

## Parliamentary Procedure in a Nutshell

Parliamentary Procedure is a protocol employed by legislative bodies to facilitate meetings. The goals of parliamentary procedure are to protect the rights of the minority, maintain the rule of the majority, and promote the most efficient proceedings.

The Graduate Student Senate uses “Robert’s Rules of Order” as a guide to parliamentary procedure. Traditionally, the GSS has not closely followed these guidelines since they can easily become cumbersome when business is simple and debate is minimal.

As the GSS becomes more active and debate more lively, we must take care to maintain the spirit of parliamentary procedure. This brief guide should be sufficient for our current level of activity.

### Tools of Parliamentary Procedure

**In Order**—Parliamentary Procedure only allows for certain actions to be performed at certain times during the meeting. Actions allowed are referred to as “in order” and those not allowed are called “out of order.” In general, actions that are germane to the topic of discussion are in order.

**Motions**- A motion is a suggestion to the senate to take a specific action. Any member of the Senate may propose a motion (provided it is in order). To propose a motion, raise your placard and wait to be identified by the President. Bills and Resolutions in New Business are *Main Motions* (automatically proposed as we come to them on the agenda). As these are debated, other motions are used to help resolve the issue. Only one main motion can be considered at a time.

**Seconds**- Most motions proposed to the senate require that at least one other member support consideration of the action. Another member shows support by raising his/her placard after a motion is proposed. If no one does so, the motion may be “lost for want of a second.”

**Floor**- A member or guest who “has the floor”, has the right to speak without being interrupted (for the most part). A member with the floor may entertain questions proposed by other members or guests without yielding the floor. When the speaker is done, he/she must yield the floor. The President always determines who has the floor. You must have the floor to make a motion, but not to second one.

**Bill**- A bill is a detailed statement of action. It defines a specific course of action for the senate. The statement has several “whereas” clauses that outline the reasons for the action and one or more “enacted” clauses that outline the action to be taken. Any member of the senate may write and/or sponsor a bill. Sponsors or authors are usually expected to read or paraphrase the document and answer questions concerning its content or purpose.

**Resolution**- A resolution is a detailed statement of sentiment. It expresses the opinion, support, or opposition of the senate. It consists of several “whereas” clauses, which outline the reasons, and one or more “resolved” clauses outlining the opinion of the senate. These may also be written and/or sponsored by any member of the senate.

### Getting Through a Meeting

**Call to Order** –The President begins the meeting. At this point, we begin employing parliamentary procedure.

**Roll Call**—(Obviously) Announce your presence when your name is called.

**Announcement of Quorum**—The executive council here determines whether a sufficient percentage of members are present to conduct business. Without a quorum, the body may still entertain debate and exchange information. However, any votes or elections must be postponed.  
When a quorum is not achieved, the meeting can be immediately adjourned.

**Amendments to the Agenda**—Any member may move to amend the agenda. To do so, raise your placard when the President calls for amendments to the agenda. When you are given the floor, be prepared to state exactly what you would like added to or stricken from the agenda. The motion to amend the agenda requires a second. The amendment requires a majority vote

of the senate. If there are no amendments, the President will announce such and proceed to the next item on the agenda.

**Approval of Minutes**—The President will most likely ask if anyone is opposed to approval of the minutes as written. If no one objects, the minutes are approved by “Silent Assent.” If you would like the Minutes to be amended, proceed just as for amendment to the agenda.

**Introduction of New Bills & Resolutions**—Bills and Resolutions in New Business are introduced to the senate at this point. They may be read or paraphrased, but not debated here.

**President’s Remarks**—Here the President merely addresses the senate to relay any pertinent information. Questions may be posed to the President, but under normal circumstances, any debate is out of order here.

**Open Forum**—Here the floor is given to a designated speaker, usually scheduled to present pertinent information or proposals to the senate. Any member or guest can request time to speak here. Again, questions to the speaker are in order, but debate is usually not.

**Committee Reports**—Much like the President’s remarks, this section is for the relaying of information. Committee Chairs in turn announce the month’s business of their respective committees. Questions are in order; debate is not.

**Old Business**—In this section, any business from the last meeting that was unresolved will be addressed here. Also, *Main Motions* from the last meeting will be listed here. Decisions upon them may be called up for reconsideration only at the meeting directly following the one in which they were resolved. Only a member on the winning side of the vote may call a decision into reconsideration. A motion to reconsider requires a second, and then a majority vote of the senate. After that, the motion is debated just as it was in New Business.

**New Business**—In this section, the senate considers new *Main Motions*. Each bill or resolution is treated separately and in the order that they are listed on the agenda. If you have a question about the content or purpose of the bill, raise your placard while the author still has the floor and address the speaker. After the bill or resolution is read or paraphrased and questions are answered, the President will open the floor to debate. Anyone (guest or member) wishing to express a sentiment or convey information germane to the *Main Motion* may request the floor. After being recognized by the President, the person may address the senate.

Aside from informing and persuading, a number of *Subsidiary Motions* are in order as well. All of these require a second and at least a majority vote of the senate.

- a. Table the motion- If you want to see the Main Motion set aside so another can be considered, move to “table the motion.”
- b. Amend the motion- If you want to see the Main Motion carried in a modified form, move to “amend the motion.” Be prepared to write down exactly what you wish to see inserted, stricken, or altered about the motion.
- c. Refer to Committee- If you think the matter can wait and should be further investigated, you can move to refer the motion to Committee. A committee is then designated to investigate and report on the details of the situation.
- d. Call the Question- If you feel debate is becoming fruitless, you can move to “call the question”, meaning you wish the debate to end and the senate to vote on the issue resolving it. Two thirds of the senate must agree. Another member may object to this, extending debate without a second, if he/she has something to add to the conversation.

\*The motions listed here are not the only ones available, but they should be sufficient to conduct the business of the GSS. If you wish to do or say something, but do not understand which motion to use or how to address the senate, do not be afraid to speak. Parliamentary Procedure is intended to assist, not intimidate, members of the group.

**Comments and Announcements**—Here, any member or guest may request the floor to (obviously) make an announcement or comment. Questions can be posed to the speaker, but debate of any issue ended with the end of New Business and must wait until the Old Business of the next meeting. If there are none, the President will announce such and proceed to the next item on the agenda.

**Adjournment**—At this point in the meeting, adjournment is in order. The President will announce the meeting adjourned.