LEADING a meeting can be a very rewarding experience! Helping the group accomplish its purposes is a big job. By knowing the basics of parliamentary procedure and having a well-planned agenda, you can accomplish everything you set out to do! Chairing a meeting is something that gets easier with experience.

**Objective:**

Plan and conduct an effective meeting using proper parliamentary procedure.

**Key Terms:**

- agenda
- amendment
- gavel
- incidental motion
- main motion
- meeting
- minutes
- second
- subsidiary motion
- privileged motion
- unclassified motion

### I Call the Meeting to Order!

A **meeting** is a gathering of members of a group for a specific purpose. Meetings are usually held at regular intervals. In good meetings, business is conducted efficiently and effectively, with input and interaction from many members of the group. Such meetings are well attended and worthwhile to the participants.

Meetings are part of our lives. From a young age, we attend 4-H meetings, Scout meetings, or other types of organization meetings. In high school, we have meetings of our class and of those groups to which we belong. As we enter adulthood, we may be part of civic organizations, church committees, or even local boards of education. We will spend a lot of time in
meetings! As you become an effective leader, chances are that you will be in charge of planning and conducting a variety of meetings.

There are several reasons for having meetings, depending on the nature of the organization. Generally, the past traditions of the group set the style in which meetings are conducted. Meetings can be held to carry out business functions or to provide educational seminars. They may be designed to develop leadership skills or provide entertainment. All meetings should offer an opportunity for all members to be represented and treated fairly. Democratic processes should be followed.

Clubs, organizations, and groups function best when their members effectively participate. Members get the most value from an organization when they understand the group’s purpose and guidelines and then actively participate.

PROPER PLANNING PREVENTS POOR PERFORMANCE

The success or failure of a meeting is usually determined before the meeting even takes place! Good attendance and participation, along with a quality agenda, are influenced by the planning that goes into a meeting.

Meetings are usually planned by the organization’s officers. Members need to know well in advance when a meeting is scheduled so that they can set aside time to attend. Oftentimes groups meet regularly, such as the first Tuesday of every month, so that every member knows when the next meeting is to take place. A meeting announced at the last minute is often poorly attended because people already have the time scheduled for something else. Meeting notices should be shared with members in advance so that the meeting can be a priority for them. Notices can be posted on bulletin boards, sent via mail or e-mail, published in the newspaper, or posted on the organization’s Web site.

An agenda is the order of business for a meeting. It is a step-by-step plan for what is to be discussed and decided upon during the meeting. It should be written out and provided to each participant at the start of the meeting. When the agenda is available in advance of the meeting, it allows participants to consider their views on items of business and often results in more productive discussions that are well thought out. Items can be added to the agenda at the start of the meeting. The agenda should be prepared with input from the organization’s officer team, but it is ultimately the responsibility of the secretary with input from the president, or chairperson.

An agenda may include the following items:

- **Call to order**—The call to order usually specifies the person chairing the meeting and often the time at which the call to order takes place.

- **Approval of minutes**—Most organizations keep minutes of meetings. Minutes are the official record of business transacted during a meeting. At the next meeting, it is appropriate to review the minutes of the previous meeting to be sure they accurately reflect what took place and then approve them.
Officer and committee reports—Time during a meeting is often allocated to representatives of groups working on committee projects to report their groups’ progress. Officers, such as the treasurer, may also give regular reports.

Old business—Old business refers to items that have been previously discussed but require some follow-up or additional discussion.

New business—New business refers to new agenda items that have not been previously discussed or decided upon.

Program—Many organizations have educational or entertainment programs as part of their regular meetings.

FIGURE 1. An agenda for an FFA chapter meeting.
Adjournment—Adjournment signifies the end of the meeting. In some cases, a specific time is set for adjournment. This assures that members move business along and that members are dismissed at an appointed time.

The meeting chairperson is usually the president of the organization or the president’s designee. The chairperson’s responsibility is to assure that the agenda is followed, that the meeting starts and ends on time, and that all members are treated fairly and courteously. Parliamentary procedure should be followed to provide a fair and orderly meeting.

A gavel is used by the chairperson to keep order in the meeting room. A gavel is usually a small wooden mallet designed for meeting purposes. Understanding the number of taps of the gavel helps the meeting run smoothly. One tap of the gavel signifies that members should be seated or that a decision has been reached. Two taps call the meeting to order. Three taps indicate that members should stand during a ceremony.

PARLIAMENTARY PROCEDURE

Parliamentary procedure is a set of widely accepted rules for conducting meetings. With its roots in British government hundreds of years ago, parliamentary procedure follows Robert’s Rules of Order to assure fairness and the right to debate to all members of a group. Parliamentary procedure is quite extensive in its rules. However, in this E-unit, we will discuss the basics so that you can feel confident in participating in your next meeting.

Motions

The main motion is the motion that brings an item of business before an assembly. Upon being recognized by the chairperson, the member proceeds by stating “I move…[the item to be presented].” The motion should contain the action to be taken and, if appropriate, a location, date (or target completion date), and time. Two examples of a proper main motion are:

- “I move that our chapter sponsor and conduct a toy drive for the homeless shelter to be completed by December 10.”
- “I move that our chapter host an FFA dance to be held on May 16 at 7:00 P.M. in the school gym, with any profit going to the State FFA Foundation.”

Following a main motion, a second is required. A second simply shows that someone else also thinks this is a good idea to present to the group. If no one seconds the motion, there is no need to waste time discussing the motion.

After a motion has been made and seconded, it is presented to the group for discussion. At this point, it is appropriate to discuss the motion only as presented, either in favor of or against.

If a member feels that some part of the motion should be changed, an amendment can be offered. An amendment changes a detail of the motion without changing the overall intent of the motion. For example, an amendment could be offered that changed the original date of the FFA dance or where the profit was to be directed, but an amendment would be out of order if
it changed “an FFA dance” to “a mechanics career development event,” because that would change the intent of the motion. An amendment also requires a second and is amendable one more time. An amendment is considered a **subsidiary motion**, which is a motion that deals with the main motion.

Other subsidiary motions include:

- **Lay on the Table, or Table**—This motion allows the assembly to put off discussion of the main motion at hand to move on to something else. The main motion can then be taken from the table and brought back up in front of the group.

- **Call for Previous Question**—This motion stops debate and initiates a vote on the business at hand. Because it limits the right of discussion, it requires a two-thirds majority vote to pass.

- **Postpone to a Specific Time**—This motion moves the item to a different time or meeting, at which it will be taken up again by the delegate body.

- **Refer to a Committee**—This motion refers the item to a committee for further study and guidance. A referral can be made with the instructions to report back to the group or with full power to act. The latter authorizes the committee to make a final decision and move forward with it.

- **Postpone Indefinitely**—This motion removes the item from immediate consideration and is often used to eliminate a motion altogether.

### TABLE 1. A Partial List of Parliamentary Motions with Their Requirements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Motion</th>
<th>2nd</th>
<th>Amendable</th>
<th>Debatable</th>
<th>Vote</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Main</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Majority</td>
<td>Includes who, what when, where.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amend</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Once</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Majority</td>
<td>Any number of items that affect main motion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refer to a Committee</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Majority</td>
<td>Standing or appointed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postpone to a Specific Time</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Majority</td>
<td>Moves issue to different time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lay on the Table</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Majority</td>
<td>Sets aside until later time in meeting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limit/Extend Debate</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>2/3</td>
<td>In effect only if time is already specified.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Point of Order</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Any member of assembly can call.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appeal</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Depends on pending matter</td>
<td>Majority</td>
<td>Allows assembly to overturn chairperson’s ruling.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Division of the Assembly</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Creates counted vote after voice vote.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous Question</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>2/3</td>
<td>Ends debate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Close Nominations</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>2/3</td>
<td>Ends nominations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjourn</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Majority</td>
<td>Ends meeting.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Other classes of motions beside subsidiary are privileged, incidental, and unclassified motions. A **privileged motion** is not related to the main motion and is designed to help the meeting go smoothly. Privileged motions include setting adjournment and taking a recess. An **incidental motion** is used to provide proper and fair treatment to all members. Any member can call a point of order on the chairperson for ruling incorrectly or can appeal the chairperson’s decision. A member can also request a division of the assembly to get a counted vote taken. An **unclassified motion** brings back before the assembly business that was previously discussed or decided. A motion to take a motion from the table or to rescind a decision previously made is an unclassified motion.

**Voting**

Parliamentary procedure is designed to allow the majority to rule. At the same time, every member is to have rights to discussion and fairness. Therefore, for passage, any motion that limits the rights of discussion requires a two-thirds majority of those present. That assures that a significant majority is in favor of moving forward with the business at hand. All other motions, except a motion to close nominations, require a simple majority (half of those assembled plus one) for passage.

Votes can be taken in a number of ways. Voice votes require members to say “Aye” (yes) or “No” when asked. On an item where there is a clear majority one way or the other, a voice vote works well. Any member who wants a specific number associated with the vote can ask for a Division of the Assembly, which requires that a vote total be tallied. This can be done by one of three methods: (1) a rising vote, in which each member is asked to raise his or her hand or to stand; (2) a secret ballot, in which each member writes down his or her vote and turns it in to be counted; or (3) a roll-call vote, in which the secretary asks each member individually how he or she votes.

**Summary:**

Effective meetings require planning and an understanding of parliamentary procedure. Parliamentary procedure exists so that all members have rights to participate in a meeting. The rules give everyone an opportunity to discuss his or her opinion while business gets accomplished. A good chairperson understands parliamentary procedure and is fair to all members of the group.

**Checking Your Knowledge:**

1. What is the written order of business for a meeting called?
2. What purpose does a gavel serve for a chairperson? What do the taps signify?
3. After a main motion is made, a second is required. Why is a second required for a motion?
4. Name the classifications of motions in parliamentary procedure.

5. Why do some motions require a simple majority vote while others require a two-thirds majority?

**Expanding Your Knowledge:**

Prepare as a class for the FFA Parliamentary Procedure Career Development Event. Learn all the motions that are part of the event, and prepare by practicing with your classmates. After some practice, prepare further by demonstrating your skills at a school board meeting, at a civic organization, or for an FFA alumni chapter.

**Web Links:**

- California State University—Fresno Parliamentary Procedure
- Parliamentary Procedure Online
- Agricultural Career Profiles
  [http://www.mycaert.com/career-profiles](http://www.mycaert.com/career-profiles)