

# PARLIAMENTARY PROCEDURE 101

Parliamentary procedure is a time-tested method of conducting business at meetings and public gatherings. The rules allow everyone to be heard and to make decisions democratically without confusion. The most recent edition of *Robert's Rules of Order* contains the procedures that Seattle Pacific University adapts for use in Faculty Senate meetings. Although these rules may seem trivial or nitpicky at times, they help secure fairness and common courtesy for all members of the meeting. Senate discussions will be most effective and productive if everyone is familiar with these basic rules of procedure and decorum.

## Guidelines for Speaking

### *When may I speak?*

1. When you have something to say, you must be recognized by the chair. Raise your hand to get recognized.
2. Do not seek recognition while someone else is talking.
3. There are a few instances when it is acceptable to interrupt someone or speak without gaining recognition by the chair, such as when making a point of order or a point of information, but these are pretty rare. (see "Situations")

### *What participation limits must I observe when I speak?*

1. Members who have not yet spoken about the topic at hand have priority over those who have.
2. You may speak only a certain length of time on any given topic. Robert's Rules allows for 10 minutes, though many organizations, particularly for a large gathering like Faculty Senate, allow for just 2 minutes. Typically, the nature of Faculty Senate discussions does not necessitate imposing a time limit. However, if a topic might be contentious or engender lengthy debate, the chair (or the Senate body as a whole) may select a time limit for each member to observe. The goal is to ensure that everyone who wants to participate has the opportunity to do so.
3. According to Robert's Rules, each member may speak only twice on any given topic. In practice, our Faculty Senate meetings allow an exception to this rule for the maker of the motion. They may respond to queries from other members as permitted by the chair, without a set cap on number of responses. It is also common SPU practice for the chair to waive the two-response limit for members from the floor if, after a suitable waiting period, no other members seek recognition to speak. In the context of more contentious debate, the chair or the Senate as a whole may decide on a specific number of times a member may speak on the topic.
4. The chair is obliged to try to alternate recognizing those who are for and against the motion being discussed. For example, if someone just spoke against a motion the chair

would say something like “Is there anyone who wishes to speak in favor of the motion?” and then recognize someone.

### ***What content and decorum protocols should I observe when I speak?***

1. After you have been recognized, address your comments to the chair, even if they involve another member. This keeps debate from becoming personal.
2. When referring to other members, it is preferable to use their title and not their first name (i.e., “Professor Smith”, or “The Chair of the Curriculum Committee.”)
3. When speaking, you may speak only on the merits of the topic immediately at hand. Anything off the topic is out of order, and you can be made to stop talking if someone points it out.
4. Members express themselves in relation to motions. Members can
  - Make motions.
  - Second motions.
  - Debate and amend motions.
  - Vote on motions.

### **The Four Basic Types of Motions**

A motion is a statement that describes a proposed action or decision that is placed before the membership of the Senate. There are four types of motions:

1. **Main Motions:** The purpose of a main motion is to introduce items to the membership for their consideration. They cannot be made when any other motion is on the floor, and they yield to privileged, subsidiary, and incidental motions.
2. **Subsidiary Motions:** Their purpose is to change or affect how a main motion is handled, and they are voted on before a main motion.
3. **Privileged Motions:** Their purpose is to bring up items that are urgent about special or important matters unrelated to pending business.
4. **Incidental Motions:** Their purpose is to provide a means of questioning procedure concerning other motions and they must be considered before the main motion.

### **How to Present a Motion**

In SPU faculty governance, main motions cannot be brought to the floor without first going through Faculty Council, which functions as the Executive Committee of the Senate. Main motions are generally crafted by a faculty committee or task force, sent to Council, and then placed on the Faculty Senate agenda. Individual faculty members may also submit a main motion to Council and request that it be placed on the agenda. Typically, written materials supporting the main motion should be sent along with the agenda to Senate members ahead of the meeting. Motions to amend can be made by individual members during the meeting.

### ***First and Second Readings of a Main Motion***

Customarily at SPU, complex major motions (such as proposals to create, suspend, or close academic programs; changes to academic policies; changes to handbook) are presented in a “First Reading” at one senate meeting and a “Second Reading” at a subsequent meeting. At the First Reading, the motion is explained and subject to clarification, but a vote on the motion is not taken and no amendments may be proposed. At the “Second Reading,” the motion is subject to further discussion, amendments or other actions permitted by Robert’s Rules, including a vote.

### ***Making a Motion (of any type) on the Senate Floor***

#### **1. Present the Motion:**

- a. The presenter of the motion (e.g., the chair of the committee that crafted the motion) should be recognized by the chair, and then speak in a clear and concise manner.
  - b. The presenter should state the motion affirmatively. For example, "The curriculum committee moves that we [do x]..." rather than, "I move that we do not ...".
  - c. Presenters should avoid referring to personalities and stay on the subject.
2. Wait for someone to second the motion. *If the motion is made by a committee, it does not need a second.*
  3. Another member will second the motion or the chair will call for a second.
  4. If there is no second to the motion, it is lost.

#### **5. If there is a second, the chair states the motion:**

- a. The chair will say, "it has been moved and seconded that we ...", thus placing the motion before the membership for consideration and action.
- b. The membership then either debates the motion (see point 6 below), or, if there is no debate, moves directly to a vote.
- c. **Once the motion is presented to the membership by the chair it becomes “assembly property,” and cannot be changed by the maker of the motion without the consent of the members.** This includes so-called “friendly amendments” (there is actually no such thing in Robert’s Rules). However, in practice, SPU Senate has generally allowed friendly amendments. If it appears to the chair that an amendment (or any other motion) is uncontroversial, it is proper for the chair to ask if there is any objection to adopting the amendment. If no objection is made, the chair may declare the amendment adopted. If even one member objects, however, the amendment is subject to debate and vote like any other, regardless of whether its proposer calls it “friendly” and regardless of whether the maker of the original motion endorses its adoption.

## 6. Expanding on the motion:

- a. The time for the maker of the motion to speak in favor of the motion is now, rather than at the time it is presented.
- b. The mover is always allowed to speak first.
- c. Comments and debate are directed to the chair.
- d. Keep to the time limit for speaking that has been established.
- e. The mover may speak again only after other speakers are finished, unless called upon by the chair to respond to a member's query or to provide clarification.

## 7. Putting the question to the membership:

- a. The chair asks, "Are you ready to vote on the question?"
- b. If there is no more discussion, a vote is taken.
- c. If there is continued discussion but a member wishes to end debate, a motion "to close debate" may be made (also known historically as "move the previous question" or "call the question"). This motion must be voted upon (see "Situation" #2 below).

## Voting on a Motion

The method of vote on any motion depends on the situation. There are four methods used to vote:

1. **By General Consent:** When a motion is not likely to be opposed, the chair says, "if there is no objection ..." The membership shows agreement by their silence, however if one member says, "I object," the item must be put to a vote.
2. **By Voice:** The chair asks those in favor to say, "aye", those opposed to say "nay". Any member may move for an exact count.
3. **By Division:** This is a slight verification on the voice vote (a member can "call for a division of the house"). It does not require a count unless the chair so desires. Members raise their hands or stand.
4. **By Ballot:** Members write their vote on a slip of paper or vote electronically..

Two other motions related to voting are commonly used.

1. **Motion to Table:** This motion is often used in the attempt to "kill" a motion. The option is always present, however, to "take from the table", for reconsideration by the membership.
2. **Motion to Postpone:** This is often used as a means of parliamentary strategy and allows opponents of motion to test their strength without an actual vote being taken. Also, debate is once again open on the main motion.

## Passing a Motion

For Senate to conduct business, a quorum of 1/3 of the total Senate membership must be present (Bylaws Art. B-II, Sec. 1. E). The proportion of votes needed to pass a motion depends on the type of motion and the Faculty Bylaws governing the SPU Senate. For more information on passage requirements, consult “Situations” below and the Faculty Bylaws.

### Situations

**1. I want to change the wording of the motion we are discussing.**

Move “to amend the motion” and state your change specifically.

- You must be recognized by the chair.
- Requires a second.
- Is debatable.
- Requires a simple majority to pass.

**2. I want to end the discussion and have the vote.**

Move “to close debate” (“call the question”/“move the previous question”). Remember, when you move to close debate, you are voting only on whether or not *to end discussion* on the motion, not on the motion itself.

- You must be recognized by the chair.
- Requires a second.
- Is not debatable.
- Requires a 2/3 majority to pass.

**3. I think discussion should continue, but I don’t want it to go on all day.**

Move “to limit debate,” and state specifically how you want to limit it.

- You must be recognized by the chair.
- Requires a second.
- Is not debatable.
- Requires a 2/3 majority to pass.

**4. I want the chair to enforce rules about time limits and the number of times people are allowed to speak.**

Make “a point of order” and then point out the rules being violated. The chair is then obliged to enforce the rules.

- Can be made at any time, even when someone is speaking.

**5. The chair has been enforcing rules about time limits and the number of times people are allowed to speak, but I really think we need to discuss this more.**

Move “to extend debate” and state specifically how you want to extend it.

- You must be recognized by the chair.
- Requires a second.
- Is not debatable.
- Requires a 2/3 majority to pass.

**6. This motion needs more attention/investigation/discussion than we can give it today.**

Move “to refer the motion to committee,” then give the specifics of the committee and when and how you want them to report on the matter.

- You must be recognized by the chair.
- Requires a second.
- Is debatable.
- Requires a simple majority to pass.

**7. I have no idea what is going on.**

Make “a parliamentary inquiry,” and ask the chair to explain what is going on.

- Can be made at any time, as long as no one is speaking.

**8. There is some noise, technical difficulty, or other distraction that makes it difficult for me to hear or concentrate.**

Make “a point of privilege,” and explain the interference.

- Can be made at any time, even when someone is speaking.
- The chair decides if a vote is needed on how to address the problem.

**9. I want to motion to do something, but I’m not sure how to do it or if it is in order right now.**

Make a parliamentary inquiry and explain what you want to do to the chair, who should then tell you the proper manner in which to do it.

- Can be made at any time, as long as no one is speaking.
- After the chair explains, you do not have the right to immediately make the motion. You must wait until the chair recognizes you in the normal fashion.

#### **10. I have a question for the person who is speaking.**

Technically, Robert's Rules allows for you make "a point of information" and interrupt a speaker by saying, "Will the speaker yield to a question?" The speaker can then choose to let you ask the question or not. However, it is very impolite to use this in situations with extremely strict time limits, since both the question and the answer will count towards to speaker's time. In such cases, it is best to wait until the speaker is done and then address the chair with your point of inquiry, who then has the right to decide whether or not to allow it.

**Parliamentary procedure is the best way to get things done at Senate meetings; it allows for a democratic, orderly process and a fair airing of ideas. But, it will only work if we use it properly.**

1. Allow motions that are in order.
2. Have members obtain the floor properly.
3. Speak clearly and concisely.
4. Obey the rules of debate.
5. Most importantly, *BE COURTEOUS*. Focus on issues, not personalities. Avoid questioning motives. Be polite.

Adapted from Roberts Rules.org

Revised by A. Middeljans, 01/2022