

VFW EDUCATION & TRAINING SERIES

Parliamentary Procedure - 101



VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS

NO ONE DOES MORE FOR VETERANS.

Parliamentary Procedure

The object of all parliamentary procedure is to get things accomplished in an orderly manner, to take things up one at a time, and dispose of them in the shortest time possible, at the same time in a democratic fashion.

When only the Presiding Officer or Chairman knows Parliamentary Procedure, he can use it to his advantage, but when most of the body also understands the rules, the “Floor” actually controls the meeting, and the “Chair” simply directs it.

If you get in the habit of using the right terms, everybody will understand matters more readily. Note the expressions which appear in boldface type throughout this text.

When a meeting is called to order by the **CHAIR, AN AGENDA, OR ORDER OF BUSINESS**, is offered for approval, or should be offered. Once the agenda is approved, the meeting is technically limited to the **POINTS** included. We usually take care of other matters and “beefs” under the “**GOOD OF THE VFW**”. If no agenda is offered, ask for it. If certain points you are interested in do not appear to be included, rise and either inquire about them or **MOVE** to add them to the agenda.

The business of a meeting is carried forward by **MOTIONS**. The object of all motions is to get things done in an orderly manner, and democratically. A motion is **MADE** from the **DEBATE ON THE QUESTION**.

In actual practice, there is usually some debate before the motion. Debate without a motion often becomes aimless, and should be limited.

In debating, or **SPEAKING ON A MOTION**, no member should be allowed to speak twice before others have had it once. Speaking on a motion is also called **TAKING THE FLOOR**.



Motions must be made on the subject involved, or the **POINT ON THE AGENDA**, which is being taken up. If a motion is made on some other subject, the chair is obliged to rule the maker of the motion **OUT OF ORDER** and **REFER THE QUESTION** to the proper place on the agenda.

Motions must be seconded to be entitled to debate. If the motion is not seconded, the chair is obliged to point out that there has been no second, and proceed with the meeting.

The chair is not supposed to “milk” the membership for a second because he/she wants one, but it is proper to allow enough time for a second, when required.

Debate before a motion has been made can always be stopped by someone **MAKING A MOTION**. Once a motion has been made and seconded, it must be **DISPOSED OF**, either by being **DEFEATED, PASSED, TABLED, REFERRED, or PLACED IN COMMITTEE**. All of these are covered further in the text.

Except for certain **PRIVILEGED MOTIONS**, which will be explained later also, a motion cannot be placed while there is a **PREVIOUS MOTION** on the floor.

Recognition

In making a motion, or **MOVING**, the member should rise, face the chair, and signal or call for attention in a manner which will not disrupt the meeting. Once **RECOGNIZED** by the chair, the **SPEAKER** should first state his or her name and department, so such information can be **RECORDED IN THE MINUTES**.

In other democratic bodies, it is proper to say “Mr. Chairman,” “Madame Chairman,” etc., but in the VFW, it is more proper to say “My Comrade(s)” or “Comrade Commander”



Once a motion has been **MADE**, it is the duty of the chair to repeat it in order that everyone hears it, and also to **CLARIFY** it, if it was made in confused language.

Before we proceed further with motions, let us remove some of the misunderstanding concerning **WITHDRAWING A MOTION**.

Withdrawing

Before a motion has been **STATED BY THE CHAIR**, its maker has the right to **WITHDRAW** it, or modify the language. But, after it has been stated by the chair, the maker cannot withdraw or modify his/her motion without the **CONSENT OF THE ASSEMBLY**. After a motion has been stated by the chair, it belongs to the assembly.

It is also out of order to ask for the consent of the **SECONDER** to the withdrawal of a motion the seconder can only withdraw their second if the motion has been changed informally after they have seconded it.

It is **IN ORDER** for anyone to ask the maker of a motion to withdraw it, through the chair. But the maker does not have to comply. In brief, once a motion is made, seconded and stated by the chair, it cannot be withdrawn without the chair getting the consent of the assembly (usually by asking if there are any objections to the withdrawal). When a motion has gone that far, it must be disposed of by being tabled, referred, defeated, passed, etc., by vote.

When a motion has been withdrawn, it is treated as though it had never been made, and is not recorded in the minutes. Further, anyone can make the same motion again. The object of withdrawing a motion is to prevent it from being voted on and appearing in the minutes.

Once a motion has been duly made, seconded and is on the floor, it is subject to **AMENDMENT**. (Note: certain motions are not amendable and will be covered later on.)



The object of an amendment is to change or modify the original motion, without destroying the sense of it. For instance, if there was a motion on the floor to hold a picnic, it could be amended to add a date or a place, but it could not be amended to change the affair from a picnic to a bowling match.

Amendments should take the form of: inserting or adding words to the motion; striking out words; substituting words or sentences. The chair is obliged to rule out of order any proposed amendment which would do more than the above, and change the sense of the motion entirely.

In some cases, where a poorly worded motion is made, even the amendment does not make it a complete motion in some of the members' eyes. In such cases, an amendment can be made to the first amendment. This **SECOND DEGREE AMENDMENT** method is sometimes confusing, but it is legitimate, and it is up to the chair to clarify the motion and its amendments.

If it is too complicated for this, the chair can call for or recommend a **SUBSTITUTE MOTION**, with the consent of the assembly, which will tie the loose ends together so that an intelligent vote may be taken. A substitute motion is itself a form of amendment.

Amendments to motions are **DEBATABLE** (that is, can be discussed). Like motions, amendments also require seconding. Discussion on an amendment must be confined to the amendment itself.

In **TAKING THE VOTE**, after debate, the amendment is first voted upon, and then the motion itself is voted upon. Sometimes, the nature of the amendment is such that passing or defeating the amendment **CARRIES** or **DEFEATS** the motion also. In that event, it is not necessary to take a vote on the motion.

Before proceeding into further study on motions, it might be well to give some attention to the **MINUTES**.



The **MINUTES OF A MEETING** are simply a record of the proceedings of that particular meeting. As such, they can only be **ACCEPTED BY THE BODY**. In short, the general membership can only **ACCEPT** minutes of the membership meetings, the executive board can only accept its own minutes, etc. Upon reading of the minutes of a given meeting, they are subject to a motion to accept. Sometimes, **CORRECTIONS** are raised, and then the minutes are **ACCEPTED AS CORRECTED**.

Being simply the record of proceedings, minutes may be corrected at any time, including subsequent meetings.

Minutes shall record all main motions which were not withdrawn, all points of order, all appeals and whether lost or sustained. The makers of motions should be recorded, but not necessarily the seconders.

The date, time, and place of the meeting, as well as the time of adjournment should be in the minutes. Also the results of any **ROLL CALL** votes, and full report of **TELLERS**. (Tellers are members elected or appointed to tally ballot.)

Minutes cannot be **REJECTED**, but they can be **RETURNED FOR CORRECTION**. When the minutes of an executive board meeting are read at a membership meeting, it is only for general information, not acceptance or correction.

However, having been thus advised, the membership can take action at the meeting to censure or approve their board.

This, of course, is done through motions at the proper time on the agenda. The membership should be alerted to do this, and be certain not to allow any top body to exercise undemocratic control.

In connection with minutes, it is important to know that **ACCEPTING A REPORT** is the same as adopting it. **RECEIVING A REPORT** merely allows it to be read to the assembly. Receiving does not mean approving or adopting. Accepting does! In making motions on reports, the assembly should understand the distinction in the above two words.



Deferring

Once a matter has been duly placed on the floor through motion and seconded, it may become necessary to defer or postpone action. This can be done democratically by the assembly in several ways, in addition to withdrawing the motion, which we have already covered.

TABLING: A motion to **TABLE** is a motion to lay aside business in such a manner that it can be **RENEWED** at a later time—either at the same meeting or a later one. A motion to table requires a second. Once seconded, the motion to table cannot be either debated or amended, but **MUST BE PUT TO IMMEDIATE VOTE WITHOUT DISCUSSION.**

When it is desired to resume the matter which was tabled, the correct motion is to “**TAKE FROM THE TABLE.**” This motion must be seconded, and is also not subject to debate or amendment. When a matter is taken from the table, it is taken with all previous actions, amendments, etc., and resumed just as it was when tabled. Tabling a motion or matter does not carry a time limit. That kind of postponement is handled as follows:

- **POSTPONE TO A SET TIME:** When the object is to set a future time at which a matter or motion must be considered, do not move to table. Instead, move to **POSTPONE** to a set time, date, or meeting. A motion to so **POSTPONE CONSIDERATION** requires a second. It **CAN BE DEBATED** before being voted on, and can be amended as to the time.
- **PLACE IN COMMITTEE:** When it is desired to let a few handle a given matter, instead of tying up the whole meeting needlessly, this is done by **COMMITTING** or **PLACING IN COMMITTEE** through a properly worded motion.
- **POSTPONE INDEFINITELY:** A motion to **POSTPONE INDEFINITELY** is really a motion to **KILL** the subject. It must be seconded, can be debated, but cannot be amended.

These motions are dangerous, and must be watched with care when they come up. They can not only help to carry the meeting along—they can also wreck consideration of important subjects.



Appeals to Overrule Chair

The Chairman of a meeting or the “Chair” has certain rights, but they do not include engineering the meeting, or “railroading” certain matters through. A decision of the chair can always be subjected to change through **APPEAL**.

When a member rises to appeal a decision of the chair, their motion can be either to **APPEAL THE DECISION**, or to **OVERRIDE THE CHAIR**—they both have the same meaning.

Under such circumstances, the member should state carefully and in understandable language why he/she is making the motion. The motion requires a second.

Technically, the motion to appeal the decision of the chair is debatable when the question involved is the **BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE**, and not debatable otherwise. It is simplest, and perfectly fair, to always handle an appeal without a debate. The decision of the chair stands, until reversed by a majority vote. A tie vote **SUSTAINS THE CHAIR**.

Members should not rise to criticize the chair. If they have an objection to a **RULING**, it should always be handled through an appeal.

A sensible chairman should not take an appeal personally, but should welcome it, since it relieves them of the responsibility and places it upon the assemblage. Sustained, they are that much more confident in their chairmanship.

The chair is supposed to be the “servant of the assembly,” and as such should refrain from discussing questions before the assembly, thus maintaining an impartial attitude.

The chair cannot authorize anyone to act in their place if they are absent from the meeting. If the By-Laws do not cover that contingency, the assembly has the duty to elect an acting chairman.



The Question of Privilege

The **QUESTION OF PRIVILEGE** is often interpreted to mean “I am a privileged person, and have the right to the floor again.” The only privilege involved is the privilege of getting the attention of the chair at once to **ASK A QUESTION, MAKE A POINT OF ORDER**, or draw attention to the pressing business which cannot wait. When rising on a question of privilege, you do not wait for recognition from the chair; you **INTERRUPT** by stating “I rise to a point of inquiry (or order, or procedure).” The chair is **OBLIGED** to recognize you, answering: “state your question.”

- Rising to a “point of procedure” means that you question the procedure the chair is following—you feel they are off the track, acting contrary to **REGULAR PROCEDURE**.
- Rising to a “point of order” usually means that you feel some member of the assembly, rather than the chair is off the track, and you want the chair to take action.
- Rising on other “questions of privilege” usually involves drawing attention to conduct or misconduct of members, comfort of members, conduct of press or guests, etc. All such interruptions are loosely included in the term “question of privilege.”

If the chair sees the point you are making, they state, “the point is well taken,” and follows it. If the chair does not, they state his/her reason, and the way is open or an appeal to be taken, if necessary.

AND THIS IS IMPORTANT! Even though the chair is obliged to recognize the above questions of privilege, the assembly is not. As the book states it, “privilege of assembly out-ranks personal privilege.” A chronic interrupter can thus be silenced by a proper motion.

While a question of privilege requires no second, gets no debate, and is not amendable, the action desired may be deferred until the speaker is finished, and may also be tabled or postponed indefinitely. In the latter case, the question interrupted is not carried with a tabling or postponement motion.



Renewal & Reconsideration

Much confusion exists as to bringing up a point again, or trying to get a matter reconsidered. There are simple rules covering these things.

Renew a Motion

The object of this action would be to bring up a motion again after it has been defeated. The rule is:

A rejected motion cannot be renewed at the same session. It can be renewed by the same maker at a future session. Further, no motion can be introduced that is so nearly like a rejected motion that it would **PLACE THE SAME QUESTION BEFORE THE HOUSE** a second time. Also, no motion can be introduced which interferes with a motion which has been tabled, postponed, or placed in committee.

Reconsider a Motion

The object of this action would be to bring back a question for more discussion, and obtain a new vote. Such a motion can only be made by a member **WHO VOTED WITH THE PREVAILING SIDE** on the previous vote! Such a motion must receive a second, and can be debated, but not amended.

If reconsideration carries, the result is just as though the original vote had not been taken.

Should such motions be brought up, and you feel the reason is a bad one, don't forget to use the "question of privilege."

It is a good thing for the most sincere members of the VFW to know the rules, and thus be prepared to keep the meeting on a true course.

Voting

Voting is normally by voice. If the result is not clear, the chair should ask for a standing vote.

Other methods of voting are: **DIVISION OF THE HOUSE, SECRET BALLOT**, or **ROLL CALL** of the assembly.

This short course was specifically designed to acquaint members with only the rudiments of parliamentary procedure, and is therefore, brief in coverage.



How To Manipulate Motions For Passage Or Defeat

(Read across the page. Read 1 with 1, 2 with 2, etc.)

To help defeat a motion:

1. Do not second it. Remain silent.
2. Speak against it while it is before the body.
3. Vote against it.
4. Move to postpone it indefinitely to “kill” it.
5. Amend it adversely to encumber it or complicate it.
6. Move to refer it to a committee to delay it.
7. Move to postpone it to the next meeting to delay it.
8. Move to the previous question to shut off debate on its good points.
9. Move to table it.
10. Move to recess to go after more votes.
11. If their motion wins, move to reconsider it.
12. If their successful motion remains unexecuted by a later meeting, then move to rescind it.
13. Move to adjourn, so as to prevent action on their motion at this meeting.
14. Only votes win. Get your voters to the meeting. Urge them to stay to the end and vote as you or another key leader will vote.

To help pass a motion:

1. Second it immediately. Say: “I second it.”
2. Speak in favor of it while it is still before the body.
3. Vote for it.
4. Vote against postponing it to rescue it.
5. Amend it sensibly to perfect it or improve it.
6. Vote against referring it, to achieve action now.
7. Vote down all postponements that delay it.
8. Defeat the previous question so you can continue to debate its meritorious points.
9. Vote against tabling it.
10. Defeat recess so they may not go seeking more votes.
11. Vote against their motion to reconsider your motion.
12. Execute motions promptly, so that they may not be subject to the motion to rescind at any later meeting.
13. Vote down all motions to adjourn, so as to achieve adoption of your motion now.
14. It is votes that win elections and other proceedings at meetings and conventions. Have your supporters there to help you with their votes.



To Presiding Officers

The presiding officer is the servant of the organization.

All his/her acts at meetings and conventions must have the body's approval, unless a by-law makes them independent.

Presiding officers who are ignorant of parliamentary law or who defy the body's will or deny to the members the proper exercise of their rights are a sad spectacle before intelligent assemblies and frequently cause discontent and disunity.

Capable presiding officers make good meetings.

Incompetent, abusive or obnoxious presiding officers can be censured; and their tenure of office can be shortened or abolished altogether by a 2/3 vote, and thus they may be legislated out of office at any meeting with prior notice.

You are not expected to know all the law, but you are expected to be able to at least match the members' combined basic knowledge of it.

Handy Phrases for Members

- Comrade Commander, or, Mr. President, or, Madam Chairman, etc.
- I doubt the quorum.
- I doubt the vote.
- I move that we ...
- I rise to a point of order.
- I move that we adopt this resolution: Resolved, That ...
- A parliamentary inquiry.
- I move to amend the motion.
- Comrade Commander, will the member yield the floor to me?
- I do not yield, or, I yield to a question only, or, I yield.



Handy Phrases for Presiding Officers

- The meeting will be in order.
- The secretary will read the ...
- The first [or, the next] business in order is...
- The Chair requests order.
- The Chair requests quiet.
- The Chair can recognize only one member at a time; all other members will be seated.
- The Chair now recognizes ...
- For what purpose does the member [delegate] rise?
- State your name, city, etc.
- The motion is [or, is not] in order.
- Do you yield the floor?
- The member will refrain from...
- The Chair wishes to state ...
- Please repeat your motion.
- It is moved and seconded that we ...
- It is moved and seconded to amend the motion by ...
- The ayes have it; the amendment is carried, now, the vote is on the motion as amended.
- Those in favor will say aye. Those opposed will say no. The ayes [or, noes] have it.
- If there is no objection, the Chair will ...



Parliamentary Procedure... at a glance, from Demeter’s Manual of Parliamentary Law and Order. Here are some motions you might make, how to make them, and what to expect of the rules.

TO DO THIS:	YOU SAY THIS:	DO YOU NEED A SECOND?	IS IT DEBATABLE?	CAN IT BE AMENDED?	WHAT VOTE IS NEEDED?	CAN IT BE RECONSIDERED?
ADJOURN MEETING	“I move that we adjourn”	YES	NO	NO	MAJORITY	NO
CALL AN INTERMISSION	“I move that we recess for ...”	YES	NO	YES	MAJORITY	NO
COMPLAIN ABOUT HEAT, NOISE, ETC.	“I rise to a question of privilege”	NO	NO	NO	NO VOTE	NO
TEMPORARILY SUSPEND CONSIDERATION OF AN ISSUE	“I move to table the motion”	YES	NO	NO	MAJORITY	NO (1)
END DEBATE AND AMENDMENTS	“I move the previous question”	YES	NO	NO	2/3	YES
POSTPONE DISCUSSION FOR A CERTAIN TIME	“I move to postpone the discussion until...”	YES	YES	YES	MAJORITY	YES
GIVE CLOSER STUDY OF SOMETHING	“I move to refer the matter to committee”	YES	YES	YES	MAJORITY	YES (2)
AMEND A MOTION	“I move to amend the motion by ...”	YES	YES (3)	YES	MAJORITY	YES
INTRODUCE BUSINESS (MAIN MOTIONS)	“I move that ...”	YES	YES	YES	MAJORITY	YES
PROTEST BREACH OF RULES OR CONDUCT	“I rise to a point of order”	NO	NO	NO	NO VOTE (4)	NO
VOTE ON A RULING OF THE CHAIR	“I appeal from the chair’s decision”	YES	YES	NO	MAJORITY (5)	YES

Footnotes: (1) Unless vote on question is not yet taken. (2) Unless the committee has already taken up the subject. (3) Only if the motion to be amended is debatable. (4) Except in doubtful cases. (5) A majority vote in negative needed to reverse ruling of chair.



SUSPEND RULES TEMPORARILY	"I move to suspend rules so that ..."	YES	NO	NO	2/3	NO
AVOID CONSIDERING AN IMPROPER MATTER	"I object to consideration of this motion"	NO	NO	NO	2/3 (6)	NO (7)
VERIFY A VOICE VOTE BY HAVING MEMBERS STAND	"I call for a division" or "Division!"	NO	NO	NO	NO VOTE	NO
REQUEST INFORMATION	"Point of information"	NO	NO	NO	NO VOTE	NO
TAKE UP MATTER PREVIOUSLY TABLED	"I move to take from the table ..."	YES	NO	NO	MAJORITY	NO
RECONSIDER A HASTY ACTION	"I move to reconsider the vote on ..."	YES	(8)	NO	MAJORITY	NO
ACCEPT REPORTS OF COMMITTEES	"I move to accept the report of committee as read."	YES	YES	YES	MAJORITY	YES
CLOSE NOMINATIONS OR THE POLLS	"I move that nominations close."	YES	NO	YES	2/3	NO
POSTPONE INDEFINITELY (TO KILL)	"I move that we postpone the motion to ... indefinitely."	YES	YES	NO	MAJORITY	YES
REOPEN NOMINATION OR THE POLLS	"I move that nominations be reopened."	YES	NO	YES	MAJORITY	YES
RESCIND	"I move that we rescind the motion."	YES	YES	YES	2/3	YES
WITHDRAW A MOTION OR SECOND	"I withdraw my motion."	NO	NO	NO	NO VOTE	NO

Footnotes: (6) A 2/3 vote in negative needed to prevent consideration of main motion. (7) Only if the main question or motion was not, in fact, considered. (8) Only if motion to be reconsidered is debatable

Demeter's Manual of Parliamentary Law and Procedure (#4105) is available from the VFW Store at 800-821-2606 or www.vfwstore.org

