



Parliamentary Procedures – What They Are and How They Are Used

There are at least two times in every Canadian student's schooling when our government is the primary focus –grade 6 and again in more detail during grade 9. It's rare however when students are taught the nuances of the parliamentary procedure our government uses to conduct its affairs and make decisions. These same procedures are used widely in business as well as personal settings and can provide a valuable life skill for the student.

Parliamentary procedures are important because they ensure:

1. Rights are observed
 - a. The right of the majority to rule
 - b. The right of the minority to be heard
 - c. The right of the individual to participate in the decision-making process

2. Topics for discussion are dealt with one at a time
 - a. Makes sure meetings are conducted in an orderly fashion
 - b. Makes allowances for when something can justifiably and temporarily interrupt a meeting

3. Discussion is relevant to the topic at hand
 - a. Motions are used to indicate which one topic will be discussed next
 - b. Motions can be modified up to twice using something called an amendment; each amendment must relate directly to the main motion
 - c. People speaking to the motion or its amendment speak only to whichever one is active at the moment

4. Balance occurs
 - a. Both positive and negative viewpoints are heard during discussion
 - b. When voting to make a decision occurs, both the agreeing and disagreeing votes are taken

5. Courtesy is observed
 - a. Debate occurs about the topic, not the people in the meeting
 - b. People speak only after being recognized by the person running the meeting
 - c. A person can speak again only after everyone in the room who wishes to speak has been heard

At Toastmasters, we use *Robert's Rules of Order*. These rules or principles help establish the specific processes and behaviours we expect to see when conducting our business meetings. Having rules in place like these provides good guidance for reasonable compromise when everyone does not agree and a mutually understood process to follow should conflict arise.

Making a Main Motion using Parliamentary Procedure

Robert's Rules of Order uses motions to bring a topic forward for discussion by the people at a meeting (the people attending are sometimes called *the assembly*). Only one motion can be discussed at a time – it is called the *main motion*. Each motion is worded in such a way that it will lead to a decision where people will vote to either agree with the motion or disagree with it.

A motion cannot be discussed until someone else agrees to debate the topic. The person making the motion is the Mover while the person agreeing to debate the topic is the Secunder. If no one seconds a motion, then the topic is closed and the meeting moves to the next motion or topic for discussion.

Once two people agree to talk about the motion, debate occurs. The person leading the meeting will call upon the person making the motion to state their opinion about the topic first. The person leading the meeting will then call upon the rest of the assembly to give their opinions. Debate ends after everyone has had an opportunity to express their opinion. The person leading the meeting will call for a vote which will lead to a decision about the topic that the whole assembly will agree to follow.

A Secretary will record all the motions made at the meeting – who moved them and seconded, what the topic was and the outcome of the vote.

The only way to start a motion is to say, "I move..."

For example, "Madam Chairman, I move that we hold our annual picnic outdoors at the Community Centre next Saturday." Pretend Joe seconds this motion.

The person running the meeting – Madam Chairman in this case – would then ask you as the person making the motion to stand and speak about why you agree or disagree with the motion you made. When you are done, the Chairman will let others speak to the motion as she calls upon them. Once discussion ends, the Chairman will call for a vote and people will show that they either agree or disagree with your motion. If they agree, the motion is called *carried* and everyone will agree to abide by this decision from now on. If they disagree, the motion is called *defeated* and will no longer be discussed or abided by. The assembly is now ready for the next topic.

Amending a Main Motion

A main motion can be changed to add more clarity to the topic for debate. The change is called an amendment and must relate to the main motion. Amendments cannot start a new topic and must be made prior to any voting on the main motion.

Like the main motion, someone needs to be the Mover and the Secunder of the amendment. Without two people agreeing to debate the amendment, it cannot be discussed. Once the amendment is seconded, debate about the main motion stops and discussion occurs about the amendment only. For example, let's say Jeffrey made a motion as follows: "Madam Chairman, I move that we hold our annual picnic outdoors at the Community Centre next Saturday." Joe seconds the motion and Jeffrey is asked by the Chairman to give his opinion about the topic. When Jeffrey finishes, you can rise, let the Chairman call you by name, then state, "Madam Chairman, I move to amend the motion by adding the words *weather permitting* to the end of the motion." Clara seconds your motion and the Chairman will ask you to rise to speak to your amendment. Further debate can occur with each member looking to say something unique to the amendment. Once discussion ends, the Chairman will call for a vote and people will show that they either agree or disagree with your amendment. If the amendment is *carried* (accepted) by the assembly, then the motion is restated in its new form ("I move that we hold our annual picnic outdoors at the Community Centre next Saturday weather permitting") and debate continues on the whole motion including the amendment. If the amendment is *defeated*, then debate continues with the main motion as it was originally worded before the amendment was made.

Amending an Amendment to a Main Motion

This is where amendments get tricky but also where they end. You cannot have more than two amendments on a main motion active at the same time so it's important that when you do make an amendment, you include everything you want to say. All of the rules about the first amendment also apply to the amendment to the amendment.

The conditions when you see an amendment to an amendment are as follows:

1. The preceding amendment to the main motion is *defeated* (the majority voted against the motion) but additional clarity is still required. To simplify, amendment #1 is defeated and the motion is standing alone with no proposed changes again. Amendment #2 now becomes the first amendment as it is the only one active (not yet voted on).

For example, if the "weather permitting" amendment is *defeated*, you can still change the main motion ("I move that we hold our annual picnic outdoors at the Community Centre next Saturday") to add more clarity by stating, "I move to amend the motion by adding the words *and move it indoors if the weather is too poor to be outside* to the end of the motion." "Weather permitting" did not indicate what would happen if it rains while "move it indoors" gives a specific course of action for bad weather which makes the two amendments different enough that the second amendment is permitted. If accepted, the changed motion would then read "I move that we hold our annual picnic outdoors at the Community Centre next Saturday and move it indoors if the weather is too poor to be outside."

2. The preceding amendment to the main motion is *carried* (the majority voted to accept the motion) and additional clarity is still required. To simplify, amendment #1 is carried and becomes part of the main motion. Amendment #2 becomes the first amendment now as it is the only one active (not voted yet on).

For example, the amended motion now reads, "I move that we hold our annual picnic outdoors at the Community Centre next Saturday weather permitting" but it's not clear if the picnic is to be held at the community centre just this year or every year from now on. You can change the motion to add more clarity by stating, "I move to amend the motion by adding *and then address whether to hold it there in future years at our next meeting* to the end of the motion." If accepted, the changed motion would then read, "I move that we hold our annual picnic outdoors at the Community Centre next Saturday weather permitting and then address whether to hold it there in future years at our next meeting."

3. The assembly has *not voted yet* on the preceding amendment but additional clarity is still required. To simplify, amendment #1 modifies the main motion and amendment #2 modifies amendment #1. Both amendments are active as neither has been voted on yet.

For example, the motion and the first amendment read together as, "I move that we hold our annual picnic outdoors at the Community Centre next Saturday weather permitting" but it's not clear who is bringing the food for the picnic. You can change the amended motion to add more clarity by stating, "I move to amend the amendment by adding *and each member brings a food item to share* to the end of the motion." If both amendments are accepted, the changed motion would then read "I move that we hold our annual picnic outdoors at the Community Centre next Saturday weather permitting and each member brings a food item to share."

The tricky part comes with the voting for the amendment to the amendment.

The vote is always taken on the last amendment made, regardless of how many came before it. Meaning, if the first amendment has not yet been voted on, then you must vote on the second amendment before you can deal with the first amendment. What happens next to the main motion depends on the outcome of the voting.

- a. If the preceding amendment was carried and the last amendment was carried, then the main motion is changed to include both amendments before the main motion is also voted on.
- b. The last amendment is married to its predecessor amendment, not the main motion so if the last amendment is carried but the amendment that precedes it (the one closest to the motion) is defeated, then the last amendment is also defeated regardless of the its vote having been carried.
- c. If both amendments were defeated, then the main motion remains exactly as it was first stated and is not changed by either amendment.
- d. If the last amendment is defeated and the preceding amendment is carried, then the main motion is amended to include only the preceding amendment.

Further Information:

- District 42 YLP Sources
 - See the District 42 YouTube video on Parliamentary Procedure.
 - See the attachment called “Parliamentary Procedure – Main Motion Diagram.”
 - See the attachment called “Main Motion Script.”
- Internet Sources
 - [Introduction to Robert’s Rules of Order](#)
 - [Fun Ways to Teach Parliamentary Procedures](#)