

Primer on the Use of Parliamentary Procedure to Ensure Democratic and Efficient Meetings

Purpose of Parliamentary Procedure

The purpose of parliamentary procedures is to ensure that a meeting can proceed in an orderly manner that divergent views can be fairly heard, and that participants' control their own meeting.

Basic Elements

We are all familiar with the basic elements:

- Participants (by majority vote) set the agenda;
- Participants can ensure that an item is dealt with by making it an "order of the day" so it will be heard at the designated time on a designated day;
- Items requiring the meeting's approval must be presented as motions and seconded to ensure that the proposed action is not the idiosyncratic view of just one person;
- Such motions require a majority of those voting (a tie results in defeat of a motion), unless it is a constitutional change or other special measures that require a 2/3rds majority to pass.
- A motion can be modified (but not so much that the original intent is contradicted) if a delegate moves an amendment (requiring a seconder) that then receives a majority vote.

Beyond that, familiarity with parliamentary procedure wanes. But knowledge of a few additional aspects can lead to a satisfying, productive, democratic and efficient meeting.

An Invaluable Guide to Key Motions

Table 1 (on page 3)¹ is an invaluable guide to key motions. It starts with what you want to do, identifies what you say to achieve that end, tells you if you can interrupt proceedings to do what you want to do or if you have to first get on the speakers' list, advises if you require a seconder, identifies if the matter is debatable or must immediately be put to a vote, indicates whether it can be amended, and indicates what vote is required to achieve your goal.

So, if you feel a debate is dragging on too long, you can get on the speaker's list and when it is your turn "move the previous question" (often also known as "closure.") If someone seconds your motion, it is put to a vote immediately and if 2/3rds agree with you, debate ends and the matter on the floor is voted upon without further debate. The "closure" motion is not itself debatable. *Robert's* ensures that if 2/3rds want to move on, there is a simple way to do it.

Similarly, if you feel the matter is getting into important detail but not really what is best handled in a large meeting like Council, you get on the speaker's list, and when it is your turn, you "move to refer" to whatever you feel is the appropriate committee or subgroup. If you feel something is a waste of time and not worthy of ongoing debate, you can move to

1. The tables are from Jim Slaughter's web site - <http://www.jimslaughter.com>

postpone indefinitely; whereas if you want it to be dealt with, but not at the present time, you can “move to lay the question on the table” or “to postpone consideration” to the next meeting or to a specific time at the current meeting.

The point of all this is that Council delegates can control their own meeting in orderly, efficient and democratic ways. If you feel something is going on too long, debate is become too repetitive, or the matter is too trivial for the delegates to deal with, it is likely that others may feel the same way. By making the appropriate motion, you can let the group decide.

Other Things You May Want to Do – Incidental Motions

If you are troubled by what is going on during the meeting, or want to raise a question or ask for relevant information, there are simple procedures to allow you to do so, without disrupting the meeting unduly. **Table 2** lists actions you may want to take, what motion or action to put forward, and what is required from the other participants.

Bringing Former Business Back to the Meeting

If there is something that has been dealt with previously that you would like to be brought back before the participants, there are several simple motions that allow you to deal with most situations. They are described in **Table 3**.

Table 1: Using Parliamentary Procedures to Make a Good Meeting

The motions below are listed in order of precedence. A motion can be introduced if it is higher on the chart than the pending motion.

§ ²	YOU WANT:	YOU SAY:	INTERRUPT?	2ND?	DEBATE?	AMEND?	VOTE?
§21	Close meeting	I move to adjourn	No	Yes	No	No	Majority
§20	Take break	I move to recess for ...	No	Yes	No	Yes	Majority
§19	Register complaint (not disagreement with debate)	I rise to a question of privilege	Yes	No	No	No	None
§18	Make follow agenda	I call for the orders of the day	Yes	No	No	No	None
§17	Lay aside temporarily	I move to lay the question on the table	No	Yes	No	No	Majority
§16	Close debate	I move the previous question	No	Yes	No	No	2/3
§15	Limit or extend debate	I move that debate be limited to ...	No	Yes	No	Yes	2/3
§14	Postpone to a certain time	I move to postpone the motion to ...	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority
§13	Refer to committee	I move to refer the motion to ...	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority
§12	Modify wording of motion	I move to amend the motion by ...	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority
§11	Kill main motion	I move that the motion be postponed indefinitely	No	Yes	Yes	No	Majority
§10	Bring business before assembly (a main motion)	I move that [or "to"] ...	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority

1. Refers to the relevant section in *Robert's Rules of Order* should you wish more detail.

Table 2: Incidental Motions

No order of precedence. Arise incidentally and are decided immediately.							
§	YOU WANT:	YOU SAY:	INTERRUPT?	2ND?	DEBATE?	AMEND?	VOTE?
§23	Enforce rules	Point of Order	Yes	No	No	No	None
§24	Submit matter to assembly	I appeal from the decision of the chair	Yes	Yes	Varies	No	Majority
§25	Suspend rules	I move to suspend the rules	No	Yes	No	No	2/3
§26	Avoid main motion altogether	I object to the consideration of the question	Yes	No	No	No	2/3
§27	Deal with parts of a motion separately	I move to divide the question	No	Yes	No	Yes	Majority
§33	Request for information	Request for information	Yes	No	No	No	None

Table 3: Motions That Bring a Question Again Before the Assembly

No order of precedence. Introduce only when nothing else is pending.							
§	YOU WANT:	YOU SAY:	INTERRUPT?	2ND?	DEBATE?	AMEND?	VOTE?
§34	Take matter from table	I move to take from the table ...	No	Yes	No	No	Majority
§35	Cancel previous action	I move to rescind ...	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	2/3 or Majority with notice
§37	Reconsider motion	I move to reconsider ...	No	Yes	Varies	No	Majority