

GOVERNANCE ESSENTIALS

Robert's Rules of Order

PARLIAMENTARY PROCEDURE QUICK-START GUIDE

 Leadership
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 **STEPHEN AARON**

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Robert's Rules of Order

PARLIAMENTARY PROCEDURE QUICK-START GUIDE



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Where there is no law, but every man does what is right in his own eyes,
there is the least of liberty. ~ *Henry M. Robert*

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Overview

of Parliamentary Procedure

[Robert's Rules of Order is] based, in its general principles, upon rules and practices of Congress, and adapted in its details for the use of ordinary societies. ~ Henry M. Robert

Definition & Importance

Definition

Parliamentary procedure is...

A set of guidelines for efficiently conducting business at meetings.

ORIGINS

Parliamentary procedure has a rich history:



It originated in the **English Houses of Parliament** around 1215.¹



It came to **America** with the first **European settlers** in 1607.



It was standardized in 1876 when **Henry Martyn Robert** published the first edition of **Robert's Rules of Order**.³

NOW

Today, the 12th edition of *Robert's Rules of Order* is used as the fundamental operating procedure for a variety of clubs, civic

organizations, governmental entities, schools, and more!

Importance

Parliamentary procedure allows every voice to be heard and facilitates decision-making by avoiding confusion or hostility.

CHARACTERISTICS²

- Majority rules
- Allows for flexibility
- Protects individual rights
- Promotes fairness
- Can be adapted to the organization

It is important for everyone, not just leadership, to understand Robert's Rules. It helps citizens understand government proceedings, empowers organization members to participate fully, and prepares those seeking elected office to lead.

This manual explains the basics of Robert's Rules of Order. It serves as a starting point, not a replacement. See page 30 for sources.



A list of terms discussed in this manual can be found in the **Glossary on page 26.**

Before the First Motion

Intro to Terminology

ROBERT'S RULES OF ORDER

Robert's Rules of Order does not determine whether an organization's decisions are good or bad. Instead, it functions as a system of organization so that a body may make decisions in an efficient manner.

BYLAWS

Bylaws are part of an organization's founding documents containing rules crafted to help govern the group.

QUORUM

A quorum is the minimum number of members required to do business; they must remain present throughout the meeting.²

MOTION

A motion is a proposal for the group to take a position on an issue or action of some kind.²

AGENDA

An agenda is an agreed-upon list of business items that should be addressed during a meeting. Once established, it helps keep meetings organized and prevents tangents.²

The Gavel

The gavel is a symbol of authority and order. Members of the assembly must respect the gavel as a symbol of authority even if, as a member, you do not like the person in authority.

The gavel is also used as a tool of non-verbal communication.

GAVEL TAP GUIDE

1 Short Tap + 2 Long Taps =
calling the meeting to order



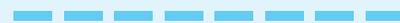
1 Short Tap = chair issuing a ruling



3 Long Taps = all members rise



Rapid Repeated Taps = restoring the meeting room to order



10 Basics of Parliamentary Procedure⁴

1

The **Rights of the Organization** supersede the rights of individual members.

2

All **members are equal** and their **rights are equal**.

3

A **quorum** must be present to conduct business.

4

The **majority rules**: all questions at any properly convened meeting shall be decided by the simple majority of the votes cast, unless stipulated otherwise in the Bylaws.

5

Two-thirds vote rule: a 2/3rds vote is necessary whenever limiting or taking away the rights of members or changing a previous decision.

6

Silence means consent: those members that do NOT vote AGREE to go along with the decision of the majority by their silence.

7

One question at a time and **one speaker** at a time; motions must be related to matters under consideration (also known as “germane”).

8

Once a member has been **“recognized”** this individual has been granted “the floor” and **may not be interrupted*** by another member.

9

A motion must receive full debate. The meeting chair **may not put a motion to vote** as long as members wish to **debate** it; the debate can only be cut short by a 2/3rds vote.

10

Once a decision is made, an **identical motion may not be brought forward at the same meeting**; such a motion shall be ruled out of order by the meeting chair.

+

BONUS RULE

Personal remarks in a debate are ALWAYS out of order.

BONUS PRINCIPLES

- Debate **motions**, not motives
- Discuss **principles**, not personalities
- Only address the **Chair**

***Exceptions Apply**: specific motions can interrupt; see p. 19



Breakdown

of Parliamentary Procedure

It's not the decision you make that must be correct, but each decision you make must be correctly made. ~ *Henry Martyn Robert*

Bylaws & Quorum

Bylaws

Bylaws are specific rules crafted by an organization to help govern their operations.

When an organization adopts Robert's Rules of Order, situations not specifically addressed by their bylaws are then covered by Robert's Rules.²

In this way, Robert's Rules act as an extension of organizational bylaws though bylaws may override Robert's Rules.



A link to a sample of Organizational Bylaws can be found in the Appendix on page 18.

Quorum

A quorum is the minimum number of members required to do business; they must remain present throughout the meeting.

Chairmen should determine if a quorum is present before calling the meeting to order.²

Your quorum is determined by your bylaws, and if you have different types of meetings, the quorum should be specified for each type of meeting.²

If a quorum ceases to exist, you can only recess or adjourn. No further business can be conducted until a quorum is reestablished.²

If a quorum cannot be reestablished, business must be brought up at the next meeting.²

Officers & Their Duties

While an assembly may have as many officers as their bylaws dictate, there are **two primary roles** that must be filled according to Robert's Rules of Order: **chairman** and **secretary**.

Chairman

A chairman may be elected to head an organization or to chair specific meetings or conventions for that organization. Multiple chairmen may be elected for these roles.

DUTIES

According to Robert's Rules of Order, the responsibilities of the Chairman are as follows:

- Maintain order
- Enforce the Rules
- Expedite business impartially
- Keep the assembly focused by avoiding irrelevant discussion
- Provide clarification on motions, votes, and procedural processes

The Chairman should maintain a calm, objective, fair, and impartial demeanor. Being able to cut tension in a meeting with humor can also be an invaluable skill to make sure people remain cooperative.

As a neutral party, the Chairman voluntarily gives up the right to debate and vote at meetings. However, depending on group size, they may make or break a tie.

In meetings of twelve or more, the Chairman may also participate in discussion of a particular motion by yielding the gavel to an agreed-upon member of the assembly until voting has concluded for that motion. Refer to "Small Boards" for smaller group rules.²

ADDITIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES

The Chair acts as CEO and Chairman of the Board for the organization they are elected to lead. This aspect of their role requires them to provide vision and clarity for the organization.

When it comes to keeping meetings well-organized, the Chairman has more responsibilities than most:

- Arrive early to be prepared
- Start the meeting on time to demonstrate respect for members' time
- Develop a well-prepared agenda and stick to it; this can be accomplished by having the assembly vote to approve the agenda to keep it on track

- Contact those with reports to share prior to the meeting so that appropriate preparations can be made in the agenda
- Maintain familiarity with the Bylaws, Assembly Rules, Standing Rules, Customs of the Organization, and Robert's Rules of Order

Secretary

The secretary acts as the primary record-keeper for the organization. This makes their role integral to any well-run organization.

The secretary supports the chairman in their responsibilities and enables other officers to fulfill their duties.

Large organizations or those with many records may opt to delegate some secretarial responsibilities to spread out the workload.

DUTIES

According to Robert's Rules of Order, the key duty of the secretary is to handle minutes of the organization. Minutes are best maintained using the **Four Rs**:²

RECORD

REVISE

REVIEW

RETURN

The secretary also assists the Chairman with the preparation and dissemination of the agenda prior to the meeting.

Timing of this distribution can be stipulated in the organizational bylaws. This helps ensure timely delivery so that members are best prepared for meetings.

ADDITIONAL RECORDS²

Organizations can have a variety of records that the secretary has to maintain. Additional records might include:

MEMBERSHIP

ATTENDANCE

DUTY ROSTERS

COMMITTEE ROSTERS

SPECIAL ASSIGNMENTS



Agenda

Organizations that use parliamentary procedure generally follow a fixed agenda, or order of business, for their meetings.



Links to **Sample Agendas** can be found in the **Appendix** on **page 18**.



Minutes

Minutes constitute a permanent, legal record of proposals, decisions, and reports made during meetings of an organization.

Since minutes constitute a legal record, they can be subpoenaed by courts should anything go awry. This fact underscores the importance of keeping accurate minutes.



Links to **Sample Minutes** can be found in the **Appendix** on **page 18**.

Minutes should be complete but not overly detailed. Organizations often record elements that are not necessary in minutes. Here are some items that should and *should not* be recorded.

RECORD

- Name of the organization
- Type of meeting
- Date and place of the meeting
- Time the meeting was called to order

- Presence of the Chairman and Secretary (or their stand-ins)
- Presence of a quorum
- Whether or not the minutes of the previous meeting were approved
- All adopted or defeated motions
- Names of all members reporting
- Number of votes on each side in a ballot or counted vote

DO NOT RECORD

- Discussion of personal opinion
- Name of person seconding the motion (though it should be noted that the motion was properly seconded)
- Motions that were withdrawn
- Entire reports (these can be attached to the minutes in an appendix)²

Motions

When followed, Robert's Rules of Order gives every member of an organization a voice. Motions are how members exercise that voice.

Understanding and employing motions allows members to engage and interact respectfully, even when disagreements arise.

A motion is a proposal for the group to take a position on an issue or an action of some kind.²

MEMBERS HAVE A RIGHT TO...



Present Motions

Make a proposal
"I move that..."



Second Motions

Express support for discussion of another member's motion
"I second the motion."



Debate Motions

Give opinions on the motion
"I think..."



Vote on Motions

Show support or opposition to a proposal
"All those in favor..."

Types of Motions²

Note: Each type of motion serves a specific purpose in parliamentary procedure and contributes to the orderly conduct of meetings and the decision-making process.

1

Main Motions: Main motions are used to introduce new business or ideas for consideration by the assembly. They typically begin with “I move that...” and require a second before they can be discussed and voted on. Main motions can cover a wide range of topics and are the foundation for conducting business in a meeting.

2

Subsidiary Motions: Subsidiary motions are used to modify or affect how the main motion is handled. These motions can include amendments, postponement, referral to a committee, and other actions that directly impact the consideration or disposal of the main motion. Subsidiary motions are made while a main motion is pending and must be resolved before the main motion is voted on.

3

Privileged Motions: Privileged motions are used to address urgent or important matters that are unrelated to the pending business. These motions take precedence over all other motions and can include motions to adjourn, recess, or fix the time at which to adjourn. Privileged motions are typically used to manage the flow and schedule of the meeting.

4

Incidental Motions: Incidental motions are used to address procedural questions or issues that arise during a meeting. These motions are made without notice and are typically resolved immediately. Examples of incidental motions include points of order, appeals, and requests for information. Incidental motions help ensure that the meeting is conducted fairly and according to the rules.

5

“Repeat” (Motions That Bring a Question Again Before the Assembly): These motions are used to reconsider or reintroduce a question that has previously been decided by the assembly. They include motions to reconsider, rescind, or amend something previously adopted. These motions provide a mechanism for the assembly to revisit and potentially revise its decisions based on new information or changed circumstances.

How to Propose a Motion



STEP 1: RECOGNITION²

a) To obtain recognition, **raise your hand** or use other appropriate signals to indicate that you wish to address the assembly.

b) Address the chair as **“Mr./Madam Chairman”** to respectfully request recognition.

c) Wait for the chair to **acknowledge you** before speaking.



STEP 2: INTRODUCTION OF MOTION²

a) After obtaining recognition, state, **“Mr./Madam Chairman, I move that...”** followed by the specific wording of the motion.

b) Ensure the motion is **clear, concise,** and **properly phrased.**

c) Once the motion has been restated by the chair, it **belongs to the assembly** and must be acted upon accordingly.



STEP 3: SECONDING THE MOTION²

a) Following the introduction of the motion, **another member must second it** to demonstrate support.

b) The seconder simply says, **“I second the motion.”** A second indicates that at least one other member **believes the motion deserves consideration.**

STEP 3 (CONTINUED)

c) Alternatively, the **chairman may ask for a second** if none is offered spontaneously.



STEP 4: DEBATE AND DISCUSSION²

a) The chair **opens the floor** for debate and discussion on the motion.

b) The **maker of the motion has the first right of debate**, followed by other members who wish to speak.

c) While not required, it is a good practice for the chair to **alternate between those in favor and those opposed** until everyone has had their first round of debate before continuing to the next round of debate.

d) **Each member can only debate a main motion twice** to ensure efficient use of time and encourage participation.

e) Members are given the opportunity to **express their opinions, ask questions, and provide relevant information.**

f) Discussion should be directed solely towards the **merits of the motion** and not personalities.

g) Members should **address all points to the chair, refrain from personal attacks, and adhere to Robert's Rule of Order** rules for discussion.

h) The **chairman remains neutral** and refrains from engaging in debate to maintain impartiality.





STEP 5: VOTING ON THE MOTION²

- a) After adequate debate, **the chair calls for a vote** on the motion.
- b) Members vote **yes** or **no**, or **abstain** if they choose not to vote. The methods of voting are covered in the next section on p. 15.
- c) The chair **announces the results** of the vote and **records them in the minutes**.



STEP 6: CLOSING THE MOTION²

- a) Once the vote is concluded, **the chair declares the motion as adopted or rejected** based on the outcome
- b) If adopted, **the chair clarifies any action to be taken** as a result of the motion.
- c) The discussion moves on to the **next item of business**.

Voting²

Methods of Voting

This can depend on the situation and what threshold must be reached for the vote to pass. The following are the methods of voting:



Voice Vote

Members express their vote orally by saying “Aye” for yes or “Nay” for no, and the chair decides the result based on the volume and clarity of the responses.



Ballot Vote

Members write their vote on a ballot, which is then collected and counted, providing anonymity, especially for sensitive matters.



Show of Hands

Members raise their hands to indicate their vote, and the chair counts the raised hands to determine the result.



General Consent (Unanimous Consent)

The chair asks if there is any objection to a proposed action, and if no member objects, the action is considered approved without a formal vote.



Rising Vote

Members stand to indicate their vote, and the chair counts the number of members standing for and against the motion.



Roll Call Vote

Each member’s vote is called individually in alphabetical order, ensuring each member’s vote is accurately recorded.

IN CASE OF A TIE VOTE

Where the number of affirmative votes equals the number of negative votes, the motion fails to pass unless the organization’s chairman votes to break the tie.

Order of Voting

Note: While the Main Motion is always proposed first, it is the last item voted upon. The chart below details the order in which motions are voted upon. See the [Catalog of Motions](#) on page 19 for a detailed description of motions and their order of precedence.





Appendix and Glossary of Terms

Digital Resources

Sample Bylaws



**Organizational
Bylaws:**
Template

Sample Agendas



Agenda A:
Executive Board
Meeting



Agenda B:
General Membership
Meeting

Sample Minutes



Minutes A:
Executive Board
Meeting



Minutes B:
General Membership
Meeting

Catalog of Motions²

Chart on the following two pages (pp. 19-20)
adapted from the 12th ed. of Robert's Rules



**Catalog of
Motions:**
Chart

Main Motions: These motions are listed in the chart in order of precedence. A motion can be introduced if it is higher on the chart than the pending motion.

The Robert's Rules section number is indicated by #

Repeat Motions: No order of precedence. Introduce only when nothing else is pending.

Incidental Motions: No order of precedence. These motions arise incidentally and are decided immediately.

Part 1: Main Motions

Adapted from the 12th ed. of Robert's Rules

Yes
 No
 Majority
 Two-Thirds Vote
 Varies
 Not Applicable

	PURPOSE	VERBAL CUE	INTERRUPT	2ND	DEBATE	AMEND	VOTE
21	Close meeting	I move to adjourn					
20	Take break	I move to recess for...					
19	Register complaint	I rise to a question of privilege					
18	Make follow agenda	I call for the orders of the day					
17	Lay aside temporarily	I move to lay the question on the table					
16	Close debate	I move the previous question					
15	Limit or extend debate	I move that debate be limited to...					
14	Postpone to a certain time	I move to postpone the motion to...					
13	Refer to committee	I move to refer the motion to...					
12	Modify wording of motion	I move to amend the motion by...					
11	Kill main motion	I move that the motion be postponed indefinitely					
10	Bring business before assembly^a	I move that [or "to"]...					

(a) A main motion

Robert's Rules section number is indicated by #

Part 2: Incidental Motions

Adapted from the 12th ed. of Robert's Rules

	PURPOSE	VERBAL CUE	INTERRUPT	2ND	DEBATE	AMEND	VOTE
23	Enforce rules	Point of order	✓	✗	✗	✗	N/A
24	Submit matter to the assembly	I appeal the decision of the chair	✓	✓	V	✗	M
25	Suspend rules	I move to suspend the rules	✗	✓	✗	✗	2/3
26	Avoid main motion altogether	I object to the consideration of the question	✓	✗	✗	✗	2/3
27	Divide motion	I move to divide the question	✗	✓	✗	✓	M
29	Demand a rising vote	I move for a rising vote	✓	✗	✗	✗	N/A
33	Parliamentary law question	Parliamentary inquiry	✓ ^b	✗	✗	✗	N/A
33	Request for information	Point of information	✓ ^b	✗	✗	✗	N/A

Part 3: Repeat Motions^c

	PURPOSE	VERBAL CUE	INTERRUPT	2ND	DEBATE	AMEND	VOTE
34	Take matter from the table	I move to take from the table...	✗	✓	✗	✗	M
35	Cancel previous action	I move to rescind...	✗	✓	✓	✓	2/3 ^d
37	Reconsider motion	I move to reconsider...	✗	✓	V	✗	M

(b) If urgent; (c) Formally known as “Motions That Bring a Question Again Before the Assembly;” (d) Or **M** with notice

Bonus Motions Info

Lay on the Table²

The motion to **Lay on the Table** is a parliamentary procedure used to temporarily set aside a pending main motion when there are more urgent matters requiring immediate attention.

It is commonly employed when unexpected or time-sensitive issues arise during a meeting that must be addressed before continuing with the current agenda item.

By laying a motion on the table, the assembly can quickly shift focus to handle pressing matters without completely abandoning the pending motion.

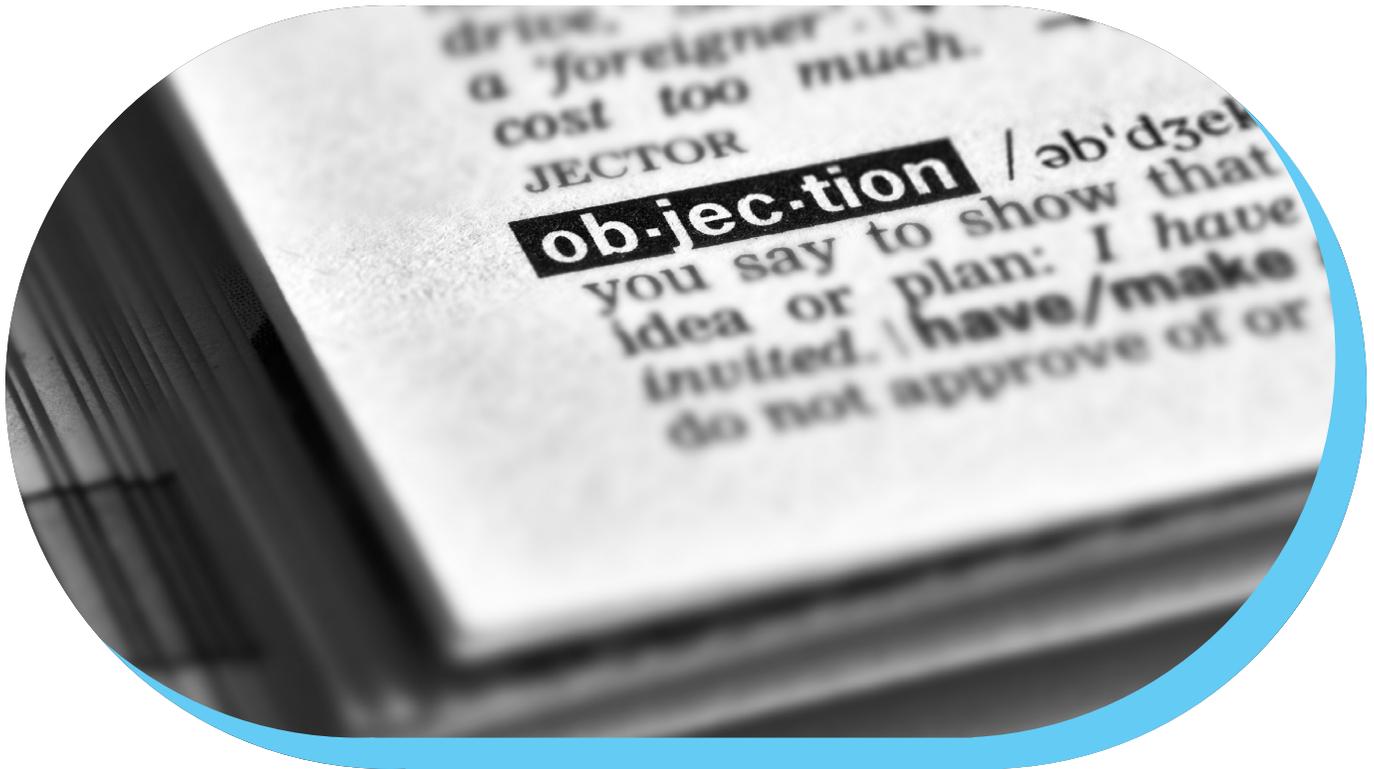
However, it's important to note that the motion to Lay on the Table does not specify a time for when the motion will be taken up again.

It simply postpones consideration until a future time when the assembly chooses to bring it back to the table for further discussion and action.

The motion must be acted upon within 90 days, ensuring that it does not linger indefinitely on the table without resolution.



PENDING



Object to Consideration of the Question²

The motion to **Object to the Consideration of the Question** is a parliamentary tool used when a member believes that a proposed motion is not appropriate for consideration by the assembly.

This motion is typically invoked when the member believes that the motion violates the organization's bylaws, is out of order, or is contrary to the organization's best interests.

By objecting to the consideration of the question, the member seeks to prevent the motion from being debated or voted upon.

This motion requires a second and is not debatable, allowing for a prompt decision on whether the proposed motion should proceed to consideration.

If the motion to Object to the Consideration of the Question is adopted by a 2/3rds vote, the pending motion is immediately set aside, and no further action is taken on it during that meeting.

It can interrupt after a motion has been made but before it is seconded.

Postpone Indefinitely²

The motion to **Postpone Indefinitely** is a parliamentary procedure used to effectively kill a pending main motion without outright rejecting it.

When this motion is adopted, it removes the main motion from consideration for the remainder of the session, or until it is brought up again.

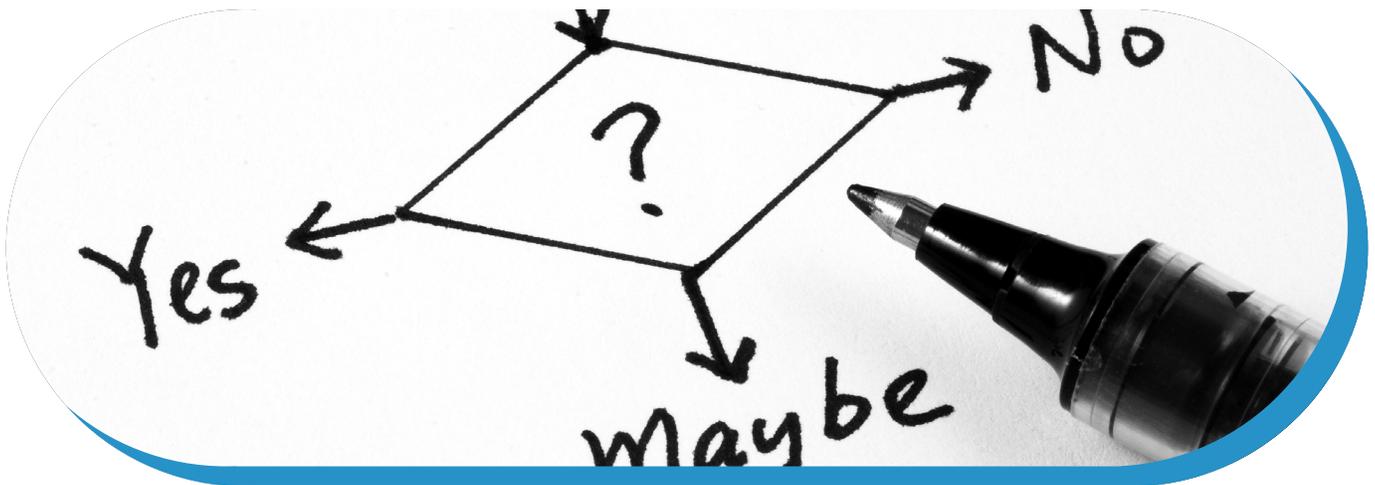
It's often used when there is strong opposition to a motion but outright rejection might be seen as too harsh or when there is a desire to focus on more pressing matters.

Unlike the motion to Lay on the Table, which must be taken from the table within 90 days, the motion to Postpone Indefinitely effectively removes the motion from consideration for a longer duration.

This motion is debatable but not amendable, and it requires only a majority vote for adoption.

It's important to note that if the motion to Postpone Indefinitely is adopted, it does not prevent the main motion from being reintroduced at a later time or meeting.





Three Distinct Motions²

Point of Order, Parliamentary Inquiry, and Question of Personal Privilege are distinct parliamentary motions, each serving a specific purpose within a meeting.

Point of Order

A Point of Order is raised to address a violation of parliamentary procedure or rules, seeking to ensure that the assembly conducts its business properly. It pertains directly to the rules of the meeting and aims to correct any deviations or errors.

Parliamentary Inquiry

In contrast, a Parliamentary Inquiry is used to seek clarification or information about parliamentary procedure, meeting rules, or the current business being conducted.

It's a request for guidance from the chair

or parliamentarian to ensure a clear understanding of the proceedings.

Question of Personal Privilege

On the other hand, a Question of Personal Privilege concerns matters of personal discomfort or inconvenience unrelated to parliamentary procedure.

It's raised when a member experiences a physical discomfort, such as being unable to hear, or when there's an external disturbance affecting the meeting.

Choose Wisely

While these motions may sometimes overlap in their application, it's crucial to recognize their distinct purposes and to use them appropriately to maintain order and efficiency in the meeting.

Motions FAQs²



IS IT IN ORDER?

Your motion must relate to the business at hand (be germane) and be presented at the right time. It must not be obstructive, frivolous, or against the bylaws.

DO I NEED A SECOND?

Usually, yes. A second indicates that another member would like to consider your motion. It prevents spending time on a question that interests only one person.

MAY I INTERRUPT A SPEAKER?

Some motions are so important that the speaker may be interrupted to make them, such as rising to a point of order, “Objecting to the Consideration of the Question.” The original speaker regains the floor after the interruption has been attended to.

IS IT DEBATABLE?

Parliamentary procedure guards the right to free and full debate on most motions.

However, some subsidiary, privileged, and incidental motions are not debatable.

WHICH VOTE IS REQUIRED?

Most motions require a majority vote, however, votes that restrict the right of members to speak, vote, or remove people from office take a 2/3rds vote.

CAN IT BE AMENDED?

Some motions can be changed by inserting, striking, striking and inserting, or substituting language. Amendments must be germane to the main motion.

CAN IT BE RECONSIDERED?

Some motions can be debated again and re-voted to give members a chance to change their minds. The motion to reconsider must come from the prevailing (or winning) side.

Glossary

A

ADJOURN

To end the meeting.

AGENDA

The list of items to be addressed during a meeting.

AMENDMENT

A proposal to change or add to a main motion.

APPEAL FROM THE DECISION OF THE CHAIR

A motion to challenge the ruling of the chair.

ASSEMBLY

The group of members present in a meeting.

B

BALLOT VOTE

Members write their vote on a ballot, which is then collected and counted by a designated teller or committee to determine the outcome.

BYLAWS

Rules governing the internal affairs of an organization.

C

CALL FOR THE ORDERS OF THE DAY

A motion to ensure that the meeting adheres to the agenda.

CHAIRMAN

The presiding officer who leads the meeting.

COMMITTEE

A group of members assigned to perform specific tasks or make recommendations.

G**GENERAL CONSENT**

Approval of a motion without a formal vote when there are no objections.

GERMANE

Relevant and directly related to the subject under discussion.

I**IN ORDER**

Compliant with the rules and procedures of the organization.

M**MAJORITY**

More than half of the votes cast.

MAIL VOTE

Casting votes by mail outside of a formal meeting.

MINORITY

Less than half of the votes cast.

O**OUT OF ORDER**

Contrary to the rules and procedures of the organization.

P**PARLIAMENTARIAN**

An expert in parliamentary procedure who advises the presiding officer and members.

PROXY VOTE

Authorization for another member to vote on one's behalf.

Q**QUORUM**

The minimum number of members required to conduct business.

Q**QUESTION OF PRIVILEGE**

A motion to address an urgent matter affecting the organization's rights or privileges.

QUESTION OF PERSONAL PRIVILEGE

A motion to address an urgent matter affecting a member's rights or privileges.

R**ROLL CALL VOTE**

Each member's vote is recorded individually by name, often in alphabetical order, typically in response to a roll call conducted by the secretary or another designated official.

S**SECRETARY**

The officer responsible for maintaining records and minutes of the organization.

STANDING COMMITTEE

A permanent committee established to handle specific ongoing tasks or areas of responsibility.

U**UNANIMOUS CONSENT**

A method of voting in which there are no objections to a proposed action or motion, and therefore, no formal vote is taken. Instead, the chair announces the action as approved unanimously based on the absence of objections.

V**VICE CHAIRMAN**

The officer who assists the chairman and assumes the chair's duties in their absence.

VOICE VOTE

Members verbally express their vote by saying "aye" (in favor) or "nay" (opposed). The chair then announces the result based on the volume and clarity of the responses.

Special Thanks

EXPERIENCED EDITORS

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REFERENCE LIST

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