

HOW TO CONDUCT A WORTHWHILE MEETING

If appropriate preparations have been made, then the scene is set for an effective meeting.

Agendas will have been produced and circulated. Participants will arrive knowing what is to be discussed and with sufficient background information to make relevant contributions. If appropriate, they will have consulted with people they represent and discussed any pertinent issues.

The Role of the Chairperson

In a more formal meeting, the chairperson will outline the purpose of the meeting and remind members why they are there.

In such a meeting there is little need to refer to this procedure as this is implicit in the established etiquette, namely:

- The chair controls the meeting.
- All remarks are addressed through the chair.
- Members do not interrupt each other.
- Members aim to reach a consensus.
- A vote is taken if consensus is not reached.
- The majority wins the vote.
- All members accept the majority decision.

This is **one model**, but alternative models may be adopted.

When discussion is underway, it is the chairperson's responsibility to ensure that it continues to flow smoothly by involving all members present and by not permitting one or two people to dominate the meeting. Summarizing by the chairperson during meetings can:

- Indicate progress, or lack of.
- Refocus discussion that has wandered off the point.
- Conclude one point and lead into the next.
- Highlight important points.
- Assist the secretary if necessary.
- Clarify any misunderstanding.

The chairperson should *pace* the meeting, ensuring it runs to time. If the planning has been properly executed, this should not prove to be a problem.

At the end of a meeting, the chairperson should remind members what they have achieved and thank them for their contributions. Finally, the time and date of the next meeting should be arranged. Again

this is one common model for effective meetings, successful outcomes can be achieved in different ways with different strategies for different purposes, so adapt as appropriate to specific situations.

The Role of the Members

While it is the role of the chairperson to run the meeting, the participation of all members is also fundamental to the success of the meeting.

To ensure an effective meeting, all participants should:

- Undertake any necessary preparation prior to the meeting.
- Arrive on time.
- Keep an open mind.
- Listen to the opinions of others.
- Participate.
- Avoid dominating the proceedings.
- Avoid conflict situations.
- Avoid side conversations which distract others.
- Ask questions to clarify understanding.
- Note down any action agreed upon.

Why Meetings May be Ineffective

There are many reasons why meetings are not effective, some of these include:

- The meeting is unnecessary and revolves around discussion of trivial issues, thus wasting members' valuable time.
- The meeting lacks a clarity of purpose, i.e., the aims and objectives are not clearly defined.
- Inappropriate style of leadership, i.e., the chairperson dominates and closes down or disregards other contributions. See our page: [Leadership Styles](#).
- The chairperson exercises little control and allows one or two members to dominate the proceedings.
- The meeting is too large thereby limiting the flow of discussion and preventing all members being able to contribute.
- Decisions emerge that are not truly representative.
- Problems are talked about rather than being talked through.
- Decisions are delayed or not acted upon.
- No clear-cut decisions are made.

- Minutes are inaccurate or seen as being manipulated by the chairperson or secretary for his/her own purposes.
 - The wrong people are present, thus preventing the meeting proceeding effectively, e.g., those present have to refer back to another person and are therefore unable to comment effectively.
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Summary

There are many types of meetings and many reasons why meetings may be ineffective.

For meetings to be effective, participation is required from all those present. The key skills of interpersonal communication and listening are important.

To ensure the success of a meeting, good preparation is essential and the role of the chairperson is paramount. If these conditions are met, then all participants should leave the meeting feeling a sense of accomplishment, not as if their time has been wasted.

Order of Business for Meetings

Based on *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised (11th Edition)*

Part of any meeting should be a systematic plan for the orderly conduct of business. The sequence in which business is taken up during a meeting is known as the "Order of Business." The Order of Business is a blueprint for the meeting.

OPENING THE MEETING

The presiding officer should never call the meeting to order until a quorum is present. A quorum is the number of members entitled to vote who must be present in order for business to be legally transacted. Quorum is typically defined in the governing documents.

Once a quorum is present, the presiding officer calls the meeting to order by stating, "The meeting will come to order."

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

In meetings when minutes are to be approved, the minutes are typically distributed to all members so that they do not have to be read aloud. Corrections and approval are normally done by unanimous consent. That is, the presiding officer can ask, "Is there any objection to approving the minutes as read [or distributed]." If there is no objection, the minutes are approved.

REPORTS OF OFFICERS, BOARDS, AND STANDING COMMITTEES

The first substantive item of business in meetings is typically hearing from the officers and established boards and committees. The logic in this order of arrangement is to give priority to the items of business from the leadership. Typically, the presiding officer learns in advance who needs to report and only calls on those officers, boards, and committees that have reports.

Reports are generally for information only. In such instances, no motion is necessary following the reports unless there are recommendations to be implemented. A motion "to adopt" or "to accept" a report is seldom wise except when the report is to be issued or published in the name of the organization. On the other hand, it is common that the reporting member end by making a motion if there is a specific recommendation for action.

REPORTS OF SPECIAL COMMITTEES

Unlike standing committees established in the governing documents, special committees do not have continual existence. Instead, special committees exist solely for the purpose of a specific project. For example, a special committee might be created to plan a specific function or event. Special committees typically go out of existence upon their final report.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Unfinished business refers to matters carried over from a previous meeting. This

category of business is sometime incorrectly referred to as "old business." "Old business" is a misnomer in that unfinished business is not simply items that have been discussed previously. Instead, unfinished business items typically fall into one of several specific categories. For organizations that meet at least four times a year, unfinished business may include: (1) any matter that was pending when the previous meeting adjourned; (2) any matters on the previous meeting's agenda that were not reached; or (3) matters that were postponed to the present meeting.

The presiding officer should know if there are any items to be considered under unfinished business. As a result, the presiding officer should not ask, "Is there any unfinished business?" Instead, the presiding officer should simply state the question on the first item of business. If there is no unfinished business, the presiding officer should skip this category of business.

NEW BUSINESS

Much of the work in a meeting is accomplished during the heading of new business. In this category of business, members can introduce any new item of for consideration (unless there are notice requirements that must be considered). In some instances, the presiding officer may be unaware of what items of business will arise under new business.

The presiding officer introduces the heading of new business by asking, "Is there any new business?" Any member can then introduce new items of business by making a motion and obtaining a second. Following the consideration of each item, the chair repeatedly asks, "Is there any further new business?" This process continues until there are no additional business items.

CLOSING THE MEETING

In most assemblies the presiding officer can adjourn the meeting without waiting for a motion to adjourn. If all items of business have been considered, the presiding officer can ask, "Is there any further business?" If there is no response, the presiding officer simply states, "Since there is no further business, the meeting is adjourned."

If custom or tradition requires that a motion to adjourn be made, the presiding officer can ask, "Is there a motion to adjourn?" Once the motion is made and seconded, the presiding officer can ask, "Is there any objection to adjourning the meeting? Hearing no objection, the meeting is adjourned."