



California Special Districts Association
Districts Stronger Together

This quick-glance reference covers some of the basics needed for effective meeting management, including a sample order of business and steps to handling motions. This reference is intended for informational purposes only and should not be used as a substitute for legal advice.

Parliamentary procedure is a set of rules for conducting business at meetings in an orderly and productive fashion. Robert's Rules of Order have been adopted by many organizations and assemblies, including the governing boards of special districts, to help them establish their procedural rules of order and manage their meetings effectively. Using parliamentary procedure enables a special district governing board to consider and act upon the greatest number of issues in the shortest amount of time, while promoting a deliberative process of full and free discussion.

Sample Order of Business

If a quorum is present, the board president or chair begins the meeting by taking his/her position and announcing: "The meeting will come to order." The meeting begins on the order of business, typically following the order below.

- 1. Reading and approving of the minutes:** If there is no objection, the minutes will be adopted as presented.
- 2. Reports of officers and standing committees:** Recommendations coming from these reports may result in motions from any board member in attendance. Reports are heard in the order in which the officers or standing committees are listed in the bylaws. Officers should not make motions off their own reports.
- 3. Reports of special (ad hoc) committees:** Recommendations coming from these reports may result in motions from any board member in attendance. Reports are heard in the order in which the special committees were created.
- 4. Special orders:** These are issues specifically slated for consideration at this meeting. Special orders not dealt with at the previous meeting come first. Often the bylaws dictate that certain tasks, such as elections or creation of committees, must be dealt with at a specific meeting. These tasks are typically dealt with as special orders.
- 5. Unfinished business and general orders:** These are issues left pending when the previous meeting was adjourned. Any motion that was postponed from the last meeting to the current meeting constitutes general orders. Older motions come before newer motions.
- 6. New business:** This is when any new issues are introduced.

Before adjourning the meeting, the chair should inform the board of any unfinished business that must be dealt with or be taken up at the next meeting. Any important announcements should be made at this time as well. The president cannot end a meeting without the board's consent. However, if all business is completed and a preselected (and voted upon) hour of adjournment has arrived, a motion to adjourn is not needed.

Origins of a Motion

Board members may present motions to formally propose an action, second motions to express support for discussion, debate motions to express their opinions and, finally, vote on motions to make their decision. Listed below are the ways motions may be introduced.

- 1. Item on an agenda:** a) Chair introduces the item briefly; b) Member moves a motion (seconded); c) Debate and vote.
- 2. Item not on an agenda:** Action or discussion of items not on a posted agenda are generally prohibited under the Brown Act except in specific situations. Refer to Brown Act for more information.
- 3. Committee is charged with returning a recommendation:** a) Committee Chair presents a report and states committee's recommendations; b) Member moves the recommendation as a motion (no second required) or a slightly different motion (second required) or a completely different motion (second required); c) Debate and vote.
- 4. Committee is charged with returning a motion (or has the power):** Committee Chair presents a report; b) Committee Chair moves the committee's motion (no second required); c. Debate and vote.
- 5. Chair assumes a routine motion:** a) Chair states, "If there is no objection, a motion to... will be adopted;" b) If there is no objection the motion has been properly adopted without a second, debate or voting; c) If there is an objection, the chair handles the motion according to Robert's Rules' six formal steps.

Six Steps to Handling a Motion

The basic form of the motion is the Main Motion. These introduce topics for consideration by the assembly. They cannot be made while another motion is pending.

A Main Motion is brought before an assembly:

- 1. Motion is moved:** While no motion is pending, a board member seeks recognition from the chairperson. Once she is recognized she has the exclusive right to be heard at that time. Example: "*I move we allocate \$300 to repair the computers.*"
- 2. Motion is seconded:** Someone without needing to be recognized seconds the motion. The seconder is not claiming to agree with motion. The seconder is stating that the motion should be discussed and voted by the organization.
- 3. Motion is stated:** The chair states the question, "*It is moved and seconded to allocate \$300 to repair the computers.*" As the chair turns to the maker of the motion, she states, "*Are you ready for the question?*" The motion no longer belongs to the mover; it belongs to the assembly.

A Main Motion is considered by the assembly:

- 4. Motion is debated:** All remarks by the members are made to the chair, never to or about another member. Debate can be closed only by a two-thirds vote by the assembly.
- 5. Motion is put:** The chair says, "*The motion is to allocate \$300 to repair the computers.*
All in favor of the motion indicate by saying, 'aye.' (Not 'Yes')
All opposed to the motion indicate by saying, 'no.' (Not 'Nay')
 - The wording of the motion when the question is put is the way it goes into effect.
 - A voice vote is the regular method when a majority vote is required for adoption.
 - A rising vote is the normal method when a two-thirds vote is required for adoption.
 - A 'show of hands' is intended for small assemblies or after an inconclusive voice vote.
- 6. Vote is announced:** The chair must make the following four statements.
 - "*The 'ayes' have it.*" Or, "*The 'noes' have it.*"
 - "*The motion is adopted.*" Or, "*The motion is lost.*"
 - The chair states the effect of the vote or orders its execution.
 - "*The next item of business is ...*"

Other types of motions:

- 1. Subsidiary Motions:** Apply to Main Motions and can change how they are handled (for example: postpone, amend, refer to committee, limit or extend debate). They are voted on before the Main Motion.
- 2. Privileged Motions:** Concern matters not related to current business, but are considered before other motions (for example: call for recess, set the time for adjournment, call for the orders of the day).
- 3. Incidental Motions:** Questions of procedure with regard to pending motions. They must be decided before business can continue (for example: point of order, appeal, division of a question, request for information).
- 4. Motions to Bring Question Again Before Assembly:** Not related to pending business but enable certain items to be reconsidered (for example: amend something previously adopted, reconsider a previous motion, discharge a committee).

Purpose and Form for Each Motion

PURPOSE	FORM & MOTION
PROPOSE SOME ACTION	MAIN MOTION: I MOVE TO...
IMPROVE A PROPOSAL	AMEND: I MOVE TO AMEND THE MOTION BY...
CHANGE THE AMOUNT OF TIME FOR DISCUSSION	LIMIT/EXTEND DEBATE: I MOVE TO LIMIT/EXTEND DEBATE TO...
STOP DISCUSSION AND VOTE NOW	CLOSE DEBATE: I CALL THE PREVIOUS QUESTION.
DELAY A DECISION	REFER: I MOVE TO REFER THE MOTION TO... POSTPONE TO A CERTAIN TIME: I MOVE TO POSTPONE THE MOTION UNTIL... RECESS: I MOVE TO RECESS.
KILL A MOTION	POSTPONE INDEFINITELY: I MOVE TO POSTPONE THE MOTION INDEFINITELY.
DEAL WITH AN EMERGENCY	LAY ON THE TABLE: I MOVE TO LAY THE MOTION ON THE TABLE.
OBTAIN INFORMATION	PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY: POINT OF INFORMATION, CHAIRPERSON...(FOLLOWED BY QUESTION)
CHALLENGE THE RULING OF THE CHAIR	POINT OF ORDER: POINT OF ORDER, CHAIRPERSON...(FOLLOWED BY QUESTION)
ASSURE THE ACCURACY OF THE VOICE VOTE	DIVISION: I MOVE FOR A RISING VOTE.
CLOSE THE MEETING	ADJOURN: I MOVE TO ADJOURN.

Ranking of Selected Motions

Not all motions need a second. Not all may be amended or debated. Not all require a majority vote, or even need a vote for adoption.

Some motions have a higher ranking in power than other motions. The following chart illustrates the ranking.

Parliamentary Procedure grants certain motions a higher rank than other motions because the rank illustrates which motion is in order when other motions are pending.

The Main Motion is the lowest ranking motion because all the other ranked motion are intended to perfect the Main Motion. This ranking concept establishes a priority ranking that protects the member's right from the whim of other members.

In other words, the higher the ranking number, the higher the power to bump another motion, and also the higher the power to be protected from lower ranking motions.

	May Interrupt Speaker	Requires Second	May Be Debated	May Be Amended	What Vote
PRIVILEGED MOTIONS					
13. FIX THE TIME TO WHICH TO ADJOURN		YES		YES	MAJORITY
12. ADJOURN		YES			MAJORITY
11. TAKE A RECESS		YES		YES	MAJORITY
10. RAISE A QUESTION OF PRIVILEGE	YES				CHAIR DECIDES
9. CALL FOR THE ORDERS OF THE DAY	YES				CHAIR DECIDES*
SUBSIDIARY MOTIONS					
8. LAY ON THE TABLE		YES			MAJORITY
7. PREVIOUS QUESTION		YES			2/3
6. LIMIT OR EXTEND DEBATE		YES		YES	2/3
5. POSTPONE TO A CERTAIN TIME		YES	YES	YES	MAJORITY*
4. COMMIT (REFER)		YES	YES	YES	MAJORITY
3. AMEND		YES	YES, UNLESS MOTION TO BE AMENDED IS NOT DEBATABLE	YES	MAJORITY
2. POSTPONE INDEFINITELY		YES	YES		MAJORITY
1. MAIN MOTION		YES	YES	YES	MAJORITY
INCIDENTAL MOTIONS (NO RANKING)					
APPEAL	YES	YES	YES		MAJORITY
DIVISION OF ASSEMBLY	YES				*
POINT OF ORDER	YES				CHAIR DECIDES*
REQUEST FOR INFORMATION					CHAIR DECIDES
SUSPEND THE RULES (THAT PROHIBIT)		YES			2/3
BRING AGAIN BEFORE ASSEMBLY					
RESCIND/AMEND SOMETHING PREVIOUSLY ADOPTED		YES	YES*	YES	*
RECONSIDER THE VOTE		YES	YES		MAJORITY
DISCHARGE A COMMITTEE		YES	YES*	YES	*
TAKE FROM THE TABLE		YES			MAJORITY

*See Robert's Rules