

# PARLIAMENTARY PROCEDURE

“Lead, follow, or get out of the way!” – Lee Iacocca

Parliamentary procedure, also referred to as Robert’s Rules of Orders, is often implemented by large organizations in order to maintain structure and efficiency in meetings. Regardless of the size of your group, however, parliamentary procedure can be employed for the same reasons. Following are some of the basic elements of the procedure, which can be used as a guideline if your group wishes to follow this format. Procedures can be altered to meet the needs and size of your group.

## Basic Ideas

- The purpose of the rules is to encourage cooperation and balance among group members.
- All members have equal rights which include (but are not limited to) the following:
  - The right to a complete, open discussion of every motion.
  - The right to know what question is being discussed (which may mean restating it prior to voting).
  - The majority of the group has the right to make decisions, and the minority has rights which need to be acknowledged and protected.
- All members of the group have an equal amount of privileges and obligations.
- Members may not speak until they have been acknowledged by the meeting chairperson.
- A member may not speak on the same question twice as long as there is another member who wants to speak for the first time.
- The meeting chairperson should be unbiased and fair.

## Rules of Debate/Discussion of Pending Question

- Unless your group has established its own rule, generally a member may not speak longer than ten minutes unless she or he obtains the group’s consent.
- No one can speak more than twice in the same meeting regarding one question.
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A member must be recognized by the chairperson before speaking.

- Debating rights are nontransferable, which means a member cannot “give” her or his speaking time to another member.
- There are some general guidelines regarding what members say:
  - Statements must be related to the topic at hand.
  - Members should be able to speak free from distractions such as whispering, hissing and so forth.
  - Persons speaking should do so in a loud, clear manner.
  - When speaking, one should not attack another member’s motives or ideas.
  - Members should stand when speaking.

## **Motions**

- There are three steps involved in making a motion:
  - A member makes the motion.
  - Another member seconds the motion.
  - The chairperson states the motion.
- Three steps are also involved in considering a motion:
  - The members debate the motion (see debate rules above).
  - The chairperson requests a vote, at which time she or he restates the pending question so all members are clear about what they are voting upon.
  - The chairperson states the results of the vote, which may include:
    - Stating which side prevailed.
    - Asserting that the motion has either been adopted or lost.
    - Indicating what the vote means or ordering its implementation.

Announcing the next item of business, if applicable.

## Voting

- There are three basic methods of voting:
  - Voice vote: Typically adopted when the pending question does not require more than a majority vote in order to pass. Involves members saying either “yea” or “no” to indicate their voting preferences.
  - Rising vote: Generally used when the voice vote has not concluded with a definite result; also used when 2/3 vote is required in order for a motion to pass. Involves members standing to indicate their voting preferences.
  - Show of hands: Often used to confirm an inconclusive voice vote and is generally limited to rather small meetings. Involves members raising hands to indicate their voting preferences.
- Other methods may be ordered if the above ones do not provide conclusive results:
  - Ballot: Normally used when secrecy is important. This method should always be used when the vote is related to charges or proposed charges against a group member. Involves members writing their votes on pieces of paper, which are then tallied by the chairperson.
  - Roll call: Only used when the group is responsible to a constituency. Involves recording in writing how each person votes.
- To determine the results of a vote, generally the majority (more than half) prevails although some groups require a 2/3 vote. This number does not include blanks nor abstentions.

## Reference:

Cagle, J.A. (1990). Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised. CA State University at Fresno: On-Line.

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