

University Senate FAQs for Senators¹

What Is Parliamentary Procedure?

It is a set of rules for conduct at meetings that allows everyone to be heard and to make decisions without confusion.

Why is Parliamentary Procedure Important?

Because it's a time tested method of conducting business at meetings and public gatherings. The University Senate uses *Robert's Rules of Order* (newly revised) as the basic handbook of operation. The trick to parliamentary procedure, like any set of rules, is that it works its best when everyone is familiar with it. (Imagine you were playing a game of softball where half the players didn't understand the rules!)

O.K., but *Robert's Rules* is 700 pages long—what are the basics I need to know?

In a typical Senate meeting, the agenda contains reports and business items. Business items usually take the form of a bill or a resolution. Bills and resolutions are brought up in the form of a *motion*. A motion is a proposal on which the entire Senate can take action.

Senators can:

1. Make a motion.
2. Second motions.
3. Debate motions.
4. Vote on motions.

These are the three types of motions most commonly made in the University Senate:

1. Main Motions: The purpose of a main motion is to introduce items to the Senate for their consideration. Main Motions cannot be made when any other motion is on the floor, and deliberations on them yield to subsidiary and incidental motions (see next types).
2. Subsidiary Motions: The purpose is to change or affect how a main motion is handled, and is voted on, before the main motion is voted on. An example of a subsidiary motion is an amendment to a bill.
3. Incidental Motions: The purpose is to provide a means of questioning procedure concerning other motions and must be considered before the other motion. An example of an incidental motion is a parliamentary inquiry (when a Senator asks about parliamentary procedure).

How are Motions Presented?

1. Obtain the floor. (That means raising your hand and waiting to be called on by the Chair, or in the case of an agenda item that you are sponsoring, simply waiting until the Chair announces the item.)
2. Make the motion. Speak in a clear and concise manner. Avoid personalities and stay on the subject.

¹ Modified from <http://www.dummies.com/how-to/content/roberts-rules-for-participating-in-a-debate.html> and http://www.elpasotexas.gov/commdev/_documents/RobertsRulesofOrder_Overview.pdf

3. Wait for someone to second the motion. (In the case of agenda items, this often is skipped)
4. The Chair restates the motion, thus placing the motion before the Senate for consideration and action. If the motion is an agenda item, such as a bill or resolution, typically the senator who is sponsoring the item will introduce it and answer any questions.
5. The Senate then debates the motion. The Chair will recognize Senators who wish to speak, preferably alternating between pro and con opinions. In addition, typically, Senate guests may be recognized by the chair, at his/her discretion. However, guests do not have speaking, debating, or voting rights in the proceedings.

What Happens DURING the Debate, and How Does it End?

Unless the Senate has adopted special rules of order for a particular motion, Senators come to every meeting entitled to speak once on every motion. (With over 80 Senators, it's a wonder meetings don't last for weeks!)

In reality, the Senate always has access to one of the most used subsidiary motions: the motion to limit debate. It's possible to adopt a motion to limit discussion to a set period of time, to a set number of speeches for or against, to a short period of time per speech, or to some combination of these options.

Senators, in order for you to be sure you have your say, you need to be familiar with how the limitations on debate work:

Limited time: The Chair is responsible for letting you (or any other member) know when your time is up, and it's your duty to honor the chair's polite notice that your time has expired and immediately conclude your remarks.

Yielding time: You can't transfer time. When you yield the floor, you waive your remaining time, but that remaining time doesn't get added to another member's time. Yielding for a question counts against your time.

Ending Debate: If two-thirds of the assembly wish to close the debate without allowing all the time desired by others, they can do so by "calling the question" (sometimes referred to as "putting the question"). This motion requires a vote in favor by two-thirds of the Senate present, as it suspends the fundamental right of every member of a deliberative assembly to have every question fully discussed before concluding the matter at hand.

How do we vote?

The default method of voting in the Senate is by iClicker. The vote results are displayed immediately on the projector screen. The Chair does not vote, except in the case of a tie, in which case the Chair casts the deciding vote. Only Senators who are present in the meeting room can vote; there is no proxy voting.