

Parliamentary Procedure

The following is a very brief condensation of Robert's Rules of Order. It is intended to provide a basic background in Parliamentary procedure in order to conduct business in as efficient and orderly manner as possible.

Addressing the Chair

All meetings should be conducted from the “chair” (usually the President). Members addressing the chair refer to the presiding officer as Mr. President.

Obtaining the Floor

Before a member can make a motion or speak in debate he must obtain the “floor”. To claim the floor a member raises his hand when no one else has the floor and waits to be “recognized” by the chair. The chair will recognize the member by announcing his name or title. The member then has the floor and can stand and speak until he yields the floor by resuming his seat. While a motion is open to debate, there are three important cases where the floor should be assigned to a person who may not have been the first to rise and address the chair. The cases are as follows:

1. If the member who made the motion claims the floor and has not already spoken on the question, he is entitled to be recognized in preference to other members.
2. No one is entitled to the floor a second time as long as any other member who has not yet spoken to the pending motion requests the floor.
3. The chair should attempt to alternate opposite opinions on the question if he is aware of members requesting the floor that have opposing views.

Making a Motion

1. First a member makes a motion. Though he makes a motion, he uses the word “move” to make the motion. For example: I move to allocate ... etc.
2. Another member seconds the motion by saying, “I second it”, or simply “second”. It should be noted that a second by a member merely implies that the motion should come before the council and not that he necessarily favors the motion. A member may second a motion because he would like to see the assembly go on record as rejecting the proposal, if he believes a vote on the motion will have such a result.
3. The chair then states the “question” on the motion. Neither the making nor the seconding of a motion places it before the council; only the chair can do that by stating the question. When the chair has stated the question, the motion is pending and is then open to debate (providing it is a debatable motion). If the council decides to do what the motion proposes it adopts a motion, or it is carried. If it decides against the motion it is rejected or lost.

Amending a Motion

The motion to amend is a motion to modify the wording – within certain limits – of a pending motion before it is itself acted upon. An amendment must be germane, that is, it must be closely related to or have some bearing on the subject of the motion to be amended.

A motion to amend is handled the same way as a main motion and requires a second to be considered. An amendment is adopted by a majority vote even in cases where the motion to be amended requires a 2/3 vote for adoption.

Approval a Minutes

At the beginning of regularly scheduled meetings copies of the minutes of the previous meetings will be distributed for study by council members. The chair then asks, “Are there any corrections to the minutes?” and pauses, (corrections, when proposed, are handled by general consent). Then the presiding officer says, “If there are no corrections” (or “No further corrections.”) the minutes stand, or are approved, or approved as corrected.

Call For the Orders of the Day

A call for the orders of the day is a privileged motion by which a member can require the council to conform to the agenda.

1. Call for the orders of the day, if in order, may be made when another has the floor, even if it interrupts a person speaking
2. It does not require a second.
3. It is not debatable.
4. Upon a call by a single member, the orders of the day must be enforced, except that a 2/3 vote can set them aside. (That is, the orders of the day can be set aside by a vote of 2/3 in the negative on a question put by the chair as to council’s desire to proceed to the orders of the day, or by a vote of 2/3 in the affirmative on a motion by a member to extend the time for considering the question at hand.)

Point of Order

When a member thinks that the rules of council are being violated, he can make a “point of order.” Thereby calling upon the chair to make a ruling and an enforcement of the regular rules.

1. Can be applied to any breach of the council’s rules.
2. Is in order when another has the floor.
3. Does not require a second.
4. Is not debatable unless the chair, being in doubt, submits the point to a vote of the council; in which case the rules governing its debatability are the same as for an appeal.

Parliamentary Inquiry

A parliamentary inquiry is a question directed to the presiding officer to obtain information on a matter of parliamentary law or the rules of the organization bearing on the business at hand. It is the chair's duty to answer such questions when it may assist a member to make an appropriate motion, raise a proper point of order, or understand the parliamentary situation or effect of a motion.

1. Can be made at any time.
2. Is in order when another has the floor if it requires immediate attention.
3. Does not require a second.
4. Is not debatable.
5. Is not subject to reconsideration.

Previous Question

The previous question is the motion used to bring the council to an immediate vote on one or more pending questions. The motion for the questions:

1. Takes precedence over all debatable or amendable motions to which it is applied.
2. Can be applied to any immediately pending debatable or amendable motion; to an entire series of motions; beginning with the immediately pending question.
3. Is out of order when another has the floor.
4. Must be seconded.
5. Is not debatable.
6. Is not amendable.
7. Requires a 2/3 vote.

Forms used in making the motion include: "I move the previous question" or "I call for the previous question."

Lay on the Table

The motion to lay on the table enables the council to lay a pending question aside temporarily when something more urgent has arisen.

By adopting the motion to lay on the table, a majority has the power to halt consideration of a question immediately without debate. This power is necessary to enable the council to function effectively when sudden urgent consideration arises – so – long as it is exercised with a view to taking up the interrupted question again later. This motion is often misused, however, particularly in place of the motion to postpone indefinitely, and should not be used to kill a pending question. The motion to lay on the table:

1. Is out of order when another is on the floor.
2. Must be seconded.
3. Is not debatable.
4. Is not amendable.
5. Requires a majority vote.

Forms used in making this motion are, “I move to lay the question on the table”, or “ I move that the pending question be laid on the table.”

Take from the Table

The object of the motion to take from the table is to make pending before the council a motion that has been laid on the table.

1. Is out of order when another has the floor.
2. Must be seconded.
3. Is not debatable.
4. Requires a majority vote.

Time limit on taking a question from the table, a question that has been laid on the table remains there and can be taken from the table during the same session or at the next session of the council. If it is not taken from the table within the time limits the question dies, although it may be reintroduced later as a new question.

Right of Way in Preference to a New Motion

A question is supposed to be laid on the table only temporarily, with the exception of resuming its consideration after disposal of the immediate urgent situation. Consequently, as soon as it is practical to resume consideration of the tabled question, any member may seek recognition from the chair for the purpose of moving to take the question from the table. If the chair recognizes someone else as having arisen and addressed the chair first, a member who requested permission to move to take the question from the table should address the chair, and state that he requests permission to move to take the question from the table and the chair should assign him the floor to do so. The principle is that, if the council so desires, a motion already within its control, such as a tabled motion, has the right of way over a new main motion.

Postpone Indefinitely

Postpone indefinitely is a motion that the council declines to take a position on the main question. Its adoption kills the main motion, for at least the duration of the session, and avoids a direct vote on the question. It is useful in disposing of a badly chosen main motion that cannot be either adopted or expressly rejected without possible undesirable consequences. The motion to postpone indefinitely:

1. Is out of order when another has the floor.
2. Must be seconded.
3. Is debatable.
4. Is not amendable.
5. Requires a majority vote.

Adjourn

To adjourn means to close the meeting. The motion to adjourn is a motion to close the meeting immediately, made under conditions where some other provision for the meeting exists, and where no time for adjourning the present meeting has been already set. The motion to adjourn:

1. Is not applied to any motion, and no motion can be applied to it.
2. Is out of order when another had the floor.
3. Must be seconded.
4. Is not amendable.
5. Requires a majority vote.