

Parliamentary procedure: How do you handle a motion?

A good first step to ensure effective meetings is to know how to properly handle a motion.

A simple way to help meetings run more smoothly is to know how to properly introduce and manage official business. The procedure of a member presenting an idea or issue to a board for a certain action is known as making a motion.

Most people on official boards are familiar with the process of making a motion but oftentimes are less clear on how to manage a motion properly.

The gold standard of parliamentary procedure is Robert's Rules of Order, a book first published in 1876.

If the six steps outlined in the newly revised 11th edition are followed, board chairs should have control over their meetings and members should all be clear on the decisions that need to be made.

Step 1: A member of a board who wants to make a motion must first be recognized by the chair of the meeting. To be recognized, the member can stand, raise their hand or address the chair by their title. In response, the chair offers a simple nod, or repeats the member's title or name to assign the floor. This seems like an obvious and simple first step, however, it is one that is often overlooked.

The member makes a motion by saying "I move to ..." or "I move that ..." To keep business moving, the member should avoid explanation of why he is making the motion. An explanation is most appropriate when members debate the justification for the motion (see Step 4).

Step 2: A member seconds the motion. Seconding a motion indicates that at least two people believe the motion is worthy of discussion.

Step 3: The chair states the motion: "It is moved and seconded to ..." At this point the motion now belongs to the group (not the maker or the "seconder"). The chair then asks if there is any debate.

Step 4: Members debate the motion. The chair always should allow the maker of the motion to speak first provided the maker wishes to be recognized. This is the time to elaborate on the motion, including reasons for bringing it forward and informing members about the motion and any necessary background or context. From time to time members don't want to "debate" the motion (no discussion) and in that case the motion can go directly to a vote (see Step 5).

Step 5: The chair puts the question to a vote. Once all members who wish to speak have done so, the chair should ask members if they are "ready for the question?" At this

time the chair repeats the motion so that members are clear on what they will be voting. The chair says, "The question is on the adoption of the motion to ... " The chair calls for the vote by asking for all those in favor to say "aye" and all oppose to say "no."

Step 6: Results are announced in the final step. The chair should declare the motion as adopted or lost depending on the outcome of the vote. If adopted, the chair should indicate the effect of the vote or order its execution. If lost the chair moves on and announces the next item of business.

Notice that within the steps outlined above the chair repeats the motion on the floor three times. A common mistake is that the chair never repeats the motion at hand, which could create confusion for members as to the exact item up for discussion or vote.

Introduction to Robert's Rules of Order

Motions

A motion is a proposal that the entire membership take action or a stand on an issue. Individual members can:

- Move a motion
- Second a motion
- Debate motions
- Vote on motions

Types of Motions

Main Motions introduce items to the membership for their consideration. They cannot be made when any other motion is on the floor, and yield to privileged, subsidiary, and incidental motions.

Subsidiary Motions change or affect how a main motion is handled, and are voted on before a main motion.

Privileged Motions bring up urgent items about special or important matters unrelated to pending business.

Incidental Motions provide a means of questioning procedure concerning other motions and have priority.

Presenting a Motion

1. Obtaining the floor
 1. Wait until the last speaker has finished.
 2. Rise and address the Chair by saying, for example, "Mr. Chairman," or "Madam President."
 3. Wait until the Chair recognizes you.
2. Make Your Motion
 - a. Speak in a clear and concise manner.
 - b. Always state a motion affirmatively. Say, "I move that we ..." rather than, "I move that we do not ...".
 - c. Avoid personalities and stay on your subject.
3. Wait for Someone to Second Your Motion
 - o Another member will second your motion or the Chair will call for a second. If there is no second, your motion is lost.
4. The Chair States Your Motion
 - . The Chair will say, "it has been moved and seconded that we ..." Thus placing your motion before the membership for consideration and action.
 - a. The membership then debates your motion, or may move directly to a vote.
 - b. Once your motion is presented to the membership by the Chair it becomes "assembly property", and cannot be changed by you without the consent of the members.
5. Expanding on Your Motion
 - . The time for you to speak in favor of your motion is at this point in time, rather than at the time you present it.
 - a. The mover is always allowed to speak first.
 - b. All comments and debate must be directed to the Chair.
 - c. Keep to the time limit for speaking that has been established.
 - d. The mover may speak again only after other speakers are finished, unless called upon by the Chair.
6. Putting the Question to the Membership
 0. The Chair asks, "Are you ready to vote on the question?"
 1. If there is no more discussion, a vote is taken.
 2. Alternatively, a motion to "move the previous question", if adopted, brings the question to a vote.

Voting on a Motion

The method of vote on a motion depends on the circumstances and the by-laws of your organization. There are five methods used to vote by most organizations:

- **Voice.** The Chair asks those in favor to say, "aye", those opposed to say "no".

Any member may move for a exact count.

- **Roll Call.** Each member answers "yes" or "no" as his name is called. This method is used when a record of each person's vote is required.
- **General Consent.** When a motion is not likely to be opposed, the Chair says, "if there is no objection ..." The membership shows agreement by their silence, however if one member says, "I object," the item must be put to a vote.
- **Division.** Members raise their hands or stand with the ayes or the noes. A count is not necessarily required.
- **Ballot.** Members write their vote on a slip of paper. This method is used to maintain secrecy in votes.

Use It Properly

- Allow motions that are in order.
- Have members obtain the floor properly.
- Speak clearly and concisely.
- Obey the rules of debate.
- Most importantly, *BE COURTEOUS*.

Action	What to Say	Can interrupt speaker?	Need a Second?	Can be Debated?	Can be Amended?	Votes Needed
Introduce main motion	"I move to..."	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority
Amend a motion	"I move to amend the motion by...." (add or strike words or both)	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority
Move item to committee	"I move that we refer the matter to committee."	No	Yes	Yes	No	Majority
Postpone item	"I move to postpone the matter until..."	No	Yes	Yes	No	Majority
End debate	"I move the previous question."	No	Yes	Yes	No	Majority
Object to procedure	"Point of order."	Yes	No	No	No	Chair decision
Recess the meeting	"I move that we recess until..."	No	Yes	No	No	Majority
Adjourn the meeting	"I move to adjourn the meeting."	No	Yes	No	No	Majority
Request information	"Point of information."	Yes	No	No	No	No vote
Overrule the chair's ruling	"I move to overrule the chair's ruling."	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Majority
Extend the allotted time	"I move to extend the time by ____ minutes."	No	Yes	No	Yes	2/3
Enforce the rules or point out incorrect procedure	"Point of order."	Yes	No	No	No	No vote
Table a Motion	"I move to table..."	No	Yes	No	No	Majority