

MEA

Michigan Education Association

Just Between Presidents

Parliamentary Procedure for Local Presidents

Keeping It Simple



Building Full Capacity Locals

Dear Local President,

How many times have you been to a meeting that didn't go well? Did it seem like the chair of the meeting didn't keep order? Did it seem like too many people were talking at once or that not everyone had the chance to speak? Did the meeting seem to drag on forever? Did you leave frustrated, perhaps with the feeling that you had wasted your time?

Part of being an effective local president is knowing how to run a good meeting—one that is organized, efficient, and productive. The best meetings are those with a clear purpose and that allow for all voices to be heard.

Following parliamentary procedure is a way to ensure such a meeting. Parliamentary procedure refers to a common set of rules and customs that are used to run a meeting. Those rules, as they exist in the U.S. today, evolved from a book written by Henry Martyn Robert in 1876—*Robert's Rules of Order*. That book has been updated and revised many times since then and is now in its tenth edition. That current edition is titled, *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised* (also known as RONR)

For those of you who are brave and have a lot of time, you may be interested in reading the entire book from cover to cover. However, if you have neither the time nor the inclination to read the entire book, don't worry because at least 80 percent of its contents are actually needed less than 20 percent of the time!

With that fact in mind, this simple booklet has been developed to provide you with the most commonly used rules along with some clear, basic language you can use at your meetings. Though you won't become a parliamentary expert as a result of reading this booklet, I guarantee that you will be able to run a much more effective, organized and productive meeting.

Though chairing a meeting using parliamentary procedure will take some practice, the results will be worth your time. I encourage to read the booklet and to put these rules into effect at your next meeting.

Here's to great meetings!



Steven B. Cook,
President, Michigan Education Association

Most Frequently Used Parliamentary Motions

MOTIONS	PURPOSE	NEED A SECOND	AMENDABLE	DEBATABLE	VOTE REQUIRED	SUBSIDIARY MOTIONS CAN BE APPLIED	MAY INTERRUPT A SPEAKER
I. PRINCIPAL MOTION							
1. A main motion	To introduce business	YES	YES	YES	MAJORITY	YES	NO
II. SUBSIDIARY MOTION							
2. To postpone indefinitely	To suppress action	YES	NO	YES	MAJORITY	YES	NO
3. To amend or substitute	To modify a motion	YES	YES	YES	MAJORITY	YES	NO
4. To amend an amendment	To modify a motion	YES	NO	YES	MAJORITY	YES	NO
5. To refer to a committee	To modify a motion	YES	YES	YES	MAJORITY	YES	
6. To postpone to certain time	To defer action	YES	YES	YES	MAJORITY	YES	NO
7. To limit or extend limits of debate	To modify freedom of debate	YES	YES	NO	TWO-THIRDS	YES	NO
8. To call for the previous question	To force into immediate vote	YES	NO	NO	TWO-THIRDS	NO	NO

When in doubt about proper parliamentary procedure, use your common sense to clear up problems and continue business.

The Role of the Chair

As president, one of your jobs is to chair meetings.

As the chair, your responsibility is to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to be heard and participate in an orderly, respectful atmosphere. As chair, you do not make motions or engage in debate on a motion unless you have first called upon someone else to chair the meeting in your place. In such an event, you do not resume the chair until the vote on the particular motion has been announced.

It is important that you not allow any one person to dominate the meeting. Time is limited; everyone who wants to speak should receive an equal opportunity to do so.

Parliamentary procedure is meant as a tool to help you facilitate an orderly, productive meeting. It should not inhibit debate or add to the stress level of the meeting. There may be people at the meeting who know more about parliamentary procedure than you do (or think they do) and you may be challenged—keep your cool and do not become defensive. Don't be afraid to ask for help or to refer to this booklet. Keep things simple and positive. Relax and enjoy!

A Sample Meeting Agenda

It is very important that you have an agenda for every meeting that you chair. The agenda serves as a guide and keeps everyone on task and moving forward. The following is a sample meeting agenda you may want to use if you are using parliamentary procedure:

- I. **Call to Order**
- II. **Approval of Minutes**
- III. **Reports of Officers** (includes monthly Treasurer's financial report)
- IV. **Reports of Committees/Buildings**
 - 1)
 - 2)
 - 3)
- V. **Unfinished business**
 - 1)
 - 2)
 - 3)
- VI. **New Business**
- VII. **Special Program or Training** (if planned)
- VIII. **Comments from guests, members, building reports, member issues, etc.**
- IX. **Announcements**
- X. **Executive Session** (if necessary)
- XI. **Adjournment**

Running the Meeting

Using parliamentary procedure to run a meeting takes practice. Until you feel more confident, you may want to use the following to help you learn the appropriate things to say as you run the meeting. Don't worry—you'll be an expert in no time!

First things first—is there a quorum present?

It is important that the majority not be bound by decisions made by the minority. To prevent this from happening, it is important that there be a quorum present at the meeting. A quorum is a minimum number of members that are required at the meeting in order to conduct business. Check your local association's by-laws to find out what the quorum should be. If it is not addressed there, it is common for a quorum to be a majority of the members present who are voting members of the group that is meeting. For example, if there are twenty members of your executive board, eleven would be a quorum.

Call to Order

"It is _____ o'clock, and I hereby call the meeting of the _____ to order."

Minutes

(copies should be sent out ahead of time to all participants and provided at meeting)

"You have the minutes of the _____ meeting before you. Are there any additions or corrections? (make changes). If there are no objections, the minutes will stand approved as written (or corrected)."

Reports of Officers/Committees

"May we have the Treasurer's report?"

"Does the PAC Committee have a report?"

Note: Sometimes a committee report just gives information. Sometimes, however, they include recommendations for action by the group. These recommendations should be discussed and voted on at the end of the report containing them. Usually, the committee chair will make the specific recommendation in the form of a motion (see pg. 6 for more on motions).

Unfinished Business

"Under unfinished business, the first item of business is..."

Following reports, the meeting continues with the consideration of any items of business that were carried over from the last meeting. Technically, there is no type of business called "old business" and it is incorrect for the chair to allow members to bring up matters that were considered at earlier meetings. Unfinished business refers to an item that was actually in the process of being considered when the last meeting was adjourned or any items that were scheduled to come up but were not reached before the adjournment of the last meeting or were tabled until the current meeting.

New Business

"Is there any new business?"

A business item should be stated in the form of a motion. Turn to the next page to read how this is done.

Adjournment

"Is there any further business? Since there is none, the meeting is adjourned at _____ o'clock."

Motions—the “guts” of the meeting

The primary purpose for most business meetings is for the group to make decisions. To begin the process of making any decision, a member offers a proposal which is called **making a motion**.

Strictly speaking, there should be no debate or discussion on an issue before a motion has been made and there should only be one motion put before the group at a time.

Making a Motion

To make a motion after being called upon by the chair, a member says, *“I move that...”* and then clearly states his/her proposal.

The chair asks, *“Do you have a second?”*

In order for most motions to be considered by the group, they must be **seconded**. This shows that at least two members want the proposal considered, but it doesn't necessarily mean that the seconder agrees with the motion. To second a motion, a members calls out *“I second.”* A second is not required if the motion is coming from a standing or appointed committee.

The chair says, *“It has been properly moved and seconded that...”* (restate the motion so that everyone knows what it is) and then ask the maker of the motion, *“Do you wish to speak to your motion?”*

This gives the maker of the motion the opportunity to explain the motion and the thinking behind it.

Allow members to speak in favor or against the motion by calling on those who want to speak. Try to get to each person who wants to speak before allowing any person to speak twice.

Amending a Motion

At any time during the debate, a member may want to change the motion in some way. This is called **amending the motion**. An amendment, if adopted, can modify the wording and sometimes the meaning of a main motion. Amendments must be voted upon BEFORE a vote is taken on the main motion.

A motion may be amended by addition, deletion or substitution. (See RONR for more on these.)

To amend, a member would say, *“I move to amend by...”*

The chair asks, *“Do you have a second (if necessary)?”*

After it has been seconded, the chair says, *"It has been moved and seconded to amend by (restate). Do you wish to speak to your amendment?"*

All discussion at this point is on the amendment, not on the main motion.

The chair then says, *"Is there any further debate? If there is none, the question before you is to..."*

"All those in favor, say AYE. Those opposed, say NO."

In order to pass, it takes a majority vote of the group.

Once the vote on the amendment is taken, you need to go back to the main motion (as amended or not).

Always deal with the amendments first.

When all have spoken, the chair says, *"Seeing no one else wishing to speak, the chair will put the question to the body. The motion before you is... (restate). All those in favor say aye. Those opposed say no. The motion has (carried or failed)."* In order to pass it takes a majority vote of the group.

Some members present may choose to **abstain** instead of voting on a motion. Abstentions are instances when members present choose not to vote. These are not counted and have no effect on the voting result.

Calling the Question or Closing Debate

Sometimes, before everyone that wants to has a chance to speak, someone might want to end debate altogether. There is a special motion for this purpose. The adoption of this motion immediately closes debate and brings the group to an immediate vote on the previous question.

A member who wants to do this would say, *"I call the question,"* or *"I move the previous question"* or *"I move to close the debate."*

A second will be needed for this motion.

This motion is not debatable and a 2/3 vote is needed in order for it to pass.

The chair then says, *"It has been moved and seconded to close debate on... The question before you is shall we close debate? All those in favor of closing debate say aye, those opposed say no."*

If successful, the chair says, *"You have chosen to close debate."* At this point, the chair then proceeds to complete the vote on the underlying motion.

If unsuccessful, debate continues.

Division

Division is the call for reaffirming a voice vote.

If a member doubts the accuracy of the chair's announcement of the result of a voice vote, he/she can call for **division** by calling out, "*Division*" after the vote is announced. A member does not need to be called upon (recognized) by the chair in order to do this.

Calling for division requires no second nor does the group vote on it. Once it is called, the chair says, "*Division has been called. All those in favor of the motion please stand or raise a hand (a count is taken and then those members are seated). All those opposed please stand*" (a count is taken and the chair announces the vote).

Upon occasion, a member may call for a **roll call** vote. A roll call involves the polling of each voting member of the group individually. One procedure for doing this is to have the meeting Secretary call each person's name and ask him/her to respond with either aye or no. The Secretary keeps a tally and reads the total at the end of the roll call.

Reconsideration

A meeting would never end if those who were defeated in one vote could continue to try to overturn the group's decision by making people vote on the same matter over and over. It is a rule of parliamentary procedure that once a motion has been voted on, it can't be brought up at the same meeting in the normal way. However, sometimes—either after more thought or upon learning of new facts—the group may want to reconsider a motion that has been adopted. A **motion to reconsider** may be made. The maker of a motion to reconsider must have voted on the prevailing side. A motion to reconsider is not amendable or debatable, and it takes a majority vote to pass. If passed, the original motion will be back before the group and another vote will be taken. A majority vote is required to pass or defeat.

A member would say, "*I move to reconsider...*"

The chair would say, "*Did you vote on the prevailing side?*" (answer must be yes to advance the motion) *Do you have a second?*"

Incidental Motions

The chair has the duty to make sure that the rules are followed. Any member may call the attention of the chair to a violation of the rules. This is known as asking for a **point of order**.

A member does not need to wait or be recognized in order to do this, but simply calls out, *"Point of order!"*

The chair would reply, *"The member will state his/her point of order."*

The member would then tell how he/she thinks the rules have been broken. No second is necessary and no vote is taken. The chair makes the decision and says either, *"The chair rules that the point of order is well taken,"* or *"The chair rules that the point of order is not well taken."* The chair goes on to briefly give reasons for the decision.

The group as a whole (not the chair) is the final authority in deciding whether the rules have been violated. If there is disagreement with a ruling by the chair, a member may **challenge (or appeal) the decision of the chair** by saying, *"I challenge the decision of the chair (or I appeal from the decision of the chair)."*

A challenge to the chair must be seconded and may be debated by the members if they wish (at most meetings you will chair, there probably won't be debate). Once the challenge has been stated and seconded, and after debate (if any), the chair will state, *"Shall the decision of the chair be sustained?"* A majority vote is required to overrule the chair. (Note—if this happens to you, do NOT take it personally and do not become defensive!)

There are other incidental motions such as **suspending the rules, objecting to consideration** and **personal privilege**. To learn more about these, refer to RONR.

Committee of the Whole

The purpose for going into a committee of the whole is to give meeting participants the ability to discuss a specific item or issue for a set period of time without being subject to other parliamentary procedures. Doing this allows the group to have a discussion on a specific topic without being subject to motions, amendments, requests to close debate, etc. In essence, by going into a committee of the whole, the group has agreed to talk things through prior to taking any action.

To do this, the chair can ask the permission of the group, *"With your permission we will go into a committee of the whole to discuss _____ (subject) for _____ (period of time)."*

A member may also make a motion to do this, *"I move that we go into a committee of the whole to discuss _____ (subject) for _____ (period of time)."*

The motion must be seconded, and then a vote is taken. There is no discussion, and the motion must be approved by a majority of the group.

While in a committee of the whole session, the time period can be extended by motion and vote.

At the end of the committee of the whole session, the meeting resumes and normal business ensues.

Always, Always, Always...

- Make sure there is a motion on the floor prior to discussion.
- Restate a motion and second when made (*"It has been moved and seconded that..."*).
- Entertain (ask for) a motion if needed (*"The chair will entertain a motion to..."*).
- Make sure everyone has the opportunity to speak before calling on the same person twice.
- Restate the motion prior to taking the vote (*"The motion before you is..."*).
- Call for "ayes" and "no's" even if you think the vote is unanimous.
- Remain objective and consistent.
- Help members with procedure if needed.
- Have copies of the Constitution and Bylaws, this booklet or RONR, printed agendas, minutes from the last meeting, reports and other information needed for discussion available for use/distribution at the meeting.

Never, Never, Never...

- Make motions or enter into debate while chairing the meeting—relinquish the chair if you want to do this.
- Be afraid to consult this booklet or RONR during the meeting, if needed.
- Take it personally or get defensive if you (as the chair) are challenged.
- Be afraid to rule on a question or make a decision within your scope of authority.
- Exhibit or tolerate a lack of good manners or rude, disrespectful behavior.
- Knowingly conduct business without a quorum.

Frequently Asked Questions

■ Can I vote?

As a member of the group, you have the same rights as all other members including the right to speak during debate (after relinquishing the chair) and to vote. However, because you are chairing the meeting and need to be impartial, you should not vote except when the vote is done by ballot or when your vote will affect the result, e.g., in the case of a tie.

■ What constitutes a majority for determining the results of a vote?

Simply put, a majority is more than half.

■ Do abstention votes count?

No.

■ What is a “friendly amendment” and how do I deal with it?

Sometimes during debate, a situation will occur where someone offers a “friendly amendment” and asks if the maker of the motion will accept the amendment. If the maker agrees, the chair treats the motion as amended. **This is wrong.** Once a motion has been stated, it is no longer the property of the maker and any amendment, friendly or otherwise, must be adopted by the whole group, either by a vote or unanimous consent. If it appears that the amendment is uncontroversial, it is proper for the chair to ask if there is any objection to adopting the amendment. If there isn't, the chair may declare the amendment adopted. If there is any objection (even from one person), the amendment must be debated and voted upon.

■ How many amendments can be made to a main motion?

Two.

■ What is executive session?

An executive session is a means of discussing sensitive matters intended only for the elected/voting members of the group and not for observers, guests, etc. A motion must be made and seconded, and voting is often done by roll call. *“I move to go into executive session for the purpose of...”*

The chair says, *"It has been moved and seconded by _____ to move to executive session."* A majority vote is needed. If a decision is made to go into executive session, all non-members must leave the room until the regular meeting resumes at the close of the executive session. Discussion in executive session is confidential. The outcome of any vote taken in executive session should be recorded in the minutes, but not the discussion, etc.

A motion must be made, seconded and voted on in order to move out of executive session and back into the regular meeting.

■ **What happens if there isn't a quorum present at a meeting?**

You can still discuss business, but no official action may be taken.

■ **Where can I find specific rules regarding meetings, standing committees, elections, etc., for my local association?**

You can find all of this information (and more) in your local association's Constitution and Bylaws.



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The mission of the MEA is to ensure that the education of our students and the working environments of our members are of the highest quality.

