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# **Parliamentary Procedures For School Boards**



**Missouri School Boards Association**

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**Based on**  
***Robert 's Rules of Order Newly Revised***  
**(11th Edition)**

# Quick Parliamentary Quiz

## True/False Questions

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. The mover of a motion can speak against his/her own motion.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. A motion is before the assembly when it has been moved and seconded.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. The motion to “lay on the table” is used to kill a motion without a direct vote on it.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Amendments can be applied to any motion regardless of whether or not they are germane.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. The minutes of a meeting must be approved by the use of a motion, a second, and a majority vote of the assembly.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. “Majority” means “one more than half.”
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. The person seconding a motion must, by definition, be in favor of the motion being seconded.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. A presiding officer should say “**you are out of order**” when ruling that a motion offered by a member is not in order at the time according to the parliamentary situation.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. When an election is conducted for a position on a board where six people have been nominated, if no one receives a majority vote, it is proper to drop off all but the top two candidates and hold a run-off election.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. A quorum is always a majority of the members in any parliamentary assembly.

## THE HANDLING OF A MOTION

The handling of a motion varies according to condition. However, normally the following six steps are essential:

1. A member makes the motion.
  - ▶ A MEMBER must be recognized by the chair before MAKING a motion.
  - ▶ Common form: *"I move that \_\_\_\_\_."*
2. Another member seconds the motion.
  - ▶ It is not necessary to be recognized prior to seconding a motion.
  - ▶ The name of the member who seconds a motion is NOT recorded in the minutes.
  - ▶ Common form: *"Second" or "I second the motion."*
3. The Chair states the question, i.e., states the exact question and indicates that it is open to debate.
  - ▶ Common form: *"It has been moved and seconded that \_\_\_\_\_. Is there any discussion?"*
4. The members debate the motion.
  - ▶ Each member must be recognized before SPEAKING TO the motion.
  - ▶ Discussion is strictly limited to the motion on the floor.
  - ▶ All debate is directed to the chair or through the chair to other members. Members never speak directly to one another.
  - ▶ Ordinarily, each member may speak only twice on the same motion, and each speech is limited to 10 minutes. The organization may adopt other rules that limit debate.
5. The Chair puts the question, i.e., takes the vote.
  - ▶ The affirmative vote is taken first, then the negative.
  - ▶ Abstentions are not counted.
  - ▶ A majority vote means a majority of those who vote for or against a motion. Members present but not voting are not counted. A majority is MORE THAN HALF.
  - ▶ The chair votes only when THE CHAIR'S vote WOULD affect the results, i.e., to make or break a tie vote.
6. The Chair announces the results of the vote.
  - ▶ The vote on any motion is not considered final until the chair has done this.

# AMENDMENTS

## GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS:

1. Amendments, like main motions, require a second, are amendable, are debatable, and require a majority vote.
2. An amendment should be stated so that indicates exactly what is being done to the main motion.
3. An amendment must always be handled before voting on the motion to which it was applied.

## EXAMPLES OF VARIOUS TYPES OF AMENDMENTS:

**MAIN MOTION:** *"That we sponsor a delegate to NSBA Convention in March."*

Amendment by STRIKING OUT: *"I move to amend the main motion by striking out the words 'in March.'" (Such an amendment would be useful if the exact dates of the convention are not known.)*

Amendment by ADDITION (or insertion): *"I move to amend the main motion by adding at the end of the word 'providing' however that this board shall not be responsible for expenses in excess of \$150.00."*

Amendment by STRIKING OUT AND INSERTING: *"I move to amend the main motion by striking out the words 'a delegate' and inserting the words 'two delegates.'"*

All of the above are examples of **PRIMARY** (first degree) amendments, because they apply directly to the main motion stated above.

## SECONDARY AMENDMENTS

A **SECONDARY** (second degree) amendment is one that applies to another amendment. A **SECONDARY** amendment could be applied to the above amendment by addition, as follows:

SECONDARY AMENDMENT: *"I move to amend the amendment by striking out '\$150' and inserting '\$100.'"*

**Amendments of the THIRD DEGREE are not permitted**, but an unlimited number of primary and secondary amendments can be made. However, no more than one primary and one secondary amendment can be proposed at a time.

## SUBSTITUTE MOTION

Whenever it is desired to change the wording of a motion so substantially that several amendments would be required, a substitute motion may be used. A **substitute motion has the same status as a primary amendment**, but the procedures for handling it are somewhat different. Both the main motion and the proposed substitute are opened to amendment. Then when both have been PERFECTED, a vote is taken on whether the substitute will replace the main motion. Finally, the vote is taken on the adoption of the final motion (which may be either the proposed substitute or the original main motion.)

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**EXAMPLE:** *"That we encourage all of our members to attend the NSBA Convention."* (This is a logical substitute for the main motion stated above. It deals with the same topic--attendance at the National Convention--but proposes a completely different course of action.)

## Motions, Motions, Motions

The use of parliamentary procedure is meant to facilitate the conducting of business in organizations. The purpose is not to make the rules more important than the purpose of the organization. Therefore, it is necessary for the presiding officer to use good judgment in the application of *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised (10th Edition)*. [RONR]

General Henry M. Robert himself often said that many parliamentary rules could and should be modified for small organizations. It is important to keep the procedure simple, but fair.

### HANDLING MOTIONS:

The subject that confuses small organizations the most is the process of handling motions. It is important that business of the organization be formalized through this process because the members will then have a clear understanding from the meeting and/or the minutes, of what has occurred. Furthermore, the procedure focuses on one decision at a time and allows for several ways to deal with each cause.

A subject is introduced to the meeting by a member making a "**main motion**." Most motions must be seconded. Before any discussion takes place, the chair will then state the motion and indicate that it is open to discussion. During discussion, only motions affecting the original motion or the general conduct of the meeting may be made. The main motion may be **amended** (by majority vote), **referred** to a committee (by a majority vote), or **postponed** (by majority or 2/3rds). These are debatable motions in themselves and each can also be amended.

The motion to "**lay the pending motion on the table**" (*temporarily set aside because something more urgent has come up*) or the motion on the previous question (*close debate and force an immediate vote on the issues at hand*) are not debatable. A matter may be laid on the table by majority vote and taken from the table by a majority vote. The motion on the previous question always requires a 2/3rds vote.

### VOTING:

Voting in small organizations can take place by "**unanimous consent**" (no member objecting). This is most often used on routine or non-controversial items such as approval of the minutes. The presiding officer says, "**If there is no objection,**" and pauses to allow any possible objection, then proceeds to declare the decision.

Voting is usually done by **show of hands** in a school board of seven because every member can see every other member.

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Roll call votes are required to go into **Executive Session** and for any votes taken in Executive Session.

A **counted vote** or a **roll call vote** can be ordered by the chair or by a majority of the members.

In public bodies, **secret ballot votes** are not allowed by the Open Meetings Act – for further information please consult the MSBA Attorneys.)

## **OTHER PROCEDURAL MOTIONS:**

There are several other procedures which are commonly used in small organizations such as:

1. Point of Order
2. Point of Information
3. Parliamentary Inquiry
4. A Question of Privilege
5. Appeal From the Decision of the Chair

The most common of these is the **Point of Order**. If a member feels that the rules of the assembly are not be observed, the member may "Raise a Point of Order." This requires the chair to make a ruling as to whether the point is "well taken" or "not well taken." Then, if the member disagrees with the decision of the chair, the member may "**appeal from the decision of the chair.**" If this is done, it will take a majority opposed to the decision of the chair to reverse it.

If a member wants to get information, the member raises a **point of information**.

If a member needs help with parliamentary procedure, the member raises a **point of parliamentary inquiry**.

If a member feels that the comfort of the assembly or anything else is interfering with the decision making process, the member can raise a **point of privilege** and ask the chair to correct the situation.

## **AGENDA AND MEETING DURATION:**

Other motions can be used to affect the agenda and the duration of the meeting. If the agenda is not being followed correctly a member can "**call for the order of the day**," which is a request that the presider return to the approved agenda.

If the assembly wishes to take a short intermission in its proceedings it can vote to **recess** (majority vote) and if it wishes to end the session, it can vote to **adjourn** (majority vote).

If the assembly wishes to set up another meeting to continue the business of the present meeting it can "**fix the time to which adjourn.**" In this case the meeting so set up is a legal continuation of the present meeting.

## Issues of Particular Importance to School Boards

1. A good school board uses parliamentary procedure as a **tool to assist in the efficient transaction of business**, not as a weapon to frustrate the opposition.
  - Courtesy and service
  - Agreement of parliamentary principles before problems develop
2. Assuring good public input **does not mean that patrons can interrupt the meeting** at any time they wish to. The members of board are the only ones with a right and responsibility to speak and vote at meetings. Public input is a privilege granted by the board in open meetings, not a right held by patrons.
3. When a motion is offered, be particular about the wording. The item of business before the assembly is the **wording, not the concept**.
  - Avoid "I so move."
  - After a report by a superintendent or staff member, a full and complete motion should be offered.
4. When desiring to change the substance of a motion before the board, remember that **amendments are "changes in wording"** and not conceptual changes.
5. Agree in advance on any **special rules or order** to be used by the board outside of the ordinary parliamentary rules. **RONR (11<sup>th</sup> Edition), Pages 487 & 488** indicates the following "simplified rules for small boards and committees." These adjustments to the normal rules should be **used only on the advanced agreement of the board adopted in a board policy**.
  - ▶ Members are not required to obtain the floor before making motions or speaking, which they can do while seated.
  - ▶ Motions need not be seconded.
  - ▶ There is no limit to the number of times a member can speak to a question, and motions to close or limit debate generally should not be entertained.
  - ▶ Informal discussion of a subject is permitted while no motion is pending.
  - ▶ Sometimes when a proposal is perfectly clear to all present, a vote can be taken without a motion's having been introduced. Unless agreed to by unanimous consent, however, all proposed actions of a board must be approved by vote under the same rules as in other assemblies, except that a vote can be taken initially by a show of hands, which is often a better method in such meetings.
  - ▶ The chair need not rise while putting questions to vote.
  - ▶ The chair can speak in discussion without rising or leaving the chair; and, subject to rule or custom within the particular board (which should be uniformly followed regardless of how many members are present), he usually can make motions and usually vote on all questions.

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6. Using “**consent agenda**” works well, if the items on them are REALLY routine and non-controversial.
7. **Minutes:** Be sure to accurately record “**what was done and NOT what was said**” in the minutes of a board meeting. Also be sure to approve all minutes at the next meeting. Open Meetings Act requires minutes of open sessions to record “all motions.” Executive Session minutes should do this, but also do more summarizing of discussion in case an issue arises as to whether the board violated the Open Meetings Act while in Executive Session.
8. Using **informal consideration** can ease the process of coming to agreement and then allow for the board to move back into formal consideration.