

Basic Parliamentary Procedure for 4-H Clubs



Sometimes meetings are very chaotic when making group decisions. Everyone talks at once, trying to sway others to their point of view. A basic knowledge of parliamentary procedure can make the group decision process more orderly. It is an important skill young people can use throughout life.

Parliamentary procedure can be used by groups as they conduct their meetings. Parliamentary procedure is practiced in Congress, by county commissioners, school boards, and local fair boards, to name a few groups.

What is Parliamentary Procedure?

It is an organized method for a group to accomplish their goals in an effective, fair and efficient manner. It is:

- **Effective** by providing an orderly way to conduct the group's business and make decisions.
- **Fair** because it is a democratic process for making a decision.
- **Efficient** by keeping the group focused. One item of business is disposed of before going on to another.

Most parliamentary procedure is based on *Robert's Rules of Order*, a book that describes the procedures for conducting items of meeting business.

The Basics

4-H meetings are often the first exposure young people will have to parliamentary procedure. There are volumes of material written

on the fine points of parliamentary procedure, but only the basics are necessary for 90 percent of the business conducted at a local 4-H club meeting. Start with the basics of parliamentary procedure listed here, and then continue to learn by doing.

The Motion

One of the basics of parliamentary procedure is how to move and dispose of a motion. Here are the steps to follow:

1. Recognition by the chair. A member seeks permission to speak to initiate a motion by simply raising his or her hand, or standing, and saying "Mister/Madam President . . ." When the president recognizes the member, that member has the floor and may speak. In a large group, it is a good idea for members to stand when speaking.

2. The motion. A member should say "I move that we buy a 4-H flag." (It is not correct to say, "I make a motion that . . .")

3. Second. The motion must receive a **second** before any discussion begins. A member does not need to be recognized to second a motion but just says, "I second the motion" or simply "Second." Obtaining a second indicates that at least two people favor discussing the motion. If there is no second, the motion is dropped.

4. Discussion. Once the motion has been moved and seconded, its merits can then be discussed. First, the president must recognize a member of the group. The member who is recognized gives reasons –

for or against the motion – to the group. Discussion on a motion may end in three ways: (a) No one says anything, (b) The president decides that there has been adequate discussion or (c) A member says "I call [for] the question" which means that the member wants the motion brought to a vote. In the case of (c), if the motion to call the question is seconded, the president stops the discussion and takes a vote *on the "call the question" motion only*. If the "call" motion passes by a two-thirds majority, discussion on the original motion is stopped and a vote on it is taken. If the motion to call the question fails to receive a two-thirds majority, discussion on the original motion continues.

5. Vote. Some methods of voting include: voice vote (*aye/nay*), a show of hands, standing, roll call or secret ballot. The president should always call for both sides of the vote even if the vote appears to be unanimous. The president announces the result of the vote by saying "The motion passes/fails." A majority (more than half of the members who are present and voting) is generally needed to pass a motion, though some motions need a two-thirds vote to pass.

Amendments

At times members of the group will want to change a motion while it is in the discussion phase. This is called an amendment. It is recommended that only one amendment be permitted per motion. An amendment generally strikes out, adds or substitutes words in the main motion. A

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motion has been moved and seconded and is being discussed. To amend a motion:

1. A group member is recognized by the president to speak, then says, "I move to amend the motion to buy a 4-H flag by adding the words '3 foot by 5 foot.' "

2. A second to this amendment is required.

3. **Discussion** follows and is **only for the amendment**, not the original motion. In the example, members may discuss the merits of a 3 foot by 5 foot 4-H flag, not whether they are to purchase a flag (the original motion).

4. When it is time to vote, the president conducts a vote to determine if the amendment passes. A majority is needed to pass it.

5. **If the amendment passes**, discussion follows on the **motion as amended**. In our example, "I move that we buy a 3 foot by 5 foot 4-H flag."

6. After discussion, a vote is taken on the original motion as amended. A majority is needed for it to pass.

7. **If the amendment does not pass**, discussion on the original motion continues. In our example, this was to "buy a 4-H flag."

8. After the discussion, a vote is taken on the motion. A majority vote is needed for it to pass.

For less formal meetings, such as 4-H club meetings, it may be best to introduce complicated ideas by discussing them before a motion is made. This eliminates the need for most amendments.

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To Postpone or Refer to Committee

Sometimes there is a reason to delay a decision on a motion. For example, there may not be enough information for members to make a decision. Two types of motion are used to handle this situation: 1) Refer the motion to a committee and 2) Postpone a motion to a specific date and time. Both types take a majority vote to pass.

The **motion to refer to a committee** allows the motion under discussion to be researched by a smaller group, which then reports its findings to the larger group. The committee may already exist or may be created specifically to handle the issue at hand.

A motion to refer is offered during discussion of the original motion. It requires a second and allows discussion. It also can be amended if a member wants to change some aspect of it, such as adding a deadline for the committee to report back to the group.

A **motion to postpone** can also be offered during discussion of the original motion. This type of motion can be helpful if the group needs more time or information before it can make a good decision. Such a motion should specify when the original motion should come back before the group for more discussion (such as "at the next meeting after our club show").

A motion to postpone requires a second, allows discussion and can also be amended. If a motion to postpone is adopted, the issue at hand is placed under "unfinished

business" on the agenda of the meeting to which it has been postponed.

Adjournment

Adjournment is used to end the meeting.

1. To adjourn the meeting, a member is recognized by the president and says, "I move that we adjourn." A second is required.

2. There is **no discussion permitted**. The group votes on whether to end the meeting. A majority is needed for the motion to pass.

A motion to adjourn can be made at any time during a meeting, but should not be misused by members to adjourn prematurely when there is important business yet to be addressed.

If you're interested in learning more about parliamentary procedure as a decision-making tool, consider the following resources:

- Michigan 4-H Youth Development. (2008). *Helping you help officers and committees*. (Rev. ed.). East Lansing: Author. <http://web1.msue.msu.edu/4h/>
- National Association of Parliamentarians Web site: <http://www.parliamentarians.org/>
- Robert, H. M., Evans, W. J., Honemann, D. H., & Balch, T. J. (2000). *Robert's rules of order: Newly revised* (10th ed.). Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press.

The information in "Basic Parliamentary Procedure for 4-H Clubs" appears in *Helping You Help Officers and Committees* (4H 1467). It was adapted with permission from the "Ohio State University Fact Sheet 4H-011-99 Parliamentary Procedure," a publication of The Ohio State University Extension.