

The background of the cover features a blue-tinted image of a pair of scales of justice and a wooden gavel resting on a wooden surface. The scales are positioned in the upper half, and the gavel is in the lower half, both slightly out of focus. The overall aesthetic is professional and legal.

BECOMING AND BEING A SUNY PARLIAMENTARIAN

A Resource Guide for SUNY Campus Parliamentarians

Sharon F. Cramer, Parliamentarian Emerita, SUNY University Faculty Senate

Maryann Faller (SUNY Adirondack)

Slade Gellin (SUNY Buffalo State)

Amy Rosen-Brand (SUNY Buffalo State)

**Becoming and Being a SUNY Parliamentarian:
A resource guide
for SUNY Campus Parliamentarians
Spring 2020**

By Sharon F. Cramer, Ph.D.
Parliamentarian Emerita, SUNY University Faculty Senate
Maryann Faller (SUNY Adirondack)
Slade Gellin (Buffalo State) and
Amy Rosen-Brand (Buffalo State)

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Section 1: Introduction

Introduction: Welcome to UFS and FCCC Parliamentarians

Assisting an organization to achieve its goals is comparable to laying out the network of transportation within a geographic area. Signage must be clear and visible. A single strict formula (all roads must be either parallel or at right angles to each other) would never meet the diversity of needs of travelers – drivers, bikers, walkers. Geographic variations also must be considered. Similarly, the function of an effective parliamentarian is to provide guidance to the organization's leader, so that the members of the organization come to understand how to communicate respectfully, resolve differences of opinion, and take action.

Your role as parliamentarian (or as one who is considering becoming a parliamentarian) is to assist the organization's members to be efficient, focused and outcome oriented. There are certain conventions followed (either very strictly or in a more relaxed manner) that, when conveyed by you to the organization's leader, can help all to come away from meetings feeling that they have been heard, and that their time has been well spent.

Within SUNY, campus governance bodies as well as the overarching units (the Faculty Council of Community Colleges and the SUNY University Faculty Senate) typically follow *Robert's Rules* (most current edition, now the 11th) as the guide for running successful meetings. Appendices 1 and 2 provide the most commonly used parliamentary procedures; Appendix 3 gives you observations about the value of the role of the parliamentarian.

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However, in addition to the “rules of the road” you will need to know (many of which are described in Appendix 4), there are other aspects of being a helpful and effective parliamentarian. This guidebook has been developed by individuals who have served as either governance leaders, parliamentarians, or both within SUNY. We have, through experience, found ways to anticipate and address the challenges you may face in meetings. Ideally, after reading through it, you will be better prepared to handle difficulties, and to lay the groundwork for avoiding them in the future.

We hope that our thoughts and suggestions will enable you to think about your role in new ways, and to lay out a parliamentary network within your organization. Take time to enjoy considering or reconsidering your responsibilities: what do you have to lose?

Question 1: Why do organizations need parliamentarians?

As indicated in the introductory portions of *Robert’s Rules of Order*, parliamentary procedures are intended to offer all members of a governance body (1) clarity about procedures and (2) equal opportunities for participation. When standardized procedures are not used, or are unknown by all, a small group of members can exert control over process. This can lead to a distorted process of decision-making. The parliamentarian is a resource person to facilitate the use of standardized procedures.

The parliamentarian can be a resource to enable the leader to focus on the content of the meeting. The parliamentarian can keep track of the details of running a meeting (e.g., if the time spent on a topic is extending beyond what is planned, if a motion needs to be seconded, if a vote needs to be taken on a motion) and quietly speak (or write a note) to the presiding officer. This frees the presiding officer up considerably.

Although it may seem labor-intensive to teach, and learn, parliamentary procedures, they can enable members to conduct business efficiently and fairly. This is in part possible because the published documents outlining *Robert’s Rules of Order* offer detailed analysis of almost every governance challenge that an organization might face. Routines are examined, as are unusual circumstances.

There is an additional benefit to learning parliamentary procedures. When an individual joins a new governance organization, s/he is able to quickly understand the expectations and norms, if parliamentary procedures are used.

Governance bodies are representative democratic institutions, and one of the major functions of the rules is to ensure that the will of the body is best expressed, following full, and free discussion. The parliamentarian is absolutely necessary in that context, the impartial judge to guide the presiding officer, who with the very best of intentions, may lose sight of the larger importance of their work – collective decision-making. This is a luxury the parliamentarian cannot afford. And that is the beauty of this service, it keeps us honest and allied to the highest goals of academic discourse.

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Overall, there are good reasons to incorporate standard parliamentary procedures into any governance organization. This includes (as discussed elsewhere in this guide) instructing new members, offering resources that summarize typical strategies (offered as appendices to this guide), and presence of a parliamentarian at meetings.

Section 2: **What you need to know:**

Question 2: *What operationally defines serving as a Parliamentarian?*

Operational Definition: A parliamentarian is an expert in the formal rules and procedures of deliberative assemblies. The parliamentarian not only advises the chair of the governance body, but also serves all members of that body on matters of parliamentary procedure.

It is important for the parliamentarian to well-versed in *Robert's Rules of Order*, as well as thoroughly familiar with the governance body's by-laws and constitution. Remember, the rules for order in the governance body's constitution and bylaws always take precedence.

Additional responsibilities: In addition to advising the presiding officer and members of the governance body during a meeting, and providing formal parliamentary opinions about questions on procedure, the parliamentarian has several other duties.

- Attend all governance body and executive committee meetings and other committee meetings as necessary or as requested by the presiding officer.
- Maintain a current copy of the governance body's constitution and bylaws and stay well-versed in Robert's Rules of Order.
- Keep track of motions to assist the presiding officer and secretary during meetings.
- Be a resource for/help interpret results of elections.
- Provide workshops to train members of the governance body on parliamentary procedure.
- Provide advice to members of the governance body during committee meetings.
- Serve as a resource to auxiliary organizations (e.g., campus governing bodies).

Question 3: *How is the Parliamentarian appointed?*

Appointment: The parliamentarian is generally appointed by the presiding officer in consultation with the governance body's executive committee. Ideally, the process, as well as term of office, are included in the governing documents of the governance body.

When seeking a parliamentarian, the organization can be well served if there is a past or present member, familiar with the bylaws of the governance body, who is

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willing and able to serve as a qualified and well-informed parliamentarian. If no such individual is available, there are national organizations (e.g., the National Association of Parliamentarians, <http://www.parliamentarians.org>) that can provide lists of certified parliamentarians available to be hired for meetings. If this latter approach is used, as it is in rare instances, the individual would not be expected to be fully familiar with the governance body's governing documents, so a member of the body's bylaws, or governance, committee would need to be prepared to serve in that capacity.

Question 4: *What are the Parliamentarian's core resources, and what are the Top Ten Things every parliamentarian should know?*

Core Resources:

In addition to *Robert's Rules of Order*, 11th edition (hard copy), the current version of your governance body's bylaws, standing rules, and other governing documents, a parliamentarian in the SUNY system should have read (and have saved in electronic format) the current *Policies of the SUNY Board of Trustees*. A parliamentarian should also be familiar with the minutes of the previous meeting. Particularly for a new parliamentarian, going back through the previous year's minutes, and reviewing motions, will help to provide a feel of what is "precedent" within your governance body

Things every Parliamentarian should know

- A. How to become bi-lingual -- translate "parliamentarian speak" into English, and also learn to speak "Robert's." (This will enable you to make use of the oddities of the index in the text of *Robert's Rules of Order*, essential since the 11th edition is not available electronically.)
- B. Where to quickly look things up (e.g., when a two-thirds/super-majority vote is needed, what motions are debatable, what motions aren't amendable, etc.) during a meeting (see resource at the end of this guide). Keeping a chart that contains this information with you during meetings will be handy. Several versions of the chart are available as indices at the back of this guide.
- C. How you can best communicate with the current presiding officer (prior to, during, and following a meeting) regarding process issues

Presiding officer and parliamentarian should know (in general):

- your own constitution/bylaws
- Parliamentary Procedures (P: 60%, C: 40%)
- political landscape/locations of minefields

Presiding officer and parliamentarian should know (for each meeting):

- motions that are to be presented and/or voted upon
- motions that might be coming from the floor
- the politics of upcoming issues (to the greatest extent possible)

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- Work out potential logistical problems in advance (together and/or with key members of the Executive Committee)

D. One's own style of educating and providing information to all others (to the presiding officer, executive committee, members of the unit/governance body).

Important differences between role of presiding officer and parliamentarian

- Only the presiding officer can/should ask if there are any questions.
- All comments, statements, and questions should be directed to the presiding officer, not to other members of the governance body;
- If multiple hands are raised, presiding officer should make eye contact with each, write down names in order, read the list of names periodically, presiding officer should call on people in order, so hands do not have to remain raised. Parliamentarian can help point out raised hands presiding officer might not see.
- Only members of the body can speak during discussions, unless the presiding officer determines that a person present in the chamber can contribute to the conversation. (Ask, "Unless there is any objection..."). Usual procedure: no one can speak twice unless everyone who wants to has spoken first. (exceptions: points of privilege, which are listed in resource at the end of this guide.)

E. How to handle mistakes, and how to curb those of your own worst instincts, which might intrude on being effective.

F. How to use your modesty, humility, sense of humor, and sense of perspective to assist others to govern wisely and/or have effective, productive meetings

Question 5: *What boundaries should govern the input of the Parliamentarian?*

As stated earlier in this guide, the role of the parliamentarian is to advise the presiding officer and members of the governance body.

Though you may possess an opinion about the topic under discussion, the rules for order are not debatable. A parliamentarian must be impartial with respect to the rules of order. Your job is to ensure that those rules are followed.

Should a member of the governance body raise a concern or a "point of order," this should be addressed to the presiding officer. The presiding officer will then look to you for an opinion regarding the legitimacy of the specific "point" that was raised. You should not offer your opinion prior to that point, nor offer an opinion about the matter under consideration. The presiding officer has the final decision as to whether there has been a violation of the rules of order. The governance body can make a motion to overturn that decision. Once again, the rules of order must be followed during this time.

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You should have a rationale based on the rules for order as stated in the governance body's constitution, bylaws or *Robert's Rules of Order* for every opinion you offer. You should be prepared to cite those documents if necessary. If you need time to research a question during a meeting, ask for it: it is better to hold the meeting up for a short time than to provide an unfounded or incorrect answer.

Generally, the parliamentarian does not speak directly to the body, unless asked to do so by the presiding officer. If so wished, the parliamentarian can ask for time before the end of a meeting to further explain or clarify a ruling. This should be done after advance approval by the presiding officer. Such a strategy can better inform members of the body, so that they become increasingly knowledgeable about the parliamentary process.

Question 6: *How should the Parliamentarian provide advice to the Governance leader during formal meetings, points of order, etc.?*

The presiding officer and the parliamentarian should have a good working relationship.

Before meetings: They should meet to review the agenda for an upcoming meeting and identify contentious items, which should be discussed so that you can be prepared.

A helpful strategy to use, the day before a meeting, is to ask the presiding officer, "Is there anything you are concerned about for tomorrow's meeting?" This offers time for consideration of potential problems – logistical, process, or personality-oriented – to be identified and discussed.

During meetings: You should be seated next to or near the presiding officer, so you can easily be consulted should a situation concerning the rules of order arises. Consultation with the presiding officer should be done inconspicuously.

If you notice a breach in the rules of order, you should signal the presiding officer. The presiding officer should then consult with you discretely and make a decision as to whether a breach has occurred.

Some parliamentarians prefer to pass notes to the presiding officer, while others prefer to make brief comments.

Section 3: Strategy and Practice

Question 7: *What should you consider when providing advice to members of the organization outside formal meetings?*

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A good parliamentarian's work does not begin with the call to order and end with the passage of a motion to adjourn at a meeting. The parliamentarian is a reference to the entire organization at all times.

Prior to a meeting a committee is usually charged with formulating an agenda for the meeting. The parliamentarian should be aware of and review those motions that have been placed on the agenda. Are they stated well? What kind of amendments can be accepted within the scope of the motion? Of course, one cannot anticipate all that may happen. The chair, who is probably more aware of the politics of the motion, may be concerned about certain actions that may be forthcoming from certain members of the body, and needs parliamentary advice on how to handle them. The parliamentarian should help formulate a plan for this eventuality.

After a meeting, there may be a need to explain to the body certain parliamentary actions that were taken and why. It is appropriate in these cases for the parliamentarian to summarize the parliamentary actions taken, why they were correct (or, possibly, incorrect), and what, if any, further action may be required.

Over time, a good parliamentarian will be recognized by the organization for being knowledgeable and fair. As a result, (s)he will receive requests for parliamentary advice from other members of the organization, and, eventually, from individuals outside the organization: chairs of committees, both inside and outside the organization; members formulating motions; constituents who may belong to other organizations that have meetings; and student organizations, to name a few. If a parliamentarian enjoys the "job", (s)he will not mind taking the time to answer these requests with a few paragraphs in an email. Sometimes, the question will require more detailed knowledge and will require some research. A good parliamentarian enjoys the intellectual challenge and the satisfaction of getting it right.

Question 8: *What is the best way for the Parliamentarian to work with the organization's Bylaws/Governance Committee?*

As has been mentioned several times in this guide, the bylaws of the organization take precedence over anything *Robert's Rules of Order* may suggest. Accordingly, thorough knowledge of the current bylaws can be more of a prized skill for the parliamentarian than his/her facility with *Robert's Rules*.

It is most helpful for individuals who become parliamentarians for their organization to have served on that organization's bylaws committee. As a result, the parliamentarian has an appreciation for the interpretation of these bylaws and the extent to which the organization is actually following them; there is also a perspective on what self-governing policies require a bylaws change.

This expertise, along with the ability to advise the committee on how to present bylaws changes to the organization as a whole, makes the parliamentarian an important resource to the committee. While the individual serving as the parliamentarian may

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continue as a regular member of the committee (and, thus, with voting privileges), it is recommended that the parliamentarian become an *ex officio* member of the committee without voting privileges in keeping with the role of an unbiased resource.

A relationship between bylaws leadership and the parliamentarian is critical. Questions about issues in the organization that involve the bylaws are usually directed to the chair of the bylaws committee. While this chair should also be an expert in the bylaws, having a parliamentarian who can give a historically interpretive and/or a procedural perspective on the issue can formulate a unified position for the response. The result is that the body will have great confidence in the work of the committee knowing that this process is being followed.

Section 4: The Bigger Picture

When you get stuck: where to go for help

One of the benefits of being part of SUNY is having access to parliamentarians at other comparable SUNY institutions (e.g., members of FCCC or UFS), as well as the individual serving as the parliamentarian of the FCCC or the UFS. If the problem you are facing has to do with your institution's bylaws, or to elections, these would be excellent resources for you to use.

If you have a question related to *Robert's Rules*, or an interpretation of parliamentary procedure, consider posting a question to the "Robert's Rules of Order Forum." The dialogue that ensues when a question is posted can be less than perfectly clear, and often are contradictory. However, individuals responding are extremely well versed with regard to *Robert's Rules*. Input gained through responses can be very helpful.

<https://robertsrules.forumflash.com>

You and your presiding officer (and executive committee) may find yourself in a circumstance when an outside expert opinion is needed. If so, and your budget permits, you may choose to seek out a "professional registered parliamentarian." A resource list is available at <https://www.parliamentarians.org/prp-search/>

Succession planning

Inasmuch many campus leaders thrive on continual committee involvement, there are times, such as retirements, illnesses and other outside commitment necessitate leadership adjustment. Succession planning is not always at the forefront, but it is important for some potential eventualities. In addition to the seated Parliamentarian, who serves at the pleasure of the chair of the body, there need to be others who are familiar with parliamentarian duties and can step in if needed.

In some cases, a replacement person might be needed on a temporary basis, in advance of the eventual transition from current to future parliamentarian. Biannual training is a good way to reach out to the campus community to gauge interest in this

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area of service and provide a program to develop future parliamentarians. In the world of parliamentary service, having a plan B or plan C is in order.

To sum up, there are dual arenas of knowledge with which the ideal parliamentarian has to be familiar: (1) the bylaws of the organization and (2) policies and procedures described in *Robert's Rules of Order*. In addition, the Parliamentarian serves as a trusted advisor, which requires sensitivity to difficult topics, understanding of interpersonal complexities, and ability to provide counsel effectively.

Ideally, individuals serving on governance committees on the campus would be attentive to the responsibilities of/need for the role of parliamentarian. When holding and passing the parliamentary torch, do everything possible so that the transition process from one parliamentarian to the next will be undertaken with attention and care. In this way, the governance organization can continue to seamlessly accomplish its mission.

Purpose	Sample Wording	Interrupt Speaker?	Seconded?	Debatable?	Amendable?	Vote Needed?	Comments
Amend Order of Business during meeting or session	"I move that we amend the agenda to . . ." or "I move for a special order"	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Two-thirds	Debate should be limited to wisdom of changing the agenda
Obtain Information on appropriate motion, parliamentary situation, effect of motion, etc.	"Parliamentary inquiry" or "I have a question" or "Point of Order."	Yes	No	No	No	No vote; chair states opinion	Better not to use "Point of Order" (see "Object . . ." above)
Debate	[Varies; speaker may specify "for" or "against" or chair may characterize to keep balance in debate-speaker may not speak against own motion]	No	Not applicable	Not applicable	Not applicable	Not applicable	Debate only on issue under discussion; speak once only but second time if all others have spoken; not used to respond to others
Introduce business item (main or primary motion)	"I move that . . ."	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority	
Amend a motion	"I move to amend by . . ."	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority	Proposal must be germane; may reverse the intent except for bylaw amendments.
Amend proposed amendment to motion	"I move to amend by . . ." or "I move to modify the amendment by . . ."	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority	As 'Amend,' above; no further amendments until this one is disposed of
Postpone consideration to a definite time	"I move to postpone consideration until . . ."	No	Yes	Only the "wisdom" is debatable	Yes	Majority	
Have something studied further	"I move that we refer this matter to . . ." a committee, board, officers, other; "Commit" or "recommit" may be used	No	Yes	Only the "wisdom" is debatable	Yes	Majority	Amendment may change referee or may add instructions

Purpose	Sample Wording	Interrupt Speaker?	Seconded? ?	Debatable ?	Amendable ?	Vote Needed?	Comments
Suspend consideration (temporarily)	"I move that we table this motion"	No	Yes	No	No	Majority	Not to be used to defeat
Take up tabled matter	"I move that we take from the table the motion to . . ."	No	Yes	No	No	Majority	Only on same day or next day; otherwise falls to the floor
"Friendly Amendment"	"I would like to propose a friendly amendment"	No	see comment	see comment	see comment	see Comment	New in Robert's 10th. Original maker has say only before debate has begun; after, group must agree or otherwise is treated as ordinary amendment
Withdraw a motion	"I would like to withdraw the motion"	No	see comment	see comment	see Comment	see comment	Original maker has say only before chair states motion; unanimous consent or majority vote required after motion is on floor
Dispose of a matter without taking a position ("kill diplomatically")	"I move that we postpone consideration of this question indefinitely"	No	Yes	Yes	No	Majority	Debate can include discussion of substance of original motion
Vote on ruling of chair	"I appeal the ruling of the chair" (must be done before next item of Business is taken up)	Yes; see comment	Yes	see comment	No	Majority in negative to overrule chair's ruling	Debatable except for speech rules, order of business, or if pending motion is not debatable. Motion always stated in positive, "to sustain the ruling of the chair"
End debate	"I move that we close debate" or "I move the previous question"	No	Yes	No	No	Two-thirds	
Modify previous action Or bring issue up again (at same meeting or on next day of business	"I move that we reconsider the Motion that..."	Only before speaker begins to speak	Yes	Both "wisdom" and substance debatable; best limited to	No	Majority	Motion can only be made by someone on prevailing Side of original vote

Purpose	Sample Wording	Interrupt Speaker?	Seconded?	Debatable?	Amendable?	Vote Needed?	Comments
Session)				“wisdom” of reconsidering			
Modify previous action or bring issue up again (at any time but usually at later time)	“I move that we rescind...” or “I move that we amend something previously adopted, the motion that...”	No	Yes	Both “wisdom” and substance are debatable	Yes	Majority with prior notice; two-thirds without notice; but two-thirds if scope of prior notice expanded	

Robert's Rules of Order Motions Chart

Part 1, Main Motions. These motions are listed in order of precedence. A motion can be introduced if it is higher on the chart than the pending motion.
 § indicates the section from Robert's Rules.

§	PURPOSE:	YOU SAY:	INTERRUPT?	2ND?	DEBATE?	AMEND?	VOTE?
§21	Close meeting	I move to adjourn	No	Yes	No	No	Majority
§20	Take break	I move to recess for ...	No	Yes	No	Yes	Majority
§19	Register complaint	I rise to a question of privilege	Yes	No	No	No	None
§18	Make follow agenda	I call for the orders of the day	Yes	No	No	No	None
§17	Lay aside temporarily	I move to lay the question on the table	No	Yes	No	No	Majority
§16	Close debate	I move the previous question	No	Yes	No	No	2/3
§15	Limit or extend debate	I move that debate be limited to ...	No	Yes	No	Yes	2/3
§14	Postpone to a certain time	I move to postpone the motion to ...	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority
§13	Refer to committee	I move to refer the motion to ...	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority
§12	Modify wording of motion	I move to amend the motion by ...	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority
§11	Kill main motion	I move that the motion be postponed indefinitely	No	Yes	Yes	No	Majority
§10	Bring business before assembly (a main motion)	I move that [or "to"] ...	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority

Part 2, Incidental Motions. No order of precedence. These motions arise incidentally and are decided immediately.

§	PURPOSE:	YOU SAY:	INTERRUPT?	2ND?	DEBATE?	AMEND?	VOTE?
§23	Enforce rules	Point of Order	Yes	No	No	No	None
§24	Submit matter to assembly	I appeal from the decision of the chair	Yes	Yes	Varies	No	Majority
§25	Suspend rules	I move to suspend the rules	No	Yes	No	No	2/3
§26	Avoid main motion altogether	I object to the consideration of the question	Yes	No	No	No	2/3
§27	Divide motion	I move to divide the question	No	Yes	No	Yes	Majority
§29	Demand a rising vote	I move for a rising vote	Yes	No	No	No	None
§33	Parliamentary law question	Parliamentary inquiry	Yes if urgent	No	No	No	None
§33	Request for information	Point of information	Yes if urgent	No	No	No	None

Part 3, Motions That Bring a Question Again Before the Assembly.

No order of precedence. Introduce only when nothing else is pending.

§	PURPOSE:	YOU SAY:	INTERRUPT?	2ND?	DEBATE?	AMEND?	VOTE?
§34	Take matter from table	I move to take from the table ...	No	Yes	No	No	Majority
§35	Cancel previous action	I move to rescind ...	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	2/3 or Majority with notice
§37	Reconsider motion	I move to reconsider ...	No	Yes	Varies	No	Majority



BUFFALO STATE

The State University of New York

Wisdom from SUNY Governance Leaders About Parliamentarians

Thoughts as to the importance of having a good parliamentarian by your side

David Carson, Past Chair, College Senate, Buffalo State

I always thought that the Chair's most important work came between meetings, not during them. During a meeting, the Chair essentially plays the role of traffic cop, making sure there is a smooth flow of discussion and action, and that all the work that had taken place between meetings is related to the body for consideration and action. The parliamentarian is vital in knowing all the traffic rules and helping the Chair keep the flow moving.

Sharon Cramer, SUNY University Faculty Senate Parliamentarian and Past Chair, College Senate, Buffalo State

Just like orchestras without conductors, it is possible for governance bodies, departments, and other organizations to function without parliamentarians. But why should they? The burden then falls to the chair and the members to attend to process plus content. Niggling questions (“Does this need a second?” “Does this vote require a super-majority/two-thirds for approval?” “Did I recognize everyone whose hand was up?”) plague the leader of the meeting, distracting from the content of the topic under discussion. A parliamentarian, like the concertmaster violin, takes on a unique role that emerges from the individual’s style, the knowledge/confidence (regarding Robert’s Rules of Order and other matters) of the chair of the meeting, and the needs of the organization. Although the parliamentarian can be almost invisible, an organization breathes easier when a competent parliamentarian is in the house.

Henry S. Flax, Parliamentarian-elect, SUNY University Faculty Senate

The importance of a parliamentarian is to ensure that there is one person in the meeting concentrating on the **process** of governance, while the members of the assembly focus on the content of the proceedings. This way the meeting does not end without motions passed; responsibilities clearly delineated.

Slade Gellin, Buffalo State College Senate Parliamentarian

A good parliamentarian will have your back when the going gets complex.

Gwen Kay, President, SUNY University Faculty Senate

A good parliamentarian knows what should happen and can ensure that it does. A great parliamentarian makes suggestions and corrections gently (and, in the best instances I've seen, quietly). Like most of life, most people know the general rules for a meeting, but when there's a sticky issue or a procedural question, it's essential to have someone who actually knows what the body ought to be doing. It helps keep things "clean," also less personal/more process-oriented.

Peter L. K. Knuepfer, Past President, SUNY University Faculty Senate, Past Parliamentarian for one of Binghamton's Faculty Senate chairs

Parliamentary procedure is ideally a tool to enable a body to operate effectively and collegially to accomplish business. It can also be mis-used as a cudgel by some to advance their own agenda by "cleverly" making motions to impede, shut off (or even dominate) discussion, realign motions in their own direction, interrupt

others, etc. Thus, a good parliamentarian is essential for a body to operate effectively, as that person ideally provides dispassionate objectivity.

Joe Marren, Chair, College Senate, Buffalo State

How important is a parliamentarian? Personally, I wouldn't step into any shared governance meeting without one.

Amy McMillan, Past Chair, College Senate, Buffalo State

The Parliamentarian is essential for a good and fair meeting. This person, ideally, is a neutral voice; one that is there to assure that membership have a fair discussion and follow reasonable courtesies. This can be very important when there are issues that raise some ire! Also, they keep track of where the discussion, amendments, votes, etc. are so that the chair can concentrate on the bigger picture discussion.

Ken O'Brien, Past President, SUNY University Faculty Senate

I'll speak only for myself, who I think had the well-earned rep of being an inordinately "active" chair of a meeting. So, I relied on my parliamentarians, especially Sharon, to keep me honest. She knew that what I really wanted, more than any specific result, was to have the will of the body over which I was presiding accurately expressed and full (which is not "repetitive") discussion of the issues at hand.

So, one important, and in my case crucial, role of the parliamentarian was to keep the chair honest.

A second, and much more critical in most circumstances, was to ensure that the rules or order, which were established to facilitate open discussion, were not high-jacked by those who hearing the way the discussion was moving (against their position) would try to use Roberts as a tool to subvert the expressed will of the body.

Howard Reid, Past Chair (three different times), College Senate, Buffalo State

You need someone who is unbiased and who knows the rules to assist the chair and the body through challenging times. And during a meeting the chair is often simultaneously thinking about/dealing with numerous issues – the parliamentarian can stay focused, and thus is invaluable.

Advice for new parliamentarians

Sharon Cramer, SUNY University Faculty Senate Parliamentarian and Past Chair, College Senate, Buffalo State

Add "educate" to your role description. In addition to learning the ropes yourself, teach others (the group's leader and members) what you are doing and why. Robert's Rules of Order is a language you will learn to speak, but you can teach others, too, to become bilingual. By the end of each year you serve, you should learn (and so should they) at least one new rule or practice. By the end of a decade, all of you will be wiser. It is a privilege to serve as parliamentarian -- I hope you enjoy it as much as I have.

Henry S. Flax, Parliamentarian-elect, SUNY University Faculty Senate

The best advice I have for new parliamentarians - shadow an experienced parliamentarian prior to beginning your term of office to learn how that person has assisted the organization as well as to understand the organizational culture. Some groups are highly formal in their approach to governance, others more laissez-faire. Focus on the organization's bylaws; this is the most important document. Robert's Rules should be used for guidance with "gray areas", not as a "gotcha" to "chill" debate.

Slade Gellin, Buffalo State College Senate Parliamentarian

Be patient with yourself. You will make mistakes at first. Eventually, you will define and get comfortable in your role.

Gwen Kay, President, SUNY University Faculty Senate

Be confident and know that pausing to look things up in Robert's Rules of Order (RRoO) is always acceptable: we trust the parliamentarian to "get it right" and if that means double-checking versus relying on

memory, we'd much rather have a check instead of an error that is discovered later. Parliamentarians are invaluable during difficult discussions or times of crisis, when doing things correctly is critical.

Peter L. K. Knuepfer, Past President, SUNY University Faculty Senate, Past Parliamentarian for one of Binghamton's Faculty Senate chairs

A parliamentarian needs to be familiar with the most common procedures, which allow debate, which require a super-majority, etc. But my own main advice is not to over-use Roberts Rules--to remember that they are a set of tools to enable a body to conduct its business, but that sometimes a little flexibility can go a long way toward having that succeed.

Joe Marren, Chair, College Senate, Buffalo State

A piece of advice? Always take a few minutes to talk to the parliamentarian about any upcoming issues. This can be done in the time just before a meeting, or earlier if the potential issue may be complicated.

Amy McMillan, Past Chair, College Senate, Buffalo State

Advice: talk to the chair before each meeting to make sure you both are aware of what might happen during the meeting.

Ken O'Brien, Past President, SUNY University Faculty Senate

What does this have to do with training? Simply this.... many smart folks attend our meetings, most with strongly held opinions on almost everything, and the parliamentarian is necessary to keep the business of the meeting moving forward by the established rules of discourse. So, s/he absolutely must know those rules, and work with the chair to ensure that the result of any discussion is in fact the will of the body, not matter how slim the majority may be.

Howard Reid, Past Chair (three different times), College Senate, Buffalo State

My piece of advice for a new parliamentarian: Before a meeting think through what is likely to happen during the meeting and what problems might occur – and then have a solution ready for each issue that might arise. Of course, the unforeseen may occur, but you will have thought through the most likely issues. And enjoy that you don't have to worry about actually voting on difficult issues!

A Guide to Parliamentary Procedure and Robert’s Rules of Order

Compiled from previous materials of the Faculty Council of Community Colleges
by Jon Grennan¹ (Sullivan CC) - *Notes by Michael Delaney (Erie CC) 2015*

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¹ Jon Grennan is now Director, Library and Information Services at the Conrad N. Hilton Library, Culinary Institute of America.

Parliamentary Procedures and Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised

Overview

Parliamentary procedure is the established set of rules and customs that governs the meetings and operations of a deliberative body, which is a group that meets to decide on actions to be taken. The name comes from the English Parliament in which the basic content of the rules was developed over several centuries. Parliamentary procedure protects the right of the majority to decide, the right of the minority to be heard, and the rights of individual members & absentees.

Henry Martyn Robert (1837-1923), engineer and U.S. Army brigadier general, published the first edition of his *Robert's Rules of Order* in 1876. This manual, currently known as *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised*, is now in its 11th edition (2011).

Why Is Parliamentary Procedure Important?

Parliamentary procedure is a time tested method of conducting business at meetings and public gatherings. It can be adapted to fit the needs of any organization. Today, Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised is the basic handbook of operation for most clubs, organizations and other groups. So, it is important that everyone know these basic rules!

What is the Purpose of Robert's Rules? (RobertsRules.com and RobertsRules.org)

It provides common rules and procedures for deliberation and debate in order to place the whole membership on the same footing and speaking the same language. The conduct of all business is controlled by the general will of the whole membership—the right of the deliberate majority to decide. Complementary is the right of at least a strong minority to require the majority to be deliberate—to act according to its considered judgment after a full and fair “working through” of the issues involved.

Robert's Rules provides for constructive and democratic meetings, to help, not hinder, the business of the assembly. Under no circumstances should “undue strictness” be allowed to intimidate members or limit full participation.

Ultimately, the assembly rules—they have the final say on everything! The fundamental right of deliberative assemblies requires all questions to be thoroughly discussed before taking action! So, make sure your voice is heard—silence implies consent!

Typical Order of Business

Organizations using parliamentary procedure usually follow a fixed order of business.

Below is a typical example:

1. Call to order
2. Roll call of members present
3. Reading of minutes of last meeting
4. Officers reports
5. Committee reports
6. Special orders
 - a. Such as important business previously designated for consideration at this meeting
7. Unfinished business (Old Business)
8. New business
9. Announcements
10. Adjournment

The agenda and all committee reports are merely recommendations! When presented to the assembly and the question is stated, debate begins and changes can occur!

A deviation from the agenda requires a “Suspending the Rules” motion.

Using Robert’s Rules Effectively (RobertsRules.com and RobertsRules.org)

Robert’s Rules is a set of rules for conduct at meetings, which allow everyone to be heard and to make decisions without confusion. But it will only work if you use it properly:

1. Allow motions that are in order.
2. Have members obtain the floor properly.
3. Speak clearly and concisely.
4. Obey the rules of debate.

And most importantly, **BE COURTEOUS!**

Ten Basic Rules of Parliamentary Procedure (Zimmerman)

1. The rights of the organization (as expressed in its constitution/bylaws and in Robert's Rules) supersede the rights of individual members.
2. All members are equal, and their rights are equal.
3. A quorum must be present to conduct business. (A quorum is a majority of members unless otherwise specified in the constitution/bylaws.)
4. The majority rules.
5. Silence equals consent.
6. Two-thirds vote rule (to end debate, to limit or take away the rights of other members, or to change something already decided).
7. One question at a time and one speaker at a time. (*Note – it is “out of order” to discuss issues unrelated to the motion on the floor while a motion is being debated - MD.*)
8. Debatable motions must receive full debate.
9. Once a question is decided, it is “out of order” to bring up the same motion or one essentially like it at the same meeting.
10. Personal remarks in debate are always out of order.

(Note –One might add: 11. The Chair is the arbiter of every procedural question. The Parliamentarian advises the Chair as to procedure but does not make rulings. All statements by the assembly members are addressed to the Chair, not to other members. The Chair recognizes all speakers and relinquishes his/her role only when appointing another person to act as Chair. Unrecognized speakers may be ruled “out of order.”)

Making and Voting on Motions

What Is A “Motion?”

The method used by members to express themselves is in the form of moving motions.

A motion is a proposal that the entire membership take action or a stand on an issue.

Individual members can:

- Make/move motions,
- Second motions,
- Debate motions, and
- Vote on motions.

Types of Motions

1. **Main** motions: Proposals that certain actions be taken or opinions expressed by the organization. (Main motions require a second to be considered by the assembly except when they come from a committee.)
2. **Secondary** motions: Motions that can be made while a main motion is on the floor and before it has been decided.
 - a. **Subsidiary** motions: Motions that relate directly to the main motion being considered.
 - i. Amend (insert, strike out, strike out and insert, or substitute)
 - ii. Commit (i.e. refer to committee)
 - iii. Postpone to a certain time
 - iv. Postpone indefinitely (to kill a motion)
 - v. Limit debate (not debatable; requires two-thirds vote)
 - vi. Previous question (motion to vote on the main motion on the floor immediately - not debatable; requires two-thirds vote)
 - vii. Lay on the table (for temporary delays during a meeting)
 - b. **Privileged** motions: Motions that relate to an urgent need regarding the welfare of the group and not to the main motion under consideration.
 - i. Question of privilege
 - ii. Recess (not debatable)
 - iii. Adjourn (not debatable)
 - c. **Incidental** motions: Procedural motions that deal with proper procedures, verifying votes, clarifying information, and the like.
 - i. Division (to verify a vote, e.g. by raising hands or standing; does not require a second)
 - ii. Division of a question (motion to split a motion into a set of motions)
 - iii. Point of information (a request for information regarding facts bearing on a motion; does not require a second)

- iv. Parliamentary inquiry (regarding proper procedures; does not require a second)
- v. Point of order (regarding the disregard of proper procedures; does not require a second)
- vi. Appeal (to override a Chair's ruling on proper procedures)

Types of Votes

- 1. Majority vote is more than half the votes cast.
- 2. Two-thirds vote is two-thirds of the votes cast. (This has at least twice as many votes on the winning side than on the losing side.)
- 3. Majority of the entire membership is more than half of the entire number of all eligible voters whether or not they are present at the meeting.
- 4. Tie votes are lost votes. (Except for ballot votes, the Chair only votes **to break or to make a tie**; the Parliamentarian does not vote, thus reserving this right to the Chair.)

Methods of Voting

- 1. Voice vote (aye or no)
- 2. Standing vote or show of hands, uncounted ("division")
- 3. Counted standing vote or show of hands
- 4. Roll call vote (especially for electronic meetings)
- 5. Ballot vote
(Note: meaning secret ballot – requires a majority vote of the assembly to implement unless required in the constitution/bylaws)
- 6. Unanimous consent/general consent/consent of the assembly
(Note: this is the source of such shortcuts as "friendly amendment." E.g., an amendment to a motion may be made without a vote on the amendment if there is no objection from the assembly, but it requires the consent of the whole assembly, not only the maker of the motion. Other actions may be accomplished without a vote if there is no objection: e.g., calling the question (immediate voting.) If anyone objects, a vote must be taken. Give the assembly sufficient time to object)

Robert's Rules of Order Motions Chart

RobertsRules.org – Based on *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised (10th Edition)*

Note: § indicates the section from *Robert's Rules*.

PART 1 – MAIN MOTIONS

These motions are listed in order of precedence.

A motion can be introduced if it is higher on the chart than the pending motion.

§	PURPOSE:	YOU SAY:	INTERRUPT?	2ND?	DEBATE?	AMEND?	VOTE?
§21	Close meeting	I move to adjourn	No	Yes	No	No	Majority
§20	Take break	I move to recess for ...	No	Yes	No	Yes	Majority
§19	Register complaint	I rise to a question of privilege	Yes	No	No	No	None
§18	Make follow agenda	I call for the orders of the day	Yes	No	No	No	None
§17	Lay aside temporarily	I move to lay the question on the table	No	Yes	No	No	Majority
§16	Close debate	I move the previous question	No	Yes	No	No	2/3
§15	Limit or extend debate	I move that debate be limited to ...	No	Yes	No	Yes	2/3
§14	Postpone to a certain time	I move to postpone the motion to ...	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority
§13	Refer to committee	I move to refer the motion to ...	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority
§12	Modify wording of motion	I move to amend the motion by ...	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority
§11	Kill main motion	I move that the motion be postponed indefinitely	No	Yes	Yes	No	Majority

§10	Bring business before assembly (a main motion)	I move that [or "move to"] ...	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority
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PART 2 – INCIDENTAL MOTIONS

No order of precedence.

These motions arise incidentally and are decided immediately.

§	PURPOSE:	YOU SAY:	INTERRUPT?	2ND?	DEBATE?	AMEND?	VOTE?
§23	Enforce rules	Point of Order	Yes	No	No	No	None
§24	Submit matter to assembly	I appeal from the decision of the chair	Yes	Yes	Varies	No	Majority
§25	Suspend rules	I move to suspend the rules	No	Yes	No	No	2/3
§26	Avoid main motion altogether	I object to the consideration of the question	Yes	No	No	No	2/3
§27	Divide motion	I move to divide the question	No	Yes	No	Yes	Majority
§29	Demand a rising vote	I move for a rising vote	Yes	No	No	No	None
§33	Parliamentary law question	Parliamentary inquiry	Yes	No	No	No	None
§33	Request for information	Point of information	Yes	No	No	No	None

PART 3 – MOTIONS THAT BRING A QUESTION AGAIN BEFORE THE ASSEMBLY

No order of precedence.

Introduce only when nothing else is pending.

§	PURPOSE:	YOU SAY:	INTERRUPT?	2ND?	DEBATE?	AMEND?	VOTE?
§34	Take matter from table	I move to take from the table ...	No	Yes	No	No	Majority
§35	Cancel previous action	I move to rescind ...	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	2/3 or Majority with notice

§37	Reconsider motion	I move to reconsider ...	No	Yes	Varies	No	Majority
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Robert's Rules of Order Reference Sheet

General Rules to Keep in Mind.

- In order to speak, you should be recognized by the chairperson.
 - Stand up and address the chairperson, or raise your hand to be recognized. If the chairperson calls on you, you may speak.
 - You should not seek recognition when someone else is speaking.
 - After being recognized by the chairperson, state name and department.
- Address comments to the chairperson.
- Speak clearly and concisely
- State motions affirmatively (“I move that we...” not, “I move that we do not...”)
- Wait until your motion has been seconded and stated to the membership by the Chair before speaking in favor of your motion.
- If there is no second, the motion is “lost”.
- Once the motion is present to the membership, it cannot be changed by you or anyone without the consent of the membership.

I want to change the wording of the motion we are discussing.

- Seek recognition from the chair.
- Move to amend the motion and state the change.
- Requires a second, is debatable, & requires a simple majority to pass.

I want to end the discussion and have the vote.

- Seek recognition from the chair.
- “I move the previous question” or “I call the question”.
- Requires a second, is not debatable, & requires a 2/3 majority to pass.

I want the chairperson to enforce the rules about time limits and the number of times people are allowed to speak (these rules are made by the chair unless they are in your by-laws.)

- Interrupting motion - can be when someone is speaking
- State “point of order”.
- Current speaker sits down and you state the rule being violated.
- No second, no vote, & chair decides but group may appeal decision.

I think discussion should continue but don't want it to go on all day.

- Seek recognition by the chair.
- Move to limit debate - be specific.
- Requires a second, is not debatable, & requires a 2/3 majority to pass.

This motion needs more attention, investigation, or discussion than we can give it today.

- Seek recognition by the chair.
- Move to refer the motion to a specific committee.
- Be specific as to when and how you want them to report on the matter.
- Requires a second, is debatable, & requires a simple majority to pass.

I made a motion and now I think it's dumb.

- Seek recognition by the chair.
- Ask "permission to withdraw" the motion.
- Chair asks if there are any objections.
- If none, the motion is immediately withdrawn.
- If there is an objection, the request to withdraw becomes a motion which must be seconded, is not debatable and requires a simple majority to pass.

I have a question for the maker of the motion or someone who has already spoken.

- Make a "point of information".
- Ask chair if he/she will allow a question, then direct question through the chair to the person.
- Do not address the person directly.
- Can be made at any time, as long as no one is speaking.
- The chair has the right to decide whether or not to allow the question.

I have no idea what is going on.

- Make a "parliamentary inquiry".
- Ask the chair to explain what is going on.
- Can be made at any time as long as no one is speaking.

Sources

Robert, Henry M. *Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised*. 11th ed. Philadelphia: Da Capo Press, 2011.

Robert, Henry M., et al. *Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised, In Brief*. 2nd ed. Philadelphia: Da Capo Press, 2011.

Zimmerman, Doris P. *Robert's Rules in Plain English: A Readable, Authoritative, Easy To-Use Guide to Running Meetings*. 2nd ed. New York: Collins Reference, 2005.

The following websites may also be useful

<http://robertsrules.com/>

<http://robertsrules.org/>

Compiled by Jon Grennan (Rockland CC) - *Notes by Michael Delaney (Erie CC) 2015*