

## BASIC PARLIAMENTARY PROCEDURE FOR 4-H CLUBS

4-H club meetings can become chaotic, especially when the group is trying to make decisions. Everyone talks at once, trying to sway others to their point of view. An organized system for discussing topics and making decisions can make the decision making process more orderly, less frustrating and less time consuming.

Decision making systems like parliamentary procedure are especially useful when new groups are forming or when controversial issues are being discussed. Groups that have a history of working well together may prefer to use the consensus method of decision making. Whatever system your group uses, learning to participate effectively in groups discussions and decision making is an important skill young people can use through-out their lives.

Parliamentary procedure is the formal system most often used by groups to make decisions. It is an organized method that allows groups to accomplish their goals in an effective, fair and efficient manner.

Parliamentary procedure is effective because it provides an orderly way to conduct the group's business and make decisions. It is fair because it is a democratic process for making decisions. It is efficient because it keeps the group focused. One time of business is disposed of before going on to another. Most parliamentary procedure is based on a book called *Robert's Rules of Order*, which describes how to conduct business meetings.

4-H meetings are often the first setting in which young people are exposed to parliamentary procedure. Volumes have been written on the fine points of parliamentary procedure, but only the basis are necessary for 90 percent of the business conducted at 4-H club meetings. Start with the basics of parliamentary procedure described here, then help your club continue to "learn by doing."



## “I Move That We....”

One of the basics of parliamentary procedure is how to move and dispose of a motion:

1. **Recognition by the chair.** A member seeks permission to speak to initiate a motion by simply raising their hand or standing and saying “Mister/Madam President...” When the president recognizes the member, that member has the floor and may speak.
2. **The motion.** A member should say, “I move that we buy a 4-H flag.” (It is not correct to say, “I make a motion that....”)
3. **Second.** The motion must receive a **second** before any discussion begins. A member does not need to be recognized to second a motion but just says, “I second the motion” or simply “Second.” Obtaining a second indicates that at least two people favor discussing the motion. If there is no second, the motion is dropped.
4. **Discussion.** Once the motion has been moved and seconded, its merits can then be discussed. The president must first recognize a member of the group before discussion begins. The member explains their reasons for supporting or opposing the motion to the group.
5. **Vote.** Discussion on a motion may end in three ways:
  1. No one says anything.
  2. A member says “I call for the question,” which means that the member wants the motion brought to a vote.
  3. The president decides that there has been adequate discussion.

Some methods of voting include:

- Voice vote (aye/nay).
- A show of hands.
- Standing.
- Roll call.
- Secret ballot.

The president should always call for both sides of the vote even if the vote appears to be unanimous. After voting is complete, the president announces the result: “The motion passes/fails.” With the parliamentary procedure method of decision making, a majority is needed to pass a motion. A majority is more than half of the members present and voting.

## Amending a Motion

Sometimes group members want to change a motion while it is in the discussion phase. This is called an **amendment**. It is recommended that only one amendment to a motion be permitted. An amendment generally strikes out, adds or substitutes words in the main motion after it has been moved and seconded and is being discussed. To amend a motion:

1. A group member is recognized by the president to speak, then says “I move to amend the motion to buy a 4-H flag by adding the words 3-foot by 5-foot.” A second to this amendment is required.
2. Discussion follows and is for **only** the amendment, not the original motion. In the example, members may discuss the merits of a 3-foot by 5-foot 4-H flag, not whether they are to purchase a flag (the original motion).

3. When it is time to vote, the president conducts a vote to determine if the amendment passes. A majority is needed to pass it.
  - If the amendment **passes**, discussion follows on the **motion as amended**. In our example, “I move that we buy a 3-foot by 5-foot 4-H flag.” After the discussion, a vote is taken on the motion as amended. A majority is needed for it to pass.
  - If the amendment **did not pass**, discussion on the original motion continues, which in our example is “to buy a 4-H flag.” After the discussion, a vote is taken on them motion. A majority vote is needed for it to pass.

For less formal meetings, such as 4-H club meetings, it may be best to introduce complicated ideas by discussing them before a motion is made. This eliminates the need for most amendments.

### **Tabling and Bringing Back a Motion**

There may be times during your club meetings when there is a reason to delay the decision on a motion. Perhaps there is not enough information to make a decision or everyone who would be affected by the decision is not present to give input. The procedure for approving this delay is called “laying (a motion) on the table.” This delays a decision until another time. The steps for this action follow:

1. During discussion of a motion, a member is recognized by the president and says “I move to lay the motion on the table.” A second is required.
2. **No discussion** is permitted. The group proceeds directly to voting on whether to table the motion. A majority is needed for the motion to be tabled. To bring back a motion so it can be discussed and acted on is called “taking (a motion) from the table.” While in the **Old Business** portion of the meeting, a member says “I move to take from the table (motion’s name). A second is required.
3. **No discussion** is permitted. The group proceeds to vote on whether to bring the motion from the table. A majority is needed to take a motion from the table.

Once a motion has been brought back from the table, it is the next item of business. Generally a tabled motion comes back for consideration at the next regular meeting. Don’t use the motion to table as a way to “kill” a motion.

### **Adjourning a Meeting**

Adjournment is used to end a meeting. Any member can make the motion to adjourn the meeting. A motion to adjourn can be given at any time during a meeting, but hopefully will not be misused by club members to adjourn prematurely when there is important business yet to be addressed. The steps to adjourn a meeting follow.

1. To adjourn the meeting, a member is recognized by the president and says, “I move that we adjourn.” A second is required.
2. **No discussion** is permitted. The group votes on whether to end the meeting. A majority is needed to adjourn.