Parliamentary Procedure 101 by C Kohn, Waterford WI

Parliamentary Procedure is the set of processes by which a proper business meeting is run. It ensures that everyone at a meeting has the opportunity to be heard and have a vote. Most corporations, large organizations, and local, state, and national governments use Parliamentary Procedure for their own meetings.

Below are a few simple procedures from Parli Pro. Read carefully as a group. Then be prepared for a class demonstration.

# Main Motion

**What it is**: a main motion is simply a request to do something as a group.

**Example**: “*I move that our class adopts a kitten for the room.“*

**How to do it**: Begin by asking to be recognized by the chair (“Mr. Chair!”). After being recognized (“The chair recognizes…”), then state your motion: “I move that we \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_”.

**What happens next**: After someone makes a motion to do something, another person has to “second” it. To do this, they simply yell out “Second!”. They do not have to be recognized to do this, but it cannot be the same person that made the motion (if no one else agrees with you, no one else will say “second” and the motion will die).

**How it ends:** after someone seconds a motion, the chair will re-state the motion so that everyone knows what is happening. Then there is an opportunity for debate – usually you will begin by stating whether you are in favor or against that particular idea and why. After everyone has had a chance to argue their case, the chair will bring the idea to a vote. In most cases, if the majority of people are in favor of the idea, it will pass. Either way, the chair should state the outcome and then tap his or her gavel once to make it official.

# Amend a Motion

**What it is**: an addition or change to a motion.

**Example**: “*I move to amend the motion by adding “gray” so that the new main motion reads ‘that our class adopts a GRAY kitten for the room’.”*

**How to do it**: Begin by asking to be recognized by the chair (“Mr. Chair!”). After being recognized (“The chair recognizes…”), then state your amendment: “I move to amend the motion by \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ so that the new motion reads that we \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_”.

**What happens next**: After someone moves to amend a motion, another person has to “second” it. To do this, they simply yell out “Second!”.

**How it ends:** after someone seconds the amendment, the chair will re-state the proposed amendment. Then there is an opportunity for debate – usually you will begin by stating whether you are in favor or against that particular amendment and why. After everyone has had a chance to argue their case, the chair will bring the idea to a vote. The chair should state how the amendment has changed (if it has at all) and then tap his or her gavel once to make it official.

# Take a Recess

**What it is**: to take a break.

**Example**: “*I move to take a 2 minute recess.”*

**How to do it**: Begin by asking to be recognized by the chair (“Mr. Chair!”). After being recognized (“The chair recognizes…”), then state your request: “I move to take a \_\_ minute recess”.

**What happens next**: Another person has to “second” it. To do this, they simply yell out “Second!”.

**How it ends:** after someone seconds the motion for a recess, the chair asks for a vote. If the majority agree to take a recess, the chair taps his or her gavel to make it official and asks the secretary, time keeper, or other official to let him or her know when the requested time has passed. Once it has, the chair will call the meeting back to order by tapping the gavel twice and describing where the meeting left off when the recess began.

# Division of the House

**What it is**: to ask for a re-vote if the vote seems to close to call.

**Example**: *After the voting, Bob yelled “Division”. This forced the chair to do a standing re-vote.*

**How to do it**: Division can be called after the votes not in favor of a motion are cast (usually those in favor say “aye” first, and those opposed say “no” second.) After the No’s, you can yell “Division!” and the chair will have to do a re-vote (usually by having those in favor stand and counting them and then repeating the process with those opposed).

**What happens next**: The chair must count both those in favor and those opposed one by one. Then the chair should re-state the actual count for those in favor vs. those opposed (e.g. “With 10 in favor and 9 opposed, the motion passes”).

**How it ends:** after the chair has restated an official count, the matter is settled. He or she should tap the gavel once and then state what has happened (“With 10 in favor and 9 opposed, the motion passes. We will buy a kitten for the classroom.”).

# Refer to a Committee

**What it is**: to have a small group of people work outside the meeting to figure out the details for a complicated motion that does not have to be decided in that same meeting.

**Example**: “*Mr. Chair, I move to refer this motion to a committee.”*

**How to do it**: Begin by asking to be recognized by the chair (“Mr. Chair!”). After being recognized (“The chair recognizes…”), then state your amendment: “I move to refer this motion to a committee.”

**What happens next**: Another person has to “second” it. To do this, they simply yell out “Second!”.

**How it ends:** after someone seconds the amendment, the chair will re-state the proposed motion. Then there is an opportunity for debate – usually you will begin by stating whether you are in favor or against referring to a committee and why. After everyone has had a chance to argue their case, the chair will bring the idea to a vote. The chair should state if the motion to refer to a committee has passed and then tap his or her gavel once to make it official.

# Lay on the Table

**What it is**: to “freeze” a motion where it is until a later meeting.

**Example**: “*Mr. Chair, I move to lay on the table the motion for the class to get a gray cat.”*

**How to do it**: Begin by asking to be recognized by the chair (“Mr. Chair!”). After being recognized (“The chair recognizes…”), then state: “I move to lay on the table the motion to .”

**What happens next**: The chair will state that there has been a motion to lay the motion on the table and request a second.

**How it ends:** if there is a second, the motion to lay the motion on the table will proceed. If the majority agrees, then the original motion is “frozen” until it is taken from the table at a later meeting (Mr. Chair, I move to take from the table the motion to “. A second and a majority vote is required to take a motion from the table).

# Rise to a Point of Order

**What it is**: to interrupt the meeting due to call attention to an error

**Example**: “*Mr. Chair, I rise to a point of order.”*

**How to do it**: You do not have to wait to be recognized – you can simply stand and loudly say, “Mr. Chair, I rise to a point of order!”

**What happens next**: The chair will recognize that a point of order has been called and will ask you to state your point.

**How it ends:** after the person who rises to a point of order has stated the error, the chair will re-state what was argued by that person and then state if the point is in order or out of order. If the point of order is “in order”, then the chair will take action to correct the mistake. If the point of order was “out of order”, then the meeting will continue where it was prior to the point of order being called.

# Call Previous Question

**What it is**: to end debate and force a motion to a vote.

**Example**: “*Mr. Chair, I call previous question.”*

**How to do it**: Typically, a person can yell “Question!” when the chair asks for any debate. Or, the person can wait to be recognized by the chair and state, “Mr. Chair, I call previous question.”

**What happens next**: The chair will recognize that previous question has been called and announce it to the meeting.

**How it ends:** after the chair announces previous question has been called, he or she will ask for a second. If it is seconded, it will immediately proceed to a vote. If 2/3’s of the meeting attendees vote in favor of calling previous question, the debate immediately ends and the motion proceeds to a vote.

# Adjourn

**What it is**: to end the meeting.

**Example**: “*Mr. Chair, I move to adjourn this meeting.”*

**How to do it**: Begin by asking to be recognized by the chair (“Mr. Chair!”). After being recognized (“The chair recognizes…”), then state your amendment: “I move to adjourn this meeting.”

**What happens next**: Another person has to “second” it. To do this, they simply yell out “Second!”.

**How it ends:** The chair will bring the motion to adjourn to a vote. If the majority agrees, the chair will state: “Meeting adjourned” and will tap the gavel once to signal the end of the meeting.