



OREGON
SCHOOL
BOARDS
ASSOCIATION

A Guide to Parliamentary Procedure



*for School District, Charter
School, Education Service District
and Community College Boards*

Oregon School Boards Association

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About This Booklet

Parliamentary law was the name given to the rules and customs for doing business in the British Parliament. These customs were introduced to the British colonies, and became the basic rules for all legislative assemblies in the newly formed United States. Our form of constitutional self-governance necessitated some changes to parliamentary law which Thomas Jefferson codified in 1801 when he compiled his *Manual of Parliamentary Practice*.

The form of parliamentary procedure in use today by almost all government, civic, church and social organizations, can be traced directly to a book first published in 1876 called *Robert's Rules of Order*. Henry Martyn Robert was a General in the U.S. Army and a distinguished engineer. His work has seen many revisions and is now in its 9th Edition, but it remains the basic blueprint for how business is conducted in all deliberative assemblies and is the core of this pamphlet.

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QUESTIONS?

If you have questions about the information in this handbook, call OSBA Policy and Board Development, 503-588-2800 or 800-578-6722.

Parliamentary Law

Parliamentary law is simple in principle. It is based largely on mere common sense and courtesy. It seems technical because it has been necessary to develop a special vocabulary for discussing it. If one knows the vocabulary, the rules come easily. For this reason, we've included a glossary of common terms in the back of this booklet.

Parliamentary law has three main purposes:

- Enables a board to transact business with speed and efficiency.
- Protects the rights of each board member.
- Preserves a spirit of harmony.

To achieve these purposes, always consider the five basic principles of parliamentary procedure:

1. Only one subject may claim the attention of the board at one time.
2. Each proposition presented for consideration is entitled to full and free debate.
3. Every board member has rights equal to every other board member.
4. The will of the majority must be carried out, and the rights of the minority must be preserved.
5. The personality and desires of each member should be merged into the larger unit of the organization.

The Agenda or Order of Business

It is customary for every school board to adopt a standard order of business for meetings, commonly referred to as the agenda or order of business.

A suggested order for an agenda follows:

- **Call to order**
- **Opening ceremonies:**
(optional) Pledge of Allegiance, welcoming remarks
- **Approval of minutes of previous meeting(s)**
- **Public comment**
- **Reports: officers, standing committees and special committees**
- **Unfinished business**
- **New business**
- **Announcements and program**
- **Adjournment**

Motions

A motion is a proposal that the group take certain action.

How are motions classified?

Main motion

The objective of a main motion is to bring a question, or proposition, before the board for consideration. Only one main motion can be considered at a given time by the board, and such a motion, when introduced, excludes all other main motions until it has been disposed of. For example:

“I move that we replace the playground equipment at the Oak Street Elementary School.”

Secondary motion

A secondary motion can be made while the main motion is on the floor and before it has been decided. Secondary motions are divided into three classes which relate to their use in parliamentary procedure.

Subsidiary motion – A motion that modifies or disposes of the main motion being considered. Its existence depends entirely upon the principal motion to which it is subordinate. Since it relates to the question before the board, it is “in order” to propose a subsidiary motion when a main motion is still before the board and

to vote on it before voting on the main motion. For example:
“I move that we postpone the motion to replace the playground equipment until the next meeting due to the lateness of the hour.”

A subsidiary motion has rank among other subsidiary motions commonly called the order of precedence. A motion of higher rank can be made while a motion of lower rank is on the floor. See the centerfold chart for order (rank) of motions.

Privileged motion – A motion that has no connection whatsoever with the main motion before the board, but is a motion of such importance that it is entitled to immediate consideration. A motion of this class has the privilege of interrupting the main business before the board. For example: “I move that we recess for 10 minutes.”

Incidental motion – The name “incidental” was chosen because a motion of this class arises only incidentally out of the business of the board. For example: “I call for a roll-call vote on the motion to adjourn since I’m not sure we had a majority in favor of adjournment.”

These motions have few characteristics in common and are grouped in this category only for convenience.

See the centerfold for a chart of priority of motions.

How should a motion progress?

- **A member raises his or her hand or requests recognition and addresses the presiding officer.**

The presiding officer should be addressed by title, as “Mr. (or Madam) Chairman.” If the specific title is not known, it is always correct to use the term “Mr. (or Madam) Chairman.”

- **The member is recognized by the presiding officer.**

The chairman recognizes a member by name or by a nod. Having thus received formal recognition from the chairman, a member is said to “have the floor” and is the only member entitled to present a motion.

- The member proposes a motion.

A motion is always introduced in the form, “I move that,” followed by a statement of the proposal. This is the only correct phraseology. Except for very brief explanatory remarks, it is not permissible to discuss the merits of a motion either prior to, or immediately following, the formal proposal of the motion. All discussion must wait until after the chairman has stated the motion to the board and has called for discussion.

- Another member seconds the motion.

Another member, without addressing the chairman, may say, “I second the motion.” Seconding a motion is merely an indication that the member seconding it wishes the matter to come before the board for consideration. If no one seconds the motion, the chairman may ask, “Is there a second to the motion?” If there is none, he may declare, “The motion is lost for want of a second.” Or the chairman may second the motion. (This varies from *Robert’s Rules of Order* because the school board chairman is an equal member of the board and therefore has the right to second.)

- **The presiding officer states the motion to the board.**

When a motion has been properly proposed and seconded, the chairman repeats the motion to the board, or “states the motion.” After it has been formally stated to the board, it may be spoken of as a “question,” a “proposition,” or a “measure.”

- **The board discusses or debates the motion.**

After the motion has been formally stated by the chairman, any member has a right to discuss it. The member must obtain the floor in the same manner as when presenting a motion. Normally, the first person who asks for recognition is entitled to speak, but when several members wish to speak or present motions at the same time, certain guiding principles should determine the decision of the chairman:

1. The chairman should always show preference to the proposer of the motion.
2. A member who has not spoken has prior claim over one who has already discussed the question, or who has proposed another motion.
3. If the chairman knows the opinions of the various members regarding the measure before the board, he should alternate between those favoring the measure and those opposing it.
4. The chairman should recognize a member who seldom speaks in preference to one who frequently claims the attention of the board.

Discussion must be confined to the question that is “before the board.”

- **The presiding officer takes the vote on the motion.**

When all members who desire to discuss the question have done so, the chairman “puts the motion to a vote.” He may, before taking the vote, inquire, “Is there any further discussion?” or “Are you ready for the question?” If no one speaks, the chairman presumes discussion is closed and will proceed to take the vote by announcing, “All in favor of the motion (state the motion) say ‘Aye.’”

Following response from the board, the chairman then says, “Those opposed say ‘No.’” If the chairman cannot determine from the volume of voices which way the majority has voted, he says, “The chair is in doubt. Those in favor of the motion please rise.” After counting, the chairman says, “Be seated. Those opposed, rise.” After counting, he says, “Be seated.” Another alternative is to simply call for a show of hands.

- **The presiding officer announces the result of the vote.**

The chairman formally announces the result of the vote, saying: “The motion is carried: therefore (state the intent of the motion).” If a majority voted in the negative, the chairman says, “The motion is lost.” As soon as the vote has been announced by the chairman, another motion is in order.

Priority of Motions and Summary of Governing Rules

MOTIONS (in order of precedence)	May interrupt speaker	Requires a second	Debatable	Vote required	Motions that may apply
PRIVILEGED MOTIONS					
To fix a time at which to adjourn	No	Yes	Limited	Majority	Amend, reconsider
To adjourn (unqualified)	No	Yes	No	Majority	None
To take a recess	No	Yes	Limited	Majority	Amend
To rise to a question of privilege	Yes	No	No	Chairman rules	All
To call for the orders of the day	Yes	No	No	None	None
SUBSIDIARY MOTIONS					
To lay on, or take from, the table	No	Yes	No	Majority	None
To call for the previous question	No	Yes	No	Two-thirds	Reconsider
To limit, or extend limits of debate	No	Yes	Limited	Two-thirds	Amend, reconsider
To postpone definitely	No	Yes	Limited	Majority	Amend, reconsider, previous question
To refer to a committee	No	Yes	Limited	Majority	Amend, reconsider, previous question
To amend the motion (1st rank)	No	Yes	Yes	Majority	Amend, reconsider, previous question
To amend the amendment (2nd rank)	No	Yes	Yes	Majority	Reconsider
To postpone indefinitely	No	Yes	Yes	Majority	Limit debate, reconsider, previous question
MAIN MOTIONS					
General motions (the question)	No	Yes	Yes	Majority	All
Specific motions:					
To reconsider	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority	Limit debate, previous question, table, postpone indefinitely
To reconsider and enter in minutes	Yes	Yes	No	None until called for	None
To rescind	No	Yes	Yes	Two-thirds	All
To expunge	No	Yes	Yes	Two-thirds	All
To adopt a resolution	No	Yes	Yes	Majority	All
To adjourn (qualified)	No	Yes	Limited	Majority	All
To create orders of the day	No	Yes	Yes	Majority (general) Two-thirds (special)	All
To amend (constitution, etc.)	No	Yes	Yes	Two-thirds	All
INCIDENTAL MOTIONS					
To suspend rules	No	Yes	No	Two-thirds	None
To withdraw or modify a motion	No	No	No	Majority	Reconsider
To read papers	No	Yes	No	Majority	Reconsider
To object to consideration	Yes	No	No	Two-thirds	Reconsider the negative vote only
To rise to a point of order	Yes	No	No	Chairman rules	None
To rise to a point of information	Yes	No	No	None	None
To rise to parliamentary inquiry	Yes	No	No	None	None
To appeal from the decision of the chair	Yes	Yes	Limited	Majority	All, except amend
To call for a division of the assembly	Yes	No	No	Majority	None
To call for a division of the motion	No	Yes	No	Majority	Amend

Commonly Used Motions

KIND OF MOTION	OBJECT	EFFECT
To lay on the table	To clear the floor for more urgent business	Delays action
To call for the previous question	To secure immediate vote on pending question	Ends debate
To limit or exceed time for debate	To provide more or less time for discussion	Shortens or lengthens discussion period
To postpone definitely (to a certain time)	Often gives more time for informal discussion and for securing support	Delays action
To commit or refer	To enable more careful consideration to be given	Delays action
To amend	To improve the motion	To change the original motion
To postpone indefinitely	To prevent a vote on the question	To suppress the question
To raise a point of order	To call attention to violation of rules	Keeps group functioning according to parliamentary procedures
To appeal the decision of the chair	To determine the attitude of the group on the ruling by the chair	Secures ruling of the group rather than by the chair
To suspend the rules	To permit action not possible under the rules	Secures action which would otherwise be prevented by the rules
To object to the consideration of a question	To prevent wasting time on unimportant business	Suppress the motion
To divide the question	To secure more careful consideration of parts	Secures action by parts

Commonly Used Motions

KIND OF MOTION	OBJECT	EFFECT
To call for division	a) To determine the accuracy of a voice vote b) To secure expression of individual member's vote	Secures an accurate check on the vote
To nominate	To suggest names for office	Places before the group names for consideration
To make a request	To secure information or ask to be excused from a duty	Provide information growing out of pending business
To fix the time to which to adjourn	To set the time for another meeting to continue business	Adjourns the meeting with a time set to continue business
To take a recess	To secure an intermission	Delays action
To raise a question of privilege	To correct undesirable conditions	Corrects undesirable conditions
To call for the order of the day	To secure adherence to order of business	Same as object
To take from the table	To continue the consideration of the questions	Same as object
To reconsider	To reconsider the question	Secures further consideration and another vote on the question
<i>(Only a member of the prevailing side may make this motion.)</i>		
To reconsider and have entered on the minutes	To reconsider the question at the next meeting	Secures further consideration and another vote on the question
<i>(Only a member of the prevailing side may make this motion.)</i>		
To rescind	To repeal previous action	Same as object
To ratify	To approve previous action taken	Same as object

Amendments

How may a motion be amended?

The purpose of the motion to amend is to modify a motion that has already been presented in such a manner that it will be more satisfactory to the members.

- **Methods of amending:**

By addition or insertion – To add something to the motion which it did not contain.

By elimination or by striking out – To subtract or eliminate something from a motion that was originally a part of it.

By striking and inserting – This method is a combination of the first two methods; something is stricken and something inserted in its place. The word or words must be together and the insertion must also be kept together.

By substitution – When it is not possible to satisfactorily amend the motion without changing several parts or rewriting the motion entirely, a new motion may be presented as a **substitute** motion. Debate then proceeds on the original motion, then on the substitute motion, and then a vote is taken on whether to substitute.

The most important principle to understand in connection with any form of the motion to amend is that an amendment “may be hostile, but it must be germane.”

“Hostile” means opposed to the spirit and aim of the motion to which it is applied.

“Germane” means having direct bearing upon the subject matter of the motion; that is, relevant, or relating to it.

An amendment may be opposed to the actual intent of the original motion and, in fact, nullify it, but if it relates to the same subject matter, it is germane.

How to handle amendments

- **Types of amendments:**

Amendment of the first rank – An amendment to a motion. For example: “I move that the motion (to replace the playground equipment at the Oak Street Elementary School) be amended by adding the phrase ‘with wooden material’ after the word ‘equipment.’”

Amendment of the second rank – An amendment to the amendment.

(The amendment to the amendment must modify and relate directly to the amendment and not to the main motion, otherwise it is out of order.)

For example: “I move that we amend the amendment by striking ‘wooden’ and inserting ‘cedar wood.’”

No amendment beyond that of second rank is possible.

It is never in order to propose more than one amendment of each rank at one time. If a board member desires to amend two separate and unrelated parts of a motion, this must be done by two amendments of the first rank, and one must be voted on before the other is proposed.

It is possible, however, to have one amendment to the motion (amendment of the first rank), and one amendment to the amendment (amendment of the second rank) before the board at one time.

Until the amendment of the second rank has been voted on, no other amendment of the second rank is in order.

Until the amendment of the first rank has been voted on, no other amendment of the first rank can be proposed.

Order of voting

Amendments are voted on in inverse order, that is, the one of second rank is disposed of first.

1. Discussion is held and the vote taken on the amendment to the amendment (amendment of second rank).
2. Discussion is called for and the vote is taken on the amendment to the motion (amendment of first rank).
3. When the vote on this has been taken, discussion upon the original or main motion as amended is opened and, when completed, a vote is taken on the main motion.

Nominations and Elections

A nomination is the formal presentation to the board of the name of a candidate for the office to be filled.

Nominations from the floor:

- a. Nominations do not require a second.
- b. Nominations are in order as soon as the chairman calls for them.
- c. As a nomination is made, the chairman repeats it and the secretary records it.
- d. No member may nominate more than one candidate for each office.
- e. If there are no further nominations, the chairman may declare the nominations closed.
- f. A motion to close the nominations requires a two-thirds vote.
- g. Before voting, but following the formal closing of nominations, nominations may be reopened by a motion, which requires only a majority to carry.

Voting on nominations:

- a. After the nominations are closed, the board proceeds to vote upon the names.
- b. An election becomes effective immediately, if the candidate is present and does not decline or if he is absent but has consented to his candidacy. If he is absent and has not consented to his nomination, the election becomes effective as soon as he is notified, if he does not decline immediately.
- c. An officer assumes the duties of office as soon as he has been elected.

Most organizations make specific and detailed provisions for nominating and electing new officers in their constitution and bylaws. The provisions ordinarily include such details as time of nomination, time of elections, method of nominating and electing, and time of installation.

See ORS 332.040.

Glossary

Agenda – A list of items to be taken up at a meeting.

Amend – To change a motion either by adding to it, taking from it, or by altering it in some other way. (See *Amendments*, page 12.)

Blanks, filling – “Filling blanks” is a term used to indicate a method of decision regarding a matter where several different courses of actions are possible. The term “blank” is used because usually this method is applied in motions where an exact amount, a name, a date, or some other essential, specific information is left blank.

Chair – The chairman. “Addressing the chair” means speaking to the chairman or president. This is done by raising one’s hand or requesting recognition when no one else is speaking (with some exceptions) and saying, “Mr. or Madam Chairman.” Being “recognized by the chair” means being given permission to speak further. (See *How should a motion progress?*, page 6.)

Chair, power of – The chairman should vote at all times unless there is a conflict of interest. The chair may comment on a motion under consideration as he or she desires.

The chair also has the following authority:

- a. May decide in what order speakers shall be recognized.
- b. May refuse to recognize

members offering absurd or frivolous motions or motions intended, in the chair’s judgment, to delay or obstruct business.

- c. May restrain speakers within the limits of the rules.
 - d. May enforce decorum.
 - e. May appoint committees.
 - f. May decide points of order.
- Actions of the chair are subject to appeal.

Commit – To refer to a committee.

Committee of the whole – Sometimes matters come up that can be best studied and digested in a committee setting, but that, because of their importance, should be considered by all members, and should not be referred to a small committee. Then the meeting, on motion duly made, may “resolve itself into a committee of the whole.” This means that the meeting officially is discontinued while everyone remains and becomes a member of a large special committee. The chairman of the regular meeting does not preside over a committee of the whole; a special chair is appointed.

Consideration, informal – When a member moves “informal consideration,” and the motion is adopted, the meeting lays aside formal rules, allowing each person present to speak on the subject under consideration.

Debate – Discussion on a motion.

Division – “Division” in parliamentary law means simply a vote whereby all who are in favor and all who are opposed to a motion stand separately when the chair calls for “ayes” and “nays.”

Floor – The privilege of speaking before the board. Thus, when one “obtains the floor,” he or she is granted an opportunity to speak.

Inquiry, parliamentary – An investigation or checking to determine the proper course of procedure.

Motion – A formal proposal to a meeting that it take certain action. A motion is a “motion” when stated by its proponent and until repeated by the chairman when presented for acceptance or rejection, at which time it becomes a “question,” a “proposition,” or a “measure.” (See *How should a motion progress?*, page 6.)

Motions, incidental – Incidental motions, as a class, deal with questions of procedure arising out of another pending motion or item of business and must be disposed of before the original motion may be proceeded with. (See *Motions*, page 5.)

Motion, main – A main motion is one that independently presents an idea for consideration. (See *Motions*, page 5.)

Motion, privileged – A privileged motion is one that is so vital in character that it takes precedence over all others. (See *Motions*, page 5.)

Motions, subsidiary – A subsidiary motion is one growing out of

another motion already under consideration. The board must dispose of the subsidiary motion before it can act on the motion to which it applies. The purpose of a subsidiary motion is to assist the board in treating or disposing of the main motion (and sometimes other motions). (See *Motions*, page 5.)

Order – When this term is applied to an act of an assembly, it means an expression of a will of the board in the form of a command. An “order” differs from a “resolution” in that the latter is not a command, but a declaration of fact or an expression of opinion or purpose.

Order, general – “Making a general order” is setting a future time for the discussion of a special matter. Making a general order differs from making a special order in that the former does not allow the suspension of certain rules that would interfere with its consideration.

Orders of the day – Regular order or program of business. A motion “calling for the orders of the day” is a motion demanding that the present discussion be dropped and that the chairman announce the next matter to be taken in accordance with the organization’s customary and established business routine. The term “orders of the day” has a more specific meaning when a certain time has been set aside for the consideration of a given matter. Then a demand for the “orders of the day” is a request that this specific thing be taken up at the time set for it.

Order, special – “Making a special order” suspends any rules that may interfere with consideration of a question at a future specified time.

Postponement, indefinite – This term is clear except that the object of indefinite postponement is not merely to postpone, but, in effect, to reject.

- **Previous question** – To “move the previous question” is to demand that the chairman take a vote on a motion being discussed, thereby ending debate on that motion.

Privilege – The term “privilege” in parliamentary law refers specifically to the privileges or rights of the meeting or those attending chiefly in connection with matters of physical comfort such as inability to hear a speaker; the heating, lighting and ventilation of the meeting room; noises and other disturbances; or the ineligibility or misconduct of a member in a meeting at the time. These “questions of privilege” should not be confused with “privileged motions.” Questions of privilege may be involved in motions, but privileged motions include other matters.

Question – The question in parliamentary law is the proposition or motion after it has been placed before the meeting for action by the chairman. A “question,” when adopted, becomes an “order,” “resolution,” or “vote.” (See *Motions*, page 5.)

Question, division of – To separate a motion so that different parts of it may be considered individually.

Refer – To refer to a committee.

Resolution – The act of a board, the purpose of which is to declare facts or express opinions or purposes, and not to command.

Rules, suspension of – When the board wishes to do something that cannot be done without violating its own rules, but that is not in conflict with its constitution or bylaws or with the fundamental principles of parliamentary law, it suspends the rules that interfere with the proposed action.

Second – A motion, in order to be considered by the meeting, must have a “second,” i.e., a sponsor in the form of a second member who indicates a wish to discuss the motion by saying, “I second the motion.” (See *Motions*, page 5.)

Table – The “table” in parliamentary law is literally the speaker’s table, but to “lay on the table” or “to table” a motion means to delay action on it.



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