



EXTENSION

AECL-9817

Parliamentary procedure for youth series: #2 — How to conduct business

September 2026

Introduction

Ashley and Samuel are back and ready to learn more about parliamentary procedure! In the last fact sheet, they learned that parliamentary procedure is a set of guidelines like the rules for a board game. These rules outline the main key players — the chairperson, the secretary and the members. Ashley and Samuel now know that each person plays an important role in navigating a formal meeting, but they still have questions. Does the meeting follow a protocol or steps? How can they conduct business? What happens if business changes? Ashley and Samuel plunge back into their resources to find the answers.

How you can use parliamentary procedure

You may be wondering, “Why does my club need parliamentary procedure?” Parliamentary procedure is more than a set of meeting rules. It helps youth practice leadership and public speaking skills, learn democratic decision-making, ensure everyone participates, keep meetings organized, resolve disagreements respectfully and build confidence in sharing ideas. When starting to use parliamentary procedure, it is important to understand three key components: 1) what the gavel is and what it is used for, 2) what should be included in a meeting agenda and 3) how motions are used to conduct business.

The gavel

As the president of the Little Dreamers club, Ashley wonders what the gavel is supposed to do. She has seen it used before, but she has never used one herself. After some research, Ashley discovers the gavel holds an important role on its own within parliamentary procedure. She concludes knowing what each tap of the gavel means will greatly help her Little Dreamers friends understand what is happening during their meetings.

- One tap of the gavel signifies that a ruling has just been made, such as the passing/failing of a motion, or that the chairperson is telling the members to sit if they are standing.
- When the chairperson taps the gavel twice, it signals to members to settle down because the meeting is beginning. Immediately after tapping the gavel twice, the chairperson calls the meeting to order, officially opening it up for business.
- Finally, three taps of the gavel indicate all members should stand up. Ashley figures this would be a great way to get all her friends to stand up when they recite the Pledge of Allegiance. She concludes that the gavel taps can be very helpful in maintaining the flow of the meeting.

Meanwhile, Samuel wonders how he will ever be able to keep all his notes in order during the meeting. Surely, he thinks, there is some way to make the note-taking process easier. After some digging, he learns he is right — there is a way! An agenda could be very helpful for him.

Agenda

Samuel learns agendas are a very useful tool in navigating an organized meeting. They act as an outline for what will happen and what will be discussed in a specific meeting. Samuel finds Park County Colorado State University Extension's (n.d.) outline of a sample meeting agenda:

- Call to order
- Pledges
- Roll call, welcome any guests in attendance
- Minutes from the last meeting
- Treasurer's report
- Committee reports
- Old business
- New business
- Announcements
- Adjourn

"This is great!" Samuel thinks. But he has no idea what some of these things mean. He pulls Ashley into a deeper dive with him to explore what these things called 'motions' are, and how they are used to conduct business and make decisions.

Motions

Together, Samuel and Ashley discover another critical piece to using parliamentary procedure is understanding how to use motions. Motions are what really put parliamentary procedures into action! As Ashley reviews the club meeting agenda, she realizes that if a member wants to organize a canned food drive, the member can make a motion, another member can second it, discussion can occur, amendments or changes can be suggested, and the group can vote. Parliamentary procedure and the use of motions help every member contribute ideas and participate fairly.

The first thing they learn about motions is that there are many different types of motions. All motions fall into one of five categories of motions depending on their purpose and how they are used in a meeting.

Table 1. Categories of motions.

Motion category	Purpose
Privileged motions	• Can affect main motions, but largely operate outside of main and subsidiary motions • Ashley and Samuel think of these as motions that affect one person or a group of people • Some of the more commonly used privileged motions include adjourn, recess, and raise a question of personal/group privilege
Subsidiary motions	• Apply directly to the main motion • Samuel and Ashley think of these as motions that affect how they will handle the main motion • Some of the more commonly used subsidiary motions include previous question, postpone, amend, and lay on the table
Main motions	• Introduce new business to the group • Ashley and Samuel think of these as new ideas or potential actions that should be discussed and voted upon as an entire group • They note that the verbiage of main motions will vary according to their club's needs and language
Incidental motions	• Are brought up to clarify a situation then go away • Samuel and Ashley think of these as 'accidental' motions • Some of the more commonly used incidental motions include point of order, appeal, division of the assembly and parliamentary inquiry
Unclassified motions	• Are used to bring back or get rid of business • Ashley and Samuel learn if these motions are being used to bring back business, they typically bring back an item from a previous meeting • The motions to reconsider or rescind are a couple of the more commonly used unclassified motions

Next, since Ashley and Samuel are still new to parliamentary procedure, they make special note of the basic rules for some of the most common motions to start with. Ashley and Samuel discover that motions become most useful when real situations arise during meetings. Motions provide a clear process for handling each situation while keeping meetings productive and fair.

Table 2. Basic rules for common motions.

Motion	Purpose	How to initiate	Does it require a second?	Is it debatable?	Can it be amended?	Type of vote required	Youth club example
Main motion	Introduces new business items	Member stands, gets recognition from the chair and says, “I move to/ that/ for [as it reads on the agenda].”	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority	A club member wants to have a canned food drive. After standing and being recognized by the chair, they say: “I move to organize a canned food drive.”
Recess	Temporarily pauses the meeting.	Member stands, gets recognition from the chair and says, “I move to recess for [amount of time] so that [purpose for the recess, action to be taken during the recess].”	Yes	No	Yes	Majority	Your club usually has a time during the meeting to do something active with members. It’s reached that time in the meeting, but business is still happening. After standing being recognized by the chair, a member says: “I move to recess for 10 minutes so we can take a recreation break.”
Amend	Changes or modifies the motion on the floor	Member stands, gets recognition from the chair and says, “I move to amend this motion by [striking out/adding/deleting] _____ so that the motion now reads...”	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority	“I move to amend the main motion by adding ‘in October’ so that the motion now reads ‘organize a canned food drive in October.’”
Postpone definitely	Delays the motion to a later time	Member stands, gets recognition from the chair and says, “I move to postpone the motion definitely to [date and time] at [location]” or “until the next regularly scheduled meeting.”	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority	More details are needed before a member feels confident in taking a vote on the canned food drive. After standing and being recognized by the chair, they say: “I move to postpone the motion to have a canned food drive in October definitely to next month’s club meeting.”
Postpone indefinitely	Eliminates the motion without directly voting against it	Member stands, gets recognition from the chair and says, “I move to postpone the motion indefinitely.”	Yes	Yes	No	Majority	A member doesn’t think the idea to have a canned food drive is worth discussing further or taking a vote on, so they stand and say after being recognized by the chair: “I move to postpone the motion to have a canned food drive in October indefinitely.”

Motion	Purpose	How to initiate	Does it require a second?	Is it debatable?	Can it be amended?	Type of vote required	Youth club example
Previous question	Ends debate and calls for an immediate vote for the motion on the floor; helpful if debates becomes repetitive or drags out	Member stands, gets recognition from the chair and says, "I call for previous question."	Yes	No	No	Two-thirds	Discussion about the canned food drive is starting to become repetitive and members are ready to vote. A member stands, is recognized by the chair and says: "I call for previous question."
Division of the assembly	Calls for second vote to be counted; must be called for immediately after the first vote is taken	Member stands, no recognition from the chair is needed and says, "I call for division of the assembly."	No	No	No	Two-thirds	A voice vote was taken on the motion to have a canned food drive in October, but you think it was too close to call. A member wants the vote to be taken again and counted. The member stands and says: "I call for division of the assembly."
Adjourn	Ends the meeting immediately; a great way to end the meeting after business is finished	Member stands, get recognition from the chair and says, "I move to adjourn the meeting."	Yes	No	No	Majority	All items on the agenda for this meeting are complete. A member stands, is recognized by the chair and says: "I move to adjourn the meeting."

Try it with your club

1. Follow a written agenda during your club meeting.
2. Introduce one main motion.
3. Allow discussion.
4. Practice voting.
5. Reflect afterward on how parliamentary procedure helped!

Questions to ask

- Did everyone have an opportunity to participate?
- How did the motion process help organize the discussion?
- What was easiest to use?
- What could be improved next time?

Ashley and Samuel now understand how different taps of the gavel, agendas and motions work together to help groups conduct business efficiently and fairly. Parliamentary procedure is not simply about rules. It is a leadership tool that encourages participation, respectful discussion about ideas and effective decision-making. As Ashley and Samuel use these skills in club meetings, they gain confidence in leading discussions and helping members work together toward common goals.

Be sure to [check out the last parliamentary procedure fact sheet in this series](#) to see what Ashley and Samuel learn next!

Resources

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Peer Reviewed

Lauren Lewis Cline

Assistant Professor, Agricultural Education, Communications
& Leadership

Delaney A. Weisend

Graduate Student, Agricultural Education, Communication
& Leadership



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