

The

ABC's

of

Parliamentary

Procedure

"**A**ddress the Chair to be recognized"

"**B**e sure to avoid personalities, stay on subject and state the motion in an affirmative manner"

"**C**hair will call for a second, if there is no second, the motion will fail to be considered"

Robert's Rules of Order is a common source of rules of debate. These rules of debate govern motions, the order of issues to be discussed, and other discussion procedures. Because Robert's Rule's is a time tested method of conducting business at meetings and public gatherings, it has come to mean democratic rule; flexibility; protection of rights and a fair hearing. So it's important that everyone know these basic rules. The book is available at most bookstores and libraries.

Parliamentarian. Normally, the presiding officer will decide matters of parliamentary procedure. However, most rules provide for a disinterested third party (often the attorney of the local government) to act as parliamentarian in the event that a ruling by the presiding officer is questioned.

It may be several months before you feel comfortable with your governing body's rules of procedure. You may get frustrated and feel that you would like to get rid of the rules. Ask questions if you are unsure of the consequences of your vote and remember to review your governing body's written rules often.

The formality of parliamentary rules and the meeting process can seem stifling, and you may be tempted at times to view these constraints as the "problem" with your meetings. But they have been developed over time and on the basis of experience to help groups of people who may disagree on issues make decisions in a more democratic way.

Problems, more often than not, stem from lack of information - or from a lack of preparation on the part of council members or staff.

Unless a city's/town's charter imposes requirements on the format for conducting meetings, the municipality is free to adopt any process or procedure that will work for it. Today, **Robert's Rules of Order Revised** is recognized as the authority on parliamentary procedure. It is the basic handbook of operation for most cities and county governments and can be adapted to fit the needs of each municipality.

Many procedural items may also be found in the city's charter. This document should also be referenced for direction on a regular basis.

Motions. A motion is a proposal that the assembly take a stand or action on an issue. Members of an assembly can:

- Present Motions (Make a Proposal)
- Second Motions (Express support for discussion of another member's motion)
- Debate Motions (Give opinions on the motion)
- Vote on Motions (Make a decision)

There are four general types of motions most often recognized.

1. Main Motions - introduce subjects to the assembly for its consideration. They cannot be made when another motion is before the assembly. They yield to privileged, subsidiary and incidental motions. (i.e. "I move that we . . .");
2. Subsidiary Motions - change or affect how the main motion is handled. They are voted on before the main motion. (i.e. "I move the question before the assembly be amended by adding the following...");
3. Privileged Motions - are most urgent. They concern special or important matters not related to pending business. (i.e. "I move we adjourn at ..."); and

4. Incidental Motions - are questions of procedure that arise out of other motions. They must be considered before the other motion. (i.e. "I move to suspend the rules for the purpose of ...").

More About Motions

A motion must relate to the business at hand, and be presented at the right time. It must not be obstructive, frivolous or against the charter.

Usually a second is needed to a motion. A second indicates that another member of the council supports the motion and would like to have the motion considered by the entire group. It prevents spending time on a question which only interests one person.

Some motions can be amended by striking out, inserting, or both at once. Amendments must relate to the subject as presented in the main motion. Some motions that are not subject to amendments: move to adjourn; move to temporarily suspend consideration of an issue; move to end debate; and move to amend an amendment.

Some motions can be debated again and revoted to give members a chance to change their minds. The move to reconsider must come from the winning side. Some motions that can be reconsidered: move to postpone discussion for a certain time; move to give closer study to some issue; move to amend a motion; move to introduce business.

Some motions are so important that the speaker may be interrupted to make them. The original speaker regains the floor after the interruption has been recognized and attended to. An example is to complain about the heat, noise, etc.

Parliamentary procedure guards the right to free and full debate on most motions. However some privileged and incidental motions are not debatable. Some motions that are not debatable: move to adjourn; move to call an intermission; move to suppress, limit, or to extend limits of debate; move to temporarily suspend consideration or "table" an issue.

Most motions require only a majority vote, but motions concerning the rights of the assembly or its members need a 2/3 vote to be adopted. The municipal charter may specify the vote required for passage under certain circumstances.

A motion may be tabled to take care of a more urgent matter. There is always the option to "take from the table" any motion for reconsideration by the assembly.

A motion to postpone indefinitely is a parliamentary strategy - it allows members to dispose of a motion without making a decision for or against the issue. It is useful in case of a badly chosen main motion for which either a "yes" or "no" vote would have undesirable consequences.

Typically, there are three accepted methods for voting on a motion.

1. By voice
2. By show of hands
3. By roll call

Routine business can take place without the formality of motions and voting, the Chair assuming unanimous consent (i.e. approving the minutes, etc.). If a motion isn't likely to be opposed, the Chair can say "If there is no objection...". Members of the council show their agreement with their silence. If a member says "I object", the matter must be put to a vote.

As a rule of thumb, only the most formal councils and organizations strictly adhere to **Robert's Rules of Order**. A city/town may adapt them to fit their needs and meeting styles. The presiding officer or any elected officer should serve as the parliamentarian for the council with the principal duty of advising the presiding officer. The parliamentarian should familiarize him/herself with the rules for conducting meetings that the council has adopted and/or are found in the municipal charter.

How to Present a Motion

1. Obtain the floor:
Wait until the last speaker is finished.
Address the chair to be recognized. Once recognized:
2. Make your motion:
State the motion in an affirmative manner.
Avoid personalities and stay on the subject.
3. Wait for another member to second the motion.
Or the Chair will call for a second.
If there is no second, the motion will fail to be considered.
4. Chair states the motion by saying, "It is moved and seconded that we ...". *Debate and voting can now occur.*
5. Expand on the motion.
Mover is allowed to speak first.
Direct all comments to the Chair.
Keep to the time limit (if there is one) for speaking.
In the debate of a motion, each member has the right to speak twice on the same question as long as any member who has not spoken on that question desires the floor.
6. The Chair will ask, "Are you ready for the question?" or "Call for the question"
If there is no more discussion, a vote is taken and the Chair announces the results.

The following table provides some examples of motions, how to make them and what to expect of the rules.

TO DO THIS:	YOU SAY THIS:	MAY YOU INTERRUPT THE SPEAKER?	DO YOU NEED A SECOND?	IS IT DEBATABLE?	CAN IT BE AMENDED?	WHAT VOTE IS NEEDED	CAN IT BE RECONSIDERED?
Adjourn meeting	"I move that we adjourn"	NO	YES	NO	NO	MAJORITY	NO
Call an intermission	"I move that we recess for..."	NO	YES	NO	YES	MAJORITY	NO
Complain about heat, noise, etc.	"I rise to a question of privilege"	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO VOTE	NO
Temporarily suspend consideration of an issue	"I move to table the motion"	NO	YES	NO	NO	MAJORITY	NO *1
End debate and amendments	"I move the previous question"	NO	YES	NO	NO	2/3 rd	YES *2
Postpone discussion for a certain time	"I move to postpone the discussion until..."	NO	YES	YES	YES	MAJORITY	YES
Give a closer study	"I move to refer the matter to committee"	NO	YES	YES	YES	MAJORITY	
Amend a motion	"I move to amend the motion by..."	NO	YES	YES	YES	MAJORITY	
Introduce business	"I move that..."	NO	YES	YES	YES	MAJORITY	YES
The motions listed above...	Are in order of precedence						
Protest breach of rules or conduct	"I rise to a point of order"	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO VOTE *5	NO
Vote on a ruling of the chair	"I appeal from the chair's decision"	YES	YES	YES	NO	MAJORITY	
Suspend rules temporarily	"I move to suspend the rules so that..."	NO	YES	NO	NO	2/3 rd	
Avoid considering an improper matter	"I object to consideration for this motion"	YES	NO	NO	NO	2/3 rd *6	
Verify a voice vote by having members stand	"I call for a division" or "Division!"	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO VOTE	
Request information	"Point of information"	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO VOTE	
Take up a matter previously tabled	"I move to take from the table..."	NO	YES	NO	NO	MAJORITY	
Reconsider a hasty action	"I move to reconsider the vote on..."	YES	YES	YES *8	NO	MAJORITY	

***NOTES:**

1. Affirmative votes may not be reconsidered.
2. Unless vote on question has begun.
3. Unless committee has already taken up the subject.
4. Unless the motion to be amended is not debatable.
5. Unless chair submits to assembly for decision.
6. 2/3 vote in negative to prevent consideration of main motion.
7. Only if main question has not beend debated.
8. Unless the motion to be reconsidered is not debatable.