

The Use of Parliamentary Procedure

Why use parliamentary procedure?

A knowledge of basic parliamentary procedure prepares a member of any organization to be more effective when participating in business meetings, and allows the member to understand and support the fundamental principles of parliamentary law.

Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised provides perhaps the best summary of the broad benefit of parliamentary law to organizations: *"The application of parliamentary law is the best method yet devised to enable assemblies of any size, with due regard for every member's opinion, to arrive at the general will on the maximum number of questions of varying complexity in a minimum time and under all kinds of internal climate ranging from total harmony to hardened or impassioned division of opinion."* (RONR, 10th ed., p. xlviii)

In other words, while parliamentary procedure cannot guarantee that every member of an organization is pleased with the outcome of a decision, it aims to ensure that every member is satisfied by the manner in which the decision was made, and that the organization makes decisions efficiently but with consideration for every member's opinion.

Who uses parliamentary procedure?

Countless organizations use parliamentary procedure every day. Consider these examples:

Government and civic organizations

U.S. Congress

State legislatures

City and county councils

School boards

Neighborhood and homeowners' associations

Corporations Boards of directors

Shareholder meetings

Non-profit organizations

Charitable organizations

Fraternal organizations

Churches

Clubs

Unions

Professional organizations

Parliamentary Basics:

Fundamental Rights The rules of parliamentary law are constructed upon a careful balance of the rights: of the majority, of the minority, especially a strong minority (greater than one third), of individual members, of absentees, and of all these together.

Fundamentally, under the rules of parliamentary law, a deliberative body is a free agent—free to do what it wants to do with the greatest measure of protection to itself and of consideration for the rights of its members.

Motions There are several classes of motions you may encounter in meetings, listed below. The most commonly used motions belong to the thirteen ranking motions..

Classes of Motions There are several classes of motions you may encounter in meetings:

The main motion is the basis of all parliamentary procedure. All business to be considered by an assembly is introduced by a main motion. This type of motion may only be considered if no other business is pending.

Subsidiary motions are those that may be applied to another motion for the purpose of modifying it, delaying action on it, or disposing of it.

Privileged motions are motions that are **unrelated to the current motion, but are of such urgency or importance that they are considered immediately**. These motions are related to members, the organization, and meeting procedure rather than the item of business being considered.

Incidental motions are motions that are related to, or incidental to, the business being considered, but do not directly modify the pending motion.

Motions that bring a question again before the assembly, or bring-back motions, are a special type of main motion that permit the assembly to consider business that was previously disposed of.

Thirteen ranking motions The main motion, subsidiary motions, and privileged motions all have rank relative to one another. The table below illustrates the motions' rank and basic characteristics.

13 Ranking Motions –TABLE (Insert)

Discussion and Debate Discussion, or debate in parliamentary terms, is how an assembly decides whether a proposed course of action should be followed. Disagreement is healthy, and helps the organization make the best decision if discussion is approached fairly and consistently:

Before speaking in debate, members obtain the floor as described in Parliamentary Basics - Presiding.

- The person who makes a motion may speak on it first, if he expresses the desire to do so. All remarks are addressed to the chair, not to other members.
- Debate is confined to the merits of the motion currently under consideration.
- Debate can only be closed by order of the assembly (2/3 vote), or by the chair if no one seeks the floor for further debate.

RULES OF ORDER- Survival Tips on Robert's Rules of Order

Six Steps to Every Motion!

Every motion requires 6 steps (with some exceptions). The shoulds and shouldn'ts are as follows: (RONR(10th ed.),p.31-54)

- **STEP 1. A member stands up, is recognized, and makes a motion;**
Common Mistake: Members do not stand up, do not wait to be recognized, and typically start to discuss their motion before completing STEP 2, STEP 3, and STEP 4 below!
- **STEP 2. Another member seconds the motion;**
Common Mistake: The person seconding the motion dives into the merits of the motion.
- **STEP 3. The presiding officer restates the motion to the assembly;**
Common Mistake: Motion is restated differently from the wording of the maker! Beware because the motion that is adopted is the one stated by

the presiding officer, not the one stated by the maker of the original motion.

➤ **STEP 4. The members debate the motion;**

Common Mistake: Debate gets out of control in temper, in duration, in relevance! Members talk at each other across the room rather than through the presiding officer.

➤ **STEP 5. Presiding officer asks for the affirmative votes & then the negative votes;**

➤ *Common Mistake: The presiding officer states 'All in favor' and fails to tell the members what to do as a matter of voting (for example, 'say aye', 'stand up', 'raise your hand', etc.); or the negative vote is never requested or counted!*

➤ **STEP 6. The presiding officer announces the result of the voting; instructs the corresponding officer to take action; and introduces the next item of business.**

➤ *Common Mistake: Presiding officer fails to pronounce the result of the voting! No one is instructed to take action. Commonly, dead silence follows because the presiding officer is lost and stares at the assembly*

Unanimous Consent

"If there is no objection ...". These are the 5 most helpful words a chairperson will ever find. In cases where there seems to be no opposition in routine business; or on questions of little importance; and in the presences of a quorum; you can save time by obtaining Unanimous Consent (General Consent) from the assembly. And then in one meeting, you as a chair can accomplish ten times the amount of work. **After all, parliamentary procedure is designed to protect the minority, and generally need not be strictly enforced when there is no minority (opposition) to protect.**

In these cases, a motion can be adopted without the Six Steps or even the formality of making a motion. Any meeting can be ten times more

productive if the chair will merely state, "If there is no objection, (we will adopt a motion to do such and such)."

When no objection is heard, the chair states, "Since there is no objection, ... (such and such a motion is adopted)."

If someone objects, the chair cheerfully proceeds with the traditional Six Steps.

Examples of situations which clearly beg for the Unanimous Consent approach are:

- **To correct or approve the minutes.** You do not need a time wasteful motion for this.
- **To withdraw an own motion before the vote is taken.** The maker may wish to withdraw his own motion; but *the motion belongs to the assembly*. **Only the assembly may allow the withdrawal of a motion.**
- **To suspend a rule on a matter clearly not controversial** (and as long as no ByLaw is violated).
- **To allow a speaker a few more minutes than the prescribed time.**
- **To allow a guest speaker to speak in an order contrary to the approved agenda** (or Rules of Order).
- **To divide a complex motion into logical parts for discussion, amendments, and voting purposes.**
- **To close polls on a voting process after inquiring if there are any more votes.** *No motion to close the polls is necessary.*
- **To elect a lone nominee by acclamation.**

In reality, as long as you have a quorum and do not violate a ByLaw, these 5 powerful words can allow a chair to quickly accomplish just about anything. These 5 words can shorten any meeting which is typically run by an egocentric, self-indulging, power meister.

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