

Basics of Making Motions

During a business meeting of an organization someone gets recognized by the chair so that s/he may speak from the floor. The recognized person says “I move that/to ...” and continues with what s/he wants the organization to accept or adopt or approve. Someone else, without being recognized, can say “I second that” or just “second”. The chair then says “It has been moved and seconded that ...”. The motion is now considered to be “on the floor” and is open for debate and a vote of some type.

Now, the chair asks for any discussion on the motion. During that discussion period any other motions related to the motion on the floor. This is where Parliamentary Procedure comes in handy for handling the business in a fair and orderly fashion.

Classes of Motions

Several classes of motions can be a part of the business meeting of an organization:

Main Motion -- the basis of all parliamentary procedure. All business to be considered by an organization is introduced by a main motion. This class of motion may be considered only when there is no other business pending.

Subsidiary Motions -- those motions that may be applied to another motion for the purpose of modifying it, delaying action on it, or entirely disposing of it.

Privileged Motions -- these motions are unrelated to the current motion, but are of such urgency that they are considered immediately. These motions are related to members, the organization, and meeting procedure rather than the item of business being considered.

Incidental Motions -- these motions are related to, or incidental to, the business being considered, but do not directly modify the pending motion.

Bring-back Motions -- these motions bring a question back before the organization. They are motions are a special type of main motion that permit the assembly to consider business that was previously disposed of.

Debate on the Motion

- Before speaking in debate, members obtain the floor by being recognized by the chair
- The person who makes a motion may speak on it first, if he expresses the desire to do so
- All remarks are addressed to the chair, not to other members
- Debate is confined to the merits of the motion currently under consideration
- Debate can only be closed by order of the assembly (2/3 vote) or by the chair if no one seeks the floor for further debate

Miscellaneous Motions

Call the Question – If debate seems at an end or nothing new is being added, any voting member may “call the question”. This motion ends debate and moves the process directly to a vote. No second is needed but any voting member may object to the call. An objection counters the call and debate continues as normal.

Point of Order – If parliamentary procedure is not being followed, any voting member may interrupt and present a correct parliamentary course of action.

Thirteen Ranking Motions

The main motion, subsidiary motions, and privileged motions all have rank relative to one another. The table below illustrates the motions' rank and basic characteristics.

Name of Motion	Is it in order when another has the floor?	Does it require a second?	Is it debatable?	Is it amendable?	What vote is required for adoption?	May it be reconsidered?
Fix the Time to Which to Adjourn*	No	Yes	No	Yes	M	Yes
Adjourn**	No	Yes	No	No	M	No
Recess**	No	Yes	No	Yes	M	No
Raise a Question of Privilege	Yes	No	No	No	(1)	No
Call for the Orders of the Day	Yes	No	No	No	(2)	No
Lay on the Table	No	Yes	No	No	M	No
Previous Question	No	Yes	No	No	2/3	Yes
Limit or Extend Limits of Debate	No	Yes	No	Yes	2/3	(3)
Postpone to a Certain Time (Definitely)	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	M(4)	Yes
Commit (Refer to a Committee)	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	M	(5)
Amend	No	Yes	(6)	Yes	M	Yes
Postpone Indefinitely	No	Yes	Yes	No	M	(7)
Main Motion	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	M	Yes

SUBSIDIARY
PRIVILEGED

* A main motion if made when no business is pending

** Check RONR for specific rules

(1) Chair grants

(2) No vote: demand

(3) Yes, the unexecuted part may be reconsidered

(4) 2/3 vote required if made a special order

(5) Yes, if the committee has not started work

(6) Yes, if applied to a debatable motion

(7) Only an affirmative vote may be reconsidered

How it Works

Parliamentary procedure refers to the *rules of democracy* -- that is, the commonly accepted way in which a group of people come together, present and discuss possible courses of action, and make decisions.

Parliamentary procedure is used by all types of decision-making bodies on a daily basis: school boards, city councils, homeowners' associations, and non-profit boards of directors, for example. Parliamentary procedure also defines what duties people typically have when they are elected the president, secretary or treasurer of an organization.

Fundamentally, parliamentary procedure defines how groups of people, no matter how formal or informal, can most effectively meet and make decisions in a fair, consistent manner—and make good use of everyone's time. Even a basic background in parliamentary principles can help you and your organization hold more efficient meetings.

The most widely used parliamentary authority in the United States is *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised*. This book (often abbreviated *RONR*) was first published as the *Pocket Manual of Rules of Order for Deliberative Assemblies* in 1876. Since then, the book has been expanded and updated several times, incorporating solutions for countless meeting situations and acknowledging both societal and technological changes that affect the way business is conducted. The current edition of this book is *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised*, 10th edition (2000).

For More Information

See the National Association of Parliamentarians website at <http://parliamentarians.org>.



Parliamentary Procedure