

MEETINGS DON'T HAVE TO BE TEDIOUS!  
(some advice for Chairs and members)

Don't underestimate the value of well-run democratic meetings to society. Every day in hundreds of meetings around the world, respect for the rights of others and acceptance of majority decisions is required in democratic meetings. This is a potent force teaching justice at the grass-roots level where it is ultimately most needed, today more than ever!

1. Plain language is best:  
Use only plain language. For example, instead of "I move the previous question," say "I move we vote now." Instead of "I move we table this motion," say "I move we postpone this motion." Traditional rules of order contain a lot of special jargon but your meetings will be fairer and just as legal if you avoid formal, old-fashioned terms.
2. Techniques such as a Mover's Privilege are useful:  
When opinions are not too divided, use a *Mover's Privilege*, allowing the mover to reword a motion during the discussion provided there is a seconder and not more than one member objects. This enables members to perfect the wording of a motion without voting on a lot of amendments. By the way, it is more effective to disallow amendments to amendments. The motion can be defeated and started again.
3. Informal discussion may save time:  
Sometimes it saves time to discuss an idea before presenting a formal motion. Move "that we discuss [the idea] informally." If no motion is forthcoming from the discussion, then the meeting proceeds with the next item on the agenda. This is simpler than the more formal "committee of the whole" procedure.
4. Preventing domination and empowering the timid:  
Here are three little rules to help prevent a talkative member from dominating and to keep the atmosphere relaxed so that timid members can participate easily:
  - \* A member must be acknowledged by the Chair before speaking.
  - \* A member who has spoken once may not reply to another speaker's statements, no matter how outrageous, until all others who wish to speak have done so.
  - \* A member's right to an uninterrupted floor includes freedom from any kind of audience response while that member is speaking.
5. Basic requirements:

A good Chair needs self-control, good humor, and a thorough knowledge of the constitution, the bylaws, the standing rules, and the rules of order of the organization.

Some parliamentary authorities contain hundreds of pages of rules. How can we have smooth meetings when very few members (perhaps none) have the desire or time to learn them? One answer is for the organization to adopt a simpler, more modern rule book for its parliamentary standard. Knowing these two basic principles of parliamentary practice also helps:

Individual rights: Each member has a right to participate equally and fully in orderly meetings free from intimidation, filibustering, or other disturbances, and the right to be equally and fully informed of all events, whether the member is present or not.

Final authority: Given a quorum, the will of the majority of members present and voting at any meeting held in accordance with the bylaws is the final authority and cannot be thwarted by any individual or by any previous decision, except where a law provides an exception.

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