



## Facilitation Series: Parliamentary Procedure

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Meetings often become stressful and chaotic when a group is attempting to make a decision. At times, multiple individuals are attempting to talk at the same time while others sit in the back of the room and are disengaged from the topics being discussed. Disorganized meetings result in arguments among participants, inappropriate decisions, and people leaving the meeting feeling confused and frustrated. A basic understanding of parliamentary procedure leads to organized meetings and positive decision making experiences for participants.

Parliamentary procedure is a set of proven rules that serve as guidelines (not laws) for conducting effective meetings. The use of parliamentary procedure provides a way of conducting business in a fair and democratic manner. The “rules” of parliamentary procedure are simply guidelines to follow, not laws. The most commonly used system of parliamentary procedure is Roberts Rules of Order, which provides an in-depth description of procedures used in conducting meetings.

Parliamentary procedure can be intimidating, confusing, and boring – especially for those who have had little or no experience. As the person leading the meeting, it is your responsibility to show respect and courtesy to all members. Knowing the guidelines and language of parliamentary procedure will assist you in facilitating the transaction of business and promoting cooperation and harmony.

Remember: as the leader, or “chair,” of the meeting your job is to facilitate a discussion that follows basic guidelines of sound parliamentary procedure that include the following:

- All members have equal rights, privileges, and obligations.
  - The majority has the right to decide.
  - The minority has rights, which must be protected.
- A quorum must be present for the group to act.
- Full and free discussion of every motion considered is a basic right.
- Only one question/motion can be considered at any given time.
- Members have the right to know at all times what the impending question/motion is, and to have it restated before a vote is taken.
- No member can speak until recognized by the chair.
- No one can speak a second time on the same question as long as another member wants to speak a first time.
- The chair should be strictly impartial and not debate or discuss items of business while serving as the chair. The chair may only vote by ballot or to create or break a tie.

*Adapted from Roberts Rules of Order, 10<sup>th</sup> edition*

## Authorities on Parliamentary Procedure

Organizations have access to more than one recognized authority on parliamentary procedure, but the organization normally selects one resource to guide the way it conducts business. The list of resources includes:

- Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised (RONR)
- Cannon's Concise Guide to Rules of Order
- Demeter's Manual of Parliamentary Law and Procedure
- Mason's Manual of Legislative Procedure
- Riddick's Rules of Procedure
- Jefferson's Manual (Manual of Parliamentary Practice for the use of the Senate of the United States)
- Standard Code of Parliamentary Procedure

## The Language of Parliamentary Procedure

Every leader learns the language required to conduct business within the organization. Parliamentary procedure has key words that are used when referring to specific actions. The words include:

- **Motion:** A proposal or resolution by a member that the assembly takes a certain action or expresses a certain view. A motion is considered out of order if it conflicts with the constitution or by-laws of the group or is beyond the scope of the organization's purpose.
- **Main Motion:** A main motion is used to introduce a new item of business or principal subject. In order for a motion to be considered, it must be supported with a second by another member of the assembly or group. The member who seconds the motion does not have to be in favor of the motion; a second simply shows that they have interest in discussing the motion. Only one main motion may be considered at a time and the motion must be disposed of before another main motion may be considered.
- **Motion to Lay on the Table (or Tabling):** When the group needs to take action on an urgent item of immediate need the current main motion may be temporarily set aside by utilizing the motion of *Lay on the Table*. If approved, the pending question (Main Motion) will remain of the table until the assembly approves bringing it back before the group. The main motion may only be set aside until the next meeting or it will be considered lost (disposed of).
- **Motion to Take from the Table:** This motion enables the assembly to resume consideration of a previously tabled main motion.
- **Point of Order:** Allows any member to object/question a proceeding as being in conflict with the rules of procedure. The chair must recognize the *Point of Order* and rule on whether the member's concern was valid.
- **Previous Questions:** A motion to terminate debate and proceed to vote on the issue at hand. The *Previous Question* must be supported by another member and this procedure requires a 2/3 vote to pass, and is not debatable.

- **Friendly Amendment:** A small change to an original motion. Those who made and seconded the original motion must agree to the amendment. Normally, the chairman will ask for unanimous consent on a friendly amendment.
- **Amendment:** A procedure that allows a main motion to be altered. The amendment must be germane (relevant) to the main motion and this procedure allows a member to change the wording in order to make the motion better or more desirable. A motion may be amended by 1) Inserting words, 2) deleting words, or 3) inserting/substituting new words in place of the deleted words.
- **Motion to Adjourn:** A motion made at the conclusion of a business meeting or at the final business session. This motion allows for an orderly close to the meeting.
- **Majority Vote:** More than half of the votes or 50 percent + 1.
- **Quorum:** The minimum number of members required in the by-laws to conduct business legally. Normally considered to be at least 50 percent of the people eligible to attend the meeting.
- **Recess:** A motion that allows the group to take a short break in the meeting in order to count ballots, to secure additional information, or to allow for informal discussion of an item of business.
- **Object to the Consideration of a Question:** A motion used to prevent discussion of a main motion that is not worthy of the group's attention. An example of such a main motion is one that may be considered ridiculous or injurious to the reputation of the group or its members. This procedure must be made before discussion of the main motion occurs and it requires a 2/3 vote.
- **Limit Debate:** If you believe that discussion of the main motion will take a long time, then you can move to limit debate or extend debate. Debate can be limited/extended to the number of speakers, the number of times a speaker may address the group, the length of discussion, or by setting a time for terminating debate. Roberts Rules of Order, if adopted by the organization, limits the debate on each motion to two discussions per member, and a ten minute time limit per debate.
- **Postpone Definitely:** If you believe that the group needs more time to investigate/gather more information about the main motion, then you can move to postpone the main motion to a definite time or day. The item is normally postponed to the next meeting date. An item cannot be postponed more than three months.
- **Reconsider a motion:** Sometimes a motion that was passed at a previous meeting needs to be altered or improved upon due to new circumstances. Only members that voted on the prevailing side of the previously approved motion can move for the reconsideration.
- **Commit or Refer to a Committee** – There are times when a motion could be handled more effectively by a small group of people due to the time constraints, the need to gather additional information, or to act on the membership's behalf. When this situation occurs, a member may

move to refer the motion to a special or standing committee. If the maker of the motion does not specify the members of the special committee, then the chair appoints the committee once the motion to refer passes. The first person the chair appoints is the chair of the committee. If the motion is referred to standing committee then there is no need to appoint a chair of the committee.

When a motion is referred, the maker of the motion must decide on what powers to give the committee. Unless the appointed committee's power is restricted, then the committee can spend money, sign contracts, and appoint new members to their committee without a requirement to report back to the membership. Therefore, it is often a good idea to give a committee the charge to investigate an item/motion and to specify when they should report back to the group (i.e. the next scheduled meeting).

*Note: Any time a committee report is presented back to a group, the report comes with an implied second and the chair should consider the report open for discussion. No formal motion to do so is required.*

*Adapted from the ABC's of Parliamentary Procedure, Arnold Air Society-Silver Wings*

## The Agenda

The order of business conducted at a meeting is called an agenda. It is prepared by the group's chair and/or leadership team, written to contain specific parts organized in a specific manner, and distributed to the membership either prior to the meeting or at the beginning of the session. Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised (p. 25) defines the components of an agenda as:

- Call to Order
- Adoption of the Agenda
- Reading and Approval of Minutes
- Reports of Officers, Boards, and Standing Committees
- Reports of Special Committees
- Special Orders (matters which have previously been assigned a type of special priority)
- Unfinished Business
- New Business
- Announcements
- Adjournment



Be assured that Robert's Rules of Order does not suggest using the phrase "old business" but lists "unfinished business" as the category for any action that is carried over from one meeting to the next meeting.

In addition to what is recommended by Robert's Rules, a promising practice used by many organizations is to include the organizational mission and vision on each agenda. The inclusion of these statements remind members of the organizational purpose and its aspirations.

## **Motions & Voting**

The business of an organization is managed through motions or proposals made by the members. The assembly of members would then take action on any motion through a vote. Robert's Rules of Order has defined the types of motions, whether a second is required, if the motion may be amended, and what level of vote is required.

Types of motions are categorized as:

- Main
- Secondary
  - Subsidiary
  - Privileged
  - Incidental
- Unclassified
  - Reconsider

An effective leader must consider that:

- Only one Main Motion may be on the floor at one time.
- Only one member/speaker can have the floor at a time.
- The person that makes the main motion should always be given the first debate.
- Once a person has debated then all other members should be given an opportunity to debate before any member is allowed to have a second debate.
- Debatable motions must receive full debate.
- Personal remarks during debate are always out of order.
- Once the question has been decided, it cannot be brought up again at the same meeting.
- The majority rules.
- Silence means consent.

### ***Steps by which a Motion is brought before the Group***

Consideration of a motion begins when a member makes a motion. The Chair asks "Is there a second?" (*Of course, if someone quickly seconds the motion, there is no need to ask for a second. If the motion is coming from a committee, it does not require/need a second.*) After another member seconds the motion, the chair restates the motion and opens the floor for discussion.

### ***Consideration of a Motion***

When the floor is open for discussion, members are encouraged to debate/discuss the motion unless no member claims the floor for that purpose. Remember, no debate should occur unless a motion has been made, seconded and stated by the chair.

As members request permission to speak to the motion, it is appropriate to recognize (invite) the person who made the main motion to speak first. If needed, the chair will want to alternate debate between pro and con positions on the motion.

A motion may be amended with words either inserted/added or removed/struck, or both. Amendments require a second and may be debated/discussed and the amendment must be voted on before the main motion can be discussed. Amendments may also be amended - this is called a secondary

amendment. Only one secondary amendment can be pending and the secondary amendment must be voted on before debate/discussion continues on the primary amendment.

### Voting

As motions are made in the meeting, the organization may vote on a motion in several ways including by:

- Voice
- Rising (standing)
- Secret ballot
- Roll Call
- Unanimous Consent



Please note, raising one's hand is not considered an official method of voting outside of informal groups (like committees).

The chair puts the question to a vote by restating the question and taking the vote. A chair may state:

- "All in favor of the motion, say aye."
- "Those opposed, say no."
- The chair of the group may only vote 1) to cause a tie, 2) to break a tie, or 3) on a ballot vote.

A motion passes with a simple majority except in specific cases, such as *Previous Question* or *Limit or Extended Debate*, which each require a 2/3 vote. A 2/3 vote is generally required on a motion when the motion affects certain rights of the assembly.

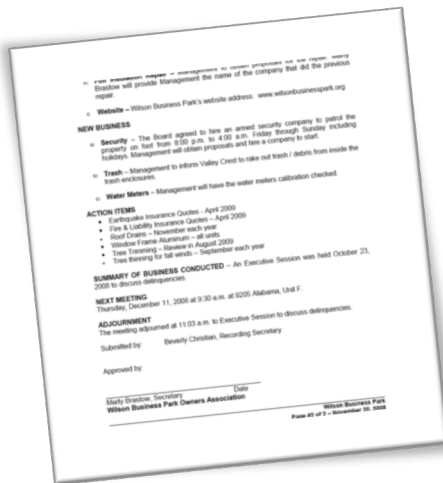
The chair announces the result of a vote by saying "The motion was approved" or "The motion was defeated." A complete announcement should include a:

- Report on the voting itself, stating which side prevailed (and giving the count if a count prevailed).
- Declaration that the motion is adopted or lost.
- Statement indicating the effect of the vote or ordering its execution.

### Minutes

The record of the proceedings of a deliberative assembly is usually called the Minutes, the Record, or the Journal. The essential text that should be included in the minutes include: (a) the kind of meeting; (b) name of the assembly; (c) date of meeting and place; (d) the presence of the regular chairman and secretary or, in their absence, the name of their substitute; (e) whether the minutes of the previous meeting were approved; (f) all the main motions (except those that were withdrawn) and points of order and appeals, whether sustained or lost, and all other motions that were not lost or withdrawn; and (g) the hours of meeting and adjournment.

Generally, the name is recorded of the member who introduced a main motion, but not of the seconder. In some organizations the minutes are signed by the president in addition to the secretary and, when published, they should always be signed by both officers.



Adapted from Roberts Rules of Order, 10<sup>th</sup> edition



## Sample Meeting Agenda/Minutes Template

# XXXX BOARD MEETING MINUTES

**DATE:** Month./Day/Year

**TIME:** 10:30 AM

**LOCATION:** Conference Room B, Main Office

**MEETING CHAIR:** Jane Doe      email: janedoe@email.com      phone: 540.555.5555  
**MEETING SECRETARY:** George Cruz      email: johndoe@email.com      phone: 540.555.1111  
**MEETING TITLE:** December Monthly Board Meeting

### BOARD MEMBERS

*Monique Abel*

*George Cruz*

*\*John Doe*

*Elizabeth Walker*

*\*designates absence*

1. Call to Order    Remarks
2. Welcome / Introductions    Remarks
3. Quorum    Remarks
4. Agenda Approval    Remarks
5. Approval of Previous Minutes    Remarks
6. Reports of Officers, and Standing Committees    Remarks
7. Reports from Special Committees    Remarks
8. Unfinished Business    Remarks
9. New Business    Remarks
10. Adjournment    Remarks

**BOARD CHAIR APPROVAL:**  
(Signature & Date)

\_\_\_\_\_

**BOARD SECRETARY APPROVAL:**

\_\_\_\_\_

(Signature & Date)

**Summary**

*Robert's Rules of Order 10<sup>th</sup> Edition* offers a chart on wording that should be used, actions that should be taken during meetings, and the appropriate and type of vote is required by the group.

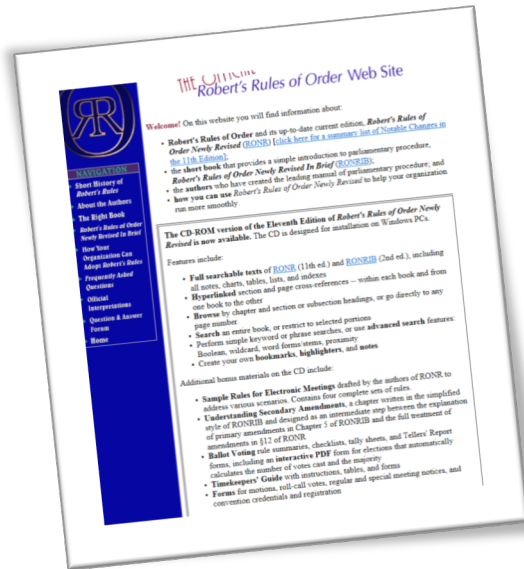
**Parliamentary Procedures at a Glance**

To do this...	You say this...	May you interrupt the speaker?	Must you be seconded?	Is the motion debatable?	What vote is required?
Make Main Motion	I move that . . .		Yes	Yes	Majority
Amend a motion	I move this motion be amended by...	No	Yes	Yes	Majority
Adjourn meeting*	I move that we adjourn	No	Yes	No	Majority
Recess meeting	I move that we recess until...	No	Yes	No	Majority
Complain about noise, room temp., etc.*	Point of privilege	Yes	No	No	No vote
Suspend further consideration of something	I move we table it	No	Yes	No	Majority
Close debate	I move the previous question	No	Yes	No	2/3 vote
Postpone consideration of something	I move we postpone this matter until...	No	Yes	Yes	Majority
Have something studied further	I move we refer this matter to committee	No	Yes	Yes	Majority
Introduce business (a primary motion)	I move that...	No	Yes	Yes	Majority
Object to procedure or personal affront*	Point of order	Yes	No	No	No vote, chair decides
Request information	Point of information	Yes	No	No	No vote
Ask for actual count to verify voice vote	I call for a division of the house	No	No	No	No vote
Take up a matter previously tabled*	I move to take from the table...	No	Yes	No	Majority
Reconsider something already disposed of *	I move we reconsider our action relative to...	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority
Vote on a ruling by the Chair	I appeal the Chair's decision	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority

\*Not Amendable

*Adapted from Roberts Rules of Order, 10<sup>th</sup> edition - Reference: Ericson, J. (1991) Notes and comments on Robert's Rules, Revised Edition. Southern Illinois University Press*





In addition, a website developed by Robert's Rules of Order offers additional support. Items include:

- <http://www.robertsrules.org/rulesintro.htm> offers a quick overview of the rules.
- <http://www.robertsrules.org/> provides a summary of Roberts Rules.
- <http://www.robertsrules.com/faq.html#1> includes answers to key questions related to parliamentary procedures.
- <http://www.rulesonline.com/> offers on-line training for Roberts Rules.
- Institute for Local Government. Parliamentary Procedure Simplified for elected officials  
<http://www.ca-ilg.org/document/parliamentary-procedure-simplified>

Meeting with purpose and impact requires planning and organization. The ideal outcome for most groups is to have agreement for an action reached based on building consensus among the members. Parliamentary procedure offers every leader a tool to guide the discussion and maintain order so that everyone is heard and the majority decides.

## References

- *ABC's of Parliamentary Procedure*, Arnold Air Society-Silver Wings. <https://www.aas-sw.org/>
- Robert III, H.M. (2000). *Roberts Rules of Order*, 10<sup>th</sup> edition. Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press a member of Perseus Books Group.
- Ericson, J. (1991). *Notes and comments on Robert's Rules, Revised Edition*. Southern Illinois University Press.

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