



Basic Parliamentary Procedure for 4-H Clubs

By Dave Hileman, 4-H Youth Specialist
Franklin County University of Missouri Extension

Parliamentary Procedure is one way to run a 4-H Club meeting. However, because of the age of the members and the constantly changing membership, it is best to use only very basic parliamentary procedure. For most 4-H Club meetings a mixture of parliamentary procedure and the problem solving method described in "Making Group Decisions" (LG 776) is desirable.

When used correctly, parliamentary procedure can help a meeting run smoothly and efficiently. However, when used too strictly, it can be intimidating to member and volunteer leaders, and can cause a meeting to become confusing to everyone.

Two Basic Principles

Robert's Rules of Order, the "bible" of parliamentary procedure, is based on two basic principles:

1. The will of the majority is followed.
2. The rights of the minority are protected.

All meeting procedures should meet these two criteria.

Opening Ceremonies—what is correct?

Approval of Minutes

No motion or vote is required to approve the minutes of the previous meeting. After the minutes have been read the President should ask if there are any additions or corrections. If there are no corrections or additions offered, the President simply says, "The minutes stand approved."

However, a member may raise her hand and when recognized by the President says, "I believe the car wash was held on June 5, not on June 15." Then the President says, "If there are no objections, the minutes will be corrected to read June 5. Since there are no objections, please make the correction Mr./Ms. Secretary. Are there any further corrections? If not, the minutes stand approved as corrected."

Approval of the Treasurer's Report

A treasurer's report should never be "approved" or "accepted" unless the books have been audited. Instead it is appropriate to "acknowledge" the report. After the treasurer's report has been presented, the President says, "Are there any questions?" After all questions are answered, the President says, "Seeing no further questions, the report is received as read."

Voting

There are several ways for a group to reach a decision in parliamentary procedure.

Simple Majority	One more than half the votes cast, used in elections and most motions.
Two-thirds	2/3 of the votes cast, used with motions only, especially any motion that would limit discussion.
Plurality	Most votes. Used in elections with more than two candidates, sometimes used when voting for more than two options, such as ideas for a club social event.
General Consent	allows the group to make a decision without voting. This method can be used when there seems to be unanimous agreement of the membership. It is an excellent time saver. To vote by general consent the President says, "If there are no objections, we will hold a car wash on June 5." If there are objections, a different voting method should be used.

There are also several ways to vote, including:

- Voice
- Show of hands
- Standing
- Secret ballot — recommended for elections and with divisive issues.
- Secret roll call ballot — secret ballot, but members sign their names on ballot.
- Roll call - members respond when their name is called.

When a secret ballot is used, the President should vote at the same time as the rest of the members, and the vote should be counted at that time. The President may not break a tie in this situation.

When other methods of voting are used, the President can only vote to **make a tie or break a tie**. When a vote is tied, it fails.

All other officers should vote every time.

Officer Elections

Officer nominations can be made in three ways:

- Nominations from the floor - allows any member to nominate another member.
- Nominations by petition - anyone who wishes to run is asked to nominate themselves.
- Nomination by Committee - a committee recommends candidates after seeking their approval.

Nominations do not need a second.

Closing Nominations

The President can close nominations when there are no more. The President says, "Are there any further nominations?" When there are no more, the President continues, "Seeing none, nominations are closed and we will proceed to vote." Closing nominations in this way saves a lot of time when compared to the other option below.

When there are several members nominated, and a member wishes to have the nominations closed, the member can make a motion to close nominations. The member says, "I move that nominations cease." If the motion receives a second then the membership must vote without any discussion. The motion requires a 2/3 majority to pass since it limits discussion.

Voting for Candidates

Officer should be elected by secret ballot.

When the officer candidates are selected by a nominating committee, members should be allowed to write in the name of a different candidate if they do not approve of the candidates offered by the committee.

Members should vote even if there is only one candidate. There is no need to use a secret ballot when there is only one candidate, unless the candidate was selected by a nominating committee.

The President should not accept a motion to "cease nominations and elect by acclamation", because ceasing nominations requires a 2/3 majority vote and electing a candidate requires a simple majority vote.

Motions Everyone Should Know

Motions are the starting point for action by the group. When any member wants the group to discuss something, the member must make a motion. In true parliamentary procedure the club does not discuss business until the motion is made. Most motions require a second before the discussion begins. The "second" simply means that a second member also wants to discuss the issue brought up by the motion. There are many different kinds of motions, but only a few that will come up in a 4-H Club Meeting.

Main Motion

A main motion introduces an action for consideration. There can be only one main motion before the group at one time. Once a main motion has received a second, it can only be disposed of by a vote. Main motions should be introduced with the words "I move...".

"I move that we have a car wash on June 8."

"I second the motion."

Amendment to a Main Motion

An amendment is offered to change some part of the main motion. Amendments must be seconded, discussed, and then voted on before discussion continues on the main motion. Amendments require a simple majority vote.

“I move that we amend the motion by changing June 8 to June 5.”

If the amendment passes, the main motion is changed. Discussion continues on the changed main motion until it is disposed of by a vote. If the amendment fails to pass, then discussion continues on the original main motion.

It is appropriate to amend an amendment, but this get confusing and complicated and is not recommended for most 4-H Clubs.

Lay on the Table (also called Tabling a Motion)

If more time is needed to gather information before the group can make a decision on a main motion, then the motion can be laid on the table. This simply means that the motion is set aside until later.

“I move we table the motion. to have a car wash on June 5.” or more specifically, ***“I move we table the motion to have a car wash on June 5 until the next meeting.”***

The motion must receive a second, but cannot be discussed. It requires a simple majority vote. If the motion is tabled the group moves on to the next item of business. If it fails, discussion continues on the main motion.

Once a motion has been laid on the table, it can only be brought back for discussion when a member moves to take the motion from the table later in the same meeting, or at the next meeting. If the motion is not taken from the table at the next meeting, the motion is considered “dead”.

Taking From the Table

To remove a motion from the table, a member says ***“I move that we take the motion to have a car wash from the table.”*** The motion must be seconded. It cannot be discussed, and it requires a simple majority vote.

Refer to a Committee

If more information is needed, or the group is best served by a smaller group discussing a motion and making a recommendation, the motion can be referred to a committee.

“I move we refer the motion to a committee.” or more specifically, ***“I move we refer the motion to a committee of 4 members and one adult, made up of volunteers, to find out where we can hold a car wash and report back at our next meeting.”***

A committee can be given the power to act if the group wishes, but usually they just gather information. The motion requires a second, may be discussed, and requires a simple majority vote. It can also be amended.

Motion to Reconsider (Changing Our Mind)

If the group made a decision, but now would like to change that decision, they can use a motion to reconsider. The motion must be made by a member who was on the winning side of the vote to make the original decision.

“I move to reconsider the motion to hold a car wash on June 5.”

The motion requires a second, is open for discussion, and requires a simple majority vote. If the motion passes than the main motion returns to the floor for discussion. If the motion to reconsider fails, then the previous decision stands.

President’s Role

The President holds a key role in meetings run by parliamentary procedure. It is the President’s responsibility to see that the proper order is followed. This includes not accepting motions without a second, making sure that members know what they are voting for, and making sure that they know what is decided. The President also controls the floor, deciding who gets to speak next. The selection should be as fair as possible.

Discussion or Debate

The President should keep the meeting discussion on the subject (motion), and not let discussion wander into other subjects. Likewise the President can keep the meeting moving along by closing discussion so the members can vote. To do this the President waits until most discussion has ended and then asks, ***“Is there any further discussion.?”*** If no one raises their hand to speak the President says, ***“Seeing none, discussion is closed and we will proceed to vote.”***

The President may close discussion when there is no more, or when the same points are being repeated again and again.

Members can ask that discussion stop by moving the previous question. The member says, ***“I move the previous question.”*** The motion requires a second, cannot be discussed, and requires a 2/3 majority vote since it limits discussion. If the motion passes the group moves on to voting. If it fails, discussion continues.

A common mistake occurs when a member who wants to end discussion simply calls out “Question!” In parliamentary procedure this means “I am ready to end discussion and vote.” But it is not a motion and requires no action from the President or the group.

Additional Resources:

The Meeting Will Come to Order (NCR228) - This North Central Region Extension Publication is a simple guide to Parliamentary Procedure. The publication can be purchased from the Michigan State University Extension web site for \$1.10 each. The web site is: **www.msue.msu.edu**

www.rulesonline.com - The complete Roberts Rules of Order online.

www.robertsrules.com - The official Roberts Rules of Order web site. You can get official interpretations to your Parliamentary Procedure questions.

www.ParliPro.org - features an online Parliamentary Procedure tutorial.