

Notes on Parliamentary Procedure

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Last month I confessed to you, my Republican sisters, that I love Parliamentary Procedure! And I'm hopeful you will come to love it, or at least *like* it, too!

It sounds like a paradox, but rules can provide freedom. Rules are like train tracks. If the train stays on the track, the train is free to fly wherever its engineer wants to take it. But if the train leaves the tracks . . . well, you know what happens. And it's not pretty.

Think of your club as the train, and Parliamentary Procedure as the tracks. A leader who knows Parliamentary Procedure is a treasure for her club because she can enable her club to work well together and avoid the crashes that are sure to come if a predetermined structure of fairness isn't followed.

A. Conducting a Business Meeting According to Robert's Rules Standard Agenda

1. Unless your club adopts its own particular order of business, then the club should follow the order of business specified in Robert's Rules.
2. To start the meeting, the president stands at the front of the group (*called "takes the chair"*), waits for quiet, and then says in a clear voice, "The meeting will come to order." While calling the meeting to order is the first thing to be done at a meeting, it is not part of the agenda and should not be included on the agenda.
3. You may not have realized it, but Robert's Rules specifies the order of your agenda. Any item on the agenda may be taken out of order by a 2/3 vote to suspend the rules (*a member states, "I move to take ___ item out of order," or you can use unanimous consent*).
 - a. **Robert's Rules Standard Agenda**
 - i. Opening Ceremonies (Prayer and Pledges) – Optional
 - ii. Reading and Approval of Minutes
 - iii. Reports of Officers and Standing Committees (*permanently established committees*)
 - iv. Reports of Special Committees (*committees appointed to exist only until they have completed a specified task*)
 - v. Special Orders (*matters that have been given a special priority, such as election of officers or delegates*)
 - vi. Unfinished Business (*matters previously introduced at the preceding meeting*)
 - vii. New Business (*matters initiated at the present meeting*)
 - viii. Announcements – Optional
 - ix. Program (*can be placed elsewhere in the agenda if that is what the club is accustomed to*)
 - b. **Discussion of the Agenda**
 - i. The minutes – Hopefully, most clubs are distributing the minutes ahead of time, so they do not have to be read aloud at the meeting (*unless a member objects to not reading them aloud, which I can't imagine anyone would! If you've heard minutes read before, you know that they work better than a sleeping pill!*). The president states, "Are there any corrections to the minutes?" (*Note – don't ignore this because there can be times when the minutes are very important in settling a later dispute.*) Corrections, if any are made, are voted on, and then the approval of the minutes is voted on. Next month, we will talk about what the president can do to move smoothly, quickly, and fairly through this (*see last month's extra credit*).
 - ii. Officer and standing committee reports – These reports are given in the order that officers and committees are listed in the club's bylaws. The president should

only call on those officers and committees that have a report to give, or if you are uncertain, you can state, "Does the _____ Committee have a report?"

1. Note: The Treasurer's report is given during this time. It is simply a report, and the club does not vote to accept it. After the report is given, the president states, "The treasurer's report will be filed with the minutes."
2. If a motion comes up from one of the committee reports, the vote should be taken at during that report. Don't wait for later in the agenda.
- iii. Special committee reports – Your club might not have any special committees. If that is the case, then leave this item off the agenda. If you have more than one special committee, then the reports should be given in the order that the committees were created.
- iv. Special orders – The only time this item will be on your agenda is when the bylaws require a specific vote to be taken at a specific meeting, i.e. officers are elected at the October meeting. Most of the time, you will leave this item off your agenda.
- v. Unfinished business – You've probably heard by now that "Old Business" is passé, and we now use the term "unfinished business". Something only can be included in this section if it was started at a previous meeting but was not completed. Each item of unfinished business should be listed on the agenda. The president should not ask if there is any unfinished business. If there is no unfinished business, then simply state, "Since there is no unfinished business for this meeting, we will now proceed to new business."
- vi. New business – This is different from unfinished business, obviously, because items not previously discussed are brought up here. But it's also different because the president cannot control what might come up under new business. The president should state, "Is there any new business?" and cannot refuse to allow an item to come up under new business as long as the item has to do with the club's purpose.
- vii. Announcements – The club can allow members to make brief announcements at this time.

B. To Do!!!

1. Review some of your previous agendas. Evaluate if you have been following the order of business specified in Robert's Rules.
2. This month create your agenda according to Robert's Rules. Give deliberate thought to the items that you put on your agenda and how you are going to state them during the meeting. You can even create your own special "president's script agenda" which includes a script of everything you are going to say for each item on the agenda. You would keep this copy for yourself alone.
3. Look through your bylaws to find which months you will need to have Special Orders on your agenda. Make a notation to yourself on your calendar.

C. Just For Fun!!

Here are some questions to help you learn. You'll need to look in your club's bylaws for the answers.

1. My club has _____ (how many?) standing committees. The first one listed is _____ committee.
2. My club has _____ special committees.
3. The delegates to the TFRW state convention are elected in _____ (what month?).

Extra Credit: How can the club president apply unanimous consent to the approval of the minutes? (Answer can be found in Robert's Rules, Chapter XI, Subsection 41, page 343.)

Answer to last month's extra credit: The words were "if there's no objection," and the parliamentary term is called general consent or unanimous consent.