



PARLIAMENTARY PROCEDURE

Wikipedia defines **parliamentary procedure** as “the body of ethics, rules, and customs governing meetings and other operations of clubs, organizations, legislative bodies, and other deliberative assemblies”. Basically, it is a method of conducting business at meetings. It allows everyone to be heard, and the making of decisions without confusion.

Robert’s Rules of Order is the most widely used guide on parliamentary procedure. This handbook was first written in 1876 and is based on the procedures used in the British parliament. Robert’s Rules of Order is in its 12th edition and remains applicable today to any decision-making organization or body.

An understanding of these principles will enhance your effective participation in union meetings at the local, worksite, regional and provincial levels and committee meetings with employers and other groups.

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What is Parliamentary Procedure?

It is a set of rules for conduct at meetings that allows everyone to be heard and to make decisions without confusion.

Why is Parliamentary Procedure Important?

It is a time-tested method of conducting business at meetings and public gatherings. It can be adapted to fit the needs of any organization. Today, Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised, 12th Edition is the basic handbook of operation for organizations. It is important that everyone know the basic rules!

There are four fundamental principles of parliamentary law:

1. To facilitate action, not obstruct it
2. To enable the assembly to express its will
3. To give every member a fair opportunity to be heard
4. To maintain order

These principles give rise to the following fundamentals of presiding:

- * Justice and courtesy for all
- * Do only one thing at a time
- * The majority rules
- * The minority has a right to be heard
- * All members have equal rights, privileges, and obligations
- * The Chairperson remains impartial

What order should a meeting be in?

Organizations using parliamentary procedure usually follow a fixed order of business known as the **AGENDA**. Below is a typical example:

1. *Call to Order*
 - ✓ *Roll call and/or establish quorum*
 - ✓ *Can use sign-in sheet to be filed with the minutes*
2. *Reading and Approval of Minutes*
 - ✓ *The minutes are a legal record; therefore, the point here is to ensure that the minutes are accurate.*
 - ✓ *The Chair can declare them adopted as read or amended – no motion is necessary.*
3. *Financial (Treasurer's) Report*
 - ✓ *Only the Annual Report and the Auditor's Report need to be adopted via motion.*

4. President's Report
 - ✓ Does not need to be adopted via motion.
 - ✓ A copy should be provided for the minutes.
5. Board of Director's Report
 - ✓ Ask your Board Member to provide a written report or refer to the Board Meeting minutes.
6. Committee Reports
 - ✓ Reports should be in writing with a copy for the minutes.
 - ✓ No motion necessary unless the report contains a recommendation(s).
7. Special Orders
 - ✓ Motions referred from a previous meeting.
 - ✓ By-law requirements.
8. Unfinished Business
 - ✓ Follow-up from the previous meeting/minutes.
 - ✓ Should include a report of any actions undertaken as a result of direction given at a previous meeting.
9. New Business
 - ✓ Expedite business by coming prepared with written motions.
10. Correspondence
11. Announcements
12. Adjournment

What is a motion?

A motion is the method used to introduce a subject for discussion at the business session. A motion is a proposal that the entire membership take action or a stand on an issue. Individual members can:

- Call to order
- Second motions
- Debate motions
- Vote on motions

There are four basic types of motions:

The first three types of motion are in rank order with the highest ranking at the top.

KEY: S:	requires a second	R:	May be reconsidered
A:	Is amendable	I:	May interrupt
D:	Is debatable	Ch:	Chair rules
M:	Majority vote required	2/3:	Two-thirds vote required

1. Privileged Motions: Their purpose is to bring up items that are urgent and related to special or important matters unrelated to pending business.

Fix the time of adjournment	S	A	-	M	R	-
Adjourn	S	-	-	M	-	-
Recess	S	A	-	M	-	-
Raise a question of privilege	-	-	-	Ch	-	I
Call for the Orders Of The Day	-	-	-	Ch	-	I

2. Subsidiary Motions: Their purpose is to change or affect how a main motion is handled; they are voted on before a main motion.

Lay on the table	S	-	-	M	-	-
Previous question	S	-	-	2/3	R	
Limit or extend debate	S	A	-	2/3		
Postpone to a certain time	S	A	D	M	R	
Refer to a committee	S	A	D	M	R	
Amend	S	A	D	M	R	
Postpone indefinitely	S	D	-	M	R	-

Postpone indefinitely	S	D	-	M	R	-
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3. Main Motions: The purpose of a main motion is to introduce items to the membership for their consideration. They cannot be made when any other motion is on the floor, and they yield to privileged, subsidiary, and incidental motions.

Main Motion	S	A	D	M	R	-
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4. Incidental Motions: Their purpose is to provide a means of questioning procedure concerning other motions; they must be considered before the other motion. These motions are the most commonly used, and are not in ranked order

Point of Information	-	-	-	-	-	I
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Parliamentary Inquiry	-	-	-	-	-	I
Point of Order	-	-	-	-	-	I
Appeal the Decision of the Chair	S	-	D	-	R	I
Division of the Assembly	-	-	-	-	-	I
Suspend the Rules	S	-	-	2/3	-	-
Rescind or amend something previously adopted	S	A	D	-	R	-
Reconsider	S	-	D	-	-	-
Take from the Table	S	-	-	-	-	-

How are motions presented?

1. Obtaining the floor
 - Wait until the last speaker has finished.
 - Rise and address the Chair by saying, "Mr. Chairperson, or Mr. President."
 - Wait until the Chairperson recognizes you.

2. Make your motion
 - Speak in a clear and concise manner.
 - Always state a motion affirmatively. Say, "I move that we ..." rather than, "I move that we do not ...".
 - Avoid personalities and stay on your subject.
 - Wait for someone to second your motion.
 - Another member will second your motion or the Chairperson will call for a second. If there is no second to your motion, it will not be discussed.
 - Motions coming from a committee do not require a second, as it is assumed that the committee has at least two members wanting to have the motion discussed

3. The Chairperson states your motion. The Chairperson will say, "It has been moved and seconded that we..." thus placing your motion before the membership for consideration and action.
 - The membership then either debates your motion or may move directly to a vote.
 - Once the Chairperson presents your motion to the membership, it becomes "assembly property", and cannot be changed by you without the consent of the members.

4. Expanding on your motion
 - The time for you to speak in favour of your motion is at this point in time, rather than at the time you present it.
 - The mover is always allowed to speak first. The mover may speak again only after other speakers are finished, unless called upon by the Chairperson.
 - All comments and debate must be directed to the Chairperson.

- Keep to the time limit for speaking that has been agreed to at the beginning of the meeting, unless there has been an amendment passed to alter the time allowed for discussions.
- No member should be allowed to speak a second time on the same question if another member wishes to speak on it for the first time.

5. Putting the question to the membership

- The Chairperson asks, "Are you ready to vote on the question?"
- If there is no more discussion, a vote is taken.
- A motion to "move the previous question" may be adopted, which ends debate and causes an immediate vote.

What are the rules of debate?

Unless the assembly adopts other rules, "Robert's Rules" set out the following:

- Debate is the right of every member.
- Every speech should be addressed to or "through" the Chair.
- Only one main motion may be considered at any one time.
- The mover of the motion has the right to speak first.
- The speaker should first indicate whether speaking for or against the motion.
- All speeches should be relevant to the motion.
- Verbal attacks of a personal nature are not permitted, and motives of members must not be questioned; the issue, not the person is the subject of debate.
- Each member should be allowed to speak once on the question before one makes a second speech. A member should only speak twice in total.
- Each speech is limited to ten minutes, unless the time limits have been amended by the assembly
- All remarks must be limited to the merits of the motion
- As far as possible, the Chairperson should ensure speakers are alternated between those in favour and those against the motion.
- A member may not speak against his own motion; however, he may vote against it. If the member has changed their position based on new information, they may also request permission of the Chairperson, who in turn asks the assembly for permission, to withdraw the motion.
- The Chair may give information when it is a matter of fact, and not opinion.
- The Chair should relinquish the chair to another individual if he/she has strong opinions on a subject and/or wishes to speak to the motion. He/she cannot resume the chair until all action related to the motion is completed.
- The Chair has the right to vote but usually refrains when it cannot alter the result.
- The Chair must always call for the negative vote regardless of near unanimity of the affirmative.
- The Chair will not ask for abstentions
- No member may speak to a question after the voting has been completed.
- A main motion, once defeated, cannot be re-introduced at the same session.

How do I amend a motion?

The motion to amend is a proposal to change the wording of a motion (either to clarify or, within limits, to modify its meaning) before the main motion is voted on. Amendments are often essential to secure passage of a controversial proposal. Caution should be taken to avoid impromptu amendments that create long-term difficulties. Whenever possible, well thought out main motions are a more effective means of doing business.

Methods of amendments:

- Insert
- Add
- Strike out
- Strike out and insert
- Substitute

Rules governing the motion to amend:

1. Cannot interrupt a speaker
2. Requires a second
3. Is debatable unless applied to an undebatable motion such as the motion to recess
4. Takes precedence over main motions and motion to postpone indefinitely
5. Can be amended (known as a secondary amendment), but the secondary amendment cannot be amended
6. Cannot change the subject or introduce proposals irrelevant to the original motion
7. Cannot apply a negative to the original motion

“Friendly Amendments”: Are no longer considered appropriate under the revised Robert’s Rules. When the person who proposes the original motion recognizes an obvious improvement that should have been included from the beginning, that person may rise and say, “I accept the suggestion.” The Chair then says, “There is an amendment proposed. It is acceptable to the maker of the motion. Is there any objection to the proposed change? There being none, the motion as amended now reads...” Any objection by any member renders invalid, this way of handling a proposed amendment, and a vote must be taken.

Voting on a motion

The method of vote on any motion depends on the situation and the by-laws or policy of your organization. There are five methods used to vote by most organizations; they are:

1. **By voice** -- the Chairperson asks those in favour to say, "aye", those opposed to say "no". Any member may move for an exact count.

2. By roll call -- each member answers "yes" or "no" as his name is called. This method is used when a record of each person's vote is required.
3. By general consent -- when a motion is not likely to be opposed, the Chairperson says, "If there is no objection..." the membership shows agreement by their silence, however if one member says, "I object," the item must be put to a vote.
4. By division -- this is a slight variation of a voice vote. It does not require a count unless the Chairperson so desires. Members raise their hands or stand. This is the method to be used when a 2/3 majority vote is required. Affirmatives are counted first.
5. By ballot -- members write their vote on a slip of paper, this method is used when secrecy is desired. Any member can call for a secret ballot vote. Such a motion is not debatable and there is no vote.

There are two motions that are commonly used that relate to voting:

1. Motion to table -- this motion is often used in the attempt to pause a motion. The option is always present, however, to "take from the table", for reconsideration by the membership at a later time.
2. Motion to postpone indefinitely – This is a means to “kill” the motion and that the motion will never be discussed in its current format

General Rule: The Chair should vote only when the Chair’s vote will change the final result. The exception to this rule occurs in the case of a committee of less than six people, in which case it is acceptable for the Chair to be part of the debate and to vote as desired.

Abstentions: every member has the duty to vote, but the right to abstain- meaning to not vote at all. Abstentions diminish the number required to obtain a majority of those present and voting (it is as though the person was not there). They are not counted except to determine the presence of a quorum.

Majority Vote: “More than half of the votes cast by persons legally entitled to vote, excluding blanks or abstentions, at a regularly called meeting at which a quorum is present.” For example: If 36 votes are cast, 19 is a majority.

What if there is a tie vote?

In the case of a tie, the motion is lost because a majority was not obtained.

The Chair may vote to break a tie or to make a tie. By way of example, if the vote was 10 in favour and 10 against, the Chair could vote in favour and the motion will pass. However, if the vote was 10 in favour and 9 against, the chair could vote in the negative, creating a tie and the motion will be lost. The Chair will of course now be showing some favouritism

towards an issue and their impartiality may come into question by the assembly. The Chair should use their vote sparingly.

In the case of a ballot vote the Chair may always vote as their vote will remain secret as are all votes.

What is the difference between a resolution and a motion?

A resolution is a formal main motion, a proposal for action. It sometimes includes the reasons for the proposal in the form of a preamble. A resolution is dealt with in the same manner as an ordinary main motion, and all of the same rules apply. Both the preamble and the resolving clauses can be amended.

Preamble Clauses: State the reason(s) for the action
Paragraphs begin with, "Whereas..."

Resolving Clauses: State the action(s) to be taken.
Paragraphs begin with, "Be it resolved that"

For example:

Whereas the forecast is for a hot sunny day on Saturday; and whereas I have the weekend off; therefore, be it resolved that we all go to Grand Beach for a picnic.

A resolution is out of order when:

- It conflicts with a law
- It presents substantially the same question as a motion/resolution previously rejected
- It conflicts with a motion/resolution previously adopted at any time and still in force
- It would conflict with or present substantially the same question as one which has temporarily but not finally been disposed of (e.g., sent to committee or postponed to a definite time).
- It proposes an action outside of the scope of the organizations by-laws or charter.

Courtesy Resolutions express appreciation to those who rendered service. A vote is not taken – it is a way of saying thank you.

Nominations and Elections

The by-laws should provide the details of the nominating procedure and the nominating committee structure. Robert's Rules recommends that the President is NOT part of the committee.

Responsibilities of the Nominating Committee include:

- Knowing the Constitution and By-law requirements including:
 - Who is eligible for nomination
 - Timelines
 - Whether there is a requirement to pre-publish the nomination slate
 - Whether nominations from the floor are allowed
 - Whether proxy voting is allowed
- Preparation of the nomination slate, listed alphabetically
- The Nominating Committee Chairperson presents the report of the committee/nomination slate to the meeting and the presiding officer asks for additional nominations from the floor (if allowed) and conducts the election.

Handling the nominations at the meeting

The presiding officer should be thoroughly familiar with the nominating process.

- After the Chairman of the Nominating Committee gives the report of the committee and the nomination slate for each office, the chair then repeats the nominations and asks for nominations from the floor.
- Any member can give a nomination from the floor unless their Constitution/By-Laws have made other provisions. He does not have to rise and address the Chair, but can call out from where seated, the name of a nominee.
- A nomination does not need a second.
- The chair repeats the nomination and asks for further nominations.
- The nominations from the floor are added to the slate in the order they are received.
- After no one rises to present further names, the Chair may declare that nominations are closed, or any member may move to close nominations (motion is not debatable and requires a 2/3 majority vote).
- Nominations may be reopened by majority vote or general consent.
- If candidate speeches are allowed, the time allotted for each speech should be set out ahead of time and carefully observed.

Elections

The Chair can take the nominations and vote one office at a time, or take all the nominations for all offices first, and then take the vote on each office. This should be established by a rule.

Ballots

A ballot vote is necessary unless the by-laws specify otherwise. The process must be explained clearly, and ballots must be clear and distributed carefully to avoid any question of fairness.

Counting

The Chair should appoint the tellers (scrutineers). They collect and count the ballots and prepare the tellers' report and present it to the Chair. For example:

Number of votes cast _____
Number of votes necessary for election _____
For the office of President:
Ms. A _____ votes
Mr. B _____ votes

The Chair and tellers (scrutineers) may cast a ballot.

The Chair announces the result. Announcing the number of votes is optional, but the nominees have a right to know the count. A majority vote is required for election.

Once elections are completed, the Chair may order the ballots to be destroyed or entertain a motion for same.

Illegal ballots

First, a legal ballot is one that is properly marked. Second, if a blank ballot and a marked ballot are folded together, this is a legal ballot because blanks never count.

Illegal ballots are:

- One that is not marked correctly.
- One that has marked two candidates for the same office.
- One that has two marked ballots folded together
- One that has a written name that is not readable or a name of someone that is not eligible to serve in that office.
- In elections in organizations, illegal ballots count in determining the majority, but they are not credited to a person.
- In counting votes, tellers (scrutineers) need to use some common sense. If the members are instructed to put an "x" by the person they want and a member instead puts a "v" or circles the name, then the tellers (scrutineers) should count the vote. As long as the person has made his vote understandable, it should be counted

Parliamentary procedure is the best way to get things done at your meetings. But it will only work if you use it properly.

- Allow motions that are in order.
- Have members obtain the floor properly.
- Speak clearly and concisely.
- Obey the rules of debate.
- Most importantly, be courteous.

PARLIAMENTARY PROCEDURE AT A GLANCE

TO DO THIS	YOU SAY THIS	May you interrupt speaker?	Must you be seconded?	Is the motion debatable?	Vote required
Adjourn the meeting	I move that we adjourn	no	yes	no	majority
Recess the meeting	I move that we recess until...	no	yes	no	majority
Complain about noise, room temperature, etc.	Question of privilege	yes	no	no	no vote
Suspend further consideration of something	I move that the motion be laid on the table	no	yes	no	majority
End debate	I move the previous question	no	yes	no	2/3 standing vote
Postpone consideration of something	I move we post pone this matter until...	no	yes	yes	majority
Have something studied further	I move to refer the motion to the committee	no	yes	yes	majority
Amend a motion	I move to amend...	no	yes	yes	majority
Introduce business (a primary motion)	I move that...	no	yes	yes	majority
Object to procedure or to a personal affront	Point of order	yes	no	no	chair decides
Request information	Request for information	yes	no	no	no vote
Ask for a vote by actual count to verify a voice vote	I call for a division	no	no	no	no vote
Object to the consideration of some undiplomatic matter	I object to the consideration of the question	yes	no	no	2/3 standing 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 to reconsider...	yes	yes	yes	majority
Consider something and vote out of its scheduled order	I move we suspend the rules and consider...	no	yes	no	2/3 standing vote
Vote on a ruling by the chair	I appeal from the decision of the chair	yes	yes	yes	majority

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

1. Robert McConnell Productions
<http://www.parli.com>
2. Cagle's Parliamentary Procedure
<http://www.csufresno.edu/comm/cagle.htm>
3. National Association of Parliamentarians
<https://www.parliamentarians.org>
4. Manitoba Association of Parliamentarians
<https://parliamentarians-mb.ca>

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

1. *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised, 12th Edition*, Henry M. Robert III, et. al., Perseus Publishing, 2019

This book is the entire text of Robert's Rules of Order with many more complex examples and explanations for organizations to use as a solid reference.

2. *Robert's Rules of Order in Brief 3rd Edition*, Henry M Robert III, et. al., Perseus Publishing, 2020

This resource is a very helpful, easy to read book for new leaders.

3. *The Standard Code of Parliamentary Procedure, 4th Edition*, by Alice Sturgis, American Institute of Parliamentarians
4. *Parliamentary Procedure at a Glance*, O. Garfield Jones, Garfield Jones, Viking Penguin, 1991
5. *New World Robert's Rules of Order: Simplified and Applied, 2nd Edition*, Robert McConnell Productions, 2001