

Simplified Parliamentary Procedure

An abridged version of Robert's Rules of Parliamentary Procedure

Meetings are no more troublesome than the members that attend them.

Parliamentary procedure is a system of rules that allow members to know what they can expect from each other in an orderly, fair, and efficient way. The procedures are based on two universally accepted democratic principles which balance the interests of the individual and of the group.

Every member has equal rights and obligations. The officers and members must deal with each other in good faith and with fairness. The whole organization is undermined to the extent that any individual or minority is not treated equally.

The majority rules. Assured of fairness for all, and recognizing that unanimity is impossible, each member agrees in advance to accept the will of the majority to facilitate decision making. This is, in effect, an unqualified grant of trust and confidence.

All the procedures summarized below are an application of these principles. They allow members to express their opinions, act on their needs, and know what is going on.

Prioritized List of Motions

These motions are listed in order of precedence. In other words, if a motion is listed above a motion that is being discussed, you can interrupt that discussion to present the new motion. If it is listed below the motion being discussed, you have to wait until the discussion is complete.

Adjourn

When you want to end the meeting, you say, "I move we adjourn." The motion requires a second, is not debatable, and must be put to an immediate vote. It requires a majority vote for passage. Adjournment ends the meeting. Any unfinished business is then considered old business at the next meeting.

Recess

When you want to suspend the meeting, take a break, or just hold off until a specific time before the next regular meeting, "I move we recess until ____." The motion requires a second, is debatable only as to the time of the resumption of the meeting, and requires a majority vote. The only acceptable amendment is on the time of the resumption of the meeting.

End Debate

When you want to end debate and put the question being discussed to an immediate vote, you say, "I move we end debate." The motion requires a second, is not debatable, and requires a 2/3 vote. If there is more than one part of the proposal being discussed, i.e., there are amendments, or other motions to refer to a committee, or to postpone, etc., you should specify whether you are moving for a vote on the item under immediate consideration or on all matters pertaining to that question.

If there is no objection, the chairman may end debate on his own or at the suggestion of a member. However, if there is an objection from any member, a motion is required to end debate. The phrase "I would like to call the question" is often used instead of a move to end debate. The difference between calling the question and ending debate is that calling the question is considered a vote of acclamation. In other words, no vote is necessary unless there are objections to ending debate.

Limited Debate

When you want to limit debate to a certain amount of time or to a certain number of additional speakers, you say, "I move we limit debate to ____ [a specified number of speakers on each side or a specific time]." If there is more than one part to the proposal being considered, you should specify whether you want to limit debate to one item under discussion or to all discussion on the main question. The motion requires a second, is not debatable, and requires a 2/3 vote. (The same special restrictions for the motion to end debate hold for the motion to limit debate.)

Refer to a Committee

When you want to have a smaller group go over what is being discussed before further action, you say, "I move we refer this matter to ____." The motion requires a second, is debatable and amendable only as to which committee will handle the matter, and requires a majority vote.

Business may be referred to an existing group, i.e. executive committee, etc., or to an ad hoc committee, which is a committee especially established for a specific purpose and exists until the matter is resolved; or to the committee of the whole (which is a way of saying that the group can consider the matter informally). Usually a matter is referred to the committee of the whole when there is need to discuss a matter before the introduction of a motion.

The same effect can be achieved by moving to consider the matter informally or by moving to table the discussion until another time.

Motion

A motion is the formal proposal of a suggestion for consideration of the group. A motion gives the group something to react to and act on so that there can be a final decision. A motion limits discussion to something definite so that everyone knows what is at stake and what the outcome will be. To make a motion, a member says, "I move that ____."

A second is required and indicates that at least two people feel that the proposal merits consideration. If a second is not given, the item is not discussed, simply because it doesn't have enough support to be considered. To second a motion, a member says, "I second that motion."

Amendments

Amendments are suggested changes to the motion before the body. They must be *germane* (which means they must have something to do with the motion being discussed). There can even be an amendment to an amendment, but that's all.

Amendments have to be seconded. Once before the group, discussion is limited to the amendment in question. The group votes on a the last amendment proposed and works its way back to the main motion. To amend, a motion a member says, "I move to amend the motion by ____."

Appeal

When you want to reverse a decision or ruling of the chairperson, you say, "I appeal the decision of the chair (stating the action or decision that is objected to)." This appeal requires a second. The chairperson may explain his or her reason for decision without leaving the chair. The appeal is debatable, is not amendable, requires a majority vote to overrule the chair. The appeal must be made immediately after the decision in question. The chair must recognize all appeals.

Withdraw a Motion

When you have made a motion and want to withdraw it, you say, "I withdraw my motion," and that's it -- unless discussion has started on your motion. Then it is the property of the body and can only be withdrawn by a motion to permit withdrawal which requires a second, is neither debatable nor amendable, and requires a majority vote. Of course, if no one objects, a motion may be withdrawn at any time.

Division of the Question

When you want to consider a motion point by point, you say, "I request the motion be divided as follows ____." If the chairman agrees, debate and voting will be conducted on each point, one at a time. If the request is not granted, you may move to divide the question. The rules applying to main motions govern.

Division of the Assembly

When the results of a vote are unclear or you want a definite count taken instead of a voice vote, you say, "I call for a division of the assembly." You may state if you want a

hand count, secret ballot, or roll call vote. If there is a conflict, the chairperson will decide the method of vote.

Some Terminology

Ad Hoc—An ad hoc committee is a group of people assembled just to work on one specific point. (An emergency *anything committee* is an example of an ad hoc committee.)

Dilatory—Dilatory behavior is behavior that is made in a deliberate attempt to delay the body.

Frivolous - Frivolous behavior is behavior that is, well, just plain silly.

Quorum - Quorum is simply the number of members required for a vote.