

Overview of Parliamentary Procedure

History

Parliamentary procedure originated with the Parliament of England and is the basis of constitutional forms of government. In professional society business meetings we use a descendant of the English parliamentary procedure. Its purpose remains the same—to facilitate the democratic transaction of decision making in an organized group.

American parliamentary rules were written and made uniform in 1801 by Thomas Jefferson (also author of the U.S. Declaration of Independence). Jefferson's manual was still too complex for average citizens, so in 1876 General Henry Robert, an engineer, authored the first *Robert's Rules of Order*. Robert became interested in parliamentary procedure when he was asked to preside at a meeting and didn't know how. "My embarrassment was supreme. I plunged in, trusting to Providence that the Assembly would behave itself."

Basis of Parliamentary Procedure

Parliamentary procedure is an established system of rules that govern procedures in democratic meetings. Its rules protect:

• The right of the majority to decide	• The rights of individual members
• The right of the minority to be heard	• The rights of absentees

Parliamentary procedure protects the rights of people to join together to accomplish common goals and enables them to debate and take action in a fair manner with the least amount of controversy.

Key Rules of Parliamentary Procedure

1. **The rights of the organization supersede the rights of individual members.** The organization has the right to make its own rules that must then be observed by all members. Should a conflict arise between the rights of a member and the right of the organization to do its business, the rights of the organization prevail.
2. **A quorum must be present to do business.** A quorum is the number of members who must be legally present to transact business. The number is usually stated in the bylaws.
3. **The majority rules.** The minority has the right to be heard, but once a decision has been reached by a majority of the members present and voting, the minority must then respect and abide by the decision.
4. **Silence is consent.** Those members who do not vote agree, by their silence, to go along with the decision of the majority of those who vote.
5. **Two-thirds vote rule.** This means 2/3 of the votes cast must be cast in the affirmative in order to adopt a motion which will limit or take away the rights of members or whenever the body is changing something that has already been decided.
6. **One question at a time and one speaker at a time.** No motion is in order that does not directly relate to the question under consideration. Also, once a member has been recognized, he or she has been granted "the floor" and another member may not interrupt him or her.
7. **Debatable motions must receive full debate.** The presiding officer may not put a debatable motion to vote as long as members wish to debate it. Debate can only be suspended by two-thirds vote of the members. Members may not hold the floor for longer than ten minutes at one time, although further limitations are common to insure business is completed.
8. **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.**
9. **Personal remarks in debate are always out of order.** Debate must be directed to motions and/or principles, not motives or personalities.

Glossary

Abstain: To refrain from voting

Amendment: A motion that changes a motion

Carried: Adopted, as in, "the motion was carried"

Out of Order: Not correct from a parliamentary standpoint

Parliamentarian: Person who decides on questions of correct parliamentary procedure

Putting the Question or Call the Previous Question: Placing the motion before the group for a vote

Second: A second person that agrees to have a motion considered

Kinds of Motions and What to Say

There are two kinds of motions, main motions and secondary motions.

Main motions allow a group to do its work; such as spend money, adopt projects, etc.

Secondary motions are ones that can be made while the main motion is on the floor and before the main motion has been decided. Here are several examples.

To Do This	You Say This	Vote
Introduce business	"I move that..."	Majority
Change the wording of a motion	"I move to amend the motion by..." (Adding, striking out, substituting)	Majority
Send to committee	"I move that the motion be referred to..." (Include which committee (a standing committee or a new special committee), the size of the committee, how the committee will be selected, how much authority the committee will have, and when the committee should report)	Majority
Postpone action	"I move that the motion be postponed to..."	Majority
Limit debate	"I move that debate be limited to..." (Number of speeches, number of minutes per member)	Two-thirds
End debate and immediately vote on the pending motion	"I move the previous question."	Two-thirds
Take care of an urgent request affecting the comfort, safety, dignity, or reputation of the organization or an individual	Examples: "We cannot hear in the back of the room." "Not all members received the printed materials." "The speaker is misstating my remarks."	Chair rules
Take a recess	"I move that we recess for..." (Include the length of the recess or the time for reconvening)	Majority
End the meeting	"I move that we adjourn."	Majority
Enforce parliamentary procedures	"I rise to a point of order."	Chair
Protest a ruling of the chair	"I appeal the decision of the chair."	Majority
Request additional information	"I rise to a point of information."	Given by the chair or authority
Request parliamentary help	"I rise to a parliamentary question."	Given by the chair or parliamentarian
Demand verification of the vote	Call out, "Division!" <i>This is the only motion that does not require you to be recognized by the chair before speaking.</i>	On demand of one member
Separate parts of a motion (when a motion contains several parts and you would like the group to vote on each part separately)	"I move the motion be divided."	Majority
Withdraw a motion	"I request that my motion be withdrawn."	Majority

How to Present your Motion

A motion (also called a “question”) is a proposal that the group take a specific action or express an opinion.

1. **Obtain the floor** (be given permission to speak).
 - a. Wait until the last speaker has finished.
 - b. Rise and address the Chair by saying, "Mr. Chairman or Madam Chair".
 - c. Wait until the Chair recognizes you, then go to one of the microphones.
2. **Make your motion.**
 - a. State your name, chapter, position in the chapter, or delegation from the chapter president.
 - b. Speak in a clear and concise manner.
 - c. State a motion affirmatively. Say, "I move that we ..." rather than, "I move that we do not ...".
 - d. Avoid personalities and stay on your subject.
3. **Wait for someone to second your motion.**
4. **Another member will second your motion or the Chair will call for a second.**
5. **If no one seconds your motion, it is lost (please return to your seat).**
6. **After the second, the Chair will state the motion.**
 - a. The Chair will say, "it has been moved and seconded that we ...", thus placing the motion before the membership for consideration and action.
 - b. The membership then either debates the motion, or may move directly to a vote.
 - c. Once your motion is presented by the Chair to the membership, it becomes "assembly property," and cannot be changed by you without the consent of the members.
7. **Discussion of the motion** (debate)
 - a. This is the point in time for you to speak in favor of the motion (rather than when you present it).
 - b. The mover is always allowed to speak first.
 - c. All comments and debate must be directed to the Chair.
 - d. Keep to the time limit that has been established for speaking.
 - e. The mover may speak again only after other speakers are finished, unless called upon by the Chair.
 - f. If a secondary motion is made, the previous motion may be amended.
8. **Putting the question to the membership**
 - a. The Chair will ask, "Are you ready to vote on the question?"
 - b. If there is no more discussion, a vote is taken.

Parliamentary Procedure is the best, time-tested way to get things done at a business meeting. However, it works efficiently only when meeting attendees:

1. Obtain the floor properly.
2. Speak clearly and concisely.
3. Obey the rules of debate.
4. Most importantly, be courteous.

References for Further Study on Parliamentary Procedure

www.robertsrules.org (official Robert's Rules web site)

Robert's Rules in Plain English, by Doris P. Zimmerman, ISBN 0-06-273476-8 (130 page abridged guide)

Robert's Rules of Order: Newly Revised, by Henry M. Robert, et al, ISBN 0062760513 (700 page unabridged version)