

A Short Guide to Parliamentary Procedure

General

Debate must be directed to motions, not motives – to principles, not personalities.

The chair assigns the floor.

To pass, most motions require a majority of yes votes of all votes yes or no, not a majority of those present – abstentions are not counted. A member abstains by not voting.

A 2/3 vote is required when limiting or taking away the rights of members.

The chair will generally not give the floor to someone who has already spoken to the question until everyone else has had an opportunity to do so.

For matters not prescribed in our bylaws, those bylaws specify that our procedural guide is Henry M. Robert III *et al.*, *Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised*, 10th ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: Perseus Publishing, 2000).

Common Motions

1. The Main Motion – brings a matter of business to the assembly. The mover can withdraw the motion up until the time that the chair states the question (motion). The mover may amend or vote against his/her own motion, but cannot speak against it.
2. Move the previous question – RRO makes no distinction between moving and calling the previous question. In either case, the motion is non-debatable and requires a 2/3 majority to carry. It ends further debate and forces an immediate vote on the question.
3. To Table a motion – use of this motion should be reserved for those occasions when debate needs to be interrupted temporarily to take up some more urgent matter. It cannot be debated or amended, and needs only a simple majority vote. It requires a subsequent motion and vote to be taken off of the table.
4. To Postpone Indefinitely – this motion forces a “straw vote” to test the strength of a motion, and enables the assembly to kill the motion for the duration of the session without taking a position on the issue in question. It is debatable and the debate may involve the original question as well as the move to postpone. It needs only a simple majority.
5. To Postpone to a Certain Time – requires a majority vote. Debatable, but debate is limited to the question of postponement itself, including the time.
6. To Reconsider – allows a majority to reopen a question that has already been voted on in that session. It can only be made by someone who voted on the winning side, and must be made in the same session (day). After it is moved and seconded, other business already on the floor may be completed before the vote is taken. In the interim, all action called for by the original motion should be stopped.
7. To Rescind – allows a majority to reopen a question that has already been voted on in a previous session. It cannot undo a binding action (e.g., a contract) that has already resulted from the earlier action. It requires a 2/3 majority, unless notice has been given at a previous meeting.
8. To Amend – May take such forms as strike, add, and substitute. An amendment to a main motion may also be amended, but that amendment may not in turn be amended. Amendments that would negate the motion under consideration are out of order.

9. To Commit or Refer – a debatable motion intended to send the question to a smaller group, such as a committee, for further consideration. Requires a majority vote.
10. To Adjourn – out of order when a member has the floor. Cannot be amended or debated. Requires a majority vote.

Privileged Motions

1. Personal privilege (an urgent request) – e.g., noise (can't hear); comfort (temperature); safety; reputation of the organization or individual. The chair rules. The speaker who was interrupted has the floor after the matter is attended to.
2. Point of information – directed to the chair for information relevant to the business at hand.
3. Parliamentary Inquiry – directed to the chair to obtain information on a matter of parliamentary law.
4. Intermission or recess – a temporary suspension of business. It's not debatable and requires a majority vote.
5. Point of order – ask the chair to enforce proper parliamentary procedure.