

# Parliamentary Procedure in Action

by Jon Perry

Parliamentary rules take into account the **often conflicting interests** that develop **during meetings**, and they provide procedures that **ensure decisions are made fairly**.

In 1876, General Henry Robert, stationed in Milwaukee, Wisconsin during a cold winter wrote the Manual of Rules of Order.

**Quorum:** Minimum number of members who must be present for business to be transacted legally. Specified in the organization's constitution or by-laws.

**Constitution:** Basic regulations governing the organization.

**Bylaws:** Contain provisions for their amendment; generally by a **two-thirds vote**.

**Standing Rules:** Administrative organization rather than about procedure.

**Main Motions:** Formal proposal by a member, during a meeting, that the organization take certain action. They are specific in nature and written if lengthy. Should cover what, when, who and dollar value of the proposal if money is involved. It can be made **ONLY** while no other question is pending.

**Presiding Officer:** The member who conducts the meeting and sees the rules are observed.

## Six Steps in Handling a Main Motion

1. Member makes a motion
2. Another member seconds the motion (Only that the motion bears consideration. It doesn't necessarily mean that the seconder favors the motion.)
3. Presiding officer places motion before group (After the presiding officer states the motion, the motion becomes the property of the assembly and cannot be withdrawn or amended by the maker of the motion without the assembly's consent.)
4. Motion is open for debate
  1. The maker of the motion is entitled to speak first.
  2. No one is entitled to speak a second time in debate on the same motion as long as any other member who has not spoken wants to speak.
  3. Debate is confined to the merits of the pending motion.
5. Motion is put to a vote (The presiding officer must call for both affirmative and negative votes no matter how nearly unanimous the affirmative vote may appear.)
6. Presiding officer announces result (The presiding officer does NOT vote unless it is to break a tie or will affect the result.)

## Subsidiary Motions

These are ranked in priority, where #7 has the highest priority

1. **Postpone indefinitely** – group avoids direct vote on main motion. Debatable and requires a majority vote for approval.
2. **Amend** – wording of another motion is modified. Three basic forms: insert words, strike out words, insert and strike out words. Motion requires a second and is debatable. Majority vote is required for approval.
3. **Refer to committee** – send to another group for study. Amendments and the main motion are all referred to the committee. A majority vote is required for approval.
4. **Postpone to a certain time** – consider something later. Must state the time to which the motion or motions are postponed. Debatable. Requires a second and majority vote for approval.
5. **Limit or extend limits of debate**. **NOT** debatable. This requires a **two-thirds vote** as it affects member's rights.
6. **Previous question** – stop debate on pending motion and vote. Requires a second, is **NOT** debatable and requires **two-thirds vote** as it affects member's rights.
7. **Lay on table** – put aside a pending motion. For example, when you have a surprise visitor or dignitary attending. It requires a second, it is **NOT** debatable and requires a majority vote.

*A rule to remember is "the last motion made is the first motion to be considered."*

## Privileged Motions

They do not relate to pending business before the assembly. They address matters of immediate importance that without debate, should be allowed to interrupt the consideration of other motions. Like the seven subsidiary motions, these five privileged motions fit into an order of precedence.

1. **Call for Orders of the Day**. When the agenda is not being followed. No need to second. Not debatable. Usually doesn't involve voting.
2. **Raise a question of privilege**. For example, when you can't hear the speaker because of too much background noise. No second. Not debatable and is ruled by the chair.
3. **Recess**. Must be seconded. Not debatable. Requires a majority vote.
4. **Adjourn**. This motion cannot interrupt a speaker, but can be made when other business is pending or when no main motion is under consideration. Requires a second. Not debatable. Majority vote for approval.
5. **Fix time to adjourn**. Highest ranking of all motions and sets the time and place for another meeting to continue the consideration of agenda items before the assembly. It requires a second. It is not debatable. It has no effect on when the present meeting will adjourn and has no effect on the next regularly scheduled meeting of the organization. You would use this, for

example, if members are leaving because it is late and agenda items remain that cannot wait for the next scheduled meeting.

### **Incidental Motions**

There is no prioritization on these eight Incidental Motions. They must be decided immediately.

1. **Point of Order.** Calls upon the presiding officer for a ruling and enforcement of regular rules. For example if the assembly just adopted a motion to close debate but the presiding officer is allowing a member to debate the pending motion. A member could interrupt by calling out, "Point of Order".
2. **Appeal.** Any two members have the right to force an appeal from a decision. If the majority approves, the chair is sustained and the question is taken from the presiding officer and placed in the hands of the assembly. Debatable and majority vote required.
3. **Point of information.** If for example a motion to buy computers is made, a member may ask for a Point of Information, such as having the treasurer deliver the current balances in the bank accounts. It is supplied immediately. It does not require a second. It is not debatable and requires no vote.
4. **Suspension of rules.** Here it cannot conflict with the organization's bylaws, local, state or federal laws or the principles of parliamentary procedure. Usually it when a motion is made to move agenda items around or a meeting time or place needs to be changed temporarily. If the motion is seconded, it requires **two-thirds vote** as it affects member's rights.
5. **Objection to consideration of question.** Takes place before debate has occurred. It does not require a second and it is not debatable. It does require a **two-thirds vote**. It avoids debate or consideration of a particular motion.
6. **Division of question.** Used when a pending motion contains two or more parts capable of standing as separate questions. For example a motion is made to hold Casino Night at the Golf Course in the fourth Friday of September. Here the location and time can be separated. It requires a second. It is not debatable. It is adopted by a majority vote.
7. **Consideration by paragraph.** Several paragraphs are separately debated and voted on. It is seconded. Not debatable. Requires a majority vote for adoption.
8. **Division of assembly.** If a member doubts the accuracy of a vote count they can simply call out "Division". An actual number of negative and affirmative votes must now be taken. It does not require a second. Not debatable. It requires no vote as every member has the right to demand division of the assembly.

## Additional Motions and Special Problems

These two additional motions bring to a total of 23 separate motions.

1. Reconsider. Allows an assembly, within a limited time and without notice, bring back for further consideration a motion that has already been voted on.
  - a. The purpose is to permit hasty, ill conceived or erroneous action to be corrected
  - b. Take into account added information
  - c. Situation that developed since the vote was taken

For organizations that meet weekly or monthly, the motion to reconsider can be introduced only at the same meeting the vote to be reconsidered was taken.

For annual conventions, a motion to reconsider may be made the next day.

You must **have voted** with the **prevailing** side of the motion. This prevents the minority option repeatedly bringing back a motion that has been accepted.

The motion to reconsider must be made, seconded, debated and voted on. It requires a majority vote.

If the motion is approved, then the assembly “reconsiders” the previous action with further discussion.

The presiding officer should remind the members that a vote approving the motion to reconsider only brings a previously adopted motion back for further consideration.

## Rescind

An assembly can cancel a motion previously adopted. This motion can only be moved when no other motion is pending. So, it is similar to a main motion. It requires a **two-thirds vote**.

The motion requires a second, is debatable and requires:

- A **two-thirds** vote, unless
- A Notice of Intent to make the motion was announced at the previous meeting or in the agenda for the current meeting. Then a majority vote is required.

In most cases, the motion to rescind is used to strike down a previous action that:

- May have been unrepresentative of the full membership
- May need correction after more recent financial reports reveal that funds are not available
- Dealt with a topic that on further reflection, the assembly would prefer to avoid.

## Recap Questions

1. Can a motion be adopted if only a few members vote in favor and many members abstain?
2. Can a member be required to vote on any motion?
3. Can a motion be adopted by plurality vote rather than majority vote?
4. Can the presiding officer participate in debate on a motion?
5. Can the presiding officer introduce a motion?
6. What is meant by the term "ex-officio member"?