

Parliamentary Procedures Summary

Mortar Board, Inc.

BACKGROUND

In general, parliamentary procedures were developed to allow for the orderly conduct of business in an assembly. They are the most formal means of communication ever used, but they are also “common sense” when they are fully understood by all participants. However, “common sense” varies according to how much experience and how broad a perspective a person has. The rules are designed to serve and to protect all members, regardless of their background with formal procedures.

A national meeting is governed by the following sets of rules, in order of authority: public law, organization constitution and bylaws, rules of the conference and its specified parliamentary authority. Delegates should be aware that standing rules that are used in local organizations (SGA, Greek chapters, etc.) might be different from the parliamentary authority or conference rules used by a national organization. Questions about differences in procedure are expected and will be encouraged.

MOTIONS

Parliamentary procedures require that each decision to be made by an assembly be presented in the form of a motion: “I move that...”

A motion that requires action of the assembly requires a second. No second is required for requests by a member. Motions from a committee are assumed to be seconded by a committee member.

Mortar Board conferences generally include motions for one or more of the following categories:

Motions: These may recommend for one or more of the following categories: committees, officers, etc. These may also be amendments to the Bylaws, subject to amendment procedures provided for the document.

Resolutions: These express in a formal manner the sentiment of the conference on the topic of the resolution. They do not require chapter ratification and are not generally binding on any other group or person, unless the resolution specifically calls for some action to be taken.

DEBATE DEFINED

Debate is the process members use to discuss their opinions and preferences regarding a motion. Debate must be confined to information that is pertinent or relevant to the motion. The two most common mistakes in debate occur when (1) discussion rambles to include tangents or unrelated topics and (2) members fail to specify whether they are speaking for or against the motion (see below). The chair is responsible for keeping discussion on the topic and for direction discussion between alternating sides.

ORDER OF DEBATE

Generally, the sponsor of a motion is called on first to state support. An opposing position, if any, is called for next, and supporters and opponents alternate during debate. If more persons wish to speak on one side than on the other, the chair may ask if the assembly is ready to vote, instead of prolonging discussion unnecessarily. The chair may also observe that no new points are being made for either side of the debate and may ask if the assembly is ready to vote.

AMENDING MOTIONS

Motions can be amended before a vote is taken on the original motion. Each proposed amendment must be voted on before the main motion is voted on before other amendments can be presented. (One exception: if an amendment has been proposed, one amendment to the amendment is allowed. Consult with a parliamentarian if this starts happening!)

The form of the first amendment to a motion is: “I move to amend the motion by replacing _____, with _____.” Also, one may say: “I move to amend the motion to read _____.”

This requires a second and can be debated. If the amendment passes, the main motion is voted on as amended. If the amendment fails, the main motion is voted on as originally presented, or other amendments can be made.

“FRIENDLY AMENDMENTS”

Our parliamentary body follows Robert’s Rules of Order. When strictly applied, the rules do not allow for a “friendly amendment,” but many organizations have informally adopted this way of doing business. It works this way:

- A motion is made, seconded and discussion begins
- Someone proposes an amendment or asks if the maker of the motion will accept an amendment
- The chair asks the maker of the motion if the amendment is acceptable. If it is acceptable to the maker, the chair asks the assembly if there is any objection. If not, the amendment is accepted without debate or vote. If there is an objection, either by the maker of the main motion or by someone else in the assembly, the amendment can be made only by having a formal motion to amend, which is seconded, debated and voted on before the original motion is voted on.

MOVING TO A VOTE (“CALL THE QUESTION”)

The chair may determine that the assembly is ready to vote on a motion. If the chair is uncertain, the assembly will be asked, “Are you ready for the question?” If the chair has already determined readiness to vote, the chair will call the motion to be restated and vote immediately to a vote. If a member wishes to close debate before the chair acts to do so, the member must be recognized by the chair and say,

“I move to vote immediately on the motion”

or “I move the previous question” (old style phrasing)
Such a motion requires a second and must be voted on as a motion before the main motion is voted on.

A member who calls out “Question!” in the middle of the debate, without being recognized by the chair, is out of order. If the chair determines that the assembly is ready to vote, the chair should ignore the member who is out of order and call for the vote according to proper procedures.

WAYS TO LIMIT DISCUSSION IN THE ASSEMBLY

In addition to moving to vote immediately, there are four primary ways for an assembly to limit the time it spends on discussion:

- Limit the time each speaker may speak
- Limit the number of times each member may speak
- Limit the number of speakers on each side of an issue
- Limit the total time for discussion on one main motion

These may be established as standing rules or may be enacted by a motion, with a two-thirds vote needed. They may be combined. Limits may be extended during debate by a motion to extend, which also requires a two-thirds vote.

DELAY IN VOTING ("TABLE THE MOTION")

If the assembly believes that more time or information is needed before it can vote on a motion, it can adopt various motions to delay the vote. A motion can be postponed indefinitely (which effectively defeats the motion), can be referred to a committee, or can be postponed definitely. Each motion would be considered according to its order of precedence before the vote on the main motion.

The form of delaying a vote should be one of the following:

- "I move that this question be referred to....(name of a committee) and that the committee report to us.... (name of a definite time, such as the next meeting)."
- "I move that this question be postponed to(name of definite time, such as the next meeting)."

In the first case (a), a group other than the full assembly will study the issue and report back to the assembly. In the second case (b), individual members of the assembly may study the issue, but no one is required to provide a report. This procedure generally allows members time to consider information that is already available to them, rather than gather more information. Clearly in an assembly where there is only a limited time to meet, some delaying tactics kill a motion, at least for the current year.

REQUESTING INFORMATION OR ASSISTANCE

There are several ways to stop debate on a motion so that procedural questions or comfort issues can be addressed. All these may interrupt debate and must be ruled on by the chair before business continues:

- "point of inquiry" - to clarify procedures about which a member has questions
- "point of order" - to correct a mistake the member has observed
- "point of personal privilege" - to call attention to an issue of comfort or convenience to the member(s)

ROLE OF THE CHAIR

The chair or presiding officer is responsible for assuring that the business of the organization proceeds in an orderly fashion and that the rights of members (both present and absent) are protected. The chair should not take partisan positions but should assure that full, orderly debate is possible and that all members have full access to information pertaining to business before the organization.

The chair does not make motions or nominations. Generally, the chair does not vote except to make or break a tie, but the chair may vote if the chair is a full member of the organization with voting privileges.

There are several actions the chair may take to keep procedures smooth.

- Explain procedures throughout the meeting, so that all members understand what the actions and procedures are at all times.
- Provide background information on matters pertinent to the discussion.
- Request that another person (member or non-member) provide information pertinent to discussion.
- Declare discussion out of order if it wanders away from pertinent points.
- Assure that discussion alternates between pro and con, or that discussion ends when no alternating views are presented.
- End discussion when no new views are being presented.

- Prevent one person from dominating discussion, by asking if others wish to speak.
- Ask the assembly's wishes without taking formal votes on procedural matters. (Formal votes must be taken on main motions, however.) For instance, the chair may ask, "Are you ready to vote?" without having a formal vote on closing debate. The chair may also ask, "Are there any objections to...?" If there are none, the proposed action can take effect without a formal vote.

These steps enable the chair to assure the orderly conduct of business without preventing the assembly from freely participating.

GENERAL REVISION

According to Robert's Rules of Order, "Changes of the bylaws that are so extensive and general that they are scattered throughout the bylaws should be effected through the substitution of an entirely new set of bylaws, called a revision. Notice of such a revision is notice that a new document will be submitted that will be open to amendment as fully as if the society were adopting bylaws for the first time."

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PARLIAMENTARY PROCEDURES GUIDE

To do this:	You must say this:	May you interrupt the speaker?	Do you need a second?	Is it debatable?	Can it be amended?	What vote is needed?	Can it be reconsidered?
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	YES	MAJORITY	NO
Complain about heat, noise, etc.	"I rise to a question of privilege"	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO VOTE	NO (usually)
Spend further consideration of an issue	"I move to table the motion"	NO	YES	NO	NO	MAJORITY	NO
End debate and amendments	"I move the previous question"	NO	YES	NO	NO	2/3	NO ¹
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 ²
Amend a motion	"I move to amend the motion by..."	NO	YES	YES ³	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:

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Protest breach of rules or conduct	"I rise to a point of order"	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO VOTE ⁴	NO
Vote on a ruling of the chairman	"I appeal the chair's decision"	YES	YES	YES	NO	MAJORITY ⁵	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 ⁶	___ ⁷
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 from the table..."	NO	YES	NO	NO	MAJORITY	NO
Reconsider a hasty action	"I move to reconsider the vote on..."	YES	YES	___ ⁸	NO	MAJORITY	NO

Notes:

¹ Unless vote on question is not yet taken

² Unless the committee has already taken up the subject

³ Only if the motion to be amended is debatable

⁴ Except in doubtful cases

⁵ A majority vote in negative needed to reserve ruling of chair

⁶ A 2/3 vote in negative needed to prevent consideration of main notion

⁷ Only if the main question or motion was not, in fact, considered

⁸ Only if motion to be reconsidered is debatable

Adapted from Channing L. Bete Co., Inc., *The ABC's of parliamentary procedure*. 1982.