

# Parliamentary Procedure Demystified

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# Outline

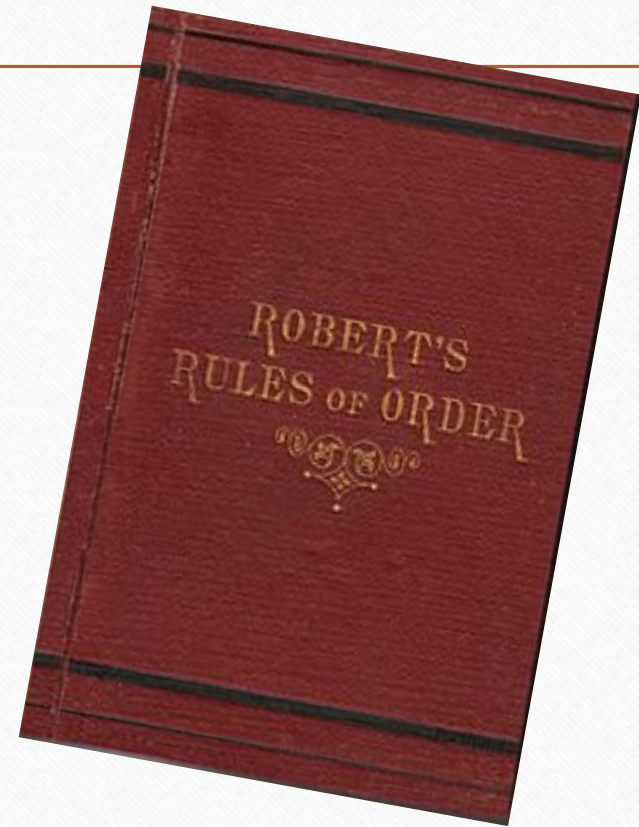
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- What is parliamentary procedure?
- Why is it important?
- Basic principles of parliamentary procedure
- Putting parliamentary procedure into action:
  - Minimum meeting requirements
  - Motions
  - Debate
  - Voting

# What is Parliamentary Procedure?

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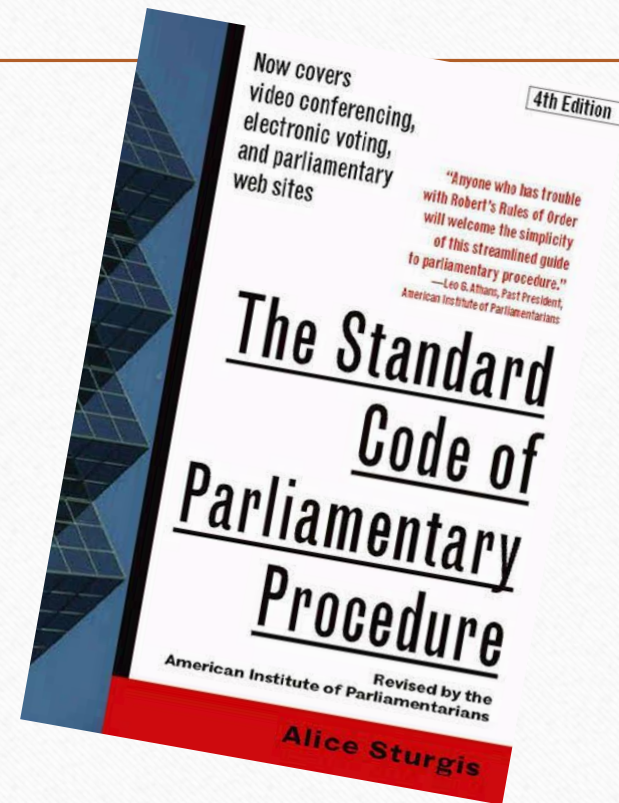
- A set of rules and ethics for working together in groups
- Evolved over centuries
- Designed to facilitate business decisions and foster effective group action
- Logic and common sense crystallized into law





# Codes of Parliamentary Procedure

- Hierarchy of codes:
  - Law
  - Charter
  - Bylaws/policies
  - Adopted Parliamentary Authority
- Standard Code of Parliamentary Procedure





# Why do we use Parliamentary Procedure?

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- To ensure that the rights of those present are respected
- To safeguard the individual and the group in the exercise of their rights to free speech and free assembly
- Brings a reliable, predictable structure to group decision-making processes
- For the facilitation of business
- Helps to maintain order and decorum



# Basic Principles of Parliamentary Procedure

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- Facilitate the transaction of business and promote cooperation
- Protect equality of rights for everyone present
- Majority decision
- Minority rights
- The right to discussion
- The right to information
- Fairness and good faith



# Minimum Requirements for a Valid Meeting

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- Quorum, as defined by the organization's bylaws
- A presiding officer (normally the chair or vice-chair)
- A secretary (to record the proceedings)
- Appropriate notice, as defined by the organization's bylaws



# Motions

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- The mechanism by which a proposal is brought to the assembly for decision
- Many different types:
  - Main motions
  - Subsidiary motions
  - Privilege
  - Incidental motions



# Main Motion

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- Main method used by a member to present a proposal for action or decision
- Only one main motion can be under consideration at a time
- Must take the form, “I move...”
- Should be concise and clearly worded
- Should be phrased in the positive
- Maybe reworded for clarity by the mover at the request of the chair, or by the chair (with the approval of the mover)
- Cannot be ignored: some action must be taken

# Main Motion: Steps

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- Motion is made: “I move April 20 as the date for our annual bake sale”
- Motion seconded
- Chair restates the motion and invites discussion: “It has been moved and seconded that April 20 be the date for the bake sale. Any discussion?” This restatement transfers the “ownership” of the motion from the individual to the assembly.
- Discussion proceeds according to debate guidelines
- Motion **may** be amended as a result of discussion
- Motion is voted upon, and approved or defeated
- Motion may be disposed of by a subsidiary motion, such as a motion to table



## Main Motions (cont.)

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- Question: a motion was voted on and passed at a previous meeting. Can that motion be amended?
- Question: a motion was voted on and passed earlier in the same meeting. Can that motion be amended?
- Question: a motion was voted on and passed at a previous meeting. Can that motion be rescinded?
- Question: a motion was tabled earlier in the same meeting. Can it be brought forth again for consideration?

# Subsidiary Motions – Types

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- To amend
- To refer to committee
- To postpone to a certain time
- To limit or extend debate
- To close debate and vote immediately
- To table (postponed temporarily)



# Subsidiary Motion – To Amend

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- Motion to amend
  - Can be used to change a main motion currently under consideration
  - Amendments must be “germane” to the motion
  - Hostile amendments are usually out of order
- “Friendly” amendments
  - An amendment is proposed that the amender thinks will be ok with the maker of the main motion
  - Main mover may accept amendment, but any member of the assembly may disagree with amendment, in which case the motion to amend is debated and voted on according to the guidelines.

# Subsidiary Motion – To Refer to Committee

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- Used to transfer pending motion to a committee:
  - For further study
  - To save time
  - In cases where privacy is required
  - To defer a decision until a later date
- Requires a seconder
- Is debatable prior to vote
- May be accompanied by instruction/direction from the assembly



# Subsidiary Motion – To Postpone

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- Used to defer debate until later in a meeting or at a future meeting
- May be specific (“I move to postpone the motion until 1:00pm, after we’ve heard the consultant’s report”) or general (“I move to postpone the motion until the April meeting”)
- Requires a second
- Debate limited to reasons for, and time of postponement
- Requires a majority vote

# Subsidiary Motion – Limit/Extend or End Debate Immediately

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- Motion reduces or extends time spent in debate, or ends debate immediately and calls vote
- Requires a second
- Debate restricted to type and time of limitation; Motion to end debate is not debatable
- Motion to limit/extend debate can be amended; motion to end debate cannot
- Both require a 2/3 vote to pass



# Subsidiary Motion – To Table

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- Removes main motion from consideration indefinitely
- Is not debatable
- If the Chair determines that the motion to table is made to “kill” the motion, a 2/3 vote is required
- Consideration on the motion can be resumed at any point in the meeting with a majority vote
- Motion dies if not brought back for consideration before the end of the meeting

# Privilege

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- Used to secure immediate decision and action by **presiding officer**
- Questions of privilege are requests made to the presiding officer relating to comfort and rights of the individual or the assembly.
  - Does not require a second; is not debatable. Requires no vote
- Motions of privilege are used to gain action from the presiding officer
  - Requires a second; follows rules of a main motion
  - Supersedes main motion
  - Motion to recess/adjourn are privileged motions under some circumstances



# Incidental Motions

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- Motion to appeal
- Motion to suspend rules
- Withdrawing a motion
- Point of Order
  - Used to correct an error in procedure
  - Must be made as soon as the error is observed
  - Requires no second and is not debatable
  - Is ruled “well taken” or “not well taken” by the presiding officer
  - When in doubt, the presiding officer may refer the point of order to the assembly for discussion and vote

# Debate

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- Most boards are “deliberative bodies,” which means that discussion and debate are essential parts of deciding on an action
- Free interchange of thought is essential to this process
- Parliamentary procedure is followed to ensure that every member has equal right to be heard
- Certain motions are debatable with restrictions; certain others are not debatable at all.
- Debatable motions are those that may require unlimited discussion: typically main motions



# Debate (cont.)

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- To obtain the floor, a member should stand or raise hand, and be acknowledged by the chair
- The person proposing the motion should have first opportunity to speak to it – and sometimes is given the final word
- Others may then speak, with preference given to:
  - Those who have not yet spoken to the motion
  - Those who are rarely heard from
- The chair may try to alternate between those who support and oppose the motion

# Debate (cont.)

- Debate should be impersonal
  - Speak to the motion, not about the person or the motives of the person making the motion
  - Presiding officer should move immediately to stop personal attacks
  - A member who refuses to behave courteously may be ejected by the chair or by a vote of the assembly





# Debate (cont.)

- Duties of the presiding officer (chair) include:
  - Control debate so that it is free and effective
  - Ensure that the person who has the floor enjoys the undivided attention of the assembly
  - Ensure that the debate remains focused on the motion under consideration
  - Ask questions as needed to ensure all aspects of the question are addressed
- The presiding officer does not participate in the debate



# Voting

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- Motions typically pass by a majority of legal votes cast
- Any member may abstain from any vote on any issue
- A member **MUST** abstain if there is a conflict of interest
- In the event of a tie vote, the motion is lost
- Presiding officer normally does not vote, but may vote where one vote may make a difference
- In a ballot vote, the presiding officer votes as any other member, and may not vote twice to break a tie.



# Voting (cont.)

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- Methods of voting
  - General consent
  - Voice vote
  - Standing/show of hands
  - Roll call
  - Ballot
- All votes should be binding during a meeting

# Going In Camera

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- Use only under certain circumstances: to discuss sensitive issues relating to personnel, security, legal matters, etc.
- There must be a motion and vote to go in and out of camera
- Minutes are not kept for in camera discussions; all discussions remain confidential
- If in camera session results in the need for action, motions must be made after the return to public forum.



# Resources

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- Alberta Library Trustees Association – Grow as Chair
  - <https://www.librarytrustees.ab.ca/page/grow%20as%20a%20chair.aspx>
- American Institute of Parliamentarians Standard Code of Parliamentary Procedure (2012)
- Eli Mina (ALA Parliamentarian)
  - [www.elimina.com/insights/articles-rules.html](http://www.elimina.com/insights/articles-rules.html)