

# Parliamentary Procedure

## What is Parliamentary Procedure?

Parliamentary procedure is a set of rules for conducting meetings. It allows for everyone to be heard and to make decisions without confusion.

Today, Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised is the basic handbook of operation for most clubs, organizations, and other groups.

## A Very Abridged Version of Robert's Rules

The degree of order needed at a meeting is dependent upon the size and purpose of the group. The following are some basics of Robert's Rules of Order, which may be helpful for groups that need a degree of normality in conducting business.

### The Motion

You may make a motion when you want the group to take some action: to send a letter, to accept a report, to hold a special meeting, to spend money for some special purpose, etc.

Introduce the motion by saying, "I move that," followed by a statement of the proposal. You cannot discuss the motion until someone has seconded it. This is done to reduce the number of discussions on a subject in which no one else in the group is interested.

### The Amendment

Amendments are offered in the same way as a motion. You may offer an amendment when you agree substantially with the motion which has been made but want to make some changes before it is adopted.

Organizations may choose to add their own stipulations, such as amendments must be made in writing and/or that they must be presented two weeks prior to a vote. An organization's bylaws should outline these processes.

### Amending the Amendment

Just as a motion may be amended, an amendment may also be changed in the same way. As with the first amendment, the second amendment must relate to the motion and the amendment. It is in order only when it relates to both. No more than two amendments may be made to one motion.

### Substitute Motion

The substitute motion is sometimes used when there is a motion and two amendments on the floor in order to save the time of the meeting. If there does not seem to be substantial disagreement with the motion and the two amendments, a substitute motion incorporating all three into one motion may be made and accepted by the chair.

Note: If you disagree with a motion or an amendment, you do not defeat it by trying to change the sense of the motion through amendment. You speak against the motion or amendments and urge the membership to vote against them. Then new motions calling for different action may be made and considered.

## **Speaking on Motions and Amendments**

When you want to speak at a meeting, you raise your hand and ask the chair for the floor. As soon as you are recognized by the chair, you may proceed to speak either for or against the motion or amendments being considered.

When several members wish to speak at the same time, these guiding principles should determine the decision of the chairman:

1. The chairman should show preference to the one who made the motion.
2. A member who has not spoken has first choice over one who has already spoken.

If the chairman knows the opinions of members discussing the measure, he/she should alternate between those favoring and those opposing it.

## **Motion to the Table**

If you wish to postpone or end debate on an issue, you may also make a motion to table. Such a motion is not debatable, and if it is seconded by one other member, the motion must be put to an immediate vote by the chair. The chair may discuss the reason for tabling with the member.

## **Calling a Question**

In order to speed up the meeting and eliminate unnecessary discussion, a member can "call the question." The chair will call for dissent. If you want the motion to be discussed further, raise your hand. If there is no dissent, voting on the motion takes place.

## **Voting**

Voting on a motion can be as formal as using written ballots or as casual as having the chair ask if anyone objects to the motion. The most common practice is to call for a show of hands or a voice vote of ayes and nays. Only members present at the time may vote unless the rules of the organization allow for proxies or absentee ballots.

A simple majority of votes cast will pass most motions. During elections when more than two candidates are running for an office, your organization rules should specify whether a majority or plurality is necessary. These rules can also call for other requirements depending on the issue on which the vote is held.

## **When the Chairperson Can Vote**

Assuming that the chairperson is a member of the organization, he/she has the right to vote whenever a written or secret ballot is used. With any other method of voting, to protect the impartiality of the chair, he/she should vote only when it will change the outcome.

## **Point of Information, Of Order**

If at any time during the meeting you are confused about the business being discussed or if you want the motion that is being considered more clearly explained, you may rise to ask the chairman for a point of information. After you are recognized, ask for the explanation which you desire.

If you disagree with any of the chair's rulings, or if you believe that the person who is speaking is not talking about the business being considered, you may raise a point of order and state your objection to the chair. The chair then is required to rule one way or another on your point of order.

## Robert's Rules Resources

### Recommended Reading

Jennings, C. A. (2004). *Robert's rules for dummies*. Wiley.

Robert III, H. M., Evans, W. J., Honemann, D. H., Balch, T. J., & Robert, S. C. (2000). *Robert's rules of order: Newly revised*. Cambridge, MA: Perseus Publishing.

Robert III, H. M., Evans, W. J., Honemann, D. H., Balch, T. J., & Robert, S. C. (2004). *Robert's rules of order newly revised in brief*. Cambridge, MA: Perseus Publishing.

Sylvester, N. (2004). *The complete idiot's guide to Robert's rules*. Alpha Books.

### Recommended Websites

- [www.robertsrules.com](http://www.robertsrules.com)
- [parliamentarians.org](http://parliamentarians.org)
- [www.rulesonline.com](http://www.rulesonline.com)
- [www.parlipro.org](http://www.parlipro.org)

## Parliamentary Procedures at a Glance

TO DO THIS:	YOU SAY THIS:	MAY YOU INTERRUPT	DO YOU NEED A SECOND?	IS IT DEBATEABLE?	CAN IT BE AMENDED?	WHAT VOTE IS NEEDED?	CAN IT BE RE-CONSIDERED?
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 (1)	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 (2)
End Debate and Amendments	"I move the previous question."	NO	YES	NO	NO	2/3	YES (3)
Postpone Discussion for a Certain Time	"I move to postpone the discussion until. . ."	NO	YES	YES	YES	MAJORITY	YES
Give Closer Study of Something	"I move to refer the matter to committee."	NO	YES	YES	YES	MAJORITY	YES (4)
Amend a Motion	"I move to amend the motion by. . ."	NO	YES	YES (5)	YES	MAJORITY	YES
Introduce Business	"I move that. . ."	NO	YES	YES	YES	MAJORITY	YES

↑ The motions listed above are in order of precedence. ↓ Below, there is no order.

Protest Breach of Rules or Conduct	"I rise to a point of order."	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO VOTE (6)	NO
Vote on a Ruling of the Chair	"I appeal from the chair's decision."	YES	YES	YES	NO	MAJORITY	YES
Suspend Rules Temporarily	"I move to suspend the rules so that. . ."	NO	YES	NO	NO	2/3	NO
Avoid Considering an Improper Matter	"I object to consideration of this motion."	YES	NO	NO	NO	2/3 (7)	YES (8)
Verify a Voice Vote by Having Members Stand	"I call for a division," or "Division!"	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO VOTE	NO
Request Information	"Point of information. . ."	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO VOTE	NO
Take Up a Matter Previously Tabled	"I move to take form the table. . ."	NO	YES	NO	NO	MAJORITY	NO
Reconsider a Hasty Action	"I move to reconsider the vote on. . ."	YES	YES	YES (9)	NO	MAJORITY	NO

### NOTES:

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|--|---|
| (1) Unless moved when no question is pending.              | (6) Unless the chair submits to the assembly for decision                               |
| (2) Affirmative votes may not be reconsidered.             | (7) A 2/3 vote in <u>negative</u> is needed to prevent consideration of the main motion |
| (3) Unless vote on question has begun.                     | (8) Only if the main question has not been debated yet.                                 |
| (4) Unless the committee has already taken up the subject. | (9) Unless the motion to be reconsidered is not debatable.                              |
| (5) Unless the motion to be amended is not debatable.      |   |

Information provided by Office of Student Leadership Development Programs at East Carolina University

ACPA Commission for Student Involvement. (2005). *Advisor Manual*. Retrieved June 20, 2009, from <http://www.myacpa.org/comm/student/documents/acpaadvisormanual.pdf>, 21-23.

Robert III, H. M., Evans, W. J., Honemann, D. H., Balch, T. J., & Robert, S. C. (2000). *Robert's rules of order: Newly revised*. Cambridge, MA: Perseus Publishing.

# Student Government Standing Rules of Order

By “standing rules of order,” it is meant, those rules established for the transaction of business by the Student Senate of Southeast Missouri State University.

These rules are additions to our adaption of the system of parliamentary rules devised by General Henry Robert in 1876 for the U.S. House of Representatives. *Robert’s rules of order: Newly Revised* stands as the authoritative work in the field and as the foundation for the Student Senate’s method of business.

## Committees

The purpose of each committee is described specifically in their respective By-Laws. Additionally, each committee will have the responsibility to review any legislation referred to them by the Senate. The committee, along with the sponsor(s) of any legislation referred to that committee will be required to get together at the committee’s standing meeting to discuss and make changes to the legislation. That legislation will not be placed back into the Senate agenda without being passed out of the committee by a majority vote.

## Debate

1. Members of the Senate who wish to speak should raise their hand and wait for recognition by the President of the Senate.
2. If more than one member seeks recognition at the same time, the President of the Senate decides who has the floor.
3. Recognition by the President of the Senate shall be impartial.
4. Senators holding the floor shall direct all remarks, including questions for other Senators, through the chair. If a Senator wishes to ask a question, he/she shall ask the chair, “Will the sponsor yield for a question? (or for a series of questions?).” If the sponsor does, he/she will hold the floor once the question has been asked.
5. Once a Senator has begun to debate, he/she shall not be allowed to make a motion or yield the floor to another Senator.

## The Right of Opening Comments (Two-Minute Limit)

Once legislation has been brought up for discussion, the sponsor or sponsors will be entitled to opening comments. This shall be used to briefly explain the legislation to the Senate and show why it is needed.

After the opening comments are completed, the floor will be opened to a Senator with an opposing comment. If there are none, the floor will be open for general debate.

## Amendments

Amendments to legislation must be made in writing. Once a motion to amend is made, the amendment must be written on a form that will be available at the Presiding Officer’s podium.

## Voting

Whether a vote requires a majority (50% plus one) or some other quantity to be carried, passage is based on the number of Senators present at the meeting. For example, if a motion requires a majority vote for passage, and 27 Senators are present, then 14 votes in the affirmative action are need for the motion to pass, *no matter how many abstentions are cast*. This method of counting votes will be used in order to avoid a large number of Senators abstaining from a vote and the motion carrying with a low number of “yes” votes.

## Rules of Parliamentary Procedure

### Parliamentary Procedure Table

The discussion which follows on the next several pages offers an in-depth exploration of parliamentary procedure and any special adaptations for Student Senate. A [Parliamentary Procedures at a Glance](#) chart is provided to give Senators a quick reference guide to each of the motions that could be used in the meetings. Please note, however, that the table is not to be a substitute for reading and understanding the following rules.

### How to Rank Motions

All motions have a “rank” in relation to one other in order to determine which motion will be considered first when there is more than one to be considered. Motions will be called out of order if they are lower rank than a motion already on the floor.

There are three types of motions: main motions, subsidiary motions, and privileged motions.

1. *Privileged motions* have the highest rank. They are unrelated to the main motion, but relate to situations such as leaving the room or ending the meeting.
2. *Subsidiary motions* are of lower rank than privileged motions. They settle details regarding the main motion under consideration.
3. *Main motions* are of the lowest rank. They are used to address a basic proposal before the group. Typically, this will be a motion to pass legislation.

### Main Motions

Types of main motions

1. To pass legislation
2. To reconsider, or bring something back that has already been voted on
3. To rescind, or simply erase an earlier action on something
4. To take legislation from the table
5. To consider vetoed legislation

The main motion most often used by Student Senate will be the motion to pass legislation. This will be done by the bill sponsor after the opening comments. For example, “I move that this amendment/resolution pass.”

#### *Motion to lay on the table*

“I move to table. . .”

Requires a second                      Majority vote                      NOT debatable

1. Effect of adoption is to place the pending main motion into a limbo status that can only end when a motion to take from the table is made and passed.
2. Takes precedence over all other subsidiary motions.

#### *Move the previous question (end debate)*

“I move the previous question. . .”

Requires a second                      2/3 vote                      NOT debatable

1. Not in order if motion to table is pending.
2. Effect of adoption is to end debate on whatever is being debated and vote on the pending motion.
3. The maker of this motion CAN move to end debate on all pending motions, which would mean voting right down the line to the main motion without any debate. This intent would not be presumed unless the maker of the motion states in that way.

### *Motion to limit debate*

"I move to limit debate to. . . minutes."

Requires a second                      2/3 vote                      NOT debatable

1. Not in order if a motion to table or end debate is pending.
2. Effect of this motion is to limit debate on a main motion to a certain number of minutes.
3. Debate on any motion in the Senate has no time limit unless this motion is made and passed.

### *Motion to postpone a definite time*

"I move to postpone this to. . . (time)."

Requires a second                      Majority vote                      Debatable

1. Not in order if a motion to table, end debate, or limit debate is pending.
2. Effect of passage is to insert the matter into the agenda for the time specified.
3. This motion should be used to postpone an Amendment to the By-Laws that has been introduced as new business until the following meeting.

### *Motion to refer the committee*

"I move to refer this matter to the. . . (committee name)."

Requires a second                      Majority vote                      Debatable

1. Not in order when a motion to table, end debate, limit debate, or postpone to a definite time is pending.
2. Effect of passage is to send a piece of legislation to the named committee for further work in order to do it whatever it feels necessary. The committee, along with the sponsor, could choose to put more work into the proposal to improve it, or choose to drop the issue all together.
3. It is to be used when the Senate feels much more work needs to be done on the legislation in order for it to pass.
4. This motion can be amended only as to which committee the proposal will be sent to or the instruction to the committee.

### *Motion to reconsider*

"I move to reconsider. . ."

Requires a second                      Majority vote                      Debatable

1. A motion to reconsider may only be made once as to a given vote.
2. May only be made by a person who voted on the side that one the first vote.
3. Debatable only if the motion to be reconsidered was debatable in the first place.

### *Motion to rescind*

"I move to rescind the vote on. . ."

Requires a second                      Majority vote                      Debatable

1. If passed, a motion to rescind takes back an earlier vote without calling for a second vote on the question.
2. Applies to main motions, questions of privilege, and appeals of the decision of the chair.
3. Can be made by any member, regardless of how the person voted on the original motion.

### *Move to take from the table*

"I move to take. . . (a previously tabled motion). . . from the table."

Requires a second                      Majority vote                      NOT debatable

1. Used to reintroduce a motion that had previously been tabled.
2. An affirmative action vote on this motion cannot be reconsidered.

### *Motion to consider vetoed legislation*

"I move to override the President's veto on. . . (vetoed legislation)."

Requires a second                      3/5 vote                      Debatable

1. Used to introduce vetoed legislation to the Senate in order to override the President's veto
2. Motion may only be made once as to a given piece of vetoed legislation.

### ***Subsidiary Motions***

Rules that apply to subsidiary motions

1. A subsidiary motion does an action on a main motion
2. A subsidiary motion is out of order unless there is a pending main motion to which the subsidiary motion applies.
3. Subsidiary motions are made during the course of debate on a main motion.
4. A vote on the main motion is not to be taken until all pending subsidiary motions have been voted upon.

List and rank of subsidiary motions

1. Lay on table (highest rank)
2. Previous question
3. Limit debate
4. Postpone to a definite time
5. Refer to committee
6. Amend
7. Postpone indefinitely (lowest rank)

### *Motion to amend*

"I move to amend this by. . . (amending action)."

Requires a second                      Majority vote                      Debatable

1. Not in order when motion to table, end debate, limit debate, postpone to a definite time, or refer to committee is pending.
2. Effect of passage is to change part of a piece of legislation or a motion,
3. Amendments must be submitted to the President of the Senate in writing before the vote on the amendment will be taken.
4. Theoretically, amendments to legislation can be unlimited, however, if the number might be excessive, referral to committee would be best.
5. Motion is debatable, but only on the amendment(s), not the main motion.

### *Motion to postpone indefinitely*

"I move to postpone this indefinitely."

Requires a second                      Majority vote                      Debatable

1. Not in order when any other subsidiary motion is pending.
2. Effect of passage is to postpone legislation until it is reconsidered. The earliest that it can be reconsidered is the following meeting.



## ***Privileged Motions***

Rules that apply to privileged motions

1. Privileged motions don't have any relation to the pending main motion. They relate to an important decision by the chamber that is more important than the main motion.

Types of privileged motions

1. Adjourn
2. Recess
3. Questions of privilege
  - a. Point of order
  - b. Point of inquiry
  - c. General question of privilege
  - d. Appeal the decision of the chair
  - e. Objection to consideration
4. Division of assembly
5. Suspend the rules

### *Motion to adjourn*

"I move to adjourn."

Requires a second                      Majority vote                      NOT debatable

1. The effect of passage of this motion is to end the meeting.
2. Although, technically, this motion is always in order, it will not be permitted until all Senate business on the agenda is finished.

### *Motion to recess*

"I move to recess until. . ."

Requires a second                      Majority vote                      NOT debatable

1. Passage of this motion stops the meeting for a specific period of time.
2. This motion should be used when a break is needed in the meeting for some reason. This could be for informal discussion between Senators or if a problem arises in the meeting that needs time to be worked out.
3. Motion is amended as to the length of the recess.

### *Point of order*

"Point of order."

No second required                      Chair decision                      NOT debatable

1. This is used to correct a mistake in procedure that has apparently been missed by the Presiding Officer.
2. No vote is taken on this, so in this sense, it isn't a "motion." It is simply a member of the Senate calling attention to the suspected error.
3. Speaker does not need to wait for recognition; just call out "Point of order."
4. The Presiding Officer must recognize and require into the point, although the Chair may finish what it is doing first if it is appropriate to do so.
5. The Chair may or may not agree with the point of order. If not, the only recourse is to appeal to the chair's decision to the Senate.

### *Point of inquiry*

“Point of inquiry.”

No second required                  Chair decision                  NOT debatable

1. This motion is used when there is an *urgent* need for information.
2. Once again, there is no vote on this motion, and the speaker need not be recognized. Just call out, “Point of inquiry.”

### *General question of privilege*

“Point of privilege.”

No second required                  Chair decision                  NOT debatable

1. Again, no vote, and the speaker need not be recognize.
2. Motion is used to correct a problem of decorum in the room. Normally, this motion will be used to ask for permission to leave the room. *No* Senate member will be allowed to leave the room without asking permission first.

### *Appeal the decision of the chair*

“I appeal the decision of the chair.”

Requires four seconds                  Majority vote                  Debatable

1. Speaker needs not be recognized; call out, “I appeal the decision of the chair.”
2. Chair must recognize this motion, and ask for the necessary four seconds.
3. A tie vote on the motion retains the chair’s decision.
4. Motion must be made immediately following the decision that is being appealed.

### *Objections to consideration*

“I object to consideration of this matter.”

No second required                  2/3 vote                  NOT debatable

1. Purpose of this motion is to quickly dispose of a business item that has no place before the Senate.
2. Once again, speaker need not be recognized, but the motion must be made before debate on the objectionable item has begun.

### *Motion to suspend the rules*

“I move to suspend the rules by. . .”

Requires a second                  2/3 vote                  NOT debatable

1. The purpose of this motion is to temporarily change the rules of the chamber until the end of the session.
2. This motion may not be used to temporarily change the By-Laws or the Student Constitution in any way.

These guidelines are empowered as the Student Government Standing Rules of order by By-Law 412-03. These rules are considered as a separate document and not an extension of the By-Laws or Student Constitution. These standing rules can be amended by the same process as the Student Government By-Laws.