

How To Run An Effective Meeting: Parliamentary Procedure Basics

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When people come together to talk and make decisions about something important, they find structure can help make better use of their time. Structure reduces chaos, helps address what the group is expected to accomplish while together, and can make meetings more efficient. However, this structure does not happen by chance.

Effective meetings require a plan, good communication and practice.

Parliamentary procedure is a planning tool and its application helps governments, businesses and associations move through their formal meetings in a productive way. Like any tool or program, parliamentary procedure can take time and practice to learn.

Below you will find some questions that will guide readers on their way to learning parliamentary procedure.

What Is Parliamentary Procedure?

Parliamentary procedure is an agreed upon set of rules that help a group focus on one item at a time, to allow equal opportunity for input, and provide an organized path for making decisions. These rules are referred to as “parliamentary” procedure because their roots were founded in England’s parliamentary government.

The procedures often provide a guide on when there are enough people present to officially meet, who can speak and when, and how many votes are required to make a decision. Robert’s Rules of Order is a well-known version of parliamentary procedure used by civics groups and Arkansas’ quorum courts, while the majority of state

Let’s Review: Should my group use Parliamentary Procedure?

Look at the check list below to help determine whether your group should use parliamentary procedure.

If you checked any of these, consider using parliamentary procedure:

- ☐ We have filed with the Secretary of State
- ☐ We have a constitution or bylaws
- ☐ We have a bank account
- ☐ We raise money
- ☐ We spend money
- ☐ We vote on whether or not to do something
- ☐ We have officers such as a president, vice president, secretary or treasurer
- ☐ We have been tasked with making an important decision

legislatures turn to Mason’s Manual of Legislative Procedure.

Not every government or organization uses the same rules because they have different needs and different customs. Rules may differ depending on a group’s size or the type of meeting they are conducting.

- If you are a government agency or committee, look at the city, county or state laws, charters or ordinances that created your body for information on which procedures your group follows.
- If you are a non-government body, check your organization’s constitution and bylaws to see whether they specify a specific set of rules to follow.

Familiarizing yourself with these guiding documents can help you better understand what is expected of you as a member or as an officer. Your group should review these bylaws with new members and with each other at least once a year. Always keep them by your side during meetings in case there are questions about how to proceed.

How Effective Are Your Meetings?

For groups that have been meeting for some time, patterns can emerge about what goes well during a meeting or potential problems that members would like to address. Think about a recent meeting you participated in and list below what went well and what you have noticed your group may need to work on to have more effective meetings.

Let's Review:

Do Well
1.
2.
3.
Need To Work On
1.
2.
3.

Look at what you have written above and compare your challenges to your group's constitution or bylaws or even a recent agenda. Does your organization's set of rules address any of what you need to work on? Is there something missing from the agenda that would address some of the areas you noted that need work? Do your meetings end on time and achieve everything listed on the agenda?

The Agenda

Before you can effectively meet, you have to prepare an agenda. An agenda is a map of the meeting, showing people what to expect and in what order.

Well-planned agendas take a group's bylaws and customs into consideration, as well as the time to complete each task. Review the sample agenda below for a better understanding of what is typically included in an agenda.

Typical Agenda – Order Of Business

- 1. **Call to Order** – Start of the meeting.
- 2. **Opening Ceremonies** – Depends on customs, such as pledge of allegiance or reciting of an oath.
- 3. **Roll Call** – Attendance is taken.
- 4. **Reading and Approval of Minutes**
- 5. **Reports of Officers, Boards and Committees**
- 6. **Unfinished Business** – Old issues for discussion and final decision making. This is when the last of several required votes takes place.
- 7. **New Business** – New issues for discussion. This may be when first of several required votes takes place.
- 8. **Program** – Depends on customs, such as a guest speaker or special activity takes place.
- 9. **Announcements**
- 10. **Adjournment**

Let's Review:

How does your group's agenda compare to this example agenda?

Using Parliamentary Procedure

Every meeting has a beginning and an end. Parliamentary procedures are the techniques or methods used to get you from the beginning to the end. These procedures are used to get you through the agenda, or to move up or down a topic of discussion on the agenda.

Many of these techniques are called "motions," or proposals to bring a subject to a group for its consideration and action.

There are many types of motions, and they each have their own set of rules for when and how they can be used. Some motions are more important, or take priority over other motions.

There are also primary and secondary motions – meaning the order they take place in depends on each other. (For example, you can not amend the time of a bake sale if you have not already proposed the bake sale.)

Many organizations and groups take motion-making very seriously. Incorrect motions can lead to poor outcomes for a decision or action you are wanting to take during a meeting. Knowing proper motion making and the procedures your group follows can help you ensure your group takes an action you support or can help stop something you don't support.

What Do I Say To Make A Motion?

Groups differ on how formal they are during their business meetings. It is important to determine the level of formality of your group, and to understand that ultimately the group's constitution and bylaws will determine the rules of operation when controversy arises.

Even if your group is very informal, start out by making your motions properly so you know you are making motions the correct way.

To properly make a motion, the following procedures are followed:

1. Member rises and addresses the Chair.

"Mr. /Madam President or Chairperson."

2. Chair recognizes the member.

3. Member: "I move that _____ (states motion)."

4. Second to motion (not necessary to stand). "I second the motion." If the motion comes as a recommendation from two or more members, the motion does not need a second.

5. Chair states motion: "It has been moved by (name) and seconded that _____."

6. Discussion: If the motion is debatable, every member has the right to debate; the Chair refrains from debate while presiding. The Chair carefully determines the order in which members are recognized to speak, giving first opportunity to the proposer of the motion. Care should be given to assure that discussion is related to the question.

7. The Chair says, "If there is no further discussion, the motion is _____ (restate motion)."

8. Vote: The Chair says, "All those in favor of _____ (the motion stated) say 'aye.' Those opposed say 'no.'"

9. Result of the vote is stated by the Chair.

"The motion is carried" or "the motion is lost."

Commonly Used Motions		
Motion	Meaning	How To State Motion
Main Motion	Brings before the assembly a question or business consideration.	I move that _____.
Motion to Amend	Motion used to change details of a main motion.	I move to amend by (adding, striking, substituting).
Call for the Question	A vote to stop debate. If it fails to receive a 2/3 vote, debate may continue.	I call for the question.
Call for the Division of the House - Questions results of a vote.	Calls for verification of a vote when there is a question about the results.	I call for division.
Refer to a Committee	Allows for additional information or study of issue before voting. Motion contains details of who the committee will be, who will appoint and time for committee to report.	I move to refer the matter to the _____ Committee.
To lay on the Table	Sets aside a pending motion to take care of something else more urgent.	I move to lay the question on the table.
Withdraw a Motion	The person who makes a motion can decide they don't want to have a vote on it anymore. A motion can be withdrawn at any time before it is voted on, even if amended or with pending amendments.	Mr. Chairman, I move that I be allowed to withdraw the motion.
Rise to a Point of Order	Used to correct a mistake in procedure before an action is taken or to ask a question about procedure.	I rise to a point of order.
Suspending the Rules	Consider something out of its scheduled order.	I move we suspend the rules and consider _____.
Adjourn	Used to end the meeting or to set a time to adjourn a meeting.	I move that we adjourn.

Let's Review:

Practice the common motions listed on your own or within a group.

What Are Your Parliamentary Procedure Strengths And Weaknesses?

Under the first heading below, list the motions you frequently use correctly in a meeting. In the second heading, list motions that give you trouble. Take a few minutes to practice saying the motions that you have difficulty using.

What Motion(s) Do You Frequently Use Correctly?
1.
2.
3.
4.
What Motion(s) Do You Have Difficulty Using?
1.
2.
3.
4.

Where I Can I Find More Advanced Information?

The University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture offers a pocket guide to parliamentary procedure as well as a more in-depth, but simplified, publication on parliamentary procedure. Both include charts that show when motions are considered proper to make or introduce.

Find Them Online:

- Pocket Guide to Parliamentary Procedure: www.uaex.uada.edu/publications/PDF/MP475.pdf
- Simplified Handbook of Parliamentary Procedure: www.uaex.uada.edu/publications/pdf/MP350.pdf

The official Robert's Rules of Order can be found at <https://robertsrules.com>. People who are interested in becoming official parliamentarians, or experts in meeting procedures, can find more information from the National Association of Parliamentarians at www.parliamentarians.org.

Finally, talk to your group's secretary or president about what rules to follow or expect in your organization. During a meeting, you can use the "point of order" motion to clarify or ask about procedures.

These techniques require practice to perfect; but once they are adopted, parliamentary procedure can make your meetings more effective and efficient.

Additional References And Suggested Reading

Proper form of writing minutes. University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture. Obtained from www.uaex.uada.edu/business-communities/leadership/docs/Minutes%20Proper%20Form.pdf

Procedural Rules for Municipal Officials. (2014). Arkansas Municipal League. Obtained from https://static.ark.org/eeuploads/arml/Procedural_Rules_May2014_WEB.pdf

Procedural Rules (2018). Association of Arkansas Counties. Obtained from <https://www.arcounties.org/publication-library/>

The University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture's Public Policy Center provides timely, credible, unbiased research, analyses and education on current and emerging public issues. This fact sheet was written by Kristin Higgins, program associate, University of Arkansas System, Division of Agriculture's Public Policy Center.

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