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Parliamentary Procedure Made Easier

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4-H Youth Development Program 

FOREWARD

This booklet is designed to ease the burden of interpreting and reinterpreting the intricacies of parliamentary procedures. It is not meant to be definitive or complete, but it should answer most of the questions raised on parliamentary procedures.

Parliamentary procedure provides a basic guide to fair and orderly procedure in meetings. It 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 a 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. While parliamentary procedures themselves can be justified on the basis of effectiveness and uniformity, they also contribute to meeting procedure. There is little, if any, reason for one person to attempt to learn every rule and its related details. To know where to find the answers is enough.



The “Why” of Parliamentary Law

Parliamentary law is simple in principle. It is based largely on mere common sense and courtesy. It seems technical because it has been necessary to develop a special vocabulary for discussing it. If one knows the vocabulary, the rules come easily. For this reason, a glossary of common terms has been included in the back of the booklet and should be referred to as often as necessary.

The Purpose of Parliamentary Law:

- ★ To enable an assembly to transact business with speed and efficiency.
- ★ To protect the rights of each individual.
- ★ To preserve a spirit of harmony within the group.

To achieve these purposes, always consider the five basic principles of parliamentary procedure:

- ★ Only one subject may claim the attention of the assembly at one time.
- ★ Each proposition presented for consideration is entitled to full and free debate.
- ★ Every member has rights equal to every other member.
- ★ The will of the majority must be carried out, and the rights of the minority must be preserved.
- ★ The personality and desires of each member should be merged into the larger unit of the organization.

The Agenda or Order of Business

It is customary for every group to adopt a standard order of business for meetings. When no rule has been adopted, the following is the order:

1. **Call to order:**
“Will the meeting please come to order.”
2. **Reading and approval of minutes:**
“Are there any corrections to the minutes?”
“There being no corrections, the minutes will stand approved as read.”
or:
“Are there any further corrections to the minutes?”
“There being no further corrections, the minutes will stand approved as corrected.”
3. **Reports of officers and standing committees:**
Officers, boards, or standing committees should be called upon to report in the order in which they are mentioned in the constitution or by-laws of the organization.
4. **Reports of special committees**
5. **Unfinished business:**
“We come now to unfinished business. Is there any unfinished business to come before the meeting?”
6. **New Business:**
“Is there any new business to come before the meeting?”
7. **Program**
8. **Adjournment:**
Unqualified Form: Proposer moves for adjournment; motion is seconded; chair calls for a vote; action depends on majority vote. This motion cannot be discussed.
Qualified Form: Proposer moves for adjournment within a definite time or adjournment to meet again at a specified time; motion is seconded; chair calls for a discussion; a vote is taken; action depends on majority vote.

What is a Motion?

A motion is a proposal that the group take a certain action.

How are Motions Classified?

1. **Main Motions:** Motions of this group have for their object the bringing of the questions, or propositions, before the assembly for consideration. Only one main motion can be considered at a given time by the assembly, and such a motion, when introduced, excludes all other main motions until it has been disposed of.
2. **Subsidiary Motions:** Motions of this group have for their object the modification or disposition of the main motion that is being considered. Their existence as motions depends entirely upon the principle motion to which they are subordinate. Since they relate to the question before the house, it is "in order" to propose them when a main motion is still before the assembly and to vote upon them before voting upon the main motion.
3. **Privileged Motions:** Motions of this group have no connection whatsoever with the main motion before the assembly, but are motions of such importance that they are entitled to immediate consideration. These motions have the privilege of setting aside temporarily the main business before the house.
4. **Incidental Motions:** Motions of this group have few general characteristics in common, but for convenience have been grouped into one class. The name "incidental" has been chosen because they arise only incidentally out of the business of the assembly.

(See pages 12 and 13 for a Chart of Precedence of Motions and a Summary of Rules governing them.)

How Should a Motion Progress?

1. **A member rises and addresses the presiding officer.**
The presiding officer should be addressed by the appropriate title, i.e., "Mr. President." If the specific title is not known, it is always correct to use the term "Mr. (or Madame) Chairman (or Chairperson)."
2. **The member is recognized by the presiding officer.**
The chair recognizes a member by his name, by a nod, or other means of recognition. Having thus received formal recognition from the chair, a member is said to "have the floor" and is the only member entitled to present or discuss a motion.
3. **The member proposes a motion.**
A motion is always introduced in the form, "I move that" followed by a statement of the proposal. This is the only correct phraseology. Aside from very brief explanatory remarks, it is not permissible to discuss the merits of a motion either prior to or immediately following the formal proposal of the motion. All discussion must wait until after the chair has stated the motion to the assembly and has called for discussion.
4. **Another member seconds the motion.**
Another member, without raising or addressing the chair, may say, "I second the motion." Seconding the motion is merely an indication that the member seconding it wishes the matter to come before the assembly for consideration. If no one seconds the motion, the chair may ask, "Is there a second to the motion?" If there is none, the chair may declare, "The motion is lost for want of a second."

5. *The presiding officer states the motion to the assembly.*

When a motion has been properly proposed and seconded, the presiding officer repeats the motion to the assembly, or “states the motion.” After it has been formally stated to the assembly, it may be spoken of as a “question,” a “proposition” or a “measure.”

6. *The assembly discusses or debates the motion.*

After the motion has been formally stated, any member has a right to discuss it. The floor must be obtained in the same manner as when presenting a motion. Normally, the first person who asks recognition is entitled to speak, but when several members wish to speak or present motions at the same time, certain guiding principles should determine the decision of the chair:

- The chair should always show preference to the proposer of the motion.
- A member who has not spoken has prior claim over one who has already discussed the question, or who has proposed another motion.
- If the chair knows the opinions of the various members regarding the measure before the house, he should alternate between those favoring the measure and those opposing it.
- The chair should recognize a member who seldom speaks in preference to one who frequently claims the attention of the assembly.

Discussion must be confined to the question that is “before the house.”

7. *The presiding officer takes the vote on the motion.*

When all members who desire to discuss the question have done so, the motion is “put to a vote.” It is permissible, before taking the vote, to inquire, “Is there any further discussion?” or “Are you ready for the question?” If no one rises, it is presumed discussion is closed. The presiding officer will proceed to take the vote by announcing, “All in favor of the motion (state the motion) say ‘Aye.’” Following response from the assembly is the statement, “Those opposed say ‘No.’” If it is not possible to determine from the volume of voices which way the majority has voted, the response is: “The chair is in doubt. Those in favor of the motion please rise.” After counting: “Be seated. Those opposed, rise. Be seated.” Another alternative is to simply call for a show of hands. Certain motions may be voted on by ballot.

8. *The presiding officer announces the result of the vote.*

The chair then formally announces the result of the vote, saying: “The motion is carried; therefore (state the intent of the motion).” If a majority voted in the negative, “The motion is lost.” As soon as the vote has been announced, another motion is in order.

How May a Motion be Amended?

The purpose of the motion to amend is to modify a motion that has already been presented in such a manner that it will be more satisfactory to the members.

Methods of Amending:

- ★ ***By addition or insertion:*** To add something to the motion that it did not contain.
- ★ ***By elimination or by striking out:*** To subtract or eliminate something from a motion that was originally part of it.
- ★ ***By substitution:*** This method is a combination of the first two methods, since in amending by substitution something is stricken out and something is inserted in its place. The substituted portion may consist of a word, a phrase, a clause, or an entirely new motion.

The most important principle to understand in connection with any form of the motion to amend is that an amendment “**may be hostile, but it must be germane.**”

“Hostile” means it is opposed to the spirit and aim of the motion to which it is applied.

“Germane” means it has direct bearing upon the subject matter of the motion; that is, it is relevant, or relates to it.

An amendment may be opposed to the actual intent of the original motion and, in fact, nullify it, but if it relates to the same subject matter, it is germane.

How to Handle Amendments

Amendment of the First Rank: An amendment to a motion.

1. ***Amendment of the Second Rank:*** An amendment to the amendment. (The amendment to the amendment must modify and relate directly to the amendment and not to the main motion, otherwise it is out of order.)
2. ***No amendment beyond that of second rank is possible.***
It is never in order to propose more than one amendment of each rank at one time. If one desires to amend two separate and unrelated parts of a motion, this must be done by two amendments of the first rank, and one must be voted upon before the other is proposed. It is possible, however, to have a motion, one amendment to the motion (amendment of the first rank), and one amendment to the amendment (amendment of the second rank) before the assembly at one time. Until the amendment of the second rank has been voted upon, no other amendment of the first rank can be proposed.
3. ***Order of voting:***
Amendments are voted upon in inverse order; that is, the one of second rank is disposed of first.
 - ★ Discussion is held and the vote taken upon the amendment to the amendment (amendment of the second rank).
 - ★ Discussion is called for and the vote is taken upon the amendment to the motion (amendment of the first rank).
 - ★ When the vote on this has been taken, discussion upon the original or main motion as amended is opened and, when completed, a vote is taken upon it.

Chart of Precedence of Motions and Summary of Rules Governing Them

	May Interrupt A Speaker	Requires A Second	Debatable	Vote Required	Motions That May Apply
Privileged Motions					
• To fix time at which to adjourn	No	Yes	Limited	Majority	Amend, Reconsider
• To adjourn (unqualified)	No	Yes	No	Majority	None
• To take a recess	No	Yes	Limited	Majority	Amend
• To rise to a question of privilege	Yes	No	No	Chair rules	All
• To call for the orders of the day	Yes	No	No	None	None
Subsidiary Motions					
• To lay on the table	No	Yes	No	Majority	None
• To call for the previous question	No	Yes	No	2/3	Reconsider
• To limit, or extend limits, of debate	No	Yes	Limited	2/3	Amend, Reconsider
• To postpone definitely	No	Yes	Limited	Majority	Amend, Recon., Prev. Ques.
• To refer to a committee	No	Yes	Limited	Majority	Amend, Recon., Prev. Ques.
• To amend	No	Yes	Yes	Majority	Amend, Recon., Prev. Ques.
• To postpone indefinitely	No	Yes	Yes	Majority	Limit Deb., Prev. Ques., Recon.
Main Motions					
• General main motions	No	Yes	Yes	Majority	All
• Specific main motions					
– To take from the table	No	Yes	No	Majority	None
– To reconsider	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority	Lim. Deb., Prev. Ques., Table, Postpone definitely
– To reconsider and have entered on the minutes	Yes	Yes	No	None until called for	None
– To rescind	No	Yes	Yes	2/3	All
– To expunge	No	Yes	Yes	2/3	All
– To adopt a resolution	No	Yes	Yes	Majority	All
– To adjourn (qualified)	No	Yes	Limited	Majority	All
– To create orders of the day (Special)	No	Yes	Yes	Gen, Majority; Spec. 2/3	All
– To amend (constitution, etc)	No	Yes	Yes	2/3	All
Incidental Motions					
To suspend rules	No	Yes	No	2/3	None
To withdraw a motion	No	No	No	Majority	Reconsider
To read papers	No	Yes	No	Majority	Reconsider
To object to a consideration	Yes	No	No	2/3	Reconsider
To rise to a point of order	Yes	No	No	Chair rules or Majority	None
To rise to parliamentary inquiry	Yes	No	No	None	None
To appeal from the decision of the Chair	Yes	Yes	Limited	Majority	All <i>except</i> amend
To call for a division of the house	Yes	No	No	Majority	None
To call for a division of a question	No	Yes	No	Majority	Amend

Nominations and Elections

A nomination is the formal presentation to the assembly of the name of a candidate for the office to be filled.

Nominations from the floor:

- Nominations do not require a second.
- Nominations are in order as soon as the chair calls for them.
- As a nomination is made, the chair repeats it and the secretary records it.
- No member may nominate more than one candidate for each office.
- If there are no further nominations, the chair may declare the nominations closed.
- A motion to close the nominations requires a two-thirds vote.
- Prior to voting, but following the formal closing of nominations, nominations may be reopened by a motion, which requires only a majority to carry.

Nominations by nominating committee:

- Committee may be appointed or elected as the assembly may choose or as stated in the by-laws.
- Nominating committee report presents to the organization the names of one or more members as candidates for each office.
- The report of the nominating committee is not adopted, but the names are posted and treated as if the person named had been nominated from the floor.
- Further nominations may be made from the floor.

Nominations by ballot:

- Chair directs tellers to pass out ballots and the member writes after each office the name of one person whom he or she desires to nominate.
- If a candidate receives a majority in this manner, it is usual to declare that candidate elected.

- If no majority is received, a second ballot is then taken, in which candidates nominated by previous ballot are voted upon. If a candidate receives a majority on this ballot, election is declared.
- If no one is elected on the second ballot, a motion is in order before this third ballot that only the two highest candidates on the previous ballot be considered on the next ballot. The third ballot then becomes the decisive vote, or the electing ballot.

Voting for candidates not nominated:

- Voters may vote for anyone who is eligible regardless of whether or not they have been nominated and anyone receiving the necessary majority is elected. This is commonly called a “sticker ballot.”

Voting on nominations:

- After the nominations are closed, the assembly proceeds to vote upon the names by the method prescribed in the constitution.
- An election becomes effective immediately if the candidate is present and does not decline, or is absent but has consented to the candidacy. If the nominee is absent and has not consented to the nomination, the election becomes effective as soon as notification is made, if it is not declined immediately.
- Unless some other time is specified in the by-laws, an officer assumes the duties of office upon election.

Most organizations make specific detailed provisions for nominating and electing new officers in their constitution and by-laws. The provisions ordinarily include such details as the time of nominations, time of elections, method of nominating and electing, and time of installation.

Action for Special Purposes

Kind of Motion	Object	Effect
To lay on the table	Clear the floor for more urgent business	Delays action
To call for the previous question	Secure immediate vote on pending question	Ends debate
To limit or extend time for debate	Provides more or less time for discussion	Shortens or lengthens discussion period
To postpone definitely (to a certain time)	Often gives more time for informal discussion and for securing followers	Delays action
To commit or refer	To enable more careful consideration to be given	Delays action
To amend	To improve the motion	Changes the original motion
To postpone indefinitely	To prevent a vote on the question	Suppresses the question
To raise a point of order	To call attention to a violation of rules	Keeps group functioning according to parliamentary procedures
To appeal from the decision of the chair	To determine the attitude of the group on the ruling made by the chair	Secures ruling of the group rather than by the chair

Action for Special Purposes

Kind of Motion	Object	Effect
To suspend the rules	To permit action not possible under the rules	Secures action which would otherwise be prevented by the rules
To object to the consideration of a question	Prevent wasting time on unimportant business	Suppresses the motion
To divide the question	Secure more careful consideration of parts	Secures action by parts
To call for a division	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To determine the accuracy of a <i>viva voce</i> vote To secure expression of individual member's vote 	Secures an accurate check on vote
To nominate	Suggest names for office	Places before the group names for consideration
To make a request growing out of pending business	To secure information or to ask to be excused from a duty	Provides information
To fix the time at which to adjourn	To have legal continuation of the meeting	Sets definite continuation time
To adjourn	End the meeting	Adjourns the meeting
To take a recess	To secure an intermission	Delays action

Action for Special Purposes

Kind of Motion	Object	Effect
To raise a question of privilege	To correct undesirable conditions	Corrects undesirable condition
To call for the order of the day	To secure adherence to order of business	Same as object
To take from the table	Continue the consideration of the question	Continues consideration of question
To reconsider (Only a member of the prevailing side may make this motion.)	To reconsider the question	Secures further consideration and another vote on the question
To reconsider and have entered on the minutes (Only a member of the prevailing side may make this motion.)	To reconsider the question at the next meeting	Secures further consideration and another vote on the question
To rescind	Repeal action previously taken	Same as object
To ratify	Approves previous action taken	Same as object

Glossary of Standard Terms of Parliamentary Procedure

Amend—To change a motion either by adding to it, taking from it, or by altering it in some other way. (See Amendments.)

Blanks, Filling—“Filling Blanks” is a term used to indicate a method of decision regarding a matter where several different courses of action are possible. The term “blank” is used because usually this method is applied in motions where an exact amount, a name, a date, or some other essential, specific information is left blank.

Business, Order of—The regular program of procedure of a society. (See Agenda.)

Chair—The presiding officer. “Addressing the chair” means speaking to the presiding officer. This is done by rising to one’s feet (or raising a hand) when no one else is speaking (with some exceptions) using the proper salutation, i.e., “Mr. Chairman.” Being “recognized by the chair” means being given permission to speak further. (See Progress of Motions.)

Power of Chair—The chair has the following authority:

- To decide in what order speakers shall be recognized.
- To refuse to recognize members offering dilatory, absurd, or frivolous motions or motions intended, in his or her judgment, to obstruct business.
- To restrain speakers within the limits of the rules.
- To enforce good decorum.
- To appoint committees.
- To decide points of order.
- To vote in cases where the vote would change the result; e.g., to make or break a tie.
- To avoid influencing a vote by comment on a motion under consideration. Actions of the chair, of course, are subject to appeal. (See Incidental Motion, “to appeal from the decision of the chair.”)

Commit—To refer to a committee.

Committee of the Whole—Sometimes certain matters come up that can be properly studied and digested only as a committee would go into them, but which, because of their importance, should be considered by all members and, therefore, should not be referred to a small committee. Then the meeting, on motion duly made, may “resolve itself into a committee of the whole.” This means that the meeting officially is discontinued while everyone remains and becomes a member of a large special committee including everyone present. The presiding officer of the regular meeting does not preside over a committee of the whole; a special officer is appointed.

Consideration, Informal—When a member moves “informal consideration,” and the motion is adopted, the meeting lays aside formal rules, allowing each present to speak once on the subject under consideration.

Debate—Discussion or argument over a motion.

Division—“Division” in parliamentary law means simply a vote whereby all who are in favor and all who are opposed to a motion stand separately in groups as the chair calls for “ayes” and “nays.”

Floor—The privilege of speaking before the assembly. Thus, when one “obtains the floor,” the opportunity to speak is granted.

Inquiry, Parliamentary—An investigation or checking to determine the proper course of procedure.

Motion—A formal proposal to a meeting that it take certain action. A motion is a motion when stated by its proponent and until repeated by the chair. When it is presented by the chair for acceptance or rejection it becomes a “question,” a “proposition,” or a “measure.” (See Progress of Motions.)

Motion, Incidental—An incidental motion is one growing out of another already under consideration. A secondary motion must be disposed of before proceeding with the original motion. (See Motions.)

Motion, Main—A main motion is one which independently presents an idea for consideration. (See Motions.)

Motion, Privileged—A privileged motion is one which is so vital in character that it takes precedence over all others. (See Motions.)

Motion, Subsidiary—A subsidiary motion is one growing out of and applied to another already under consideration which is made use of “to enable the assembly to dispose of it in the most appropriate manner,” but which need not necessarily be decided before the question out of which it has arisen. (See Motions.)

Order—When this term is applied to an act of an assembly, it means an expression of a will of the assembly in the form of a command. An “order” differs from a “resolution” in that the latter is not a command, but a declaration of fact or an expression of opinion or purposes.

Order, General—“Making a general order” is setting a future time for the discussion of a special matter. Making a general order differs from making a special order in that the former does not involve the breaking of any rules.

Order of the Day—Regular order or program of business. A motion “calling for the orders of the day” is a motion demanding that the present discussion be dropped and that the chair announce the next matter to be taken up in accordance with the organization’s customary and established business routine. The term “orders of the day” has more specific meaning when a certain time has been set aside for the consideration of a given matter. Then a demand for the “orders of the day” is a request that this specific item be addressed.

Order, Special—“Making a special order” is setting aside all other rules for the consideration of some important question at a future time.

Postponement, Indefinite—The object of indefinite postponement is not merely to postpone, but, in effect, to reject.

Privilege—The term “privilege” in parliamentary law has a restricted meaning and refers specifically to the privileges or rights of the meeting or those attending chiefly in connection with matters of physical comfort; such as inability to hear a speaker, the heating, lighting and ventilation of the meeting room, noises and other disturbances, etc., and the ineligibility or misconduct of a member in a meeting at the time. These “questions of privilege” should not be confused with “privileged motions.” Questions of privilege may be involved in motions, but privileged motions include other matters.

Question—The question in parliamentary law is the proposition or motion after it has been placed before the meeting for action by the chair. To “move the previous question” is to demand that the chair take a vote on a motion that is being discussed. A “question,” when adopted, becomes an “order,” “resolution,” or “vote.” (See Motions.)

Question, Division of—To separate a motion so that different parts of it may be considered individually.

Refer—To refer to a committee.

Resolution—The act of an assembly, the purpose of which is to declare facts or express opinions or purposes, and not to command. (See Order.)

Rules, Suspension of—“When the assembly wishes to do something that cannot be done without violating its own rules, and yet is not in conflict with its constitution or by-laws, or with the fundamental principles of parliamentary law, it ‘suspends the rules that interfere with’ the proposed action.” (Robert, *Rules of Order and Parliamentary Practice*)

Second—A motion, in order to be considered by the meeting, must have a “second,” i.e., a sponsor in the form of a second member who indicates support of the motion by saying, “I second the motion.” (See Motions.)

Sine die—Latin meaning “without day.” Meetings frequently adjourn “sine die.” This means that no date is set for a future meeting.

Table—The “table” in parliamentary law is literally the speaker’s table, but to “lay on the table” or “to table” a motion means to delay action on it

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* These references were found most useful in compiling this booklet.

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