

CHARACTER IN ACTION

4-H Parliamentary Procedure and Meeting Guide



Introduction

Serving as a leader or member of a 4-H club is a valuable life experience. The success of your club depends on you and everyone working together. The purpose of this guide is to help 4-H club members, adult volunteers, Extension professionals, or anyone attending a meeting better understand what their duties are and how to perform them well. This is not intended to be a comprehensive guide or to address every situation that may come up during a club meeting. It provides an overview of the history and concepts of parliamentary procedure, expectations for meetings, helpful resources for officers and members, and resources for finding more in-depth answers when needed.

In 4-H, our motto is “To Make the Best Better.” One way we apply this is through our meetings by using parliamentary procedure. In a club meeting (or any kind of formal meeting), no one should expect absolute perfection; we are aiming for fairness, respect, and ensuring that every member has a voice.

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I. The History of Parliamentary Law

From Parliament to Congress



Figure 1. Parliamentary procedure is widely used in legislative bodies throughout the world, including the House of Commons in the British Parliament (fig. 1a). Photo credit: © UK Parliament / Maria Unger This file is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 Unported license. The House of Representatives and the Senate in the U.S. Capitol (fig. 1b), Photo credit: public domain.

The roots of parliamentary procedure go all the way back to the early English parliaments. As democratic bodies began to form, they quickly realized that without rules for debate and voting, meetings would turn into complete chaos. They developed procedures to ensure the minority was heard, the majority could decide, and absent members were protected (fig. 1a).

These rules crossed the Atlantic with the early colonists. Following the American Revolution, the newly formed U.S. Congress, which now meets in the U.S. Capitol (fig. 1b), and state legislatures needed their own rules of order. While serving as vice president of the United States, Thomas Jefferson wrote “A Manual of Parliamentary Practice” in 1801. Based heavily on English parliamentary law, Jefferson’s Manual is still a foundational part of the rules used by the United States House of Representatives today.

FUN FACT

Although Jefferson wrote his manual specifically for the Senate, that body never formally adopted it. Instead, the House of Representatives officially incorporated it into its rules in 1837, and it is still used today. The Senate relies on its own “Standing Rules of the Senate” and historical precedents, which are compiled in a book called “Riddick’s Senate Procedure” (Riddick and Furman 1992). You can learn more about the procedures of the U.S. Congress by visiting the [Senate website](http://www.senate.gov) (www.senate.gov) or the [House website](http://www.house.gov) (www.house.gov).

The “Golden Age of Fraternalism” – Americans Start Meeting

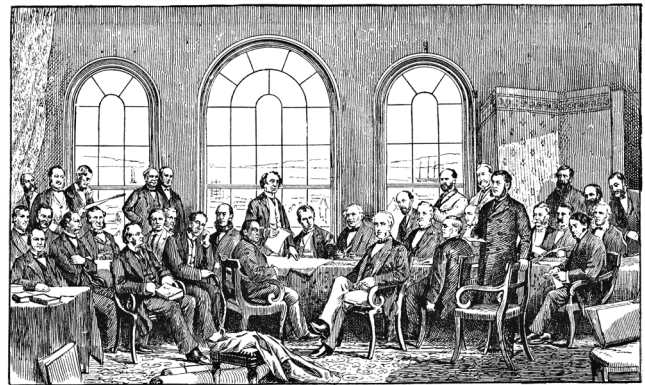


Figure 2. A 19th-century civic meeting. Photo credit: iStock.

Before the Civil War, most Americans lived in small, rural communities. When they needed to make decisions for their church or other local groups, the business at hand was often very simple, so they normally came together to talk through issues and reach a consensus. After the war, as the Industrial Revolution took hold in the United States, many people began relocating to more urban areas, and communities grew in size along with the country’s population. The business of the nation — right down to local communities — began to become more complex. Also, as people moved to cities from all parts of the country, they brought with them their own customs for running meetings, convinced that **their** way was the only **correct** way.

This was also a time known as the “Golden Age of Fraternalism” in America, when national civic groups started to form for the first time. Many of these organizations are still active today. In your own community, you may see information about the Grange,

the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks, the Knights of Pythias, the Loyal Order of Moose, or the Fraternal Order of Eagles. As these groups grew across the country, they also wanted to ensure that their own meetings were run according to the same standards.

Who Was Robert and Why Does He Care So Much About Meetings?



Figure 3. Henry M. Robert, the author of the original Robert's Rules of Order (photo credit: Public Domain).

While Jefferson's Manual worked brilliantly for lawmakers, it was just too complex for everyday citizens, and all of the diverse types of gatherings and new fraternal organizations needed something to provide structure for their meetings. This is where Henry M. Robert enters the picture (fig. 3). In the 1860s, Robert was a young engineering officer in the United States Army. As a community leader, he was asked to preside over a community church meeting. It was a disaster! People argued, talked over each other, and couldn't agree on how to make decisions.

Robert realized that everyday civic organizations needed a shared playbook to conduct business, but legislative rules were simply too rigid. He adapted those rules into a simpler guide specifically designed for meetings in nonlegislative organizations. He published the first edition of what later became "Robert's Rules of Order" in 1876.

WHY THIS MATTERS FOR 4-H

This history is why the congressional sessions you see on C-SPAN look different from a 4-H meeting. Robert's Rules was explicitly designed for everyday groups, clubs, and societies so that ordinary citizens could manage meetings in a fair and orderly manner.

FUN FACT

Not only is Henry Martyn Robert known for his rules of order, but he was also a respected Army officer. He graduated from West Point in 1857, fought in the Civil War, achieved the rank of Brigadier General (1-star rank), and was the U.S. Army Chief of Engineers just before his retirement.

Revisions and Current Editions

When Robert first published his "Pocket Manual of Rules of Order for Deliberative Assemblies," it sold out immediately because it arrived at the exact moment in American history when millions of regular citizens were desperately looking for a fair, democratic way to run their newly formed clubs and societies. Since 1876, Robert's Rules has undergone numerous revisions. Today, the recognized official manual is "Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised" (the official abbreviation for the book is "RONR"). The newest revision is the 12th edition, released on Sept. 1, 2020.

Because the full manual is now pretty long, the authors also created "Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised In Brief," a concise guide that contains the essential rules most clubs need. "Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised in Brief" is the only official companion guide to the overall RONR.

WHERE TO GET THE BOOKS

Both "Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised" and "Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised In Brief" are available from most booksellers and online. Starting with the current editions, you can now purchase them both as eBooks, which lets you quickly search through the text for precisely what you're looking for.

BEWARE OF OTHER ROBERT'S RULES!

You will often see other guides and books that say they are based on Robert's Rules or are simplified versions. The publisher of the official version warns that these other versions are based on older editions of Robert's Rules and are out of date and should not be used. Always make sure you are using the most current official version for your meetings.

Other Parliamentary Authorities

While Robert's Rules is the most commonly used parliamentary authority in the United States, you might encounter others depending on the organization:

- **The American Institute of Parliamentarians Standard Code of Parliamentary Procedure (formerly Sturgis):** Often used by medical, dental, and library associations, utilizing modern, conversational language.
- **Demeter's Manual of Parliamentary Law and Procedure:** Historically used by many labor unions and fraternal organizations.
- **Mason's Manual of Legislative Procedure:** Used primarily by state legislatures.

While some organizations use these other manuals, all Virginia 4-H clubs use the current edition of "Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised" as the parliamentary authority.

The Practical Presiding Officer

If you have been elected as the president of your 4-H club (or maybe you have to run another meeting), it's understandable to be nervous — especially if it's a new experience. Trying to understand all of the different rules for running a meeting might seem confusing or even a little overwhelming. This is where 4-H steps

in to help! All 4-H meetings are not only for business, but they are also learning experiences where everyone supports and helps one another. Everyone understands that if a mistake is made, it's an important part of how we "learn by doing."

As a presiding officer, try not to be nervous, and remember that it's all right to ask your club leader, other officers, and members to help you if you need assistance. When in doubt, there's nothing wrong with stopping for a moment to look up how to handle a particular motion or understand a rule. Everyone, even parliamentary procedure experts, makes mistakes from time to time. If that happens, think back to the Six Pillars of Character (see below). The best thing to do is acknowledge it, apologize if necessary, correct what can be corrected, and keep moving forward.

BEYOND READY: YOUR CAREER ADVANTAGE

Why learn these rules? The skills you practice in a 4-H meeting — public speaking, active listening, debating respectfully, and group decision-making — are exactly what employers, trade schools, and universities are looking for. Whether your future goal is to be a business CEO, a community organizer, an agricultural manager, or a school board member, knowing how to navigate a meeting confidently puts you one step ahead in any career path.

II. Parliamentary Procedure — Where Rules and Character Come Together

The Five Founding Principles of Parliamentary Law

At its heart, parliamentary procedure isn't about memorizing complex rules; it is built on five simple, democratic principles. If your club ever gets confused about a rule, fall back on these founding concepts to guide your decision:

1. **Justice and Courtesy for All:** Meetings should be respectful. We debate ideas, not people. Addressing the chair instead of shouting at each other ensures that courtesy is always maintained.
2. **One Thing at a Time:** To prevent chaos and confusion, a club can only discuss one main motion at a time. We must finish dealing with the current idea before moving on to the next one.
3. **The Majority Rules:** The ultimate authority of the club rests with the majority of its members. Once a fair debate has happened and a vote is taken, the majority's decision becomes the action of the entire club.
4. **The Minority Has a Right to be Heard:** Even though the majority ultimately decides, those who disagree (the minority) have an absolute right to express their opinions, debate the motion, and try to persuade others before the vote is taken.
5. **Every Member Has Equal Rights:** Every member in good standing has an equal right to make motions, speak in debate, and vote. No member's voice is more important than another's.

These five principles are derived from the foundational teachings of Gen. Robert. They are formally recognized by the National Association of Parliamentarians (NAP) as the bedrock of democratic group decision-making.

How to Act During a Meeting — CHARACTER COUNTS!® in Virginia 4-H



Figure 4.

When you read over the Five Founding Principles of Parliamentary Law, they really go deeper than just talking about meetings. In essence, they set some ground rules for how everyone should be treated when working with one another in a group. Do those ideas seem similar to other principles we uphold in 4-H?

Exhibiting good character is a universal standard for all youth and adults. In Virginia 4-H, we model this through the CHARACTER COUNTS!® program's Six Pillars of Character (fig. 5).

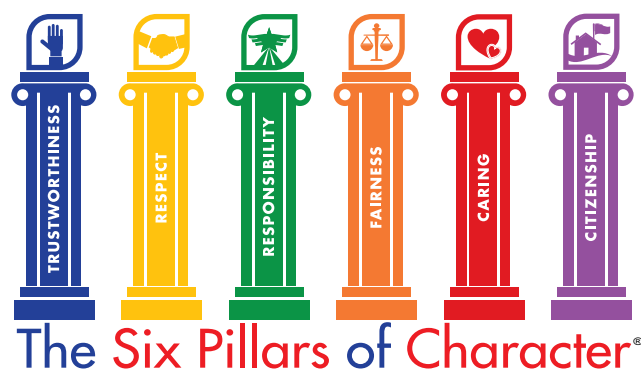


Figure 5.

• Trustworthiness

- Be honest. Don't deceive, cheat, or steal.
- Have integrity. Do what you say you'll do.
- Keep your promises.
- Be loyal. Stand by your values.

• Respect

- Follow the Golden Rule.
- Be accepting of differences.
- Be courteous to others.
- Deal peacefully with anger, insults, and disagreements.
- Be considerate of others' feelings.

• Responsibility

- Do what you are supposed to do. Try your best.
- Persevere. Keep on trying.
- Be self-disciplined.
- Think before you act. Consider the consequences.

- Be accountable for your words, actions, and attitudes.
- **Fairness**
 - Play by the rules.
 - Take turns and share.
 - Be open-minded. Listen to others.
 - Don't take advantage of others.
- **Caring**
 - Be kind.
 - Be compassionate.
 - Express gratitude.
 - Forgive others.
 - Be considerate of others' feelings.
- **Citizenship**
 - Do your share to make your home, school, and community better.
 - Cooperate.
 - Stay informed. Vote.
 - Be a good neighbor.
 - Make choices that protect the safety and rights of others.
 - Protect the environment.

It's pretty easy to see how the Five Founding Principles of Parliamentary Law and the Six Pillars of Character go hand-in-hand. If everyone keeps good character at the front of their minds in any setting (not just in meetings), then you'll be preparing yourself and the group for success before the call to order even begins!

TIP

At the beginning of a new 4-H year (or whenever you think it might be needed), ask one of the members to be the "CHARACTER COUNTER" for the meeting. This member should pay attention and write down every time a member or the club exhibits one or more of the Six Pillars of Character (respectful debate, trustworthiness in following through on a task, etc.). The counter should also keep track if they notice any times where there is still room to grow and "make the best better" with good character. After the meeting, take a few minutes to go over the list and let everyone reflect. You might also have a CC! jar set up at meetings where anyone can add slips of paper to recognize those who have shown good character throughout the meeting or program. It won't take long before thinking about good character becomes second nature when the meetings begin!

4-H Clubs — Where Everyone Belongs

An important part of 4-H clubs is creating an atmosphere where everyone feels safe and accepted. Club meetings are a great place to instill a welcoming atmosphere that helps all members feel that they belong. Some tips for a welcoming atmosphere include:

- Think about whether the meeting location is somewhere that's easy for most people to find and accessible to those with special needs.
- Greet everyone as they arrive and welcome them to the meeting.
- Make sure new members know important information like where to sit, location of restrooms, who the officers and leaders are, etc.
- Include younger or newer members in club business, such as saying the pledges, serving on committees, and taking on appropriate leadership roles, so they can develop skills to help them grow into club leaders and mentors themselves.
- Recognize members for their achievements within the club and beyond.

III. The 4-H Officer Team

A successful meeting requires a team working together. Here are the primary roles within a 4-H club:

- **President:** Sets the agenda with input from leaders, presides over all meetings, appoints committees as needed, and casts the deciding vote in case of a tie. The president must remain impartial throughout discussions.
- **Vice President:** Learns the duties of the president, serves as the chairman of the program committee, and introduces guest speakers. In virtual meetings, the vice president might be called upon to monitor the waiting room or the chat box as the “Zoom Master” (see “Virtual Meetings,” below).
- **Secretary:** Keeps the club roll, takes minutes of all meetings, and handles club correspondence. Minutes should include all actions and important details, but not all the discussion. This is done through the [4-H Secretary’s Record Book](https://bit.ly/4wq04N7) (<https://bit.ly/4wq04N7>).
- **Treasurer:** Even though most club funds are held through Virginia Tech, the treasurer keeps an accurate record of all money received and spent, initiates the payment of bills, and gives a report at each meeting that includes the beginning balance, money received, funds spent, and the ending balance. Treasurers are required to use the [4-H Treasurer’s Record Book](https://bit.ly/4dbi71W) (<https://bit.ly/4dbi71W>).

Your club may decide to have other officers, too. Some additional officers might be:

- **Reporter:** Writes brief reports of club meetings for local news media and takes photographs of club activities.
- **Historian:** Creates a scrapbook or other record of all club activities and events.
- **Sergeant at Arms/Parliamentarian:** Assists the president in keeping order, ensures proper procedures are followed, and helps count votes during meetings.

BEYOND READY: FIND YOUR PARLI PRO MENTOR

You don’t have to learn this alone! If you are a new officer or club member, ask a teen leader, an adult volunteer, or your Extension agent/staff member to be your mentor. Set a specific leadership goal for the 4-H year — such as mastering how to handle an amendment or how to run a meeting without relying on your notes. Check in with your mentor after each meeting to track your progress and set your sights on your next leadership milestone.

IV. What Makes a Meeting a Meeting

The Standard Order of Business

Generally, a 4-H club business meeting should not last longer than 20 minutes to allow time for an educational program. Following a standard agenda keeps the meeting organized:

1. **Call to Order:** The president taps the gavel and starts the meeting.
2. **Pledges:** Members recite the Pledge of Allegiance, followed by the 4-H Pledge.
3. **Roll Call:** The secretary takes roll (aloud or via sign-in sheets).
4. **Reading and Approval of Minutes:** The secretary reads the record of the last meeting. These might also have been sent to the members in advance, so they don't have to be read word for word.
5. **Treasurer's Report:** The treasurer provides a report of funds. Treasurer's reports are neither voted on nor approved; they are "filed for audit."
6. **Correspondence:** Any letters or notices sent to the club are noted by the secretary.
7. **Committee Reports:** Updates are provided from standing (permanent) or special (temporary) committees.

8. **Unfinished Business:** Items carried over from a previous meeting are discussed.
9. **New Business:** New ideas and motions brought forward by members are discussed.
10. **Adjournment:** The president taps the gavel to declare the meeting officially adjourned.
11. **Program and Social Time:** Members participate in educational activities and enjoy refreshments.

Room Setup

Each club might set up a room differently depending on the space available. One common way is to arrange the meeting room with a head table for the officers (at least the president and secretary, seated to the president's left). Club members should face the officers, either in an auditorium style, a classroom style, or in a U-shape. Place the U.S. flag to the president's right, the audience's left. The 4-H flag should be displayed on the president's left, the audience's right.

Depending on the lesson for that evening or any activities that are planned, it might be helpful to have different room setups. Remember, it is always important that everyone can see and hear the presiding officer, and that the presiding officer has a clear view to recognize members to speak.

V. The Life of a Motion

Parliamentary procedure revolves around the “motion.” A motion is an idea turned into an action. It is the official way a member says, “I think our club should do this,” giving everyone a fair chance to discuss it and make a decision together. Every member of a club has the right to bring up an idea for an action by making a motion. A motion starts with an idea and has six key parts (fig. 6)



Figure 6. Using these six steps ensures every motion gets due consideration. (Created with NotebookLM.)

- Idea:** What is it you want your club to discuss? Remember to keep ideas relevant to and appropriate for the club. Don't be afraid to ask your club leader or another member to help you figure out some good wording for your motion. You may even want to write it down beforehand.
- Motion:** This formalizes your idea. After being recognized by the president (normally by just raising your hand), start your motion by stating, "I move..." and then complete the sentence relaying your idea to the group.
- Second:** A second is needed to discuss a motion. A second comes from another member actually saying "Second" out loud. If you second a motion, it doesn't necessarily mean you agree with the motion, but that you agree it's worth talking about.
- Discussion:** This is where members debate the merits of a motion, discuss details, and state their case for or against. The president must recognize each speaker and maintain order.
- Vote:** Each club member in good standing gets one vote on the matter. The president restates the motion, "All those in favor of ___, say 'aye.' All those opposed, 'no.'" Once a voice vote is taken, if it seems the vote was close, the president may ask the group to vote again through a show of hands so it can be counted. Any member can also ask for a vote to be taken this way. Sometimes, if it's clear that a vote might be close, the president might ask for a show of hands the first time.
- Action:** Once a motion is voted on and passed, it must be followed through on. The president (or whoever is responsible) must see that the action voted upon is carried out.

BEYOND READY: POWERING YOUR 4-H PROJECTS

Parliamentary procedure isn't just for business — it also powers your specific 4-H project work! Whether you are in a robotics club debating which competition to enter, a livestock club voting on a community agriculture grant, or a shooting education team deciding to ask your Extension agent for permission to conduct a fundraiser, using these steps ensures every member's ideas are heard fairly. The next time you say, "I move that..." tie it directly to advancing your club's goals.

Framing a Motion

Sometimes members may have a great idea or feel strongly about a subject, but they are hesitant to speak up because they are anxious about how to make a motion correctly or what to say. It can often be helpful to think about your proposed motion in different pieces, then put it all together.

A motion needs to answer the following questions:

- Who is going to take action? Is it the club as a whole, or an officer or committee?
- What action should be taken?
- Is there a time period for when the action should be taken? If there is, the motion should mention it.
- Are there any other important elements that need to be included for the action to be successful?

For example, if you would like the club to send thank-you cards to everyone who donated items to a bake sale, you could think of your motion in these parts:

Who is going to take the action? The secretary.

What action should be taken? Send thank-you notes to bake sale donors.

Is there a time period? Before the next regular meeting.

Any other elements? Reimburse the secretary for postage.

When you put it all together, you have a fully formed motion:

"I move that the secretary be directed to send thank-you notes to everyone who donated items to the bake sale before the next meeting, and that he be reimbursed for any postage costs."

Here are a couple more examples:

Who is going to take the action? The club.

What action should be taken? Conduct a service project helping seniors at the local nursing home.

Is there a time period? April 15.

Any other elements? The leader will call to finalize arrangements.

Put it all together: “I move that the club conduct a service project helping seniors at the local nursing home on April 15, and that the club leader be authorized to finalize the arrangements.”

Who is going to take the action? The Fundraising Committee.

What action should be taken? Make recommendations for spring fundraisers.

Is there a time period? By the February meeting.

Any other elements? No.

Put it all together: “I move that the Fundraising Committee be directed to bring recommendations for spring fundraising ideas to the club membership at the February meeting.”

VI. Common Motions for 4-H Clubs

Not all motions are created equal. They are listed in order of precedence. Any motion can be introduced if it is higher on the chart than the pending motion.

What Do You Want to Do?	To Do That You Say:	Does It Need a Second?	Can You Debate It?	Can You Amend It?	What Vote Passes It?
End the meeting	"I move to adjourn."	Yes	No	No	Majority
Take a break for a short time	"I move to recess for ..."	Yes	No	Yes	Majority
Lay aside temporarily	"I move to lay the question on the table."	Yes	No	No	Majority
End debate and take an immediate vote	"I move the previous question," or "I call the question."	Yes	No	No	2/3
Limit or extend debate	"I move that debate be limited to ..."	Yes	No	Yes	2/3
Postpone to a later meeting	"I move to postpone the motion to ..."	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority
Refer to a committee	"I move to refer the motion to ..."	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority
Modify wording	"I move to amend the motion by ..."	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority
Kill main motion	"I move that the motion be postponed indefinitely."	Yes	Yes	No	Majority
Bring business before assembly (the Main Motion)	"I move that ..."	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority



Source: "Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised," 12th Edition

What Do These Motions Actually Mean?

1. Adjourn

- **Definition:** End the meeting, as there is no more business to discuss.
- **Example:** “We have finished everything on our agenda for tonight. I move to adjourn.”

2. Recess

- **Definition:** Take a short, scheduled break without ending the meeting.
- **Example:** “I think we should have time for everyone to take a break and stretch. I move to recess for 10 minutes.”

3. Lay on the Table

- **Definition:** To delay/postpone discussion or action on a motion with the intention of bringing it back up during the same meeting.
- **Example:** “We are debating the budget, but our guest speaker just arrived and is on a tight schedule. I move to lay the question on the table so we can hear from our guest.”

4. Previous Question (informally “Call the Question”)

- **Definition:** End the discussion and vote immediately. For the membership to force the closure of the discussion, there must be a formal motion to end the discussion, with a second, and a two-thirds “yes” vote. A single member cannot “call the question” and force the debate to end.
- **Example:** “We have been debating which color balloons to buy for 20 minutes and going in circles. I move the previous question.”

5. Limit or Extend Debate

- **Definition:** Sets a specific time limit on how long people can speak or extends a limit that was already set. This also takes a two-thirds vote.
- **Example:** “We have a lot of items left on the agenda. I move that the debate be limited to two minutes per speaker.”

6. Postpone to a Certain Time

- **Definition:** Delays the discussion and vote on a motion to a specific time or a future meeting.
- **Example:** “I move to postpone this motion to our next monthly meeting so the treasurer has time to see if we have enough money in the account.”

7. Refer to a Committee

- **Definition:** The president or the membership can appoint a committee of members to research a topic, discuss the advantages and drawbacks, and report back at a later meeting.
- **Example:** “Designing a club T-shirt with 20 people shouting out ideas is too difficult. I move to refer this to a special committee to bring us three design options next month.”

8. Amend

- **Definition:** Offer alternative (different) or additional (extra) language to an original motion. The amendment requires a second, discussion, and positive vote in order to approve.
- **Example:** “A member moved to buy bus tickets for our trip. I move to amend the motion by striking out ‘bus’ and inserting ‘Amtrak train.’”

9. Postpone Indefinitely

- **Definition:** Kills a main motion for the duration of the meeting without having to take a direct “yes or no” vote on the idea itself.
- **Example:** “I don’t think we should take up time debating something that isn’t feasible. I move that the motion be postponed indefinitely.”

10. Main Motion

- **Definition:** The fundamental action that brings new business before the club.
- **Example:** “I move that our club host a bake sale next Saturday.”

VII. Elections and Voting

Nominations and Elections

Election of officers normally occurs annually. Many 4-H clubs will elect officers in the fall to start the new 4-H year in October with a slate of officers ready to lead. Officer candidates may be selected by a nominating committee appointed by the president, or members may nominate other members.

When more than one candidate is running for the same office, youth officer elections are usually conducted by secret ballot, meaning that each enrolled member present in the meeting is given a printed ballot to indicate the candidate for whom they wish to vote. Ballots should include an area for write-in candidates or persons who are nominated from the floor during the meeting.

When Does the President Vote?

Normally, the president only votes if a single vote would affect the outcome, but if there is a ballot, the president can always vote. After the vote is taken, ballots should be counted, the results announced to the membership, and the results recorded in the minutes.

Types of Voting in Club Meetings

During the course of a regular 4-H meeting, the membership will likely conduct several votes. Depending upon the need, there are different ways that votes can take place:

- **Voice Vote:** The most common method. This is the normal method where the president says, “All those in favor say ‘aye;’ all those opposed say ‘no.’”
- **Show of Hands:** If you are looking in RONR, this is called a “rising vote.” If a voice vote is too hard to distinguish, members should raise their hands or stand to be counted for the vote.
- **Secret Ballot:** Most often used for officer elections in 4-H.

When holding a meeting, a “quorum” is the number of voting members who must be present to conduct business (normally a majority). When conducting a vote, a majority is determined by the number of members present and voting (unless the bylaws state otherwise). The presiding officer asks for ayes and noes but does not ask for abstentions. Abstentions are simply non-votes; they do not count for or against in any way.

VIII. Committees

Using Committees

A 4-H club committee consists of two or more members, ideally three to five. Committees discuss matters outside of the club business meeting, often researching possibilities for moving forward on certain projects and reporting their findings to the club. Committees save time in club meetings and help get more members involved in active club roles.

- **Standing Committees:** Meet regularly, giving updates to the club generally throughout the 4-H year. Examples include finance, community service, and program.
- **Special Committees:** Appointed by the club president, generally for a specific purpose, event, or timeframe. Examples might include planning a club trip for spring break, selecting club apparel, or a nominating committee.

NOTE

A committee’s recommendation to a club, presented during a business meeting, does not need a second in parliamentary procedure, because it’s assumed that the members of the committee want the item to be brought up. The committee chair says, “On behalf of the committee, I move that ...”

BEYOND READY: TAKE IT TO THE COMMUNITY

Ready for a challenge? Take these skills into the real world! Use the committee process to plan a service-learning project, such as Adopt-a-Highway or an agricultural literacy event. Practice your parliamentary skills by forming a special committee, drafting formal motions to approve your project budget, and presenting your final action report to the club. Real leadership means turning motions into community impact!

IX. Virtual Meetings

Do I Still Need a Gavel if the Meeting is on Zoom?

In the not-so-distant past, nearly every formal meeting was held in person because it was the only way to let everyone participate. Today, virtual meeting technology is widely used in 4-H and many other groups. You could someday find yourself in a meeting with folks from Virginia, California, and New Zealand all at the same time!

If your club meets virtually, it's important to create an online environment that replicates as much of the face-to-face meeting as possible. Everyone must be able to hear and speak to one another. Quorum requirements (and any other requirements) still count. With platforms like Google Meet and Zoom, holding virtual meetings is easier than ever before.

- **Go Over the Ground Rules:** When meeting virtually, remind everyone that the same rules apply as if the meeting were taking place in person. Members should still wait to speak until recognized, devote their time and attention to the meeting, and follow the Five Founding Principles and Six Pillars of Character.
- **The “Zoom Master”:** It often helps to have someone designated to keep an eye on the mechanics of the virtual meeting, such as checking to see if anyone is in the waiting room or letting the president know if a member has written something in the chat. This might be a great job for the vice president, because the president is busy running the meeting, and the secretary is busy taking minutes.
- **Slow Down:** Utilizing microphone features requires you to slow down and take time. Sometimes it takes members a second to unmute when they want to say something.
- **Virtual Ballots:** You are required to have a ballot vote if the bylaws mandate it. Use an online ballot through Google Forms, etc., or possibly use the poll

feature in Zoom. Share results live with the group and take time to ensure fairness.

What to do if ...

- **Additional training is needed:** As an officer, if you are struggling with handling your duties, ask your club leader or an Extension staff member for additional training. Do not feel embarrassed to ask for help.
- **Officers cannot be heard:** If you identify an officer as being too soft-spoken, respectfully ask them to speak up so all may hear. If the fellow officer continues to speak too softly, it is best not to bring it to their attention in the meeting or in front of others. Wait until you have a private moment.
- **Tangent discussions occur:** When you notice a particular discussion going off on a tangent, politely ask participants to stay focused on the topic at hand and ask them to bring up any items in the New Business section of the meeting, if they are appropriate.
- **Plans change:** Make sure you have a backup plan for a meeting program. This can include having a list of rainy-day activities to enhance team building, or an educational activity that applies to any club.

BEYOND READY: THE “AFTER-ACTION” REVIEW

Great leaders aren't perfect; they just learn from their mistakes! After your next club meeting, sit down with your officer team for a quick reflection. Ask yourselves: What went really well today? Did a debate get too heated? Did we get confused during voting? Use these moments not to identify failures but as vital stepping stones. Identify one specific thing you want to improve for your next meeting and make a plan to conquer it. That's how we make the best better!

X. Navigating the Rulebooks (How to Look Things Up)

Even the most experienced parliamentary experts do not have every rule memorized. When a tricky situation arises, the best thing a presiding officer can do is put the brakes on things and look it up.

The Big Book: “Robert’s Rules of Order Newly Revised” (12th Edition)

This is the complete, official authority. It is over 700 pages long and is meant to be used as a reference encyclopedia.

- **Section Numbers, Not Pages:** RONR is organized by section numbers (indicated by the § symbol), rather than just page numbers.
- **The Tinted Pages:** In the center or back of the book, there are pages with tinted edges. These are quick-reference charts that list every type of motion, whether it needs a second, if it is debatable, and what vote is required.
- **The Index:** The book has a highly detailed index at the back. Look up the action you are trying to take (e.g., “Voting,” “Committees,” “Elections”) to easily find what you need.

The Quick Guide: RONR In Brief (3rd Edition)

“Robert’s Rules of Order Newly Revised In Brief, 3rd edition” is the only authorized concise guide. At around 200 pages, it is the perfect size for a 4-H club president or volunteer to keep in their bag.

- **Task-Based Chapters:** Unlike the big book, “In Brief” is organized by what you want to **do**.
- **Cross-References:** If you read something in “In Brief” and need more detailed information, the book provides the exact section number to look up in the full 12th edition.
- **eBook Search:** “RONR In Brief” is available as an eBook. Keeping a copy on a tablet or smartphone during a meeting allows you to use the search function to find an answer in seconds.

How to Pause the Meeting

If you need to look something up, do not panic. The president simply makes an announcement similar to this: “The chair is in doubt. The meeting will stand at ease for a moment while we consult the parliamentary authority.” Once the answer is found, the president taps the gavel once and says, “The meeting will come back to order,” explains the rule, and moves forward.

Resources for 4-H Clubs

- [“Robert’s Rules of Order” Official Website](http://www.robertsrules.com) – www.robertsrules.com.
- [Parliamentary Procedure Charts and Handouts](http://www.jimslaughter.com/charts-handouts) – www.jimslaughter.com/charts-handouts.
- [National Association of Parliamentarians](http://www.parliamentarians.org) – www.parliamentarians.org.

XI. Beyond Ready — Career Connections

Are you interested in learning more about parliamentary procedure? Did you know that there are people who have made parliamentary procedure their profession?

Becoming a Parliamentarian

Both the National Association of Parliamentarians (NAP) and the American Institute of Parliamentarians (AIP) are recognized professional groups that credential individuals in the study and use of parliamentary procedure. Some people decide they want to be a parliamentarian as a full-time job, while others may pursue it as part of complementary careers like law, business, teaching, healthcare administration, etc.

The NAP has two accreditation levels:

- Registered Parliamentarian (RP).
- Professional Registered Parliamentarian (PRP).

The AIP has two accreditation levels and a special designation for those who teach parliamentary procedure:

- Certified Parliamentarian (CP).
- Certified Parliamentarian – Teacher (CP-T).
- Certified Professional Parliamentarian (CPP).
- Certified Professional Parliamentarian – Teacher (CPP-T).

To reach the various levels, both organizations require a period of study and the successful completion of examinations (which may also require you to demonstrate that you know parliamentary procedure during a real or mock meeting).

What Does a Professional Parliamentarian Do?

1. Meeting Advisor

The most visible role for a parliamentarian is as a meeting advisor. Parliamentarians are often hired to sit right next to the president or presiding officer during large conventions, annual general meetings, or contentious board meetings.

- They do not rule or make decisions; instead, they quietly advise the chair on how to handle complex motions, points of order, and procedural maneuvers.

- Their presence helps keep the meeting legally sound and protects the chair from making procedural errors that could invalidate a vote.

2. Professional Presiding Officer

Sometimes, an organization knows a meeting will be incredibly heated or controversial. In these cases, the regular president might step aside and hire a professional parliamentarian to actually run the meeting. Because the professional is a neutral third party with no stake in the outcome, they can maintain order, enforce time limits, and ensure fairness much more effectively than an emotionally invested member.

3. Bylaws Consultant and Drafter

Governing documents (like constitutions and bylaws) are the supreme law of any organization, but they are often poorly written, contradictory, or outdated. Parliamentarians spend a significant amount of time:

- Auditing existing bylaws for loopholes or conflicts.
- Drafting entirely new governing documents for newly formed organizations.
- Guiding committees through the complex process of a total bylaws revision.

4. Expert Witness and Legal Consultant

When organizational disputes escalate to lawsuits (for example, a corporate board trying to oust a CEO, or a union faction claiming an election was rigged), a professional parliamentarian is often called in as an expert witness. The professional provides formal, written “parliamentary opinions” on whether the actions taken violated the organization’s rules or established parliamentary law and may testify in court.

5. Educator and Trainer

Many professional parliamentarians work as consultants and trainers. After an organization holds elections, it might hire a parliamentarian to run a workshop or retreat for the newly elected board of directors. The parliamentarian teaches the officers how to build an agenda, make motions, take minutes, and fulfill their fiduciary duties without violating their own rules.

6. Election Supervisor

Organizations with highly contested or complex elections often hire parliamentarians to act as the “Chief Teller” or “Inspector of Elections.” They oversee the credentialing of voting delegates, secure the balloting

process, manage electronic voting systems, and certify the final results to prevent accusations of fraud.

Pathways for Parliamentarians – Education and Mentorship

In addition to credentials from professional associations, most professional parliamentarians also have other postsecondary training to complement their parliamentary law training. This could include attending a career/technical school to gain education in a particular field, which could lead to becoming a parliamentarian specializing in a particular career type. For those going to higher education, typical majors include business administration, communication sciences, political science, public administration, public health, and healthcare administration. It can also help to take classes in areas such as interpersonal

communication, conflict resolution, and alternative dispute resolution. Some institutions may even offer classes on parliamentary procedure itself.

Since being a parliamentarian is a highly individualized field, it will also be helpful to seek out a mentor for help and guidance. Both professional organizations allow you to search for Professional Registered Parliamentarians or Certified Professional Parliamentarians. Reaching out to one or more of these individuals can be helpful in understanding the field of parliamentary law, how to become a professional parliamentarian, and other vital information, such as client recruitment, professional responsibility, ethical standards, training, and typical duties.



Beyond Ready

XII. Conclusion: Beyond the Gavel

Learning parliamentary procedure can sometimes feel like learning a foreign language. It takes time, practice, and a willingness to make a few mistakes along the way. But the true value of these rules goes far beyond simply knowing when to tap a gavel or how to amend a motion.

When you practice parliamentary procedure by being an active and engaged member of an organization, you are building essential life skills that will serve you long after your time as a 4-H member or club officer.

- **You are learning to advocate:** Every time you raise your hand and say, “I move that ...,” you are practicing how to confidently stand up for an idea and turn a vision into a reality.
- **You are learning to listen:** When you engage in debate, you are practicing active listening and critical thinking — learning to consider viewpoints

that are different from your own with respect and an open mind.

- **You are learning to lead with character:** Accepting the results of a vote with grace, protecting the rights of the minority, and working as a team to solve problems are the ultimate tests of fairness, trustworthiness, and citizenship.

Whether your future takes you to a corporate boardroom, a community council, a university classroom, or running your own business, the ability to lead a fair, efficient, and inclusive meeting is a tremendous advantage.

So, take a deep breath, trust in yourself and your fellow members, and don’t be afraid to speak up. The skills you are building in your 4-H meetings today are exactly what it takes “To Make the Best Better” in your community tomorrow.

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