

Subsidiary Motions

In total there are 13 motions in Parliamentary Procedure, including the Main Motion (which also has two sub-categories—Original main motions and Incidental main motions. These will be dealt with at another time.)

The seven Subsidiary Motions assist the assembly in treating or disposing of a Main Motion. Let's examine briefly and in a cursory manner, each Subsidiary Motion in ascending order of precedence, in other words, from the lowest to the highest in priority and ranking.

Postpone indefinitely – If a main motion has been brought to the assembly that may prove embarrassing a member can propose to dispose of the question without bringing it to a vote by moving to have the motion **postponed indefinitely**.

Amend – If a main motion might be more acceptable in an altered form, a proposal to change the wording to provide clarity and within limits to alter the meaning before the main motion is voted on can be accomplished by moving to **amend**

Commit of Refer – Where a main motion may require more information or would consume too much of the assembly's time to properly consider it may be referred to a committee for further research by moving to **commit or refer to a committee**.

Postpone to a Certain Time or Postpone Definitely – Where an assembly prefers to consider the main motion later in the same meeting or at another meeting, this can be achieved by moving to **postpone to a certain time**.

Limit or Extend Limits of Debate – Where it is desired to continue to consider a motion but it is taking too much of the assembly's time, a member can move to **limit debate**, or in special circumstances, extend the length of debate by moving to increase the amount of time for each speech or the number of times a member may speak on the motion by moving to **limit or extend limits of debate**.

Previous Question – Where it is desired to close debate and amendment of a pending motion so that it will come to an immediate vote, a member may move the **previous question**.

Lay on the Table – If the assembly wishes to put the motion aside temporarily without setting a time for resuming its consideration, but with the provision that it can be taken up again whenever a majority so decides, this can be proposed by the motion to **lay on the table**.

Subsidiary Motions all have the following four characteristics:

1. They are always applied to another motion while it is pending;
2. They can be applied to any main motion;
3. They fit in an order of precedence;
4. The time when they are in order extends from the moment the question on a motion to which they can be applied is stated by the chair, until he begins to take the vote on the motion*.

* As with all areas of Parliamentary Procedure there are exceptions. The exceptions in this case warrant a separate article.

Source – Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised 10th Edition, Chapter III, pages 60-62

Rick Joseph DTM