

Some selected sections from a Parliamentary Procedure Overview

I. GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF PARLIAMENTARY PROCEDURE

Every member of an organization should be familiar with the following simple rules and customs:

- A. All members have equal rights, privileges, and obligations; rules must be administered impartially.
- B. The minority has rights which must be protected.
- C. Full and free discussion of all motions, reports, and other items of business is a right of all members.
- D. In doing business the simplest and most direct procedure should be used.
- E. Logical precedence governs introduction and disposition of motions.
- F. Only one question can be considered at a time.
- G. Members may not make a motion or speak in debate until they have risen and been recognized by the chair and thus have obtained the floor.
- H. No one may speak more than twice on the same question on the same day without permission of the assembly. No member may speak a second time on the same question if anyone who has not spoken on that question wishes to do so.
- I. Members must not attack or question the motives of other members. Customarily, all remarks are addressed to the presiding officer.
- J. In voting, members have the right to know at all times what motion is before the assembly and what affirmative and negative votes mean.

Characteristics of an Informal Committee Meeting

- 1. Recognition is not required in order to speak.
- 2. The presiding officer participates as freely as any other member.
- 3. Committee business is discussed without any motions.
- 4. Discussion is neither limited nor suppressed.
- 5. Most decisions are made by consensus, though votes may be taken.
- 6. Formal procedure is invoked when necessary.

II. A STANDARD AGENDA

If an organization's established rules do not specify an order of business, parliamentary law provides the following standard agenda for a meeting:

- A. Call to order
- B. Reading and approval of minutes
- C. Reports of officers and standing committees
- D. Reports of ad hoc committees
- E. Unfinished business
- F. New business
- G. Announcements
- H. Adjournment

III. TRANSACTING BUSINESS AT A MEETING

A. Quorum:

1. A quorum is the minimum number of members who must be present at a meeting for business to be legally transacted.
2. An organization, in its established rules, may define its own quorum.
3. In the absence of such a provision, the quorum is a majority of the entire membership.

B. Obtaining the Floor:

1. Before a member in an assembly can make a motion or speak in debate, he or she must obtain the floor; that is, the member must be recognized by the chair as having the exclusive right to be heard at that time.

C. Introducing Business (Making Motions):

1. Business may be introduced by an individual member or by a committee.
2. Business is always introduced in the form of a motion.

D. Seconding a Motion:

1. After a motion has been made, another member, without rising and obtaining the floor, may second the motion.
2. A second merely implies that the seconder agrees that the motion should come before the assembly and not that he or she necessarily favors the motion.
3. A motion made by a committee requires no second.

E. Placing a Motion Before the Assembly:

1. After a motion has been made and seconded, the chair repeats the motion verbatim, thus placing it before the assembly for debate and action.
2. During the brief interval between the making of a motion and the time when the chair places it before the assembly by restating it, the maker of a motion may modify or withdraw it simply by stating the intention to do so; after the motion has been restated by the chair, it is officially before the assembly and must be dealt with appropriately (e.g., adopted, rejected, postponed).

F. Debate:

1. Every member of the assembly has the right to speak on every debatable motion before it is finally acted upon; this right cannot be interfered with except by a motion to limit debate.
2. All discussion must be confined to the immediately pending question and to whether or not it should be adopted.
3. While debate is in progress, amendments or other secondary motions can be introduced and disposed of accordingly.

G. Amendments:

1. As noted above, before a motion has been restated by the chair, the maker has the right to modify his or her motion or to withdraw it entirely. After it has been restated by the chair, however, a motion may be modified only by means of an amendment.
2. There are six ways to amend a motion: a. Add words, phrases, or sentences at the end of a motion; b. Insert words, phrases, or sentences; c. Strike words, phrases, or sentences; d. Strike and insert words, phrases, or sentences; e. Strike and add words, phrases, or sentences; and f. Substitute whole paragraphs or an entire text.
3. Only two amendments (primary and secondary) may be pending on a main motion at any time.
4. Discussion of an amendment must relate only to the amendment, unless the whole motion is involved by substitution.
5. An amendment must be germane to the question under consideration.

H. Voting:

1. Unless special rules apply, a majority decides. A majority is more than half of the votes cast by persons legally entitled to vote, excluding blank ballots or abstentions.
2. Unless otherwise provided for, voting is by voice vote.
3. If the presiding officer is a member of the assembly, he or she can vote as any other member does when the vote is by ballot. In other cases, the presiding officer, if a member of the assembly, can (but is not obliged to) vote whenever his or her vote will affect the result; i.e., he or she can vote either to break or to create a tie.
4. Any member may request a division of the assembly if there is uncertainty as to the true result of the vote.

I. Announcing a Vote:

1. In announcing the vote on a motion, the chair should: a. report on the voting itself, stating which side has prevailed; b. declare that the motion is adopted or lost; and c. state the effect of the vote or order its execution.
2. For a voice or rising vote in which no exact count is taken, the chair might say, for example, "The ayes have it, the motion carries, and the brochure will be published." For a vote in which an exact count is taken, the chair might say, "There are 14 in the affirmative and 15 in the negative. The negative has it and the motion is lost. No additional funds will be spent on this project."

J. Adjournment:

1. A motion to adjourn may be made by any member. It may be made during the consideration of other business, although it may not interrupt a speaker.
2. A motion to adjourn is not in order when the assembly is engaged in voting or verifying a vote.

IV. SUMMARY OF STEPS IN HANDLING A MOTION

- A. A member rises and addresses the presiding officer.
- B. The presiding officer recognizes the member.
- C. The member states the motion.
- D. Another member seconds the motion.
- E. The presiding officer restates the motion, thus placing it before the assembly for consideration.
- F. The assembly may discuss the motion if it is debatable and amend the motion if it is amendable.
- G. The presiding officer takes the vote.
- H. The presiding officer announces the result.

V. TIPS ON PARLIAMENTARY PROCEDURE

- A. Since the secretary is responsible for keeping accurate records of business transacted, the chair may require that main motions, amendments, or instructions to a committee be in writing.
- B. It is a general rule that no member should be present in the assembly when any matter relating to himself or herself is under consideration.
- C. A question cannot be postponed beyond the next regular meeting.
- D. Calls of "Question! Question!" by members from their seats are not motions for the previous question and are simply informal expressions of individual members' desires to proceed to a vote; these calls are disorderly if made while another member is speaking or seeking recognition.
- E. A question laid on the table remains there until taken from the table or until the close of the next regular meeting. If not taken up by that time, the question dies.
- F. Abstentions do not count in tallying the vote; when members abstain, they are in effect only attending the meeting to aid in constituting a quorum.
- G. Working as a committee of the whole enables the full assembly to give detailed consideration to a matter under conditions of freedom approximating those of an ad hoc committee. In such a committee, the results of votes taken are not final decisions of the assembly but are taken up by the assembly as committee recommendations. The proceedings of a committee of the whole are not entered in the minutes of the assembly.
- H. Motions are out of order that present essentially the same question as a motion already considered at the same meeting.
- I. All persons present at a meeting have an obligation to obey the legitimate orders of the presiding officer. Members, however, can appeal from the decision of the chair, move to suspend the rules, or move a reconsideration- depending on the circumstances of the chair's ruling.