

Kappa Kappa Psi

Iota Chapter

# Guide to Parliamentary Procedure

Steven Douglass

Chair of the Judicial Committee  
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## **1. What is Parliamentary Procedure?**

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Parliamentary Procedure is the set of rules that governs how a deliberative assembly conducts business. A deliberative assembly is any body of people who meet to make decisions as a group. This includes local organizations, such as the Iota Chapter, as well as much larger groups such as the United States Congress. Each organization has its own interpretation of the procedures that should be used, but by and large, the most common set of rules governing procedure is Robert's Rules of Order. In the Iota Chapter, we use the most recent version, which as of this writing is the 10<sup>th</sup> Edition.

## **2. Why Parliamentary Procedure?**

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It often seems, when approaching small assemblies like the typical chapter of a fraternity, that an adherence to Parliamentary Procedure is a tad superfluous. We are all friends, and there aren't that many of us, so one may ask "why do we need to worry about procedure?" Indeed, many times, it appears that a more informal approach would make things go faster, absent of superfluous rules. These rules are in place, however, to ensure the following:

1. Orderly and Constructive debate.
2. Efficient and timely decisions.
3. **Observation of the rule of the majority.**
4. **Protection of the minority.**

Clearly, a meeting with no guidance whatsoever will devolve into chaos, and nothing will ever get decided. Thus, by laying down some ground rules, we can ensure that debate is in some way structured, and decisions can be made. In addition, if there is no structure upheld, the debate can turn into nonsense. Groups of people can easily get off topic, as we have seen in our chapter many times. By sticking to the procedures, we only discuss things that are immediately relevant.

Not everyone will always agree with an idea or decision that the group makes. One can easily imagine a situation, absent guiding principles, where a few dissenters can easily speak louder than the majority of people, or a situation where all but a few people think the same thing, and drown out the voices of the opposition. Robert's rules are intended primarily to ensure that the voice of the majority is the one that is observed, but that the voices of all are equally heard.

### 3. Structure of a Meeting

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Both to speed up meetings, and to provide a basic outline for how an assembly is to spend its time, most organizations, including the Iota Chapter, set a meeting structure. The Iota Chapter divides its meetings into the following categories:

#### Calling of the meeting to order

1. Reading of Officer and Committee Reports

This period is for Officer's and Committee Chairs to report to the chapter the activities that have been performed by the Officer or Committee since the last meeting.

2. Unfinished Public Business

This constitutes business (motions, to be explained later) that was sent to a committee, or postponed business from a previous meeting.

3. Private Business

This is business (unfinished or new) or announcements that should not be conducted in the presence of prospective members, as it may pertain to the Ritual, or to the membership education process.

4. New Public Business

This is any business that is neither currently in committee nor postponed and has not been previously disposed of in the current meeting.

5. Announcements

These are items which do not require a decision from the chapter but provide the chapter with information.

#### Adjournment of the meeting

It is important, when preparing for a chapter meeting, to contemplate what you may bring up in chapter, and during which phase of chapter is it most appropriate. Announcements should not be made except in the period designated for them.

Departing from the prescribed order of business may be done by a motion to "suspend the rules." This may be done for example to allow for a report from an officer or chair who arrived late, or to consider an item of old business that was forgotten, or to address an issue that must be dealt with quickly. See section 5 for more information on this motion.

#### 4. Conducting Business

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All business of a deliberative body is based around the concept of the "motion." Motions are decisions that must be made by the will of the chapter. Discussion of the chapter is always based on the "current", "active", or "pending" motion. In short, we only discuss the question that we are immediately concerned with answering. The question now is, how does one make a motion?

##### 1. Obtain the Floor

In a meeting, the ONLY person that should be talking is the person who has the floor. Exceptions are made for certain requests and inquiries, but for almost all business, one may only speak after they have obtained the floor.

To obtain the floor, one must be recognized by the chair (in most meetings, this is the president). In the Iota Chapter, one obtains the floor by raising their hand until they are called on by the chair, or until the chair has indicated that they are on the queue.

##### 2. Make a Motion

Once a motion is made, it can only be altered by the amendment process, which can take time, so take time to ensure that the motion is correctly worded before you make it. Motions are made by stating "I move that..." or "I move to..." and then clearly stating the desired motion. Also consider who it affects. Who will do the work? The motions should be complete.

Example of a correct motion:

"I move that the chapter allocate \$100 for the service committee to build a cabinet in the drum room for the Color Guard."

This motion, if adopted, would allocate the money from the unallocated funds, and would charge the service committee with the responsibility of constructing the cabinet.

Example of an incorrect motion:

"I think it will cost about \$100 to make a cabinet so I want to allocate the money to do so."

This isn't worded as a motion, so the chapter can get confused as to the main question being asked, which requires the chair to reword it. It also doesn't say who will be responsible for performing the work, where it's going, or what the point is. Now, instead of the motion leading to immediate discussion, the chair must reword it, and then the

person who makes the motion must obtain the floor to explain it.

### 3. Discussion

Once a motion has been made, the chapter debates the motion to decide whether or not to adopt it. Debate is conducted by members obtaining the floor, stating their points, and then yielding the floor. During discussion, other motions can be made which are subsidiary or incidentally to the pending motion. In most cases, the floor must be obtained to make these motions. See section 5 for descriptions.

### 4. Ending Discussion

Discussion ends when the chair calls the matter to a vote, or when the motion is otherwise disposed of. This can happen either when no member rises for further debate, at which point the chair will ask if there is any objection to calling the question, or when a member moves "Previous Question" or "Call the question". Upon this motion being made and seconded, it is immediately voted on, and a 2/3 vote to call the question closes debate, and the chair states the question for voting. The question may also be disposed of by postponing to a future time (or indefinitely), referring it to a committee, or laying it on the table to address more pressing business.

## 5. Descriptions of Motions

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There are a large number of motions that may come up in a meeting. Many of them are subsidiary to a main motion, meaning that they in some way affect that motion. Others are incidental, meaning that they affect the debate in regards to a motion. Some are merely requests or inquiries that help members. The following is a description of the effect of various motions.

### 1. Main Motion

The effect of this motion is whatever the motion indicates. This is the point of business the chapter is trying to accomplish.

### 2. Motion to Amend

This motion makes a change to the immediately pending motion. This could be to change the date of a project, to change the amount of allocation, to add something else to it, whatever.

### 3. Motion to Refer (or Commit)

This motion applies to a main motion and any subsidiary motions. If adopted, the pending main motion is referred to a committee. This motion should include the committee that it is sending it to. Example: "I move that this motion be referred to the service committee for further research."

### 4. Motion to Call the Question (or Previous Question)

This motion, if adopted, ends all debate on the immediately pending motion (the main motion, or current subsidiary or incidental motion). If adopted, the pending motion is immediately voted on.

### 5. Motion to Suspend the Rules

This motion, if adopted, allows a member to do something that would otherwise be prohibited by the rules of order. Example would be to discuss something when it is out of order, such as new business in the time for reports, etc.

### 6. Motion to Waive a Policy

This motion allows a member to do something against the Policies of Iota. This would include taking a little brother when on coop, or missing ritual, etc.

### 7. Motion to Amend Bylaws / Policies

This motion would make a change to the bylaws or policies. In the case of bylaws, 2 weeks notice must be given. For policies, only 1 weeks notice is necessary.

### 8. Point of Inquiry

This may be stated at any time, and is a question addressed to the chair or the member who has the floor. In the case of parliamentary inquiry, it is addressed to the chair, and is a question about procedure. In the case of

information, one may ask another member for information about the pending question, but it should be kept relevant.

9. Point of Order

This may be stated at any time, and is addressed to the chair when a member observes a violation of the rules of order. The chair will then rule on it, or put the point before the whole chapter.

10. Motion to Postpone

This motion, if adopted, postpones discussion on the pending motion to another time. If the chapter doesn't have enough information, it could be to push back discussion to the next meeting, even if a committee need not address it. In this case, discussion on the motion to postpone is only about postponing, and not the main motion. One can also postpone indefinitely, which eliminates discussion of the motion unless it is brought up again at a later meeting. In this case, discussion can also be on the main motion.

11. Question of Privilege

These may be brought up at any time, and refer to the overall status of the assembly or the individual. A question of privilege can be brought up to deal with emergency situations, or to open the windows if it is too hot, or to turn off the fan if you cannot hear. By and large, these are quick, and ruled on by the chair. If it is something more important, like a meeting is running long, and the chapter has another engagement immediately, a question of privilege may take the form of a motion to recess or adjourn.

12. Motion to Withdraw

Contrary to belief, a member cannot simply withdraw his own motion unless it is done with unanimous consent. If one wishes to withdraw their motion, they can move to do so, and the chair can ask for objections. If there are any, it can be voted on separately.

13. Adjourn

This motion, if adopted, ends the meeting. If there are no objections, it is adjourned immediately. If someone has an objection, then the vote must be taken.

## 6. Properties of Motions

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The following is a list and description of the various motions that are commonly used. Many other motions are included in Robert's Rules, and are acceptable in the chapter, but these are the ones most likely to come up in deliberation within the Iota Chapter and thus are included as a quick reference.

Motion	Do you need the floor?	Does it need a second?	Is it debatable?	Can it be amended?	Vote required?
1. Main Motion	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority
2. Amend the Pending Motion	Yes	Yes	When the pending motion is debatable	Yes	Majority
3. Refer to Committee	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority
4. Call the Question	Yes	Yes	No	No	Two-Thirds
5. Suspend The Rules	Yes	Yes	No	No	Two-Thirds
6. Waive a Policy	Yes	Yes	No	No	Majority
7. Amend Bylaws	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Two-Thirds and 2 weeks notice.
8. Amend Policies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Two-Thirds and 1 week notice.
9. Point of Inquiry (or Information)	No	No	No	No	Ruling by Chair
10. Point of Order	No	No	No	No	Ruling by Chair
11. Postpone	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority
12. Question of Privilege	Not unless a main motion is pending.	Only if it is a motion.	Only if it is a motion.	Only if it is a motion.	Ruling by the Chair or Majority if a Motion
13. Withdraw a Motion	Yes if by initial maker, no if by another member.	Yes if made by initial maker, no if by another member.	No	No	Majority
14. Adjourn	Yes	Yes, unless unanimous.	No	No	Majority

As is evidenced, there are a large number of various motions that can be made. In order to keep track of what is permitted, there is also an order of precedence of motions. Common sense dictates most of it. Clearly, a motion to refer supersedes the main motion and motions to amend, but is less important than motions to postpone or lay on the table. Questions of privilege and points of information and inquiry are typically the most important, as are suspension of the rules, etc. It is usually clear from context what must be decided first, and any cases where it is ambiguous are decided by the chair.

## **7. Decorum**

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The basic purpose of Robert's Rules is to maintain an orderly and fair meeting, where all members get equal say. In keeping with this, they include a lot of basic rules of decorum, such as not using names, but using titles, and addressing the chair, rather than addressing each other. These aren't necessarily useful in the chapter, but some basic rules should be observed.

1. Do not talk at all unless you have the floor.
2. Do not bring up dilatory (retarded or absurd) motions.
3. Pay attention to what is going on to avoid wasted time repeating or explaining.
4. Be prepared for motions that you plan on making.
5. Do not respond to a person's vote. Each person has the right to vote how they want and why they want.
6. Allow the chair to make rulings and admonitions if something is out of order unless it is relevant and he hasn't noticed.
7. Respect the majority opinion, even if it is not your own.
8. Know the procedures enough to participate without wasting everyone else's time.
9. Be polite, courteous, and respectful of every brother's opinion.

## **8. What questions should the Chapter deal with?**

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Make sure that the questions you bring to the chapter are going to result in something. Basic questions looking for chapter guidance, such as scheduling and brainstorming, should not be brought before the chapter. Things like that are what committees and email is for. The only questions that should be brought to the chapter should have some sort of effect.

As an example, let's say you think we should host a joint band party with Kappa Mu, and want to know what the chapter thinks. You might be inclined to ask the chapter "do you think I should look into this?" as a way of seeing whether the chapter would want to do it. If you do it that way, though, we'll have to talk about doing it then, and then talk about it again when it's finalized enough to be in a motion. There are several better ways to deal with it.

1. Look into it yourself, and don't bring it to the chapter until you have enough information for it to be a full motion.
2. Just make the motion and send it to committee: "I move that we host a joint band party with Kappa Mu and that the motion be referred to the social committee." In that way, the details can be hammered out in committee, and we don't discuss it twice in chapter.

3. Just make the motion. "I move that we host a joint band party with Kappa Mu." We can discuss it and reject it.

The basic idea is just to make sure that the only things we're actively discussing will have some result. If you just want to 'test the waters', that's what committees are for. This leads to the next section.

## **9. Straw Polls and Friendly Amendments**

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As mentioned in the prior section, the only questions that should be brought before the chapter are those that have effect. Since a straw poll has no consequences, it should not be brought up. Straw polls are always out of order. The best solution for scheduling is email. The second best is informal discussion outside of meetings. If you absolutely must get the chapter to schedule something, then make a motion to schedule it for a date. Then it can be amended to the date the chapter prefers. This takes more time, though, since it involves at least 2 motions.

That leads us to friendly amendments. They don't exist. Do not make them. Once a motion is made, it belongs to the chapter. To allow it to be modified by two people (the amender and the proposer) is to violate the basic premise of democratic action. It can be amended via the formal process, or it can be amended via withdrawal and reproposal.

## 10. Exercises

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The following are basic proposals that are typical of Iota Chapter meetings. The goal of these exercises is to phrase them in the form of a correct and complete motion.

1. I want the chapter to fix the band trucks. It will cost \$150 to do so.
2. I think we ought to fix the stands sometime.
3. We should give the VPM some money to buy roses for the sisters.
4. I want to pay for intramurals (\$90) and money is due next week.
5. I want to lower the local dues.
6. I can't make 3<sup>rd</sup> degree and I don't want to go on probation!
7. I like the project we are discussing allocating money for, but it doesn't seem like its enough money to do the job.
8. This project seems awesome, but I really think we should talk to the directors and get some more research.
9. Oh no! I forgot to bring up something that was in committee, but we're in new business.
10. We're in new business and we're discussing an allocation for \$75. That doesn't seem right...
11. This proposal seems cool, but I wonder how much it will cost.