

# Parliamentary Basics: Running Effective Meetings

Latin American Youth Center

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## Why Parliamentary Procedure?

- Aids in the orderly transaction of business
- Conduct efficient meetings while making consistent decisions
- Helpful in the absence of common courtesy and common sense

## Basic Principles

- Honor the will of the majority
- Respect the right of the minority to be heard
- Protect the right of the absentees
- Provide courtesy and justice for all
- Consideration of one topic at a time

## Member Expectations

- Prepare for the meeting
- Be in attendance
- Be timely
- Speak up
- Support the decisions of the majority
- Know the rules

## Governing Documents

- Federal, State, and local statutes
- Corporate charter (Article of Incorporations)
- Constitution/ Bylaws
- Special Rules of Order
- Parliamentary Authority
- Standing Orders
- Custom/Precedent

### What are bylaws?

The term "bylaw" is derived from an Old Norse term "byr", meaning hamlet. A bylaw is the law of the hamlet. In other words, a bylaw is a local law, applying only to the area or under the control of the organization which enacts it.

Most organizations formulate basic rules under which they choose to operate. This document guides the organization and serves as its primary document of authority. Known as "bylaws" or sometimes "constitution and bylaws" these rules come into existence by action of the members of the organization. They relate to the foundational rules under which an organization chooses to operate. Any items of a temporary nature or procedural in nature should not be included in the bylaws. Because of their importance most bylaws cannot be suspended unless they provide for their own suspension.

Bylaws normally have at least the following articles: Name, Objective, Membership, Officers, Meetings, Executive Board, Committees, Parliamentary Authority and Amendments. Additional articles could be Nominations, Elections, or Dissolution. The bylaws can give prospective members an overview of how the organization functions. It also delineates what the terms of their membership will be and to what terms the new member will be legally bound.

Vote required:

Adoption – Majority

Amend- 2/3 (plus notice)

Revision - 2/3 (plus notice)

## Types of Meetings

- Regular
- Special
- Adjourned
- Annual
- Executive Session

## Quorum

The minimum number of members who must be present to legally transact business.

## Sample Order of Business/Agenda (MRSSUN)

- Approval of **Minutes**
- Officer, Board and Standing Committee **Reports**
- **Special** Committee Reports
- **Special** Orders
- **Unfinished** Business
- **New** Business

## Introducing a Motion

- Member makes a motion.
- Another member seconds the motion, if necessary
- Chair states the question
- Members debate the question
- Chair puts the question
- Chair announces results

## Debate

What is debate?

Debate is the discussion of the merits of a pending motion. It is the consideration of whether a proposed action should (or should not) be adopted.

Rules of debate

Time – The default amount of time is ten minutes per question.

Number of Speeches

The default number of speeches is two per person per question.

Extending/ Limiting Debate

These defaults can be changed by the creation of special rules of order or by two-thirds vote on any particular question.

Transferability

Debate time cannot be given from one member to another.

Structuring Debate

- Declare a position
- Provide your rationale

## Amendments

If the goal of a meeting is to take care of business and make good decisions, then it incumbent upon the membership to be willing to work together to develop the best ideas. These ideas are reflected through the motions that are adopted.

Bad motions make bad policies. Bad policies lead to best results. So it is necessary to not just accept motions at face value but rather to perfect them so that the ultimate decision is made on the best available option.

**Amendments assist in this perfecting process.**

Basic Rule:

- An amendment is considered a **subsidiary** motion.
- A **primary** amendment applies to the main motion.
- A **secondary** amendment applies to the primary amendment,

- There is no limit on the number of amendments of each type that can be offered but tertiary (or third level) amendments are not allowed.

Amendments are:

- **Debatable** (if the motion to be amended is debatable.)
- Requires a **majority** vote (regardless of the vote required to ultimately adopt the main motion.)
- Can be **amended** (unless it is a secondary amendment.)
- Cannot be Postponed Indefinitely.
- A member's vote on an amendment does impact how s/he must vote on the main motion.

Four Ways to Amend a Motion:

- Insert or Add
- Strike Out
- Strike and Insert (Words)
- Substitute (Paragraph)

*Inserting or Add*

- Add places words or a paragraph at the end of the text.
- Insert places words or a paragraph within the text.
- After words or a paragraph have been inserted, they cannot be changed without reconsideration. However, an inserted paragraph can have words inserted.

*Strike out*

- The motion to strike out certain **words** can be only amended by striking out words from the primary amendment. The impact of this amendment is to **leave the words struck in the secondary amendment in the primary amendment.**
- The effect of striking words out of a primary amendment to strike out a **paragraph** is that the words struck out are **no longer in the text at all.**
- The membership when considering striking out an entire paragraph may choose to **perfect the paragraph** prior to deciding whether or not to eliminate it completely.

### *Strike out and Insert*

- Two Methods: **Different Wording** inserted in the **same place** or **same wording** moved from one place to a **different place**.
- **Not in order** to strike out from one place and insert different wording in another place.
- **Debate broken into two parts**: one for the strike language and the other for the insert language.

### *Substitute*

- Amendment by substitution is always a **primary** amendment.
- Substitute motions always requires **two votes**: Shall we substitute and then shall we adopt the final motion (whether it is the original motion or the substituted motion.)

## **Five Motions You Should Know**

- Request for Information
  - Used to gain factual information
- Parliamentary Inquiry
  - Used to get procedural advice
- Point of Order
  - Used to object to a breach of the rules or decorum
- Call for the Order of the Day
  - Used to return to the approved agenda
- Previous Question
  - Used to close debate and amendments