjourn or recess. They do not relate to the motion on the floor but to the welfare of the voting members.
- Incidental motions are procedural. They deal with processes, such as enforcing proper procedures, correcting errors and verifying votes. When introduced, they must be decided before business can resume.

Motion intricacies

See the table on motions for more information.

- Some motions are debatable; others are not.
- Some motions may be amended; others may not.
- Some motions require a majority to adopt; others require two-thirds.

How a motion is made and acted upon

1. Motion is made by a voting member. The presiding officer must recognize the member before having the floor.
 - a. I move that ...
 - b. I make a motion that ...
2. The motion is seconded by another voting member. That member does not have to be recognized. (However, that person may need to be identified for meeting records.) If there is no second, the motion automatically fails.
 - a. I second the motion.
3. The presiding officer states the motion.
 - a. It has been moved and seconded that ...
 - b. We have a motion that has been seconded that ...
4. Hold a debate. A member must be recognized by the presiding officer before speaking. The member making the motion has the right to speak first.
 - a. Is there any discussion?
5. The presiding officer puts the question to a vote.
 - a. The question is on the motion that ... All in favor, say aye. All opposed, say no.
6. The presiding officer announces the vote.
 - a. The ayes/noes have it.

Discussion example

- Motion made and seconded.
- Discussion takes place on the main motion.
- Amendment is proposed.
- Discussion takes place on the amendment.
 - Debate must be confined to the merits of the motion.
 - Debate is closed by a vote (two-thirds carries).
- Vote takes place on the amendment.

- Discussion resumes on the main motion.
- Member moves the previous question.
- Vote takes place on the previous question (i.e., ending discussion).
- Vote passes.
- Vote takes place on the main motion.
 - The chair will ask: “Are you ready for the question?”
 - The chair says, “The question is on the adoption of the motion that ... As many as are in favor, respond ‘aye.’ Those opposed, respond ‘no’”

Helpful hints

- If a voting member is unsure of the parliamentary procedure, they may say: “point of parliamentary inquiry.” The presiding officer will recognize the member and the question may be asked.
- If a member needs to make a point upon their or the group’s well-being to keep the meeting moving forward, they may say: “Madam president, point of privilege.” Followed by the issue (such as not receiving handouts or maybe being unable to hear the debate), a speaker may be interrupted, if necessary.
- If a member has a question that another individual can answer while the debate is taking place, they may say, “point of information.” The president will recognize them to ask what the question is.
- If a member questions the rules of debate or thinks something has been done wrong, they may say, “point of order.” The presiding officer will recognize them so that they may express their concern.
- If the debate is getting long or the same comments are being made, an eligible member may say, “I move the previous question” after being recognized by the presiding officer. To bring a vote to question without hearing everyone interested in speaking during a debate requires a two-thirds vote.
- If it is difficult to tell whether the ayes or noes have clearly won the vote, someone may call “division” without being recognized by the president, requiring the vote to be taken again by rising.