

Basic Parliamentary Terms and Procedures- Roberts Rules

Setting Things in Motion

An item of business is open for debate when it is offered from the platform as a **Main Motion**. A main motion is in order only when no other motion is pending. It requires no second when coming from a committee. It requires a majority vote for approval. (Exceptions include Pronouncements and Constitution/Bylaw changes, which require a 2/3 vote.)

Debate begins when the Moderator states that “the question is before the house.” At this point, debate will proceed in accordance with time limits and other provisions stated in the Standing Rules. While a Main Motion is under consideration, it may be modified by moving **To Amend** by “striking out” and/or “inserting” words, or by “substituting” new wording for the entire motion.

An amendment requires a **second** and a majority vote. Please note that the Moderator will not entertain a motion to amend until there has been opportunity for statements both in favor of the main motion and in opposition. Any substantive amendment should be delivered to the platform in writing at once. It is permissible to move to “amend the amendment,” but it gets terribly confusing and is not recommended.

By the way, you need not be recognized by the Moderator in order to second a motion. A “second” simply indicates that there is someone besides the mover who wishes to have the motion considered. If there isn’t, the motion would only waste time and is best allowed to die quickly “for lack of a second.”

KEEPING THEM MOVING

There are several other motions that may be made while the main motion and amendments are pending in order to expedite the flow of business. The **Subsidiary Motions** follow specific rules of precedence. Below are some of the common motions in ascending order of precedence:

1. **TO REFER** to a committee or other body. Seldom used since time is short and most items have already been in committee.
2. **TO POSTPONE** to a certain time. Again, seldom used because of the short duration. No question may be postponed to the next Annual Meeting because it will be a new body.
3. **TO LIMIT OR EXTEND DEBATE** requires a 2/3 vote (or “general consent”) because it waives the established limits.
4. **TO CLOSE DEBATE** (“Previous Question”) requires a 2/3 vote. This applies only to the immediately pending question, not to a series of motions.

There are also some **Incidental Motions** which have less definite rules of precedence. The common ones are:

1. **POINT OF ORDER IS** used when a member thinks the rules are being violated. The Moderator will rule.
2. **TO CALL FOR A DIVISION OF THE HOUSE** means a counted vote and may be ordered by a majority vote of the delegates.
3. **TO DIVIDE THE QUESTION** Breaking up a motion into parts to be voted upon separately. Each part must be able to stand alone. It requires a second and a majority vote.
4. **TO APPEAL THE DECISION OF THE CHAIR** Overrules the chair’s decision. It requires a second and a majority vote.
5. **TO SUSPEND THE RULES** It requires a second and a 2/3 vote.
6. **TO RECONSIDER**. Reopens a matter previously decided. It must be made by one who voted with the prevailing side. It requires a second and a majority vote to reconsider the question.

Finally, there are a few **Privileged Motions** which may interrupt the pending business. They are: **Call For the Order Of The Day**, **Raise a Question of Privilege**, take a **Recess**, and **Adjourn**. These are made after checking with the Parliamentarian.