Parliamentary Procedure for Meetings

Robert's Rules of Order is the standard for facilitating discussions and group decision-making. Copies of the rules are available at most bookstores. Although they may seem long and involved, having an agreed-upon set of rules makes meetings run easier. ***Robert's Rules*** will help your group have better meetings, not make them more difficult. Your group is free to modify them or find another suitable process that encourages fairness and participation, unless your bylaws state otherwise.

Here are the basic elements of ***Robert's Rules***, used by most organizations:

1. ***Motion:*** To introduce a new piece of business or propose a decision or action, a motion must be made by a group member ("I move that.....") A second motion must then also be made (raise your hand and say, "I second it.") After limited discussion the group then votes on the motion. A majority vote is required for the motion to pass (or quorum as specified in your bylaws.)
2. ***Postpone Indefinitely:*** This tactic is used to kill a motion. When passed, the motion cannot be reintroduced at that meeting. It may be brought up again at a later date. This is made as a motion ("I move to postpone indefinitely..."). A second is required. A majority vote is required to postpone the motion under consideration.
3. ***Amend:*** This is the process used to change a motion under consideration. Perhaps you like the idea proposed but not exactly as offered. Raise your hand and make the following motion: "I move to amend the motion on the floor." This also requires a second. After the motion to amend is seconded, a majority vote is needed to decide whether the amendment is accepted. Then a vote is taken on the amended motion. In some organizations, a "friendly amendment" is made. If the person who made the original motion agrees with the suggested changes, the amended motion may be voted on without a separate vote to approve the amendment.
4. ***Commit:*** This is used to place a motion in committee. It requires a second. A majority vote must rule to carry it. At the next meeting the committee is required to prepare a report on the motion committed. If an appropriate committee exists, the motion goes to that committee. If not, a new committee is established.
5. ***Question:*** To end a debate immediately, the question is called (say "I call the question") and needs a second. A vote is held immediately (no further discussion is allowed). A two-thirds vote is required for passage. If it is passed, the motion on the floor is voted on immediately.
6. ***Table:*** To table a discussion is to lay aside the business at hand in such a manner that it will be considered later in the meeting or at another time ("I make a motion to table this discussion until the next meeting. In the meantime, we will get more information so we can better discuss the issue.") A second is needed and a majority vote required to table the item being discussed.
7. ***Adjourn:*** A motion is made to end the meeting. A second motion is required. A majority vote is then required for the meeting to be adjourned (ended).

Note: If more than one motion is proposed, the most recent takes precedence over the ones preceding it. For example if #6, a motion to table the discussion, is proposed, it must be voted on before #3, a motion to amend, can be decided.

In a smaller meeting, like a committee or board meeting, often only four motions are used:

- To introduce (motion.)
- To change a motion (amend.)
- To adopt (accept a report without discussion.)
- To adjourn (end the meeting.)

Remember, these processes are designed to ensure that everyone has a chance to participate and to share ideas in an orderly manner. Parliamentary procedure should not be used to prevent discussion of important issues.

Board and committee chairpersons and other leaders may want to get some training in meeting facilitation and in using parliamentary procedure. Additional information on meeting processes, dealing with difficult people, and using ***Robert's Rules*** is available from district office staff and community resources such as the League of Women Voters, United Way and other technical assistance providers. Parliamentary Procedure at a Glance, by O. Garfield Jones, is an excellent and useful guide for neighborhood association chairs.

Tips in Parliamentary Procedure

The following summary will help you determine when to use the actions described in ***Robert's Rules***.

- **A main motion must be moved, seconded, and stated by the chair before it can be discussed.**
- **If you want to move, second, or speak to a motion,** *stand and address the chair.*
- **If you approve the motion as is**, *vote for it.*
- **If you disapprove the motion**, *vote against it*.
- **If you approve the idea of the motion but want to change it**, *amend it or submit a substitute for it*.
- **If you want advice or information to help you make your decision**, *move to refer the motion to an appropriate quorum or committee with instructions to report back.*
- **If you feel they can handle it better than the assembly**, *move to refer the motion to a quorum or committee with power to act.*
- **If you feel that there the pending question(s) should be delayed so more urgent business can be considered**, *move to lay the motion on the table*.
- **If you want time to think the motion over**, *move that consideration be deferred to a certain time*.
- **If you think that further discussion is unnecessary**, *move the previous question.*
- **If you think that the assembly should give further consideration to a motion referred to a quorum or committee**, *move the motion be recalled*.
- **If you think that the assembly should give further consideration to a matter already voted upon**, *move that it be reconsidered.*
- **If you do not agree with a decision rendered by the chair**, *appeal the decision to the assembly*.
- **If you think that a matter introduced is not germane to the matter at hand**, *a point of order may be raised*.
- **If you think that too much time is being consumed by speakers**, *you can move a time limit on such speeches.*
- **If a motion has several parts, and you wish to vote differently on these parts**, *move to divide the motion*.

PARLIAMENTARY PROCEDURE AT A GLANCE

TO DO THIS	YOU SAY THIS	MAY YOU INTERRUPT SPEAKER	MUST YOU BE SECONDED	IS MOTION DEBATABLE	WHAT VOTE REQUIRED
Adjourn meeting*	I move that we adjourn	No	Yes	No	Majority
Recess meeting	I move that we recess until...	No	Yes	No	Majority
Complain about noise, room temperature, etc.*	Point of privilege	Yes	No	No	No vote
Suspend further consideration of something*	I move we table it	No	Yes	No	Majority
End debate	I move the previous question	No	Yes	No	2/3 vote
Postpone consideration of something	I move we postpone this matter until...	No	Yes	Yes	Majority
Have something studied further	I move we refer this matter to committee	No	Yes	Yes	Majority
Amend a motion	I move this motion be amended by...	No	Yes	Yes	Majority
Introduce business (a primary motion)	I move that...	No	Yes	Yes	Majority
Object to procedure or personal affront*	Point of order	Yes	No	No	No vote, Chair decides
Request information	Point of information	Yes	No	No	No vote
Ask for actual count to verify voice vote	I call for a division of the house	No	No	No	No vote
Object consideration of undiplomatic vote*	I object to consideration of this question	Yes	No	No	2/3 vote
Take up a matter previously tabled*	I move to take from the table...	No	Yes	No	Majority
Reconsider something already disposed of*	I move we reconsider our action relative to...	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority
Consider something already out of its schedule*	I move we suspend the rules and consider	No	Yes	No	2/3 vote
Vote on a ruling by the Chair	I appeal the Chair's decision	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority

*Not amendable

PARLIAMENTARY PROCEDURE AT A GLANCE

		Debatable	Amendable	Can Be Reconsidered	Requires 2/3 Vote
Privileged Motions	Fix Time at Which to Adjourn	No	Yes	No	No
	Adjourn	No	No	Yes	No
	Question of Privilege	No	Yes	Yes	No
	Call for Order of Day	No	No	Yes	No
Incidental Motions	Appeal	Yes	No	Yes	No
	Objection to Consideration of a Question	No	No	Yes	Yes
	Point of Information	No	No	No	No
	Point of Order	No	No	No	No
	Read Papers	No	No	Yes	No
	Suspend the Rules	No	No	No	Yes
	Withdraw a Motion	No	No	Yes	No
Subsidiary Motions	Lay on the Table	No	No	Yes	No
	The Previous Question (close debate)	No	No	Yes	Yes
	Limit or Extend Debate	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Postpone to a Definite Time	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
	Refer to Committee	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
	Amend the Amendment	Yes	No	No	No
	Amendment	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
	Postpone Indefinitely	Yes	No	Yes	No
Main Motion	Main or Procedural Motion	Yes	Yes	Yes	No

This table presents the motions in order of precedence. Each motion takes precedence over (i.e. can be considered ahead of) the motions listed below it. No motion can supersede (i.e. be considered before) any of the motions listed above it.

PLEASE NOTE: many organizations use only the Main Motion and Subsidiary Motions, handling other matters on an informal basis.

IN THE MEETING

TO INTRODUCE A MOTION:

Stand when no one else has the floor.
Address the Chair by the proper title.
Wait until the chair recognizes you.

- Now that you have the floor and can proceed with your motion say "I move that...," state your motion clearly and sit down.
- Another member may second your motion. A second merely implies that the seconder agrees that the motion should come before the assembly and not that he/she is in favor of the motion.
- If there is no second, the Chair says, "The motion is not before you at this time." The motion is not lost, as there has been no vote taken.
- If there is a second, the Chair states the question by saying "It has been moved and seconded that ... (state the motion). . ., is there any discussion?"

DEBATE OR DISCUSSING THE MOTION:

- The member who made the motion is entitled to speak first.
- Every member has the right to speak in debate.
- The Chair should alternate between those "for" the motion and those "against" the motion.
- The discussion should be related to the pending motion.
- Avoid using a person's name in debate.
- All questions should be directed to the Chair.
- Unless there is a special rule providing otherwise, a member is limited to speak once to a motion.
- Asking a question or a brief suggestion is not counted in debate.
- A person may speak a second time in debate with the assembly's permission.

VOTING ON A MOTION:

- Before a vote is taken, the Chair puts the question by saying "Those in favor of the motion that ... (repeat the motion)... say "Aye." Those opposed say "No." Wait, then say "The motion is carried," or "The motion is lost."
- Some motions require a 2/3 vote. A 2/3 vote is obtained by standing
- If a member is in doubt about the vote, he may call out "division." A division is a demand for a standing vote.
- A majority vote is more than half of the votes cast by persons legally entitled to vote.
- A 2/3 vote means at least 2/3 of the votes cast by persons legally entitled to vote.
- A tie vote is a lost vote, since it is not a majority.

AMENDMENTS ILLUSTRATED

Any main motion or resolution may be amended by:

1. Adding at the end
2. Striking out a word or words
3. Inserting a word or words
4. Striking out and inserting a word or words
5. Substitution

A member rises, addresses the chair, receives recognition, and states the motion:

"I move that. . . "

MAIN MOTION

Another member seconds the motion.

The Chair repeats the motion and says, "Is there any discussion?"

Must be germane to the main motion

To improve the motion, a member rises, receives recognition and says, "I move to amend the motion by . . . "

PRIMARY AMENDMENT

Another member seconds the amendment.

The Chair repeats the amendment and says, "Is there any discussion on the amendment?"

Must be germane to the primary amendment

To improve the amendment, a member rises, receives recognition, and says, "I move to amend the amendment by . . . "

SECONDARY AMENDMENT
(not amendable)

Another member seconds the amendment.

The Chair repeats the amendment to the amendment and says, "Is there any discussion on the amendment to the amendment?"

- When discussion ceases, the Chair says, "Those in favor of the amendment to the amendment say 'Aye.' Those opposed say 'No.'"
- If the vote was in the affirmative, the amendment is included in the primary amendment. The Chair then says, "Is there any discussion on the amended amendment?"
- If there is no discussion, a vote is taken on the amended amendment. If the vote in the affirmative, the amendment is included in the main motion. The chair then says, "Is there any discussion on the amended motion?"
- At this place, the motion can again be amended.
- If there is no further discussion, a vote is taken on the amended motion.
- Even though the amendments carried in the affirmative, the main motion as amended can be defeated.