

A Quick Guide to Parliamentary Procedure

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Parliamentary procedure is meant to facilitate the procedure of a meeting, not slow it down in technicalities. Without some sense of procedure, a meeting will dissolve into babbling knots of discussion. Parliamentary procedure is the tool that brings order out of chaos.

First, you need a quorum. A quorum is the minimum number of people needed to start the meeting. *Without a quorum, business cannot be conducted.* If the temporary departure of a committee member brings the attendance under quorum, business must stop until the member returns. The quorum for your meetings is set by the Constitution and Bylaws.

The President runs the meeting. It is the role of the President to *organize, moderate, and guide discussion.* In that sense, it's nice to have the other members of the Committee make and second motions; otherwise, the President then becomes the moderator of her own motion. In the same fashion, when voting, the advisable role for the President is one of tiebreaker. However, the President is a member of the Committee after all and can make motions, second them, and vote.

Generally, under parliamentary rules, a motion is made and seconded before debate is conducted. However, that's generally not how the average committee works. The average committee needs to hear the issues under consideration in order to form a reasonable cogent motion.

It's a good idea to form your motions as precisely as possible. This will make the minutes more understandable later on. It makes the business direction clear. It also reduces the number of motions to amend that may be needed, since committees usually consider amendments as a bit of a pain. (We'll talk about those in a bit.)

Motions

The Executive Committee conducts the business affairs of the Association. They decide on that business by making and voting on motions. Generally, a motion is needed in order to **set or conduct business of the Association, or in order to move the process of the meeting.**

Let's say, for instance, that the Freelance Committee wants to have a freelancers meeting at the Chop House. The Executive Committee does not need to vote on that, as long as the Freelance Committee is operating within the budget and guidelines that have been set. (However, if the Executive Committee feels that such a meeting falls outside of the desired business approach of the Association,

the Executive Committee can then move to overrule the Freelance Committee and hold the meeting at, say, the Denny's on East Colfax.)

How to make a motion

Practice this at home: "I move that..." and then state the motion with specificity.

It is tempting when you hear a profound statement to then say, "So moved!" But for the sake of reporters everywhere, don't! How is the poor Secretary-Treasurer supposed to record "so moved" as a motion? Try this: "An excellent point, and I would like to phrase that as a motion. I move that.. ."

The order of a motion

A motion is made. There is no discussion until a second is offered. In order for debate to take place, the motion must be seconded. If no second is heard, the President announces that the motion dies for lack of a second, and the Committee proceeds in its merry way, waiting for a more popular motion, or going to the next item on the agenda.

Once a motion is made and seconded, the Committee debates the motion. Orderly debate is highly desirable. Raise your hand and wait your turn to speak.

What happens if the motion is pretty good but not quite there? There's two ways to remedy this:

1. Friendly amendment. You can say, "I would offer a friendly amendment that..." If the amendment is acceptable to the maker and the second of the motion, then the original motion is considered amended.
2. Move to amend. You say, "I move to amend the motion to reflect..." This motion requires a second, discussion, and a vote. If the motion to amend passes, then the original motion, as amended, is voted upon. If the motion to amend does not pass, then the original motion stands as made.

Voting on the motion

When the discussion has reached its natural conclusion, the President will call for the vote.

You may have heard the phrase, "Call the question," in meetings you have attended. No one member of the committee, except arguably the President, has the authority to end debate. "Calling the question" is merely a motion to close debate. Strictly speaking, that then requires a second and a vote on that motion. A motion to close debate is a motion of precedence. If seconded, there is no discussion, and the motion to close debate is immediately voted on, with a two-thirds vote needed for passage.

Sometimes a "call the question" is handled more informally. The President may say, "Is there any objection to calling the question?" If none is heard, then

unanimous consent is implied, and you vote. However, if someone does object to calling the question, the meeting should either act on the motion to close debate, or keep on debating.

The majority of motions are decided by majority vote. The President will normally call for a voice vote. If the voice vote is indecisive, then a show of hands is made. If voting results in a tie, the motion has failed to carry.

Please note: Motions are to be made in the affirmative. For instance, "I move to spend \$500 for..." You cannot make a motion in the negative, have that motion defeated, and then take positive action on it. For instance, if you said, "I move to not spend \$500 for," you cannot then have that spending accomplished through defeat of that negatively-phrased motion.

Motions of precedence

There are motions that, if made, take precedence over whatever discussion is occurring on the floor. If these motions are seconded, then the present discussion is halted until the motion is resolved. Some of the most common:

Motion to table. Once seconded, this motion is voted on without discussion. The motion is decided by majority vote. The technical meaning of this motion is that the item is removed from consideration until the time comes when a motion is approved to take the item back from the table. In actuality, most motions to table are really motions to postpone, with a time limit set to bring the item back for consideration once again.

Motion to end debate. This is the "call the question motion." As previously stated, this motion is voted on without discussion and is decided by a two-thirds majority. Once passed, the motion on the floor is immediately voted upon.