

**AMERICAN LEGION AUXILIARY
DEPARTMENT OF MICHIGAN
PARLIAMENTARIAN GUIDE
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A Parliamentarian is an advisor who provides guidance on the rules of order and parliamentary procedure during meetings or legislative sessions. They help ensure that debates and decisions follow the correct formal processes.

In this role, a parliamentarian is an advisor or expert in the rules of order for formal meetings or legislative bodies. Their role includes:

- Advising the presiding officer (chair, speaker, etc.) on how to apply rules correctly
- Interpreting and enforcing procedural rules (like *Robert's Rules of Order* or legislative rules)
- Ensuring fair and orderly debate
- Preventing violations of procedure
- Training members on how to use proper procedures

This parliamentarian is neutral and focused on helping the process run smoothly and legally.

The fundamental principles of parliamentary procedure are the core rules and values that guide how formal meetings are conducted in a fair, organized, and democratic way. These principles are designed to ensure that business is handled efficiently, that all members have a voice, and that the rights of the majority and minority are respected.

KEY PRINCIPLES

1. Majority Rule

- Decisions are made based on what the majority of members want.
- The majority vote determines the outcome of motions, elections, and other decisions.

2. Minority Rights

- The minority has the right to speak, to dissent, and to be heard.
- Even though the majority rules, the minority's opinions must be respected and protected.

3. Equal Rights

- Every member has equal rights and privileges.
- All members can make motions, debate, and vote (unless limited by the rules or bylaws).

4. One Question at a Time

- Only one main motion or topic should be considered at a time.
This keeps meetings focused and prevents confusion.

5. One Person, One Vote

- Each member (unless otherwise specified) has one vote, ensuring fairness.

6. Rights of Absentees

- Members who are not present still have rights (e.g. through prior notice of meetings, or quorum rules).
- Rules protect the integrity of decisions and ensure adequate participation.

7. Quorum Required

- A minimum number of members (quorum) must be present to conduct official business.
- Prevents small groups from making decisions without proper representation.

8. Free and Full Debate

- Members must be allowed to debate motions fully and fairly before a vote.
- Encourages thoughtful decision-making and protects democracy.

9. Courtesy and Order

- Members are expected to act with respect and follow proper decorum.
- Helps maintain a civil and effective meeting environment.

10. Rules Must Be Followed

- The assembly must follow its own rules, whether those are national laws, organizational bylaws, or adopted parliamentary authorities (e.g. *Robert's Rules of Order*).

ORDER OF BUSINESS (also called the Agenda)

Is the structured sequence used to conduct a meeting efficiently and fairly. While it may vary depending on the organization or parliamentary authority used (e.g. *Robert's Rules of Order*), the most common standard order is:

Standard Order of Business (Based on *Robert's Rules of Order*)

1. Call to Order – The chair officially begins the meeting by saying, “The meeting will come to order.”
2. Roll Call / Attendance – Used in formal bodies to ensure a quorum is present.
3. Reading and Approval of Minutes
 - o The Secretary reads (or distributes) the minutes from the previous meeting.
 - o Members may correct errors.
 - o A motion is made to approve the minutes.
4. Reports of Officers, Boards, and Standing Committees
 - o Officers (like the Treasurer or Secretary) give routine reports.
 - o Standing committees (those that are permanent) report on ongoing work.
5. Reports of Special (Ad Hoc) Committees – Temporary committees created for a specific task report on their progress or findings.
6. Special Orders – Important matters scheduled in advance to be taken up at this time (e.g., elections, bylaws amendments.)
7. Unfinished Business and General Orders – Items left over (“unfinished”) from the previous meeting or postponed to this meeting.
8. New Business – New motions or topics introduced by members for the group to consider.
9. Announcements – Members or officers can make announcements related to the organization.
10. Adjournment – A motion is made to end the meeting officially.

Example (Simple Agenda Template)

- | | |
|------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Call to Order | 6. Unfinished Business |
| 2. Roll Call | 7. New Business |
| 3. Approval of Minutes | 8. Announcements |
| 4. Officer Reports | 9. Adjournment |
| 5. Committee Reports | |

DUTIES OF THE PARLIAMENTARIAN

The duties depend on the setting, but in general, a Parliamentarian serves as a neutral advisor on the rules and procedures that govern meetings. Their job is to ensure the organization follows proper parliamentary law and conducts business fairly, efficiently, and according to its bylaws.

1. Advise on Parliamentary Procedure
 - Provide guidance to the presiding officer with correct procedures. Clarify how to handle motions, votes, amendments, and debates.
 - Interpret the organization's Bylaws, Standing Rules, and adopted Rules of Order (*Robert's Rules of Order*).
2. Ensure Rules Are Followed
 - Help maintain order and fairness during meetings.
 - Prevent violations of procedure (e.g., improper motions, ignoring members' rights).
3. Assist in Meeting Preparation
 - Help the presiding officer prepare the agenda or order of business. Review scripts, motions, or complex issues in advance.
 - Offer advice on handling controversial or sensitive topics.
4. Support Members and Committees
 - Respond to member questions about how to make motions, appeal decisions, or propose amendments.
 - Train officers and members in parliamentary rules and best practices. Assist with the rules for elections, nominations, and balloting.
5. Remain Neutral and Confidential
 - The parliamentarian does not make decisions, rule on motions, or take sides in debate. They give advice only when asked, usually by the Chair.
 - Their advice is nonbinding — the final ruling is made by the Chair or the assembly.
6. Help Draft or Revise Governing Documents
 - Assist with writing or amending Bylaws, Rules of Order, or Standing Rules. Ensure that proposed changes are clear, legal, and internally consistent.

HOW TO BE AN EFFECTIVE PARLIAMENTARIAN

To be an effective parliamentarian, you need a strong grasp of parliamentary rules, excellent communication skills, and the ability to stay neutral, composed, and detail-oriented — even in high-pressure situations.

1. Master the Rules
 - Study the adopted parliamentary authority (e.g., *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised*).
 - Be familiar with: Types of motions, Order of precedence, Rules for debate, voting, and amendments.
 - Know the Constitution, bylaws and standing rules inside and out.

2. Stay Neutral and Professional

- Remain unbiased during discussions, even if you have personal opinions. Give procedural advice, not policy advice.
- Be discreet — keep confidentiality and avoid embarrassing members.

3. Communicate Clearly and Calmly

- Explain complex rules in simple, clear language.
- Speak confidently but respectfully when offering advice.
- Help the chair run the meeting smoothly without overstepping.

4. Be Prepared

- Review the agenda and likely motions ahead of time.
- Work with the presiding officer before meetings to prepare scripts, rules, and procedures.
- Anticipate controversial issues and plan for how to manage them properly.

5. Support the Chair and Educate Others

- Coach the presiding Officer on how to handle common procedures (e.g., how to recognize speakers, handle amendments).
- Be available to advise members and committees outside of meetings.
- Offer training sessions or brief guides to help members understand parliamentary procedure.

6. Maintain Order Without Controlling the Meeting

- Let the Chair lead the meeting; only advise when asked or needed. Use subtle cues or written notes when possible, during meetings.
- If you must speak, do so briefly and only on procedure.

7. Stay Current and Keep Learning

- Stay updated on revisions to your parliamentary authority (e.g., the latest edition of *Robert's Rules*).

BONUS TIPS

- Practice active listening — know what's happening at every moment.
- Remain patient when members are unfamiliar with the procedure.
- Be the calm in the storm when meetings become contentious.

PARLIAMENTARY AUTHORITY

Is a formal, written set of rules used to govern the procedures of meetings and decision-making in a group or organization. It serves as the default rulebook for how motions are made, debated, voted on, and how meetings are conducted — unless your Bylaws state otherwise. Our Constitution, Bylaws, and Standing Rules govern our organization. If something is not covered in these documents, refer to Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised 12th Edition.

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

- Ensures fairness, order, and consistency
- Protects the rights of all members
- Provides clear guidelines when disputes or confusion arise
- Helps organizations run efficient and democratic meetings

COMMON TYPES OF PARLIAMENTARY AUTHORITIES – ROBERT’S RULES OF ORDER NEWLY REVISED (RONR)

- Used by nonprofits, boards, student governments, churches, HOAs, unions, and even some government bodies
- Latest edition (as of now): 12th Edition (2020)
- Covers: motions, debate, voting, officer duties, committees, elections, and more

HOW AN ORGANIZATION CHOOSES ITS PARLIAMENTARIAN AUTHORITY

The choice is typically stated in the bylaws, for example:

“The rules contained in *Robert’s Rules of Order Newly Revised* shall govern this organization in all cases to which they are applicable...” If no authority is named in the Bylaws, the group may adopt one by a vote.

RESOURCES

Resources available through Emblem Sales at emblem.legion.org

o National Constitution, Bylaws, and Standing Rules (also available on the Auxiliary’s website at www.alaforveterans.org).

o “Robert’s Rules of Order”, Newly Revised, 12th Edition (also available on the internet at <http://www.robertsrules.com/>).

o Parliamentary Procedure Booklet