The general format of Senate meetings comprises 1) a gavel to order, 2) approval of the Agenda and previous Minutes, 3) administrative and committee reports, 4) old and new business, and 5) adjournment. Action items are usually presented in writing. By seconded and discussed motions, the body tables or postpones, commits (or refers), rejects (or denies), adopts (or approves). Speakers from the floor are senators and occasionally nonsenators to whom a senator has yielded the floor.

Most matters can be managed with dispatch, but at times debate can be complicated or extended by vaguely prepared motions, by imprecise or redundant speeches, or by tortuous and exotic parliamentary mechanics. To expedite business, virtually all matters that reach the full Senate are first examined by the Executive Committee for substance and organization, but to ensure proper format and to focus debate, all senators should be minimally expert in the parliamentary procedures based on Robert’s Rules of Order.

Action Items Submitted in Advance. All items to be considered for action by the Senate shall first be submitted to the Senate Executive Committee for inclusion in its Agenda.

Observance of the Four-Day Rule. Adhering to the above procedure will all but eliminate the need to waive the Four-Day Rule, which requires that the Agenda be published four days before meetings (PF I-A-1, 7.3). Only the most urgent matters merit waiver of this rule.

Acceptable Format. All Agenda items, whether for action or information, shall be presented in acceptable format. Senate officers and the Chair of Constitution and Bylaws are available to assist in preparation. For example, changing the Policy File requires specific, exacting language, free from motive and ideology; committee reports need to have action items distinguished from the background and rationale.

Separation of Action Items. When a matter is moved to action, the Chair will call for discussion of the whole motion or a separation of independent items. If there are motions to separate, separations will be discussed and voted on seriatim. Lacking a motion to separate (i.e., to deal particularly and exclusively with the language or substance of any part), discussion of the whole shall proceed.

Committee Reports. All committee reports containing items for Senate approval shall be considered action items subject to separation and vote.
Amendments in Writing. All amendments to action items should be submitted to the Secretary for distribution before the Senate meeting. Amendments to amendments or motions on matters that arise from floor debate should be submitted in writing to the Secretary as they are moved.

Friendly Amendments. So-called friendly motions to amend are intended work a nonsubstantive change in language to ease understanding or adoption, but they frequently lead to obfuscation and confusion. Prior distribution of motions and amendments will allow "friendly" consultation before a meeting so that the mover may submit minor changes to the body. Only without objection from the body shall a friendly amendment be accepted.

Speakers List. The Chair will maintain a speakers list on all matters and will advise speakers that they are addressing a matter for the second time. Robert’s stipulates that a member may address a question only twice on the same day and that the member may not speak a second time if someone who has not yet spoken desires the floor.

MOTIONS

In general, keep language formal, succinct, and direct; avoid redundancy and hyperlegalisms. There are felicitous alternatives to "he or she," "(s)he," "in terms of," "being that owing to the fact that because," "individuals," etc. As in the best academic writing, the serial comma before "and" or "or" ensures clarity. The inclusive "or" means "and/or." "Which" and "that" relate to things; "who" relates to persons. Numbers need not be followed by parenthesized figures, for example, one (1).

Motions are properly couched as object clauses using the optative subjunctive, for example:

I move:

That sufficient funds be provided.

In submitting a motion in writing, identify the relevant item or section by the Agenda heading. Include your name; the name of the second or the names of any sponsors is optional. Precede your text with "Motion" or "Moved." You should also include a succinct arguments and apt documentation.

Amendments. For clarity or effect, submit amendments beforehand. Motions to amend are usually to insert, add, or delete parts of a motion on the floor. Use strikeout type to delete and underline to insert or add, for example:

I move to amend by insertion and deletion:
That sufficient funds and equipment be provided allocated.

Amend by substitution if the amendment wholly replaces the motion. So-called "friendly" amendments shall be limited to mere editorial changes.

Resolutions are introduced as motions usually comprising one or more Whereas clauses in the indicative followed by one or more Resolved clauses. Use the subjunctive if the resolution is not within the power of the body, for example:

I move that:

Whereas, Sufficient funds have been provided; and

Whereas, The need is pressing; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Senate is dismayed; and be it further

Resolved, That the President allocate funds.

Whereas clauses provide background, context, or scope of power-in general, the pertinence of the resolution. Resolved clauses are the action of the body and shall be as specific and complete as possible.

Policy Language. Although the Secretary or the Committee on Constitution and Bylaws will edit policy language, use the future imperative "shall" to ensure explicit adherence and the permissive "may" to allow choice. Also model your policy statement on the numeral-decimal format used in the Policy File.

GLOSSARY

A meeting is a single, official gathering to enact business. A session is a meeting or series of meetings devoted to a single order of business. A meeting or a session is subject to brief recesses and is concluded by adjournment.

Absentees: See Proxy voting.

Accept, adopt, or agree to a report: To endorse as the statement of the body; cf. Ratify, adopt, or approve and Receive or file a report.

Action item: Must be moved and requires a vote; committee motions require no second.

Adjourn: To end a meeting or session, usually after concluding the business of an agenda, but it may be made at any time.
Agenda: Literally, "things to be done"; agreed-upon orders of the day, that is, of the meeting or session; subject to majority approval and amendment.

Amend: To alter wholly or partially by substitution, insertion, addition, or deletion. Note: Amendments may not consist of the insertion of negatives; defeating the motion accomplishes this.

Appeal from the decision of the Chair: If one disagrees with the Chair's parliamentary ruling, one immediately makes (or takes) an appeal, seconded by another, in order to allow the body to rule; sometimes debatable, sometimes not; majority vote whether the decision of the Chair shall be sustained. Aye sustains, nay overrules the decision of the Chair.

Close debate, move to: Also, Move the previous question. To close debate immediately, usually on the last question; nondebatable; two-thirds vote.

Commit, refer, or recommit: To send to a committee, often with instructions; not "refer back."

Committee of the Whole: The entire Senate acting as a committee to consider a matter; usually chaired by the Vice Chair; reports to the Senate, which may determine any action.

Divide the question: See Separate. To deal with a motion's items separately; separation of the motion automatically divides the question but excludes discussion of some parts.

Division (of the body): After an ambiguous voice vote, and before the next question is stated, a member may call for a more accurate means of taking the vote by calling "Division."

Executive session: The Chair, the Agenda, or a motion may determine Executive Session, which excludes all nonsenators from the room.

Faculty session: Convened by a simple majority vote and terminated by a two-thirds vote; a public session, but only elected faculty senators may vote. See PF I-A-1, 7.6.

General or unanimous consent: Adoption without a motion and without a formal vote, if there is no objection; Chair calls "Without objection."

Information: Received by the body and requiring no action; see Receive or file a report.

Information, point of: Member requests from the Chair immediate information or clarification relevant to the question; not a statement but an inquiry.
Inquiries, requests and: See Requests and inquiries.

Limit or extend limits of debate: Requires two-thirds.

Main motion: Formal proposal that brings business before the body; it is subject to amendment and other actions; see Motions.

Majority vote: One vote more than half the votes cast, excluding blanks and abstentions; absolute majorities apply to the entire membership; on voice votes the Chair may vote only to cause or break a tie or to achieve two-thirds; on a ballot the Chair always may cast a vote.

Minority report of a committee: Not a right but a privilege accorded by the body; the majority report is called the committee report.

Motions: See Amend, Close debate, Commit, Divide the question, Main motion, Postpone, Ratify, Rescind, Separate, Table. Actions proposed or taken by the body. As a general rule, in a series of motions, the less essential or involved a motion is, the more quickly it is dealt with.

Order, question of or point of: Raised when the rules of the body seem to be breached; the Chair shall rule subject to appeal; see Appeal from the decision of the Chair.

Orders of the day, call for: Raised if the Agenda seems to have been breached; the Chair rules, subject to appeal; see Appeal from the decision of the chair.

Parliamentary inquiry: Member requests the Chair's immediate parliamentary opinion, not ruling.

Postpone definitely (to a time certain): To consider a question at a more convenient time; cf. Table.

Postpone indefinitely: Effectively, with the intent to terminate consideration or to prevent defeat.

Previous question, move the: See Close debate.

Privilege, questions of: One raises a question of privilege (of the whole body or oneself) for an urgent matter; the Chair rules on admitting the request, which may lead to a motion.

Proxy voting: There shall be no absentee voting; proxies shall be designated in writing by the absent senator.
Question, call for the: To request an immediate vote provided there is no objection; no second is required.

Question, put the: After debate is closed, the Chair puts the question to a vote.

Question, state the: After a motion has been seconded and, if necessary, the language has been "perfected," the Chair states the question on the motion, which now becomes the property of the body and is open to debate.

Quorum: Requisite number of members to call a meeting or session; Senate Bylaws stipulate a two-thirds quorum; once established, the quorum shall not be not challenged (PF I-A-1, 9.0).

Ratify, adopt, or approve: To pass a motion to be published as the will of the body.

Receive or file a report: To enter as part of the proceedings without action; cf. Accept, adopt, or agree to a report.

Recess: Brief interruption of a meeting or session before the conclusion of an agenda.

Reconsider: To recall an action to the floor; moved by one who voted on the prevailing side within the same day (or agenda), seconded by any member; requires a simple majority vote.

Requests and inquiries: Requests and inquiries are directed to the Chair, whose ruling is subject to appeal; see Appeal from the decision of the Chair; Information, point of; Withdraw or modify a motion.

Rescind, annul, repeal, or amend a previous adoption: Cf. Reconsider. Without prior announcement, requires a two-thirds vote; Constitution and Bylaws rescissions require both a prior announcement and two-thirds.

Rescind and expunge from the Minutes: Not only to rescind an action but to express strong disapproval; requires an affirmative vote from the majority of the entire body, not merely those in attendance.

Roll call vote: A request shall have five seconds (PF I-A-3, 7.0).

Separate: To remove from a main motion an independent item for separate motion and debate.

Seriatim or by paragraph, consideration: Items of a question are debated or voted on one by one; not "ad seriatim."
Substitute: To amend by substantive change; that is, the amendment will alter the thrust or character of the motion.

Suspend the rules or set aside the orders of the day: Requires two-thirds.

Table or lay on the table: To remove a pending question from action until a time when it may be taken from the table for action; a motion to (lay on the) table may occur after debate has been closed; used only to immediately address an urgent item of business; cf. Postpone.

Time certain: A special order identifying an Agenda item that takes precedence at a specific time.

Unanimous vote: When all members cast the same vote, or if there are abstentions but no immediate objections to "unanimous"; otherwise, the unopposed vote shall be "without dissent" (PF I-G-5).

Withdraw or modify a motion: Member requests immediate leave (or permission) to withdraw or modify a motion; if the question on the motion has not been stated, the request is granted; if the question has been stated, the request may be granted only if there is no objection.

Yield the floor: With permission of the Chair, a senator may yield the floor to another senator or to a guest; the senator may stipulate that the yield is temporary.