

# Parliamentary Procedure: A Guide to Ensure that Your Meetings Run Smoothly and Properly

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# Summary

- Parliamentary procedure is simply a system of rules that ensure that meetings can maximize efficiency and the use of time
- The process itself is actually quite simple, with only a few basic rules of thumb needing to be known and used consistently

# Role of the President/Chair

- The President or Chair of the committee or meeting body is the person in charge of running the meeting. They determine:
  - What issues will be included on the agenda
  - Length of discussion time
  - Who will be recognized for discussion
  - Also moderates any debate and keeps the group on-topic

# Committees

- A Committee is any group that is designated to research or make a judgment on a given topic
- The committee then presents its conclusions (if any) to the main group, who will then either accept or reject the committee's recommendations (if any)

# Committees (cont.)

- An example of Committee work follows:
  - A student organization wishes to request funds from SGA.
  - If every request for funding or every complaint were brought to the main body of SGA, there would be a large amount of wasted time - so SGA has a permanent committee, the Finance Committee, to look into such matters.
  - The Finance Committee then researches the issue, usually talking to a representative of the student organization, and conferring with the Assistant Dean of Student Affairs. They then decide upon a recommendation to bring before SGA as a whole.

# Committees (cont.)

- Example of committee work (cont.):
  - The Finance Committee brings forth their recommendation to SGA (either to give the organization all of the money requested, some of the money requested, or none of the money requested).
  - The Committee then offers their motion, which does not need to be seconded, and it is discussed and voted upon by the Senate at large.

# Motions

- The way things get done using Parliamentary Procedure is through the use of motions.
- Motions are used for every action that a group can do, ranging from appropriating funds to adjourning a meeting.
- Any member of the group that is permitted to vote may present a motion during the business portion of a meeting.
- A motion must be seconded by another member of the group that has a vote (unless the motion comes from a committee). If there is no second, the motion is dropped.
- If the motion is seconded, the issue is discussed by the group at large.

## Motions (cont.)

- Discussion of a motion **MUST BE RESTRICTED TO THE TOPIC AT HAND UNTIL A VOTE TAKES PLACE OR AN AMENDMENT IS MOVED AND SECONDED.**
- Refer to the organization's Constitution/By-Laws to determine the proper voting procedures and requirements
- The only proper way for ANY issue to be discussed is for it to be moved upon. **THERE SHOULD BE NO DISCUSSION OTHER THAN THAT ABOUT ISSUES THAT HAVE BEEN MOVED AND SECONDED.**



# Amendments

- If a motion has been moved and seconded, yet is not meeting the desires of the group, an amendment may be offered and seconded.
- If this occurs, discussion about the original motion must STOP until the amendment is voted upon.
- In most every case, an amendment to a motion only requires a simple majority.

# Amendments (cont.)

- Here is an example of a motion and an amendment:
  - The sisters of ZTA are discussing new ideas for their philanthropic fundraiser at a meeting.
  - A committee has already met and presented the recommendation that they would like to try a bowling event, instead of the traditional basketball event.
  - The committee then makes the motion that ZTA put on a bowling event instead of the basketball event by saying, "The Philanthropy Committee moves to hold a Bowl-A-Thon instead of shoot for the cause as ZTA's main philanthropy event." (Since this is a committee, the motion does not need seconded)

# Amendments (cont.)

## ● Example of Amending a Motion (cont.)

- The discussion of the issue ensues among the sisters of ZTA. Some are not satisfied with dismissing Shoot for the Cause, and so decide to amend the motion, by saying:
  - “I move to amend the motion, adding that should the bowl-a-thon not be successful, ZTA will revert to Shoot for the Cause next year automatically.” The amendment would then have to be seconded by another sister to be discussed. If not, it is dropped.
  - The discussion then would be about ONLY the amendment, and whether or not automatically reverting back to Shoot for the Cause is in the best interests of ZTA.

# Amendments (cont.)

- Example of an Amendment (cont.)
  - The amendment may either be approved or not approved. Let's say that, for the sake of argument, the amendment is approved. Discussion will then go back to the main motion – whether or not to have a Bowl-A-Thon in the first place.
  - Further amendments may be made if they are deemed necessary by the group.
  - After discussion and all amendments brought up are voted on and decided, the final vote is taken and the decision is made.

# A Metaphor for Parliamentary Procedure:

- Consider Parliamentary Procedure as if it were Microsoft Windows:
  - You are writing a paper on Word, but you need to have a documented source for it. The paper represents your motion – it's the main thing that needs to be discussed and taken care of. The documented source is an amendment – something that is added to the motion to make it better.
  - You bring up Internet Explorer, and find a website that reinforces your point. However, you must find what you need on Internet Explorer and use it fully before going back to your paper. The same is true with Parliamentary Procedure.

# A Metaphor for Parliamentary Procedure:

- Another example using Windows:
  - You are talking on AIM to three different people, but each is very important and you cannot switch back and forth between them. You need to deal with each person one at a time, and then close their window as you take care of them and end the conversation. Gradually, you are back to square one – your paper (or, the motion).

# Voting

- One thing that every person must remember as a part of a voting group is that it is OKAY to say “no,” or “nay” on an issue. If you do not agree with it, or you believe that it will cause more harm than good, don't just go along with things – YOUR VOICE MATTERS. SAY NO IF THAT IS HOW YOU FEEL.

# The Structure of Meetings

- Usually, meetings are laid out in a consistent and linear structure:
  - The President/Chair has opening comments/information
  - The other elected officers of the group present the status of any projects or issues that they are working on
  - Business is brought up – first old, then new



# The Structure of Meetings (cont.)

## ● Old Business:

- The only issues that may be discussed during Old Business are, fittingly, issues that are old, or have been brought up before in a meeting and then either tabled or moved to a committee. They may be moved, amended, and voted on just like any other issue.

## ● New Business:

- New Business consists of issues or topics that have not been brought before the main voting body before. It, too, may be moved, amended, and voted upon.

## The Structure of Meetings (cont.)

- If the group believes that an issue cannot be voted on appropriately, or that more research or inquiry must be conducted on an issue, there may be a motion at any time to either TABLE the motion for a duration of time (you may move for an indefinite period of time) so as to bring it up at a later date under old business
- Or, there may be a motion to move the issue to a committee, who will investigate the issue, and bring a recommendation to the main group under old business at a later date

# Adjourning

- This is, many times, everybody's favorite part of a meeting.
- A motion may come from the floor at any time to adjourn the meeting. Like any other motion, this must be seconded and receive the appropriate majority of votes.

# Conclusions

- Parliamentary Procedure isn't as complicated as it may seem to you. Simply remember these things:
  - The only time it is appropriate to talk about any topic is if a motion has been made regarding that topic. Discussion is for before and after the meeting.
  - Motions may be accepted during either old or new business, depending upon the issue. They must be seconded by another voting member of the group to be discussed (or be proposed by a committee); otherwise, they are dropped. The motion must be the sole issue discussed until voting has taken place.
  - If a motion is not satisfactory, an amendment may be proposed and seconded. If this occurs, the amendment must be the sole topic of discussion until a vote on it is taken.
  - Committees are your friends. If there is a question about an issue that nobody can answer, move it to a committee to investigate.
  - Remember, it's OKAY to say "nay."

# Congratulations!

- You've made it through the presentation and you (hopefully) know some interesting and helpful facts about getting your meetings going in an efficient and speedy manner. Good luck!