

# MEETING PROCEDURE AT A GLANCE



An abridged version of the  
internationally recognized “Robert’s  
Rules Of Order”  
And  
“Parliamentary Procedure at a Glance”  
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This is a practical manual containing a simplified and commonsense version of meeting rules and procedures as they are likely to apply from time to time at Masonic Meetings.

All lodges, Worshipful Masters, lodge Secretaries and committee chairmen should keep their own personal copy of this little manual available and thus helping to prevent a lack of knowledge from making illegal decisions.

Whilst these rules and procedures apply universally to meetings of any organisation, many rules of procedure have been omitted as they are unlikely to be needed at the meetings of Masonic bodies.

### *Quotation*

*Nothing will ever be attempted  
if all possible objections must first be overcome.*

*Samuel Johnson*

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formal vote but where there is obviously general approval on less important issues, a less formal approach should be used.

For example, if someone proposes that the lodge has a supper dance on a Friday night, and someone else stands up and says that whilst he is in favour of the proposed dance he wants to suggest that the word “supper” be changed to “dinner” because it is customary to call such affairs a “dinner dance”.

The Chairman/Worshipful Master would then say “ I believe you are correct.” and then addressing the proposer of the original motion “ Are you willing to accept that change Bro. A”

Bro. “A” accepting the change, the Worshipful Master would then say something like “ Then if there is no objection the word ‘supper’ will be changed to ‘dinner’. Is there any further discussion on the motion to have a dinner dance on Friday?”

## PREFACE

In 1876 General Henry M Robert simplified the rules of procedure that were in use by the USA House Of Representatives so that they could be used by ordinary Societies and clubs.

His *Robert's Rules Of Order* not only gained acceptance in the USA, but are now accepted and in common use throughout the world.

This little manual has adapted some of these rules and procedures so as to cover the most likely situations that might arise at a Masonic meeting and thus hopefully preventing resolutions being turned over or negated at a later stage as a result of an incorrect procedure being used.

In addition, the Chairman of a meeting will inspire the confidence of the members by clearly showing his assurance and knowledge in applying the correct meeting procedure in situations that are not covered by Masonic Rules and lodge by laws.

cease and a vote be taken forthwith, this proposal usual takes the form of “ Mr Chairman I propose the previous question”. This means exactly the same thing.

In both cases a seconder is necessary. No debate on the proposal is permitted, but it is immediately voted upon. If it is carried, discussion on the motion before the meeting ceases and the motion is immediately put to the vote.

If “The previous question” motion is defeated, then discussion ensues on the main motion.

### **OUT OF ORDER**

A Chairman ( Worshipful Master) can be faced with the difficult situation when a proposal, a person or a remark is “out of order” because it creates a change to the orderly sequence of events. Basically the Chairman says “ Stop! You cannot do that.” The Chairman cannot just leave it at that, he must now continue explaining why it is “out of order” and then tell the meeting what is “in order”.

Remarks can be out of order if they are profane, insulting or otherwise offend the decency of the lodge. Remarks can also be out of order if they violate a by law or some other rule of the Order such as remarks that can be considered religious or political in nature.

A motion can be out of order if a motion of higher precedence is on the floor and a person can be out of order if he starts speaking without being recognised by the Chairman.

### **UNANIMOUS CONSENT & COURTESY VOTES**

A Chairman ( worshipful Master) should not be unnecessarily formal. Whilst important matters should be decided by a



## CURTAILING DEBATE

At times it is necessary for the discussion to be brought to a close. There are two principal methods of doing this.

### 1. To bring the debate to a close without a vote

If it is clear that no decision is possible or likely, or that a matter needs further investigation before a decision is made, it is probably wise to close debate and leave the matter over to another meeting before putting the motion to a vote,

The Chairman could use the previous motion of “referral” if such a line of action was considered appropriate. Normally, however, there is another proposal that is used.

This is “To lay on the table”. This proposal needs a seconder and may not interrupt a speaker who has the floor.

There is no discussion allowed, the motion being immediately put to a vote.

If the motion is carried, all discussion on it ceases until such time as someone proposes the motion “that was tabled, be now taken from the table”. Such a proposal can be made at the same meeting or at a subsequent meeting. It requires a seconder, cannot interrupt a speaker and is put to the vote without discussion. In other words, the proposer must do his homework and ensure that he will have enough support to get his proposal accepted.

### 2. To bring the debate to a close and vote with no further discussion or debate.

This proposal is often referred to as “the previous question”. Whilst a member could rise and propose that debate now

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## GENERAL

### VOTING

The method of voting on any particular proposal other than by a special procedure laid down by the Grand Lodge or universal Masonic practice should be by show of hands.

If any member proposes a secret ballot on any proposal then such a ballot is carried out without the need for a seconder or even a vote.

A vote by voice “Ayes” against “Nays” should be avoided by the Chairman as a mis-count is very common.

### PROPOSALS & DEBATING IN GENERAL

A motion ( often referred to as “the question”) to take some form of action **MUST** have a proposer and in most cases also requires a seconder. If such a proposal/motion is carried it then becomes a **resolution**.

Proposers should not be allowed to speak on any subject until they have tabled a proper proposal and received a seconder. Obviously if there is no seconder, the proposal falls away and is not considered at all.

Once a motion has been proposed and seconded, the proposer may then speak to his motion **but not before**. The reason for this is that someone can stand up and speak for 20 minutes or so and then when he tables his proposal he doesn't even get a seconder. He has wasted everyone's time!

Once a motion has been properly proposed and seconded, the first speaker to be given the floor is the proposer. The

need for recognition by the Chair.

For example let us say that there is a proposal that the annual dues be set at \$500, and one of the speakers is not a member of the lodge, but merely a visitor, a member can stand up and say “ Wor. Master on a point of Order the speaker is not a member of this lodge”.

Thus such a motion can interrupt a speaker and needs no seconder. It does not get put to the vote, but the Chairman rules on the point himself. For example the Chairman could rule “ Bro.....has a valid point. Mr/Bro..... you may not speak for (or against) this motion as you are not a member of this lodge”. On the other hand if the Worshipful Master feels that it would be of value to hear what a member of another lodge has to say, he could rule that whilst the proposer has a valid point, the views of a member of another lodge may be pertinent to the debate, and he would then over rule to point.

If the member moving the point of order was very serious about it and determined that the matter not be left at that, he could then submit a formal motion, based on a point of Order, that the visitor not be allowed to comment. The proposal would need a seconder, discussion would be permitted and a vote taken before continuing with the debate on the main motion.

### REFERRAL

If it is clear that the debate is going nowhere or is consuming too much time, a proposal to “refer the motion to a committee” can be made. It requires a seconder and cannot be allowed to interrupt a speaker. The wording of the proposal has to be specific as to the motion it is being applied to and also as to time and/or place.

the floor. Such privileged motions are:

*To fix the time of the next meeting ( when no time has been fixed.*

*To adjourn the meeting.*

*Motions made under the grant of privilege by the Chair, to a member who has “risen to a question of privilege”.*

Questions of privilege refer to matters relating to the rights and comforts of any member or the members as a whole. For example, if the room becomes too hot, a member can rise “on a point of privilege” and ask that the fans be switched.

Another good and often frequent point of privilege is where a member rises “on a point of privilege” in order to propose that “ visitors be asked to leave the room whilst this confidential matter is being discussed.”

Questions of privilege affecting the rights of members do not require a seconder and may interrupt a member who is already speaking on the floor, however, the motion must be put to the vote.

Questions of privilege that affect a member’s comfort may be decided by the Chairman and no vote is necessary.

### **POINTS OF ORDER ( OR FOR INFORMATION).**

Such proposals have precedence over any motion being debated. Whereas in the case of questions of privilege the speaker must first be recognized by the Chair, in the case of points of order, the speaker rises and speaks without the

Chairman of the meeting MUST hen offer the seconder the oportunity of speaking. The seconder may choose, however, to speak at a later time in the debate.

Members are then permitted to speak for or against the motion on the floor. It is generally accepted that a member may speak only once on the proposal, but the Chairman has the power to permit such members to speak a second time.

The proposer should not be allowed to jump up every time someone speaks against the proposal, to negate what was said, but at the conclusion of the debate, the proposer has the right to deliver a closing summary of his argument and to incorporate answers to any negative remarks made during the debate.

Once the proposer has delivered his final summary, the question is put to the vote.

Some proposals are classed as “privileged” and take precedence over any motions being considered at the time. For example, let us say that the building is on fire and the room starts filling up with smoke. Clearly it would be irresponsible to continue debating whatever issue might be on the floor, so the Chairman would accept a proposal “To Adjourn the Meeting” even if it interrupted a proposal already under consideration and being debated at the time. Such a proposal however must still be put to a vote and requires a seconder.

## PURPOSE & PRECEDENCE OF MOTIONS

### MAIN MOTION

Certain proposals take precedence over others as we indicated previously with regard to a proposal to adjourn.

The principal or “main” motion is the “main” idea that is being considered by the meeting. It would be confusing to discuss two different ideas simultaneously, hence the rule that there can only be one main motion before the meeting at a time

### AMENDMENTS

The purpose of an amendment is to change a motion before that motion comes up for a final vote.

A Chairman has to take care that what appears to be an amendment can in fact be something entirely different.

For example a motion is proposed that “ the next meeting should be held next Tuesday at 5.30 p.m.” If someone proposes that it be amended to read “Wednesday” instead of Tuesday, this is NOT an amendment at all, it is in fact a completely different motion and can only be proposed after the vote has been taken on the earlier motion, and then ONLY if the earlier motion is defeated. The proposer of the so-called amendment can certainly speak against the Tuesday motion and try by means of his rhetoric to persuade the members from voting in favour of the motion.

An example of a genuine amendment, using the above example, would be to alter the time of the meeting.

The precedence of voting and discussion if an amendment has been proposed is to discuss and vote on the amendment first. The same rules of procedure apply, in that a seconder is necessary and as to speaking for or against the proposal identical procedures must be used.

If the amendment is NOT carried, then discussion resumes on the main motion. If the amendment is carried discussion resumes on the main motion as amended.

Thus at the conclusion of the debate on the amendment, the amendment as proposed is voted upon. If it is carried, the amended wording is added to the main motion or incorporated therein, and debate continues on the amended ( or new) motion and ultimately the original motion as amended is voted upon.

An amendment is not acceptable if it in fact negates the main proposal. For example, if it is proposed that “The Lodge should meet twice a month” it is not an amendment to propose that the lodge now meets every second month. The proposer of such an out of order amendment can achieve his purpose by speaking against and voting against the main motion.

In all cases of this nature, if the main motion is carried any proposal that negates that resolution completely, cannot be tabled at the same meeting and has to wait until the next meeting before it can be proposed.

### QUESTIONS OF PRIVILEGE

The Chairman must ensure that he is not confused between questions of privilege and questions that are privileged. The latter refers to motions that take precedence over others even to the extent of interrupting a motion that is already on