



Parliamentary Procedure: The Basics

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- 1999-2000 Congressional Page (where my love for parliamentary procedure began!)

OBJECTIVES

- **Understand the Foundations of Parliamentary Procedure**
 - What is Parliamentary Procedure? Why is it Important?
 - What are the Purposes & Goals?
- **Review Basic Definitions**
- **Understand the Purposes of “Motions”**
 - Main Motions
 - Subsidiary Motions
 - Privileged Motions
 - Incidental Motions
- **Review a “Robert’s Rules Cheat Sheet”**
- **Quick Tips to Remember**
- **Frequently Asked Questions**



THE FOUNDATIONS

What is Parliamentary Procedure?

Parliamentary procedure is a set of rules governing the *orderly, expeditious,* and *efficient* transaction of business during a meeting.

Parliamentary procedure is a **tool** – the rules themselves are **not the goal**. *Parliamentary procedure should empower members and promote participation – not to “out maneuver” others or to score “wins.”*



The assembly meets to transact business, not to have members exploit their knowledge of parliamentary law. A business meeting is not a class in parliamentary law.

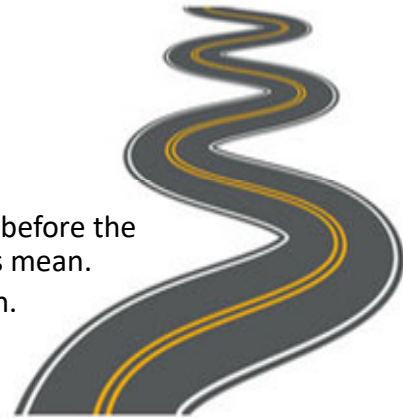
- Henry M Robert, *Parliamentary Law*, pg. 151

THE FOUNDATIONS

Why is Parliamentary Procedure Important?

Parliamentary procedure provides for the following expectations in the conducting of business:

- All members have equal rights.
- Minority rights to be heard must be protected.
- Full and free discussion is an essential right.
- Use of the simplest and most direct procedure.
- Only ONE question considered at a time.
- Members have the right to know what question is before the committee and what affirmative & negatives votes mean.
- Logical precedence governs the order of discussion.



What is the goal of Parliamentary Procedure?

The use of parliamentary procedure should enable the committee to arrive at the general will on the maximum number of questions of varying levels of complexity in a minimum amount of time and under varying internal climates ranging from total harmony to impassioned division of opinion.



BASIC DEFINITIONS

All members should be aware of the following basic definitions:

Quorum – the number of members present needed to conduct business. *(Should be listed in your organization’s governing docs.)*

Majority – more than half of those members voting. *(UNLESS either the governing docs or Robert’s Rules require a larger percentage: e.g. 2/3)*

Motion – a proposal by a member to take a particular action

Bylaws (or Charter/Constitution) – the governing documents and ultimate authority on procedure for your organization.

Members – the rights and privileges afforded in parliamentary procedure belong to members of the organization. Membership should be defined in your governing documents.

MOTIONS

During a meeting, the body can only consider **ONE** motion at a time. If subsequent motions are offered (i.e. amendments, privileged motions, etc.) they must be resolved before returning to the previous matter.

The Basic Motion Process

1. Member obtains recognition by the chair.
2. Member states the motion.
3. Another member “seconds” the motion.
4. The Chair restates the motion.
5. The motion is debated (alternating pro/con)
6. A vote is taken on the motion.
7. The Chair announces the result of the vote.

one
thing
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MOTIONS

- **Main Motions** – brings business for consideration before the committee. A main motion can only be made when no other motion is pending.
- **Subsidiary Motions** – assist the committee in considering or disposing of a main motion (and sometimes other motions).
- **Privileged Motions** – do not relate to the main motion but to special matters of immediate and overriding importance.
- **Incidental Motions** – deal with questions of procedure and are handled when they occur.

MOTIONS HAVE AN ORDER OF PRECEDENCE: SEE CHEAT SHEET

MAIN MOTIONS

If you wish the committee to do something, offer a motion.

EXAMPLE: “I move that the committee purchase a Lamborghini.”

If another member “seconds” this motion (*agreeing that they believe the committee should consider this motion*), then the question of whether to purchase a Lamborghini moves forward for debate.

If no second, then the motion fails.

SUBSIDIARY MOTIONS

Subsidiary motions generally help the committee with disposing of the main motion. Subsidiary motions **can amend the main motion**, **refer the main motion to a committee**, **postpone consideration to a different time or indefinitely**, **limit or extend the time to debate the motion**, or **end debate** (“call the question”).

Disposal of Subsidiary Motions: debate is allowed on some subsidiary motions but not others, all require a vote but of varying majority-thresholds. *SEE CHEAT SHEET*

PRIVILEGED MOTIONS

A member can offer a privileged motion if they believe there is a matter of importance that should be considered immediately. This could include: **motion to recess**, **motion to adjourn**, **fix a time to adjourn**, **raise points privilege points regarding to comfort, accessibility, or safety**.

Disposal of Privileged Motions: some require rulings from the chair, some require debate, some don't, some require a vote while other don't. *SEE CHEAT SHEET*

INCIDENTAL MOTIONS

A member can offer an incidental motion to deal with questions of procedure. Examples include: **raising a point of order** (for violation of rules), **points of parliamentary inquiry** (to ask a question regarding procedure), **suspension of the rules**, **division of the committee** (requesting a non-voice vote), **appeal a ruling of the chair**.

Disposal of Incidental Motions: some require rulings from the chair, some require debate, some don't, some require a vote while other don't. *SEE CHEAT SHEET*

ROBERTS RULES CHEAT SHEET

To:	You say:	Interrupt Speaker	Second Needed	Debatable	Amendable	Vote Needed
Adjourn	"I move that we adjourn"	No	Yes	No	No	Majority
Recess	"I move that we recess until..."	No	Yes	No	Yes	Majority
Complain about noise, room temp., etc.	"Point of privilege"	Yes	No	No	No	Chair Decides
Suspend further consideration of something	"I move that we table it"	No	Yes	No	No	Majority
End debate	"I move the previous question"	No	Yes	No	No	2/3
Postpone consideration of something	"I move we postpone this matter until..."	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority
Amend a motion	"I move that this motion be amended by..."	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority
Introduce business (a primary motion)	"I move that..."	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority

The above listed motions and points are listed in established order of precedence. When any one of them is pending, you may not introduce another that is listed below, but you may introduce another that is listed above it.

To:	You say:	Interrupt Speaker	Second Needed	Debatable	Amendable	Vote Needed
Object to procedure or personal affront	"Point of order"	Yes	No	No	No	Chair decides
Request information	"Point of information"	Yes	No	No	No	None
Ask for vote by actual count to verify voice vote	"I call for a division of the house"	Must be done before new motion	No	No	No	None unless someone objects
Object to considering some undiplomatic or improper matter	"I object to consideration of this question"	Yes	No	No	No	2/3
Take up matter previously tabled	"I move we take from the table..."	Yes	Yes	No	No	Majority
Reconsider something already disposed of	"I move we now (or later) reconsider our action relative to..."	Yes	Yes	Only if original motion was debatable	No	Majority
Consider something out of its scheduled order	"I move we suspend the rules and consider..."	No	Yes	No	No	2/3
Vote on a ruling by the Chair	"I appeal the Chair's decision"	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Majority

The motions, points and proposals listed above have no established order of preference; any of them may be introduced at any time except when meeting is considering one of the top three matters listed from the first chart (Motion to Adjourn, Recess or Point of Privilege).

QUICK TIPS TO REMEMBER

- The Chair has the authority to recognize members to speak. With the exception of points of order or privilege (or a few other actions), no member should interrupt another member who has been recognized to speak unless the rules allow for interruption.
- All members should address the Chair when speaking. Remarks should pertain to the motion under consideration (unless offering a new motion that is in order).
- All members should be respectful to one another and refrain from personal attacks.



QUICK TIPS TO REMEMBER

- If you are confused about what motion is being considered, what an affirmative or negative vote would mean, how to offer a motion, etc., please seek recognition from the Chair and raise a “Point of Parliamentary Inquiry”. **Parliamentary procedure should never be prohibitive to participation.** (If you don’t know what’s going on, others likely don’t know either.)
- Members with minority opinions on a matter have the right to be heard. Likewise, a majority of members have the right to dispose of a matter how they see fit (within the bounds of proper procedure): reject a motion, refer a matter to committee, postpone or table a matter, etc.



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



I think the committee should reconsider a matter it has already disposed of. What can I do?

You can move that the committee reconsider a previously disposed matter... IF... it is the same meeting that the original matter was considered AND you originally voted on the prevailing side (in the majority).

Do I have to be in favor of a motion to make it?

Yes. Making the motion is indicative of your support of the motion. If in the course of the debate you change your opinion, you should withdraw the motion or amend it. You DO NOT have to support the motion to provide a "second" – seconding a motion only indicates that you believe the matter is important enough for consideration.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



We just voted by voice but I disagree with the Chair's determination of the outcome. What can I do?

After the chair declares the outcome of the voice vote, you can call for "division of the assembly" by clearly (and with projection) saying "Division!" At this time, the Chair will ask members to vote by a show of hands. If there is no "count" and you still do not agree with the outcome, you can call for division again and the Chair will conduct a counted vote (again by hand raising, or physical division of the room, or by roll call).

I disagree with the Chair's ruling on a point of order. What can I do?

Every member has the right to appeal a ruling of the Chair. You can announce that you "Appeal the ruling of the Chair." If there is a second, then the appeal can be debated and considered. The committee would then consider whether or not to affirm the decision of the chair by a majority vote.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



If it looks like a rule from our Governing Document is in contrast to Robert's Rules – which should be followed?

The Governing Document is the ultimate authority. If your Governing Document requires certain things not normally required by parliamentary procedure, the rule established by the Governing Document should be followed.

QUESTIONS

