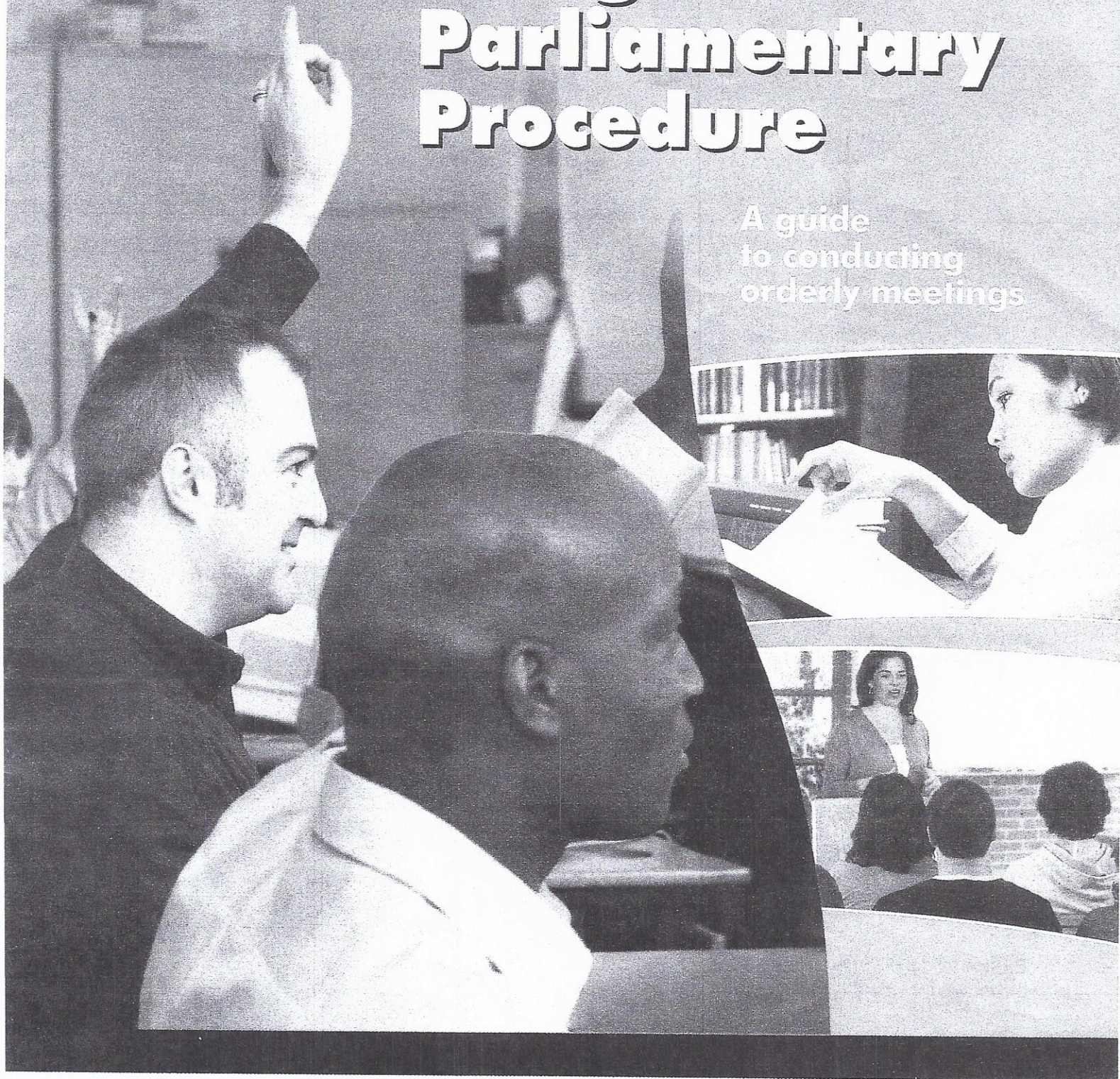
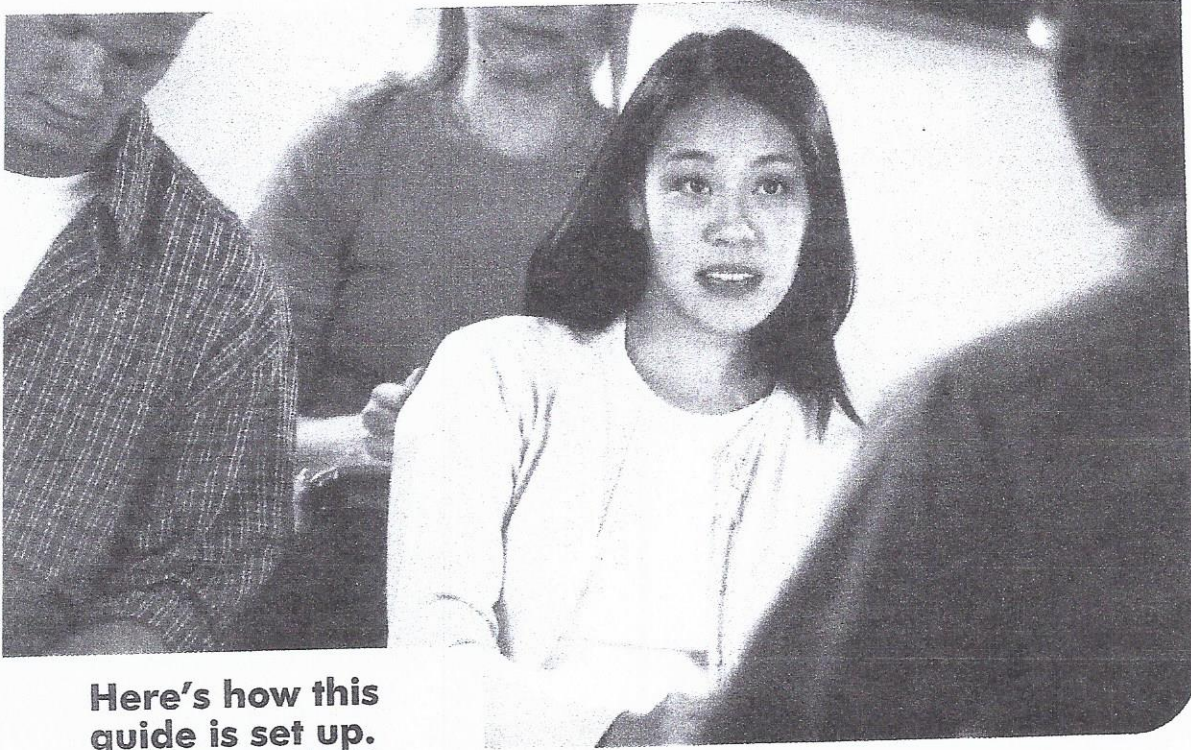


Using Parliamentary Procedure

A guide
to conducting
orderly meetings



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF PARLIAMENTARIANS®
213 SOUTH MAIN STREET
INDEPENDENCE, MO 64050-3850
TELEPHONE 816.833.3892
FAX: 816.833.3893
E-MAIL: hq@nap2.org
<http://parliamentarians.org>
TOLL FREE 888.627.2929



Here's how this guide is set up.

- **Page 4** gives a sample meeting agenda with some key definitions.
- **Page 5** focuses on types of motions.
- **Pages 6-7** describe:
 - presenting motions
 - changing motions.
- **Pages 8-9** show an at-a-glance chart of common motions and their rankings.
- **Pages 10-11** cover types and methods of voting.
- **Pages 12-13** discuss meetings, including:
 - leadership
 - etiquette
 - committees.
- **Page 14** gives a glossary of terms with an index.

Parliamentary procedure
is a great help in many kinds of meetings and gatherings.

What is parliamentary procedure?

It's a set of democratic rules used to govern meetings and make decisions consistently and fairly. It is best used in groups of more than 12 people.

Parliamentary procedure has a long history.

- It originated in the early English Parliament and came to America with the first European settlers. It became uniform in 1876, when Henry M. Robert published his manual on parliamentary law.
- Today, *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised*, 10th edition, is the basic handbook of operation for many organizations and groups. (There are also other books on parliamentary procedure that may be used.)

Use this parliamentary procedure guide to help make your meetings orderly and efficient.

Why is parliamentary procedure important?

- It lets the minority in a group be heard.
- It brings order to meetings by having the group consider one matter at a time.
- It helps groups make clear decisions efficiently.
- It lets absent members know that business is being conducted fairly in their absence.

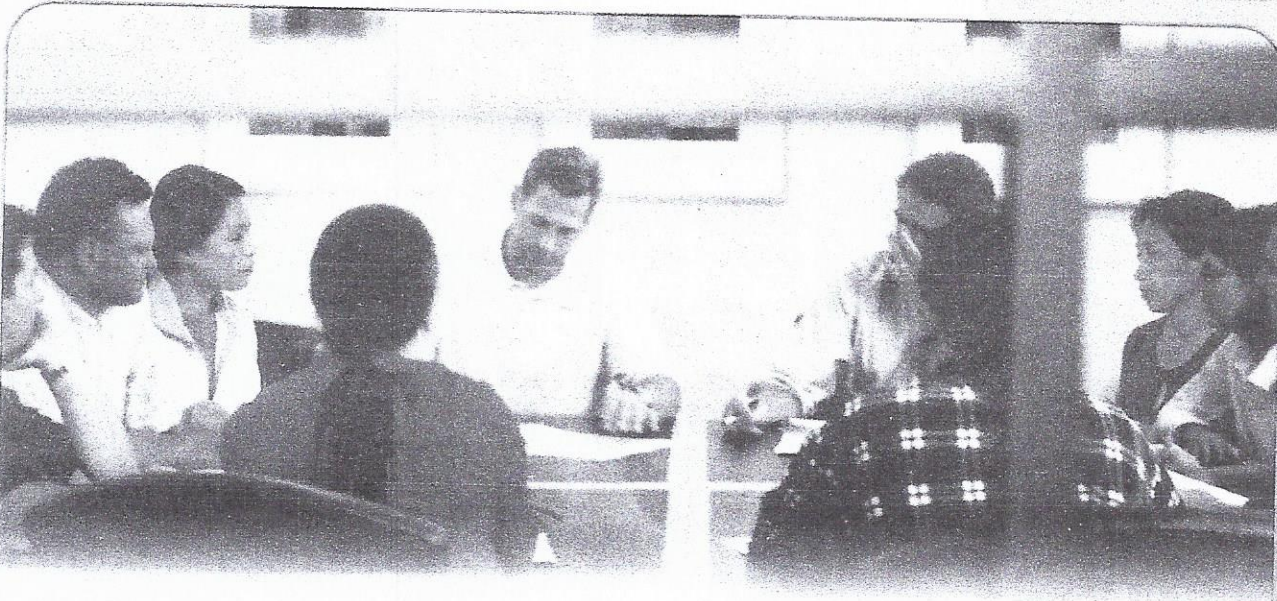
You can help meetings go smoothly!

- Be familiar with basic parliamentary procedure and with your group's bylaws (or other written rules).
- Get involved! Use the rules in this guide to contribute your ideas and help your group do business.
- For details on rules, check your organization's "parliamentary authority"—the designated rule book on parliamentary procedure.

Get the FAQs here.

Throughout this guide, find answers to frequently asked questions (FAQs) in sidebars like this one. You'll see definitions of terms plus further tips for using parliamentary procedure.

A glossary of terms is also provided on page 14.



Think about it...

What group(s) are you a member of?

Is parliamentary procedure used already? How is it working?

What is your group's parliamentary authority?

The agenda gives an outline of the meeting.

The standard order of business is:

(Your agenda may follow a specific form.)

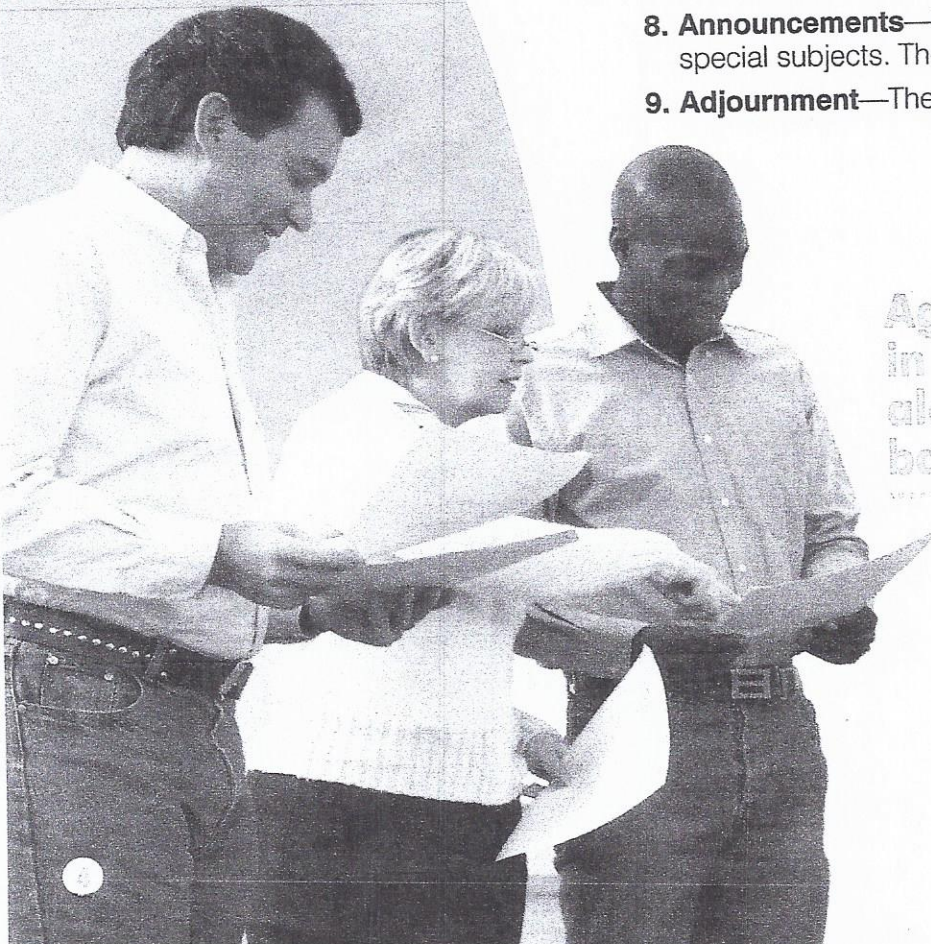
- 1. Call to order**—If a quorum is present, the presiding officer (chair) says, "The meeting will come to order."
- 2. Minutes**—The secretary reads a record of the previous meeting, and it is approved.
- 3. Officers' reports**—For example, the treasurer may give a report. Bylaws should specify the order in which officers report. Officers' reports and other reports may be circulated before the meeting so they can be handled more quickly.
- 4. Other reports**—These may include board reports and committee reports. Again, bylaws should specify the order. For example, some reports may only be given annually.
- 5. Special orders**—These are important business matters, such as elections, previously designated for consideration at the meeting. For example, the bylaws may state that officers must be elected at the fall quarterly meeting.
- 6. Unfinished business and general orders**—These include questions that are still pending from the previous meeting or that were specifically postponed to this meeting.
- 7. New business**—Any new matters are introduced.
- 8. Announcements**—These inform the assembly of events or special subjects. There may be a speaker or other program.
- 9. Adjournment**—The meeting ends.

Agendas can be circulated in advance of a meeting, along with needed background materials.

What's a "quorum"?

A quorum is the minimum number of voting members that must be present for business to be conducted legally. The actual quorum number is usually stated in the bylaws. It may be a majority of the members or some other number.

If there is not a quorum, it may be necessary to recess, adjourn or try to obtain a quorum.



Making the motions—it's how business gets done.

To introduce matters for consideration, members propose motions during the meeting.

A main motion introduces new business.

Main motions are in order if there are no other motions before the assembly. They are made and handled one at a time and may be debated or amended before voting. Some examples are:

- "I move that we have our retreat at The Pines during the first weekend in May."
- "I move to hire a consultant to assist with the upcoming contract negotiation."

Secondary motions can be made while a main motion is pending.

There are 3 classes of secondary motions.

- **Subsidiary** motions affect how main motions are handled. Examples are changing the wording of a main motion or deciding to consider it at a later time.
- **Privileged** motions relate to the welfare of the group or an individual. Examples include ending the meeting, taking a break or going into executive session.
- **Incidental** motions are questions of procedure that rise out of other motions. Examples are verifying a vote count, correcting an error or asking for information.

"Out of order!"

In general, a motion should be relevant to the question or situation at hand. Motions must **not**:

- conflict with the law, bylaws or a motion that has already been adopted
- be obstructive or frivolous
- essentially repeat a motion rejected earlier in the meeting or a motion already pending.



FAQ

What's a "second"?

A second is when a person agrees that a motion should be considered. A member does not have to be recognized to second. He or she can simply say, "I second that motion," or just "second."

The seconder does not have to agree with the motion itself, only that it is worth proposing. This lets the chair know that the motion is of interest to more than one person.

How to present a motion

May I interrupt the speaker?

Usually, no. The speaker is the person who has the floor at the moment. But sometimes, a motion is so important that it is acceptable to interrupt the speaker to make it. After the interruption has been attended to, the original speaker regains the floor. See the at-a-glance chart on pages 8-9 for motions where the speaker may be interrupted.

1. Make your motion.

- Wait until the previous speaker is finished.
- Rise and address the chair. Say, "Mr. (or Madam) Chairperson" or "Mr. (or Madam) President." Give your name and the chair will recognize you by repeating it.
- Say, "I move that . . .," and state your motion clearly and concisely. Stay on the subject and avoid personal attacks.

2. Wait for someone to second, if needed.

(Not all motions need a second—see pages 8-9.)

- Another member will say, "I second the motion." Or, the chair will call for a second.
- If there is no second, the motion will not be considered.
- ✶ Motions made at the direction of a board or a committee of more than one member do not require a second. This is because the committee or board already has 2 or more people who want the motion considered.

3. The chair states your motion.

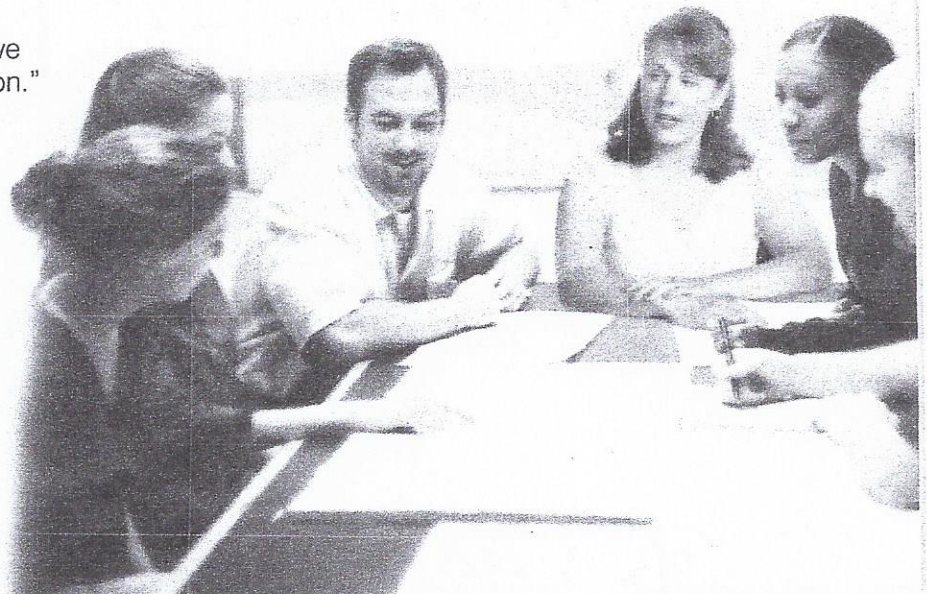
- The chair must say, "It is moved and seconded that . . ." After this happens, the motion is pending (also called "on the floor").
- If a motion is long or complex, you may wish to write it down so it can be stated clearly to all. (Or the chair may request this.)

To improve on a motion, move to amend it.

Making an amendment lets you and other members change the wording of a pending motion before voting. An amendment may add, strike out or substitute words. You may offer to amend your own motion. (See pages 8-9 for amendable motions.)

- The first change moved is the **primary** amendment. For example: "I move that we add 'with winter fund money' to the motion."
- You can also move to amend the amendment—called a **secondary** amendment. For example: "I move that we add the words 'up to \$2,000' after 'winter fund money.'"

Amendments are not limited, but only one primary and one secondary amendment can be on the floor at a time. The secondary is dealt with before the primary. When there are no more amendments, the main motion can be disposed of.



4. The motion is debated.

(Not all motions are debatable—see pages 8-9.)

- The chair says, "Is there any discussion?" As the person who made the motion, you have the right to speak first. Usually, the chair will recognize members ready to speak by stating their names. You may not speak against your own motion.
- Direct all comments to the chair. Discussion may continue for as long as needed, though speakers must keep to any time limits (usually 10 minutes per speaker).
- After all other speakers are finished, you (and others) may speak a second time. (Motions may be made at any time to limit or close debate.)

5. A vote is taken.

- If there is no more debate, or a motion to stop debate is adopted, it's time to vote on the motion. The chair asks, "Are you ready for the question?" and may restate the motion.
- The chair explains the method of voting (such as raising hands or casting ballots) and then members vote. You may vote against your own motion.

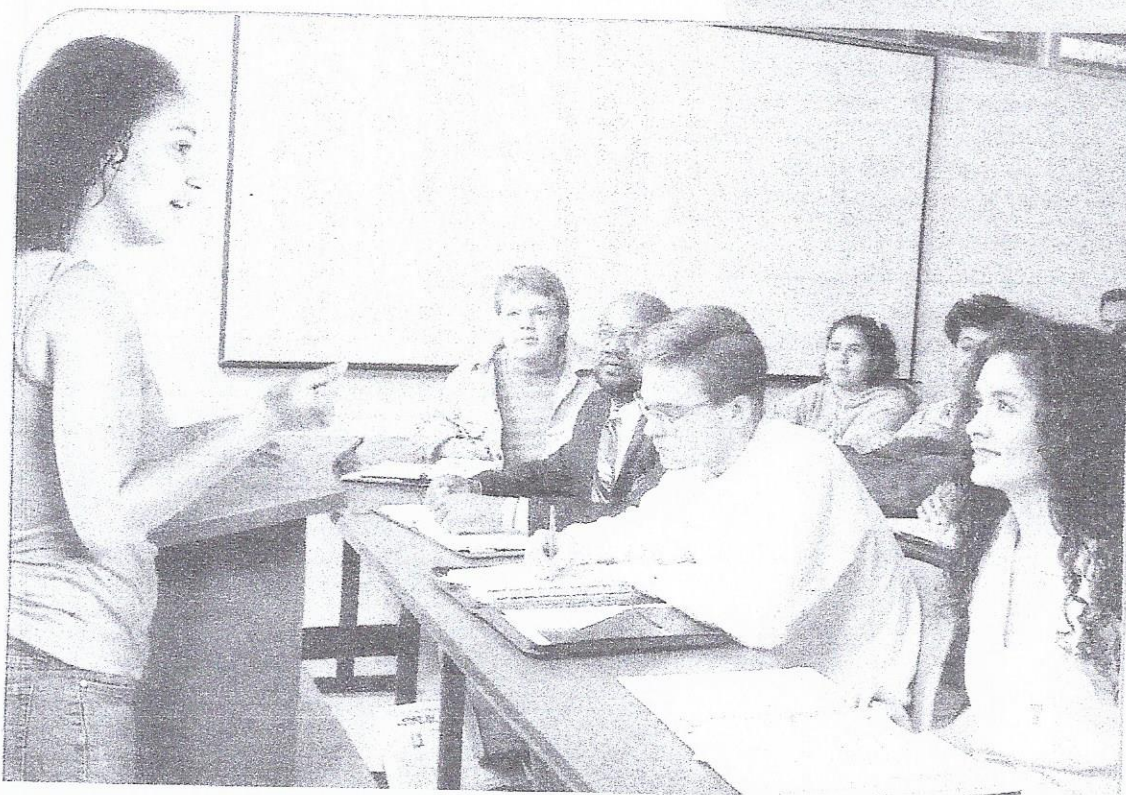
6. The chair announces the results.

He or she says which side has the votes and whether the pending motion is adopted or lost.

Can a motion be withdrawn?

- Before the chair states your motion (step 3 on page 6), you may withdraw it (or change it).
- Once the motion has been stated, it becomes "assembly property." You must request permission from other members to withdraw the motion.
- A motion cannot be withdrawn once voting has begun.

A motion may also be called "the question."



Common motions at-a-glance

	To do this:	You say this:
--	-------------	---------------

privileged

Close the meeting	"I move to adjourn."
Call an intermission	"I move to recess for..."
Complain about heat, noise, etc.	"I rise to a question of privilege."

subsidiary

Temporarily suspend consideration of an issue	"I move to lay the motion on the table."
End debate and amendments (call for a vote)	"I move the previous question."
Control the length of debate	"I move that debate be limited to..."
Postpone consideration until a certain time	"I move to postpone the matter until..."
Have a smaller group give closer study of something	"I move to refer the matter to a committee."
Amend a motion	"I move to amend by..."

main

Introduce a question	"I move that..."
• New business (main motion)	
• Take up a matter previously tabled	"I move to take from the table..."
• Reconsider a hasty action ⁽³⁾	"I move to reconsider the vote on..."

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

incidental

Protest breach of rules or conduct	"I rise to a point of order."
Vote on a ruling of the chair	"I appeal the chair's decision."
Suspend rules temporarily	"I move to suspend the rules so that..."
Consider parts of a motion separately	"I move to divide the motion so as to..."
Verify a voice vote by having members stand	"I call for a division" or "Division!"
Request information	"I rise to a point of information..."

or: "I have a request for information"

Think about it...

What motions seem most often used at meetings you attend?

What is "precedence"?

Precedence (pronounced *pre-SEED-ence* in parliamentary matters) is the ranking of motions. In this chart, motions in the top section are in order of precedence—higher motions are moved and processed before lower ones. (Motions in the bottom section have no order.)

For example, if a motion to end debate is on the floor, it is in order to make a higher-ranked motion about taking a recess. But it is not in order to move that the matter go to committee, as this has lower rank.

Note that there may be several motions pending on a single question. The last motion made is called "immediately pending," and is the first processed.

Quick tips	Is it debatable?	What vote is needed?
Need a second.	No	Majority
Need a second. Amendable.	No ⁽¹⁾	Majority
May interrupt speaker.	No	No vote
Need a second.	No	Majority
Need a second.	No	$\frac{2}{3}$
Need a second. Amendable.	No	$\frac{2}{3}$
Need a second. Amendable.	Yes	Majority
Need a second. Amendable.	Yes	Majority
Need a second. Amendable if primary.	Yes ⁽²⁾	Majority
Need a second. Amendable.	Yes	Majority
Need a second.	No	Majority
May interrupt speaker. ⁽⁴⁾ Need a second.	Yes ⁽⁵⁾	Majority
May interrupt speaker.	No	No vote ⁽⁶⁾
May interrupt speaker. Need a second.	Yes ⁽⁷⁾	Majority
Need a second.	No	$\frac{2}{3}$ ⁽⁸⁾
Need a second. Amendable. ⁽⁹⁾	No	Majority
May interrupt speaker.	No	No vote
May interrupt speaker.	No	No vote

⁽¹⁾ Unless moved when no question is pending (and is therefore a main motion).

⁽²⁾ Unless the motion to be amended is not debatable.

⁽³⁾ Precedence may vary—check your parliamentary authority.

⁽⁴⁾ Only if the speaker has the floor but has not actually begun to speak.

⁽⁵⁾ Unless the motion to be reconsidered is not debatable.

⁽⁶⁾ Unless the chair submits to the assembly for decision.

⁽⁷⁾ Unless the pending question is not debatable.

⁽⁸⁾ Unless the rule is not parliamentary (such as a standing rule of business)—in which case only a majority vote is required.

⁽⁹⁾ Only about how the question is divided.

What other motions could help your group conduct business?
(If appropriate, consider sharing your suggestions with the group.)

Voting—when it's time for the group to decide

Methods and types of voting will depend on the situation and your organization's bylaws.

Types of votes

- In many cases, just a **majority** vote is needed. A majority is defined as "more than half" of votes cast.
- Sometimes, a **two-thirds** vote is needed (twice as many in favor as opposed). This is true in cases where members' rights are affected. For example, a two-thirds vote is needed to end debate, since any future speakers will lose the right to speak.
- Some bylaws may allow a **plurality** vote. In cases where 3 or more candidates or options are available, the winner is the one with the most votes.

After voting, may a motion be reconsidered?

Under certain circumstances, a question may be brought back to be debated again and revoted. This gives members a chance to change their minds—for instance if the original vote seemed hasty or if new information comes up.

- The motion to reconsider must come from the winning side.
- It must be moved the same day as the original vote.
- Generally, it only applies to main motions.



Laws, bylaws and other rules

Like motions, some laws outrank others. Federal and state laws take precedence over an organization's bylaws, for example. Also, some laws or bylaws may outrank rules of parliamentary procedure and so must be followed instead.

Think about it...

How do laws or bylaws affect the rules of meetings for your organization? Are there any special rules or customs that your group uses?

Order of voting

- The last motion stated by the chair is the first pending ("immediately pending") and the first voted on.
- The main motion is the last voted on.

Common voting methods

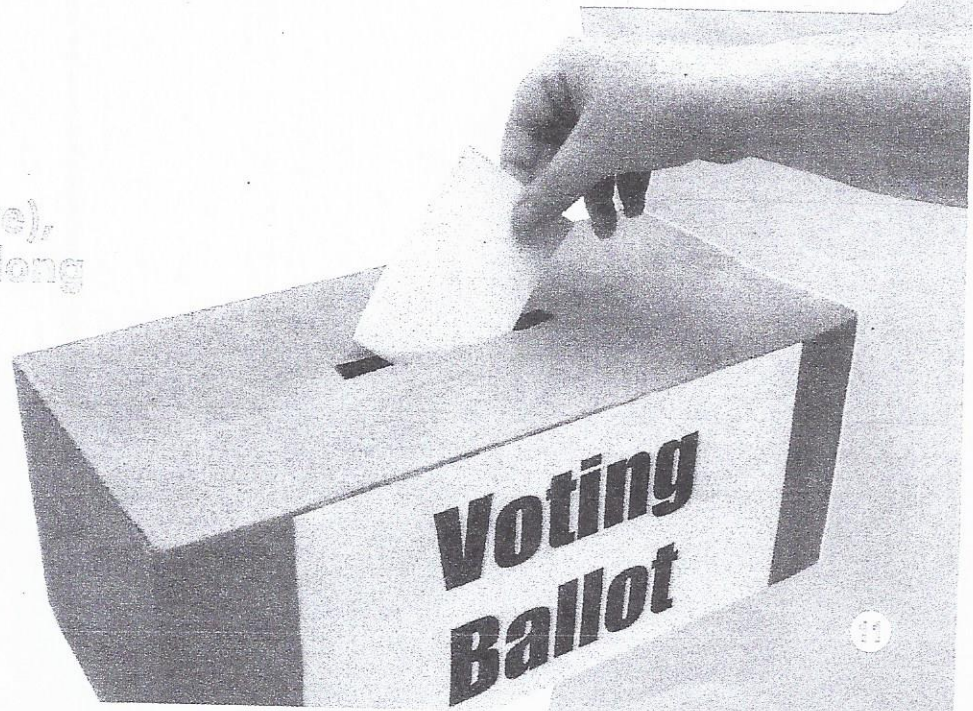
- **Voice**—The chair asks those in favor to say "aye" and those opposed to say "no" (for majority votes only). A member may move that the vote be counted.
- **Show of hands or rising**—Members raise their hands or stand up. These methods are used for a two-thirds vote or to verify a voice vote. A member may move for an exact count.
- **Roll call**—If a record of each person's vote is needed, each member answers "yes," "no" or "present" (indicating the choice not to vote) as his or her name is called. Answering "pass" means you wish to be called again later, before voting closes.
- **Ballot**—If secrecy is desired, members write their vote on a form or slip of paper.
- **General consent (unanimous consent)**—This is a good way to move things along when a motion isn't likely to be opposed. The chair simply says, "If there is no objection..." and members show consent by their silence. (If someone says, "I object," the matter must be put to a vote.)

If you abstain (do not vote), you are expected to go along with the winning vote.

Is it possible to have a tie?

It's possible for there to be an equal number of votes on both sides, which means there is no majority and the motion is rejected. When his or her vote may affect the outcome, the chair may choose to vote. For example, his or her vote could create a tie and fail the motion, or break a tie and pass it.

In most other cases, the chair remains impartial and does not vote. But if voting is secret (such as by ballot), he or she may vote.



The ins and outs of successful meetings

What are "minutes"?

These are a written record of meetings kept by an organization's secretary. Accurate, concise minutes are important as a reference for the organization. Minutes should not record all that is said at a meeting. They may include:

- the time, place and type of meeting
- the presence of officers and a quorum
- information on main motions made, adopted or defeated.
- results of counted votes.

The officers provide leadership.

- The **presiding officer** (often called chairperson or president) usually acts as chair at meetings. He or she leads each meeting in a timely manner, following the agenda. The chair aims to be calm and impartial and to follow meeting rules correctly.
- The **secretary** is the organization's record keeper. He or she notes and corrects meeting minutes. The secretary also maintains records such as the roll (list of members), committee lists, reports and bylaws.
- The **treasurer** manages and accounts for the organization's funds. He or she handles income and expenses as needed and may help with the organization's budget. The treasurer should report to the group regularly—possibly at each meeting.
- Other leaders may include a vice president (who may chair if the presiding officer is absent), an executive director (who is employed to oversee the organization's operations and staff) or a sergeant-at-arms (who helps keep meetings orderly).

Think about it...

What meetings do you attend most often?
Who are the officers?

Organization: _____

Presiding officer: _____

Secretary: _____

Treasurer: _____

Other: _____

Organization: _____

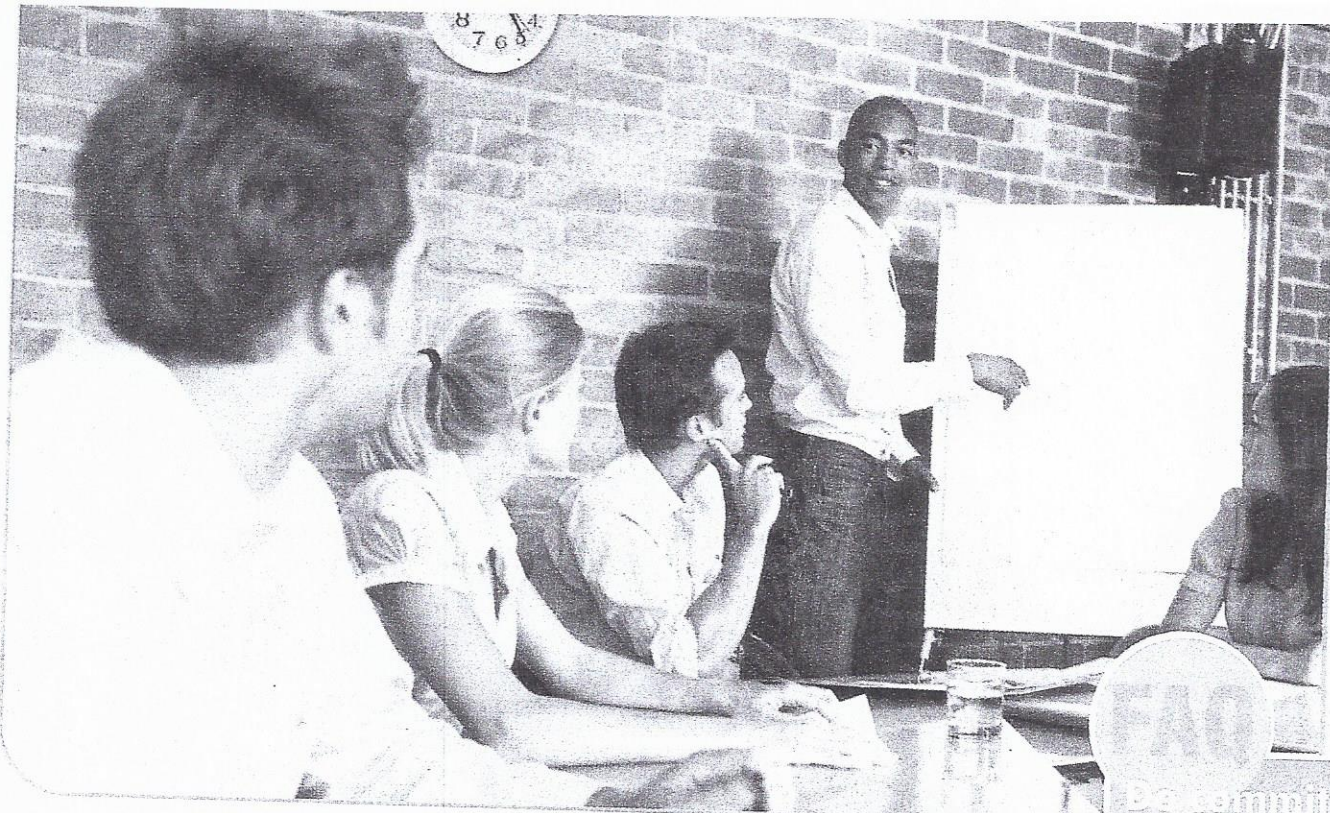
Presiding officer: _____

Secretary: _____

Treasurer: _____

Other: _____





Practice meeting etiquette.

- Being on time, prepared and polite will help a meeting go well.
- Be sure to follow ground rules, and ask for information if you need it.
- Keep remarks focused on the business at hand—don't get personal!

Delaying business—is it ever in order?

Members sometimes misuse parliamentary procedure to delay or “kill” action. Be sure to use the following motions correctly.

- A motion to “lay on the table” is used to set a matter aside temporarily so as to take care of a more urgent matter. It should not be used to prevent debate or kill a question. The motion may then be “taken from the table” by the end of the current or next session (depending on how soon the next session is scheduled).
- A move to “postpone indefinitely” effectively gets rid of a motion without members having to decide for or against it. It is useful in case of a badly chosen or embarrassing motion for which either a “yes” or “no” vote would be undesirable.

Do committees have special rules?

Usually, yes. A committee is a smaller group assembled to carry out a task or function. A **standing** committee is a permanent part of an organization, such as a finance committee. A **special** committee is created to do a specific task. It dissolves when the task is complete.

A committee with fewer than 12 members may follow less formal rules. For example:

- Members may speak freely and debate without pending motions.
- Meetings are usually closed and the proceedings kept confidential.
- The chair can debate, make motions and vote like any other member.

Glossary and index

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Parliamentary procedure works for you.

Parliamentary procedure is useful in many situations.

It can benefit:

- small groups, such as a school board, club or church
- organizations and businesses, such as a city council or at a shareholders' meeting
- large conventions (meetings of delegates).

Learn more!

For more information on parliamentary procedure, you could consult:

- *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised*, ^{12th} ~~11th~~ edition, (2020) or the parliamentary authority for your organization
- your local library
- a parliamentarian (see right)
- parliamentarian organizations (for example, try a Web search).

What is a parliamentarian?

A parliamentarian is a consultant in parliamentary procedure who can help meetings go smoothly. Some ways he or she can assist a group include:

- anticipating procedural problems and working to prevent them
- advising the chair about issues or problems that come up during a meeting (though a parliamentarian should never rule on a matter)
- referencing the organization's parliamentary authority and bylaws as needed.



