

USG Meetings —The Douglas Rules of Order

What is Parliamentary Procedure?

Parliamentary procedure is a set of rules designed to move business along in a meeting while maintaining order and controlling the communications process. Its purpose is to help groups accomplish their tasks through an orderly, democratic process. It is intended to facilitate the smooth functioning of the meeting and promote cooperation and harmony among members. The rules of procedure are guidelines, not laws. The important thing is for the group to remain focused on its objectives and reach decisions while allowing everyone to participate and be heard.

Principles of Parliamentary Procedure

Parliamentary procedure is based upon a few simple principles:

- Only one issue may be discussed at a time.
- All members have an equal ability to participate
- No member can speak until recognized by the chairperson.
- Every member can speak to the issue on the floor; however, no one can speak a second time as long as another wants to speak a first time.
- A vote decides an issue.
- The chairperson controls debate.

The Chairperson

The Chairperson has the success or failure of the meeting riding on their shoulders. They should be thoroughly familiar with all the business to be dealt with at the meeting, including reports and business held over from previous meetings. The Chairperson must be sensitive to the physical, informational, and social needs of all members.

In USG the Chairperson has absolute control over the meeting. No one may speak without being recognized by the Chairperson. The Chairperson may impose limits and restrictions on debate as they see fit. This power comes with a great deal of responsibility. The Chair must at all times conduct the meeting professionally and equitably, and must have a familiarity with relevant parliamentary procedure and the agenda.

The Meeting

The Chair is usually responsible for preparing the agenda (the items of business to be discussed) and distributing it to the members at least 24 hours in advance of the meeting. Members may propose agenda items to the chair before the meeting. The following is a typical format for meetings:

- I. Call to Open
- II. Attendance
- III. Reports
- IV. Voting Items
 - a. Approval of the Minutes
- V. Discussion
- VI. Announcements
- VII. Call to Close

Call to Open:

The Chairperson begins the meeting at the published time. Ex: “I call this meeting to open at 7:00 PM”

Attendance:

Attendance is a policy requirement for USG. This is for use by staff Minute Takers, who record what happens at all meetings. The minutes must list the names of those present and absent. In some cases Minute Takers will keep track of members’ late arrivals and/or early departures in the minutes. The Chairperson decides how attendance will be taken.

Reports:

Typically, the Directors, Deputy Directors, Advocacy Coordinators, and other officers will make brief reports on their activities since the last meeting. **When possible, reports should be written.** After an officer presents a report the Chairperson will call for questions for the officer. To make the Minute Taker’s job easier, written reports may be attached later to the meeting’s minutes.

Voting Items:

Voting items will be discussed in the order they appear on the agenda. Items not on the agenda may be added by the Chairperson, otherwise the item cannot be discussed without a motion and a two-thirds vote.

Approval of Minutes from Previous Meeting

Minutes will be sent out, with the agenda, for members to read prior to the meeting. Unless there is a disagreement regarding the minutes, it is not necessary for a motion or a vote to accept the minutes. The chairperson can simply declare them unanimously approved. If there is disagreement, then the group should consider the minutes as though they were legislation.

Discussion:

Discussion is made up of matters of interest to the group that do not require a vote. Items not on the agenda may be added by the Chairperson, otherwise the item cannot be discussed without a motion and a two-thirds vote.

Announcements:

Frequently members and officers may want to make special announcements. These can be made by any member and do not necessarily have to pertain to the business of the group.

Call to Close:

A member can “call to close” to end the meeting even though not all of the business has been finished. A call to close must be seconded and requires a majority vote. If the agenda has been completed or the meeting has exceeded the planned time frame the Chairperson may declare the meeting adjourned without a vote of the group.

Quorum of Members:

Quorum is the number of members that need to be present for official business to occur. Generally, Quorum is decided by the [USG Bylaws](#). If you want to know what Quorum is in your committee, ask the Chairperson.

Making Motions

Most business conducted during a meeting begins with a motion and a second. In general, a motion must be made and seconded before any discussion on the topic can begin. Sometimes, a preliminary discussion occurs prior to the actual motion being made. This gives people time to formulate some opinions and ideas before making the formal motion. This can result in a more precisely worded motion. Motions should be short and precise.

The Steps of A Motion

1. The member makes a motion: "I want/move to . . ."
2. If necessary, the Chairperson asks if there is a second to the motion.
3. The Chairperson repeats the motion. (The chairperson may reword the motion for clarity with the consent of the person who made the motion)
4. The Chairperson opens the floor for discussion. It is customary to allow the person making the motion to speak first and take questions. Members may speak on the issue after being recognized by the Chair. A member may not speak a second time on the issue until all other members have had an opportunity to speak a first time. The Chairperson may choose to impose various limits, such as time restrictions, on debate.
5. When everyone has had an opportunity to speak, the Chairperson should restate the motion and conduct a vote, counting those in favor and against. "All in favor of the motion say 'Aye'." "All opposed, say 'Nay'." "Any Abstentions?"
6. The chairperson announces the results of the vote to the group.

Seconding The Motion: Is It Always Necessary?

In USG the only motions that require a second is the motion to amend and the motion to table. In USG the Chairperson does not need a second on any motion but may still call for one.

Discussing/Debating A Motion

The Chairperson must ensure that the discussion pertains only to the topic at hand. They need to keep the meeting focused and keep everyone clear on exactly what is (and is not) being discussed.

Before anyone can speak, they must be recognized by the Chairperson. **Everyone should have a chance to speak before anyone is given the opportunity to speak a second time.** A major part of the chairperson's job will be clarifying thoughts and ideas and helping members restate what they mean.

When necessary, the chairperson may put time limits on speakers and enact other restrictions.

Often an item will come up in the discussion that is important but not strictly related to the motion on the floor. The Chairperson has the right to call it "out of order" and not discuss it. The Chairperson may take a "straw poll" to determine if the members would rather move to discussing the new point. Sometimes it is best to discuss several alternatives at one time in order to produce the best solution. Be flexible in order to accomplish the task at hand.

Amending A Motion

An amendment is a change to the original motion. Here are two of the more common ways to amend a motion:

1. **Many motions are informally amended while being made.** Before the chairperson formally states the motion, a member may informally offer modifying suggestions to the maker of the motion. The maker may accept or reject the member's recommendations.
2. **After the Chairperson has stated the motion, any member may propose changes to the motion before the motion is voted upon.** The amendment requires a second. The amendment is then debated, and a vote is taken on the amendment to the original motion. It takes a simple majority vote to pass an amendment. After an amendment has been voted on, the discussion of the motion, as amended, continues.

When an amendment is offered, the group must first vote on the amendment before voting on the underlying motion. By voting on an amendment, members are only deciding whether or not to change the underlying motion. Once all amendments are considered, the group still has to take a final vote on the underlying motion itself.

Voting on a Motion

After Discussion has ended and all amendments have been voted on the last thing to do is vote. The Chairperson person will indicate how the vote will be conducted.

Voice Vote

In USG the default voting method in Committees is a voice vote. The Chairperson will call for those in favor to say "Aye" and those opposed to say "Nay" then make a ruling as to if the motion passed. If a member doubts the accuracy of the Chairperson's ruling on the outcome of the vote, the member can call "recount." This requires the chairperson to immediately conduct a vote by a more precise method of the chairperson's choosing. The chairperson will conduct the new vote and announce the vote tally. The result of this tally is final.

Recorded Vote

In Senate and Governing Board meetings the default voting method is a recorded vote. This requires the members to cast a vote that is tied to their name. This serves the function of keeping elected representatives accountable to their Constituents.

Abstentions and Recusals

There are times when a member may feel as though they are not knowledgeable or passionate enough on the topic to cast a vote in favor or against. In these cases, Abstention is appropriate. If a member feels as though they have a conflict of interest, they should recuse themselves by notifying the Chairperson before debate begins and leaving the room until after the vote.

Unanimous Consent

If there is no opposition, the Chairperson can save time voting by obtaining "unanimous consent." This eliminates the need for a vote. If there is any opposition to the motion during debate or objection to the unanimous consent, then some other voting method must be used.

Actions

1. Temporary Recess

A member can ask for an intermission or recess even when another motion is on the floor. A motion to recess must have a second and requires a majority vote. “I call for a recess until 8:30 p.m.” The Chairperson may also declare a recess without a vote of the group.

2. Ayúdeme

Any member can call “Ayúdeme” for any reason that affects their ability to participate in the meeting. Ayúdeme can also be used if a member doesn’t know what’s going on. No second or vote is required. The chairperson then acts, if necessary.

- This motion was coined by Student Development Chairwoman Alexandra Aponte (2019-2020)

3. Table a Motion

When a motion is “tabled,” it is temporarily set aside while other business is considered. A tabled motion can be taken up again during that meeting or the next meeting whenever the majority so decides. The Motion to table should include a time when the group will come back to the issue. A motion to table requires a second and a majority vote.

4. Refer to a Committee

Sometimes a group doesn’t have enough information to make an informed decision or the group is too large to work out the details in a timely manner. Referring the issue to a smaller Committee for a report at a future meeting can be an effective way to move toward a decision on the issue. A motion to “refer” requires a second and a majority vote. It can be debated.

5. Amend a Motion

As discussed previously, many motions being considered by the group can be changed. A motion to amend requires a second. The membership can debate the motion to amend. At the discretion of the Chairperson the amendment itself can be further amended. Most amendments require a majority vote.

6. Withdraw a motion

The person who makes a motion can withdraw it with the consent of the person who seconded it. No vote of the membership is required to withdraw a motion, unless someone objects; then it takes a majority vote to withdraw the motion.

7. Question for the Chair

A member may ask the Chairperson for some information or fact relevant to the current discussion. The chairperson may request an answer from any appropriate member. This is a request for information, not an opportunity to state an opinion or debate a point. The chairperson can rule the request out of order or refer it to another party for clarification.

Conclusion

Don't try to memorize all the aspects of parliamentary procedure. This guide is best used as a reference.

Parliamentary procedure does give the Chairperson a great deal of power over a meeting and its members. The chair must conduct the meeting impartially and stay on top of the agenda. If the Chairperson participates in the debate, they must not abuse the privilege. If necessary, the Chair can avoid the appearance of bias by turning the Chair over to another member before making motions or discussing the issue.

Members also have responsibilities under rules of parliamentary procedure. They have the responsibility to participate in discussions, to listen to and respect the opinions of others, and to stick to the topic at hand.