

Parliamentary procedures

Basic tools for parliamentary process¹

Main motions: propose something the group will do (“moved that we abolish add date and revise Rules and Regulations as follows...”) or collectively say (“moved that the faculty request the administration to approve a sabbatical every other year”). In debate on a main motion, speakers should limit their remarks to its merits. Tips on effective speaking are [here](#). Tips to avoid wordsmithing are [here](#). All votes require a **quorum** of at least 30 voting **faculty**, and changes to the Rules and Regulations of the Faculty require a **3/5** majority with at least 30 votes in favor. Other motions pass by a simple majority unless otherwise noted. The faculty “act with power,” generally, on the educational program, and act as an important advisory voice on other institutional topics.

Amending a main motion: a motion to add, remove, or replace words in the main motion. E.g.: “moved that the words ‘to approve’ be replaced with ‘explore the costs of approving’ and add the words ‘report to the faculty on the tradeoffs that would be required.’” See also these [tips](#) on working efficiently with amendments.

Dividing the question: when the main motion on the floor for discussion has multiple parts, this motion separates the parts into a series of discrete main motions to be dealt with in succession. Say there is evident consensus on a first part but no consensus on a second part. A motion to **divide the question** enables the first part to be voted and disposed of; if opinion on the second part remains divided, one option is a motion to **postpone the question** to a defined time (e.g., the next faculty meeting).

Postpone the question: maybe there is not enough time for members who want to speak, maybe more consideration or additional information would enable consensus. This motion defers discussion and voting on the proposed motion to a specified later meeting.

Postponing the question indefinitely: this motion means the main motion *will not be considered again*, and is effectively killed. This motion can be used when a member does not believe that the main motion itself should be debated and voted.

Referring to committee: this motion can be used when the topic of the main motion is sufficiently complex that it would be better handled through focused attention by a small group. The motion to refer should identify the committee (either an existing committee, or one requested to be formed for the purpose) and specify the timeline for reporting back.

¹ Links go to explanations on the Civility.co website. NB: unless otherwise noted, each of these motions can be debated before going to a vote.

Withdrawing a motion: sometimes the sponsor of a motion will decide not to proceed (or not at this time or not through the means of parliamentary process). Sometimes action on the topic has been taken already; sometimes an alternate motion is in the works that offers a preferred statement or course of action. After a motion has been seconded and restated by the chair, the original sponsor may request to withdraw the motion. The motion to withdraw must be voted and approved.

Calling the previous question: used when a member wants to see whether others are ready to end debate and vote — on a main motion, an amendment, or *any* procedural motion subject to debate. If it passes, this motion triggers an immediate vote on the motion under discussion. Because it ends debate, the motion to call the previous question requires a 2/3 majority to pass.

Point of information: request for information that bears on the question being considered. “Point of information: what was the conclusion from CUP’s consideration of abolishing add date?” This motion, like “point of order,” does not require a vote and can interrupt the order of speaking. (In 10-250, please raise your hand. On Zoom, we will designate an emoji for points of information and points of order). No debate.

Point of order: calling attention to an actual or possible deviation from the rules of order. Similar to “point of information” above; the chair will rule, consulting the parliamentarian if necessary. No debate.

Consider informally: when a substantive action is being discussed, a motion to consider informally allows discussion to be broader than simply speaking for or against the specific proposal of the main motion. Alternately, the proposal to consider a topic informally can generate perspectives that will lead *to* a main motion.

Options for greater privacy: an executive session includes only members with voting privileges and specified guests AND carries obligations of confidentiality. All the actions possible in an ordinary meeting are available, but discussions and votes are private within the group, and minutes can only be approved in another executive session. Alternative modes of privacy include closed meetings (limiting participation to voting members and specified guests) and meetings or parts of meetings held off the record (minutes record only topics discussed). Please consult the officers on invoking these options.

Special meetings: additional faculty meetings called either by the President or the Chair of the Faculty, or requested by at least ten faculty members in writing. These meetings are identical to scheduled faculty meetings except for being held on dates other than those specified in Rules and Regulations 1.31; similar expectations apply for informing faculty in a timely way of the date and agenda for the meeting.