
Advice on the Conduct of Meetings



Newfoundland and Labrador
Teachers' Association

Advice on the Conduct of Meetings

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Preface

The purpose of rules of order is to ensure that the business of a meeting is accomplished efficiently and without waste of time. In particular, rules of order are designed:

1. to ensure that members of an association are kept informed of, and effectively control, the actions of officers and committees.
2. to protect the equal right of all members to express opinion.
3. to ensure that all members clearly know what is being debated or decided.
4. to confine debate strictly to the topic which has been announced.

The information in the following pages is intended to equip chairpersons with the means of achieving these purposes. It is set out in the form of answers to questions, in the hope that the information will thus be more readily accessible. It does not include all the devices of parliamentary debate, as described by standard authorities on rules of order.

It is customary for the by-laws of an organization to specify an authority to whom reference should be made if any question is raised that is not covered by the association's rules of order. The authority usually prescribed is *Robert's Rules of Order*.

The directions here offered conform to the principles laid down by this authority, and embody rules widely used by the affiliates of the Canadian Teachers' Federation.

"Parliamentary law is the best method yet devised to enable assemblies of any size, with due regard for every member's opinion, to arrive at the general will on the maximum number of questions of varying complexity in a minimum time and under all kinds of internal climate ranging from total harmony to hardened or impassioned division of opinion."

— Henry M. Robert (*Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised*)

A. Preliminaries

1. How many members make up a quorum?

No set number unless specified by the by-laws of the association. For a meeting for which no quorum is specified by by-law, it is usual to regard 50 percent of those eligible to attend and vote as constituting a quorum.

2. What should be done if there is no quorum at the time for which the meeting is scheduled?

If there is no quorum thirty minutes after the time announced for the start of the meeting, the president of the group, or in his/her absence, the most senior officer present, shall announce that the meeting stands adjourned. No business may be conducted.

3. What should be done if the number falls below a quorum during the meeting?

- a) If any member draws the attention of the chair to the want of a quorum, the chair shall at once count the members present. If there is no quorum, the chair shall at once announce the meeting is adjourned.
- b) If the lack of a quorum is discovered during a debate or in the course of a vote, the business being debated or voted on will be the first business at the next meeting.

B. Order of Business

1. How is a meeting begun?

The officer designated to preside opens the meeting by taking the chair and stating “The meeting will now come to order”. He/she then announces the first item of business.

2. What is the order of business?

An agenda stating the order of business must be presented at the start of the meeting for approval or amendment. The following is a typical order of business:

Consideration of Agenda

Minutes of the previous meeting

Report of action arising from previous minutes

Other business arising from the minutes

Correspondence

Reports of Officers

Reports of Committees

Unfinished Business

New Business

Elections (when appropriate)

Adjournment

Notes:

1) *Agenda*: At the start of the meeting, the chair asks if the agenda is acceptable. If no changes are proposed, he/she invites a motion to adopt the agenda. It must be seconded and voted upon.

2) *Minutes* may be read, and the meeting invited to say whether there are errors in them. No member may then speak except to point out a specific error and state the correction required.

When there are no further corrections, the chair announces that the minutes are approved. No formal vote is taken.

Reading of the minutes may be omitted if any member moves “That the minutes be taken as read and approved”, and if the motion is seconded and carried. (This motion may not be debated.)

3) *Business Arising*: Members may ask questions of fact about action taken, and may move further action to implement decisions recorded in the minutes. They may not comment on the policy or merits of the decisions recorded.

4) *Correspondence*: Important communications received, and any answers given, are read by the secretary. If any action seems to be required, an appropriate motion may be made, seconded and voted upon, but if there is much debate, it is better to postpone the matter by moving that it be referred to “New Business”.

5) Reports:

- a) If a report contains no recommendations for action, no motion of any kind need be made after it is delivered; but
- b) the meeting may, if it pleases, pass a motion “that this report be adopted”. The effect of this is that the whole meeting accepts responsibility for the statements made.
- c) If the report contains recommendations or resolutions, they should be listed at the end, and the person presenting the report may move “that the resolutions be adopted”. If preferred, however, each resolution may be presented by a separate motion. Any or all resolutions may be amended by the meeting.
- d) A member who feels that the matter reported on has not been given sufficient study by a committee may, before a vote is taken, move “that the report be recommitted to the committee”.

(If seconded, the motion to recommit may be debated only with respect to the advisability of recommitting. If it is lost, consideration of the motion “to adopt” is resumed.)

A Treasurer’s report or other financial report, must not be adopted until audited. When the report is presented, the only motion that can be allowed is “that the report be filed for audit”.

When an auditor’s report is presented, the chair must invite a motion “to adopt the auditor’s report”. This, if passed, endorses the financial report.

Notes:

- a) A motion “to receive” a report must not be allowed unless there is some doubt whether the meeting, at that time, wishes to hear a report for which no place was made on the agenda. If made, it is not debatable and must be voted on at once.
 - b) A motion “to accept” a report must not be allowed, as it implies adoption of all recommendations.
- 6) *Unfinished Business*: Matters left undecided on adjournment of the previous meeting should be taken up in the order in which they appeared on the original agenda.

At this point, a motion “to take from the table” is also in order (see section E.5. Note).

- 7) *New Business Includes*: a) Action arising from correspondence (see 4 above), and b) New proposals.

3. How can the order of business be changed?

A member who wishes to have any item of business taken up out of its normal order may move “That the regular order of business be suspended by the consideration of...”. If seconded, the motion must at once be voted on, without debate. It is lost unless two-thirds of the votes cast are in favour of it.

C. The Chair

1. What are the duties of the chair?

The chair shall:

- a) Call the meeting to order.
- b) Announce each item of business as it comes up, and ask the appropriate person to speak.
- c) When a motion has been moved and seconded, state the motion clearly before allowing discussion.
- d) Disallow any motion which in his/her opinion is out of order.
- e) Authorize members to speak in discussion.
- f) Interrupt any member who speaks without being authorized, or who, in speaking, violates any of the rules for the conduct of members at meetings.
- g) Interrupt any member whose remarks do not relate to the question before the meeting.
- h) In general, enforce the rules of proper conduct.
- i) When a point of order is raised, give a clear ruling, stating what rule he/she is applying. (He/she may ask for opinions, but must make the decision himself/herself.)
- j) When his/her ruling is challenged, allow the challenger to explain, then submit the question to a vote, without debate, by saying "The question is, shall the decision of the chair stand?"
- k) Before allowing the mover of a motion to reply to debate (see D.1(c)), inform the meeting that the mover's reply will close the debate.

2. What are the rights of the chair?

- a) The chair may not take part in discussion, but may inform the meeting on matters of fact within his/her knowledge, and he/she may if he/she chooses explain the effect of proposed measures and draw attention to departures from policy or normal procedure.
- b) If the chair wishes to express an opinion, he/she may call on another officer to take his/her place in the chair; he/she may then take part in debate.
- c) The chair may vote only when there is a tie vote on the meeting. He/she has a "casting vote". (By tradition, the chair votes in such a way that another opportunity to consider the matter can easily be provided. Normally this is done by a negative vote.)

D. Conduct of Members

1. What are the rights of members?

- a) When authorized by the chair, members have the right to speak, without interruption, as long as they violate no rules of debate or conduct.
- b) When a member violates any rule of debate or conduct, any other member may interrupt by rising and saying "I rise to a point of order". The chair must then allow the member to explain his/her point, provided that he/she does not wander beyond it nor touch on the question under debate. If the chair's decision on a point of order does not satisfy the objection, the objector may say, "I appeal the decision of the chair". The member may then explain the grounds of his/her appeal and request that the matter be put to a vote.

- c) A member may: make a motion; second a motion; speak once only to each question, except that he/she may speak again to correct a misunderstanding of words he/she has previously used, and if the member has introduced a motion, may reply once to the arguments against it.

2. What are the duties of members?

- a) Members must:
- obey the chair, subject to their right to raise a point of order,
 - speak only to the chair,
 - speak strictly to the point,
 - sit down at once when called to order,
 - remain silent in their places while a matter is being put to the vote.
- b) Members must not:
- use any abusive or offensive words,
 - speak during debate, except to the chair and when authorized by the chair,
 - discuss any matter which has been voted on,
 - walk across or out of the room while a vote is being taken,
 - interrupt a speaker, except on a point of order.

E. Debate

1. How is a topic introduced for discussion?

- a) A member wishing to introduce a proposal or ideas will rise and say “I move that ...”. If another member seconds the motion, the mover will, whenever possible, hand it in writing to the chair.
- b) The chair will then read the motion to the meeting. It is then open to debate.
- c) The motion is now a substantive motion. No other substantive motion may be made until the one under debate has been decided.

2. How may a topic be dealt with?

A substantive motion may be: discussed, amended, delayed, referred, withdrawn, voted upon, or reconsidered.

3. How is a motion discussed?

- a) Each member may speak once only, except that the mover may reply once to arguments; and other members may speak a second time to clarify a misunderstanding. (See D.1.(c))
- b) No further debate is allowed after the mover of a motion has spoken in reply to the arguments against it.
- c) If a member feels that a matter requires especially close study or free discussion, he/she may move “That this meeting do now go into committee of the whole to consider the motion that ...”. If the motion is carried, the chairperson names another person to take the chair.
- d) In committee of the whole, nothing may be discussed except the business specified. Proceedings are not recorded. Motions and amendments made in committee need no seconder. Members may speak more than once on each topic.

When a decision has been reached, a motion is made “That the committee do now rise and report.” The chairperson of the meeting then resumes the chair.

The person who acted as chairperson of the committee presents the decision of the committee as a report, and moves its adoption in the normal way.

4. How can a motion be amended?

- a) When a motion is being discussed, any member who has not already spoken may move an amendment.
- b) An amendment is a proposal to change the words of the motion by either:
 - deleting certain words;
 - adding or inserting certain words; or
 - deleting some words and substituting others.
- c) An amendment is proposed by a member saying “I move that the motion be amended by (deleting, etc.)”. A motion to amend must be seconded. It must then be debated and voted upon before there is any further discussion of the motion.
- d) An amendment is out of order if it is contrary to the sense of the motion, or if it introduces an entirely new idea.
- e) While an amendment is being debated, a member may move that the amendment be amended (by deletion, insertion or substitution). This second amendment (sub-amendment) must, if seconded, be discussed and disposed of before there is any further discussion of the first amendment. No further amendment may be proposed until the sub-amendment has been voted on.
- f) In each case, if an amendment is carried, the chair will say “the motion now is” and will read the motion in its amended form; debate of the motion in this new form then follows.
- g) Once an amendment has been adopted, the words inserted cannot be removed by any further amendment, nor can words deleted be replaced, but more words can be added by other amendments.

5. How can a motion be delayed?

- a) Discussion of a matter may be delayed
 - i) by a motion to lay it on the table
 - ii) by a motion to postpone the question to a set time.Both of these motions require seconds. Neither of them may be moved in committee of the whole.

Note:

Motion ii) may be debated, and may be amended as to time. Debate on it can be interrupted by motion i).

Motion i) cannot be amended or debated, but must be put to the vote at once. If carried, it has the effect of placing all documents concerned in the hands of the secretary until the close of the next meeting. If before that time no motion “to take the question from the table” is put, the question is dead.

- b) At any time, debate may be interrupted by a motion “That the meeting do

now adjourn”. This motion, if seconded, must be put to the vote at once, without debate or amendment. The question left undecided then becomes an item of “unfinished business” for the next agenda.

6. How can a question be referred?

- a) If a member feels that a matter should be further considered or more information gathered, he/she may move “That this question be referred to ...” (naming an existing committee, proposing a committee of the whole, or proposing a special committee). If seconded, it can be amended, but it can be debated only as to the propriety of referring the matter.
- b) A motion to refer cannot be brought if a motion to postpone is being discussed.

7. How can a motion be withdrawn?

After a motion has been read by the chair, it belongs to the meeting. If the mover wishes to withdraw it, he/she must ask the chair for leave to do so. The chair then asks the meeting if there is any objection. If there is none, the chair announces that the motion is withdrawn. If there is an objection, the chair at once calls for a vote on whether or not withdrawal will be allowed.

8. How is a motion voted upon?

- a) When debate seems to have ended, the chair asks “Are you ready for the question?” If no one rises to speak, the chair will, after a pause, read the motion again, and call upon those in favour of the motion to raise their right hands. He/she will then call upon those opposed to do the same.
- b) The chair must announce whether the motion is carried or lost.

9. How can a question be reconsidered?

- a) A member who has voted with the prevailing side of a motion may, on that day, or, if the meeting continues, on the next day at latest, move “to reconsider the vote on the motion that...” . The motion to reconsider must be seconded, and can be debated if the original motion was debatable.
- b) If the motion to reconsider is carried, debate on the original motion resumes as if no vote had been taken (i.e. no one who has spoken on that topic may speak again).
- c) At a future meeting, any member may move “That we rescind the motion that which was carried at our meeting on (date)”. This motion must be seconded and is carried only if there is a majority of two-thirds in its favour. (If notice of this motion has been given at a previous meeting, or in the public announcement of the meeting, a simple majority vote is sufficient.) If carried, it applies only to any part of the motion on which no action has been taken.

10. How can debate be cut short?

A member who has not spoken on a substantive motion may move “That this question be now put”. The motion must be seconded, and may not be debated or amended. If it is carried, the question on the main motion must be put at once. If it is defeated, debate on the main motion is again open to debate and amendment, the same as if the previous question had not been demanded.

F. Elections

1. How are nominations made?

- a) If the association has a nominating committee, the chairperson of the committee, when called upon to report, reads his/her report, consisting of the names of the persons nominated for office. The chairperson of the meeting then asks the meeting if there are any other nominations for the highest of the offices mentioned.
- b) If there is no nominating committee, the chair asks the meeting for nominations for the highest office vacant.
- c) In either case, any member may nominate a candidate. No seconder is required for a nomination. A nomination is valid if the nominee is present and does not decline.
- d) When there are no further nominations, the chair declares that nominations are closed.
- e) A member may move "That nominations be closed". The motion must be seconded, and is not debatable. It requires a two-thirds majority.

2. How are elections conducted?

- a) Before calling for the vote, the chair ensures that ballot forms have been distributed, and that enough scrutineers have been appointed to collect and count them rapidly. He/she then explains to the meeting how the votes are to be marked on the ballots, and calls for a vote on the first of the offices vacant. When enough time has been allowed for the marking of ballots, the chair instructs members to see that their ballot forms are folded, and orders the scrutineers to collect them.
- b) While the votes are being counted, other business may proceed, but the chairperson of scrutineers may interrupt as soon as counting is complete.
- c) When the count is complete, the chairperson of scrutineers reports to the chair the name of the candidate receiving the highest number of votes or reports that a further vote is necessary, as required by the Constitution or By-laws.
- d) When a candidate has received a sufficient number of votes, the chair announces that he/she is elected. The chair then proceeds to order the election for the next office on the list.
- e) After all positions have been filled, it is usual for the chair to invite a motion "That the ballots be destroyed".

G. Adjournment

1. How is a meeting closed?

- a) When it appears to the chair that there is no further business, he/she asks "Is there any further business?" If there is no response, the chair declares "this meeting is adjourned".
- b) At any time, a member may move "That this meeting do now adjourn". The motion must be seconded. If it is brought during a debate, it is undebatable (see E.5(b)), and must be voted on at once. If no business is pending, it is a substantive motion, open to debate.

H. Rules and Motions

Abbreviations: Amend = Am. Reconsider = Re. Previous = Pr. Question = Qu. Limited = Ltd. Debate - Db. General Majority = Gen. Maj.

	May Interrupt a Speaker	Requires a Seconder	Debatable	Vote Required	Motions that May Apply
Privileged Motions					
To fix time to adjourn	No	Yes	Limited	Majority	Am. Re.
To adjourn (unqualified)	No	Yes	No	Majority	None
To take a recess	No	Yes	Limited	Majority	Amend
To rise to a question of privilege	Yes	No	No	Chair rules	All
To call for the orders of the day	Yes	No	No	None	None
Subsidiary Motions					
To lay on the table	No	Yes	No	Majority	None
To call for the previous question	No	Yes	No	2/3	Reconsider
To limit, or extend limits, of debate	No	Yes	Limited	2/3	Am. Re.
To postpone indefinitely	No	Yes	Limited	Majority	Am. Re. Pr. Qu.
To refer to a committee	No	Yes	Limited	Majority	Am. Re. Pr. Qu.
To amend	No	Yes	Yes	Majority	Am. Re. Pr. Qu.
To postpone indefinitely	No	Yes	Yes	Majority	Ltd. Db. Pr. Qu. Re.

Main Motions	May Interrupt a Speaker	Requires a Second	Debatable	Vote Required	Motions that May Apply
a. General main motions	No	Yes	Yes	Majority	All
b. Specific main motions:					
To take from the table	No	Yes	No	Majority	None
To reconsider	No	Yes	Yes	Majority	Ltd. Db. Qu. Table
To reconsider and have entered on the minutes	No	Yes	No	None until called for	Postpone definitely
To rescind	No	Yes	Yes	2/3	All
To expunge	No	Yes	Yes	2/3	All
To adopt a resolution	No	Yes	Yes	Majority	All
To adjourn (qualified)	No	Yes	Limited	Majority	All
To create orders of the day (special)	No	Yes	Yes	Gen Maj. Spec 2/3	All
To amend (constitution, ext.)	No	Yes	Yes	2/3	All
Incidental Motions					
To suspend rules	No	Yes	No	2/3	None
To withdraw a motion	No	No	No	Majority	Reconsider
To read papers	No	Yes	No	Majority	Reconsider
To object to consideration	Yes	No	No	2/3	Reconsider
To rise to a point of order	Yes	No	No	Chair rules or Majority	None
To rise to parliamentary inquiry	Yes	No	No	None	None
To appeal from the decision of the chair	Yes	Yes	Limited	Majority	All except amend
To call for a division of the house	Yes	No	No	Majority	None
To call for a division of a question	No	Yes	No	Majority	Amend

