

Parliamentary Procedure Cheat Sheet

by Gregory Carlson, Professional Registered Parliamentarian

Making a Motion

Substantive business and actions consist of main motions (or resolutions) that are made by members. Making a motion consists of three parts: a member makes the motion, a second, and the statement by the Chair. Only one main motion may be pending at a time. Before you make a motion, you must be recognized by the Chair.

When no main motions are pending, say “Mr./Madam Chair,” and the Chair can call on you. After receiving recognition, you can make the motion. The motion should be clear, unambiguous, and preferably in writing.

Making the motion (Example)

Worst: “I motion that we give the parliamentarian some money.” (Too vague, who is we? how much money?).

Bad: “I motion that we give the parliamentarian \$50.” (Poor grammar, a motion is a noun, not a verb).

Better: “I make the motion that our organization give the parliamentarian \$50.” (Uses passive voice)

Best: “I move that our organization give the parliamentarian \$50.” (Uses active voice).

Seconding the motion

A second simply means that a second member desires the business to come before the Assembly (this prevents one person from holding up the meeting). The motion maker and seconder do not necessarily have to vote in favor of the motion. The seconder, without waiting for recognition from the Chair, says “I second the motion,” or “I second.”

Statement by the Chair

Important: The motion does not exist until stated by the Chair. The Chair states the motion and these words are recorded by the Secretary. If the Chair’s statement does not match the mover of the motion’s words, a point of order should be raised to correct this.

Time saving strategy:

Before a motion is stated by the Chair, there is a brief moment when the motion maker can alter the motion, or get assistance to clarify a vague motion. After this change, the motion still requires a second. After any motion is stated by the Chair, it belongs to the Assembly and this informal process is not allowed.

Debating and Disposing a Motion

Strictly speaking, members should not be allowed to debate a question if a motion has not been made and stated by the Chair. After the process outlined above, the member who made the motion is entitled to the first speech and the Chair should recognize that member. The Chair should then alternate between members “for” and “against” the motion. Your organization may have rules that limit the number of times or lengths that a member may speak. If it appears that debate is over, the Chair may call the question. The Chair asks, “Is there any more discussion/debate?” Then, the Chair must make it clear what is being voted on and should restate the motion before taking a vote. The Chair always asks for the positive and negative vote, and never asks for the abstentions. Substantive Main Motions are decided by majority vote. The Chair may take the vote by: a voice vote, an uncounted rising vote (division), counted rising vote, ballot vote, or roll call vote. The Chair must use good judgment to determine accurate results. Majority vote means “more than half” of those voting, ignoring abstentions. Two-Thirds vote means “two-thirds or more” of those voting, ignoring abstentions. The Chair may prevent nonmembers from speaking or order their removal from the hall, subject to appeal by the Assembly. Nonmembers may speak if approved by the Assembly (majority vote).

Subsidiary Motions

During debate of a Main Motion, a member may move any of the following:

1. Move to Postpone Indefinitely: Defeats the motion without taking a position. (Majority vote)
2. Move to Amend: Add, strike, or substituting words or paragraphs. (Majority Vote)
3. Move to Commit: Refer the motion to a standing or special (new) committee. (Majority Vote)
4. Postpone Definitely: Postpone the motion to later in the meeting or to a future meeting. (Majority Vote)
5. Limit or Extend Debate: Extend or decrease the length or number of allowed speeches. (2/3 Vote)
6. Call the Previous Question: Force an end to the debate and vote on the main motion. (2/3 Vote)
7. Move to Table: Temporarily postpone the motion and decide something else first. (Majority Vote)

Privileged Motions

The following motions may be made at any time (usually requiring recognition).

8. Call for the Orders of the Day: Bring the meeting back to the agenda on demand of a single member
9. Question of Privilege: Quickly solve an issue affecting the Assembly. (Quiet Microphone, etc).
10. Recess: Take a short break in the meeting. (Majority Vote)
11. Adjourn: End the meeting, even if a motion is still pending. (Majority Vote)
12. Fix the time *to which* to adjourn: Create an extension of the current meeting on the same or different day. (Majority Vote)

Motions with a higher number in the list above have a higher rank, take precedence over, and are voted on before those with a lower number, if multiple subsidiary or privileged motions are pending at the same time.

Incidental Motions

The following are motions that can be used depending on if the situation warrants their necessity.

- Point of Order: A member may require the Chair to rule on a breach of order or a breach of the rules.
- Parliamentary Inquiry: Ask a question about the current Parliamentary situation.
- Point of Information: Ask a substantive question to the Chair who may then redirect it to another member. (Example: ask the Treasurer the current bank balance).
- Appeal: Appeal the decision of a Chair on a Point of Order. Decided by the Assembly by majority vote.
- Suspend the Rules: Temporarily suspend a rule of order (Bylaws may not be suspended). Two-thirds vote required.
- Objection to the Consideration of the Question: Before debate, defeat a motion before it is considered. Two-thirds vote required.
- Division of the question: Separate a motion into two or more separate questions if they can stand as separate motions. Can be required on demand of a single member if completely separate motions.
- Consider a motion by paragraph: Amend and debate a motion one paragraph at a time.
- Division of the Assembly: Require a standing vote in place of a voice vote. Required on demand of a single member.
- Unanimous Consent: If there is no objection, many of these rules may be simplified if no member's rights are being violated. Bylaws may not be suspended even by unanimous consent.

Decorum in Debate

The following are rules of debate that should be followed by all members. The Chair or Assembly may order the member to temporarily cease speaking if the member breaks these rules.

- It is never appropriate to question the motives of a fellow member, whether present or absent.
- It is never appropriate to disparage another member, to call a member a liar, or to attack the personal character of another member in any way.
- It is never appropriate to speak directly to other members. All discussion shall be directed towards the Chair, and if a member would like to ask a question or make a point of information, that can be directed to the Chair and the Chair can address or redirect the question, the time to do so being taken from the members' time.
- It is not appropriate to mention the proper names of other members. Members should refer to each other in the third person or by title, for example, "disagree with the member who just spoke because," or "I agree with the Chair of the Communications Committee because..."
- Members may not shout for recognition from their Chair. The Chair will ignore members who call for the question from their seat. If a member wishes to seek recognition, they should rise and say "Mr./Madam Chair." The Chair can then recognize you to make a motion or to call the question. Only one person shall speak at a time.
- A member who exceeds the time limit may be cut off by the Chair.