

MOTIONS -- TWO CATEGORIES

1. **Main Motions.** Primary motions which introduce original business.
2. **Secondary Motions.** -- three types:
 - a. **Subsidiary Motions.** Motions which perfect or otherwise dispose of main motions.
 - b. **Privileged Motions.** Motions which do not relate to the pending business, but have to do with special matters of immediate and overriding importance which, without debate, are allowed to interrupt any pending business.
 - c. **Incidental Motions.** Motions which relate to pending business or to business otherwise at hand, usually dealing with questions of procedure. They neither settle nor perfect the pending business, but rather further illuminate “the terrain upon which one is currently deployed.”

RANKING OF MOTIONS

1. Motions are ranked in the following priority:

- | | | |
|-------------|----------------------------------|--------------|
| | 12. Fix time to which to adjourn | |
| | 11. Adjourn | |
| | 10. Recess | |
| | 9. Raise a Question of Privilege | |
| ▲Privileged | 8. Call for Orders of the Day | |
| ▼Subsidiary | 7. Table | |
| | 6. Limit/Extend Limits of Debate | Undeatable ▲ |
| | 5. Postpone Definitely | Debatable ▼ |
| | 4. Commit (Refer) | |
| | 3. Amend | |
| | 2. Postpone Indefinitely | |
| | 1. Main Motion | |

2. Notes:

- a. The motion “to amend” can be applied to itself, and to the following motions: Commit, Postpone Definitely, Limit/Extend Debate, Recess, and Fix Time to Which to Adjourn.
- b. When an amendment has been offered as in “a,” the motion for the Previous Question may subsequently be used *as relates to the amendment.*

MOTIONS COMMONLY USED IN SESSIONS AND PRESBYTERY.

1. Main Motions -- Form.

- Main motions propose something which the body will do, and should be proceeded with the word, “that.”
- In a concise, unambiguous, and complete manner, motions should describe the “who, what, when, where, how, how much, and where from” of the issue at hand, that is:
 - ** what is to be done?
 - ** who is to do it?
 - ** when: is there a time frame involved, or a deadline?
 - ** where is the proposed action to take place?
 - ** how is the action to be implemented?
 - ** how much: are there funding implications?
 - ** where from: if there are funding implications, what is the source of the funds?
- Motions should not be formed in the negative, and/or in a manner where to support the matter would require a “no” vote, or to oppose the matter would require a “yes” vote.

2. Amendments.

- a. There are three processes of amendments:
 - (1) To insert or to add (words or a paragraph).
 - (2) To strike out (words or a paragraph)
 - (3) To strike out and insert (words; paragraph or greater = “to substitute”)
- b. Amendments must . . .
 - be germane to the question to be amended.
 - not make adoption of the amended question equivalent to rejection of the original motion.
 - not be frivolous or absurd

3. **Postpone vs. Table.** Often, the motion “to lay on the table” is used in situations when one of the forms of the motion “to postpone” would be more appropriate. In fact, the motion “to table” should be used rarely, if at all, in deliberations of church groups, because those groups are fundamentally committed to an open exchange of ideas. The motion “to table” can curtail this open expression of ideas and foster conflict, rather than manage it well.

The reason for this is in the characteristics of the motion to table: it is not debatable, and cannot be amended or referred, because it is the highest-ranking subsidiary motion. The only option before a group is to immediately vote on the issue of laying on the table. Rather than encouraging an open exchange of ideas, this motion comes across as a power play designed to stifle any opposition to the “party line.” Such an approach is only as effective as the cohesion of the party!

4. **The Previous Question.** -- a form of the motion “to limit debate.”
 - a. Effect of passage: immediately shuts off debate and the making of subsidiary motions on the business specified; the pending question(s) is/are stated and the vote(s) is/are taken.
 - b. Rules:
 - Mover must be recognized by the chair. Motion is out of order if someone else (or no one) has the floor.
 - Motion must be seconded.
 - Motion must be adopted by two-thirds vote.
 - This motion is not permitted within committees, which are expected to explore every possible aspect of an issue.

To “call the question” is a non-standard form of this motion. Please note that one person saying these words cannot curtail the rights of every other member to debate and/or offer subsidiary motions toward the business at hand.

DEBATE

Debate refers to the discussion of the merits of a pending question, that is, whether the proposal under consideration should or should not be agreed to. The following standards of debate are to be adhered to, especially within groups which call themselves Christian:

1. Remarks shall be confined to the merits of the pending question (germane), that is, how members should vote.
2. Members shall refrain from questioning or attacking another member’s motives -- the measure, not the member, is the subject of debate.
3. All remarks are to be addressed through the Chair. Members should not address one another directly.
4. In very formal bodies, members should avoid the use of other member’s names. Reference should be made indirectly.
5. Members should not speak adversely on a prior action not pending.
6. A member shall refrain from speaking against one’s own motion. (But, the member is free to vote against it, if desired.)
7. Members cannot read from any paper or book without the permission of the Assembly.
8. A member should stand (if able) when speaking, but be seated during an interruption by the Chair.
9. Members shall refrain from disturbing the assembly in any way during debate or voting.
10. The chair may not participate in debate, but should have nothing to say on the merits of pending questions. If the chair wishes to address the issue, the chair shall give way to another officer, who shall preside.

VOTING

1. **Division of the house.** Voting ordinarily is done by voice vote. If the ruling of the chair is contested, a division of the house occurs according to the following order:
 - a. Rising vote: chair determines which group is larger.
 - b. Rising and Counted vote: As each side rises, the number of persons standing is counted.
 - c. Roll call
2. **Bases for decisions.** Voting is usually done as an intersection of two bases:
 - (1) the proportion which must concur: a majority, two-thirds, three-fourths, etc.
 - (2) the set of members to which the proportion applies:
 - a. when not stated, is always the number of members *present and voting*
 - b. can be by rule defined as the number of members present, whether they vote or not, or the total membership.
3. **Effect of abstentions or failures to vote.**
 - when the basis is the number of members present and voting, abstentions yield to the prevailing side.
 - when the basis is the number of members present, whether they vote or not, or the total membership, abstentions have the same effect as a negative vote.