

PARLIAMENTARY PROCEDURE: FAIR, LOGICAL AND EFFICIENT ***Nancy Sylvester, MA, PRP, CPP-T***

In my book, *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Robert's Rules*, and on my website, you will find a table with the basic information for processing motions. It is intended to serve as an aid during a meeting, so you can glance at it and know the vote required, debatably of a motion, etc. Sometimes you are in a meeting and don't have those aids. If you are ever in a meeting and can't remember the parliamentary rule that applies, here is the test to give as you try to figure out what to do. Ask yourself three questions:

1. What is the fairest thing to do in this situation? Be sure to consider what is fairest to all, not just to you.
2. What is the most logical answer to this problem? This one is hard, because most of us don't have a mind that is as logical as Robert's.
3. What is the most efficient way of doing this? If you can get there in two steps, don't take three!

Example Please! An example might show how to apply these questions. The debate has been going on for awhile and someone calls out "Question" with the intent of stopping the debate and moving on to the vote on the motion. But you don't know how to process this. Is a vote needed close debate? If one is, what kind of vote is required – a majority or two-thirds?

What is the fairest thing to do? Well, it is clear that it is not fair that the one person who called out "Question" can tell all of the rest of us that the debate is over and we have to vote, just because he or she is ready to vote! So, it must take a motion and a second.

What vote would be fair? The rules allow us to each debate the motion two times. Probably, everyone in the room has not yet talked their two times. Therefore, it must take more than a majority of us to stop people from doing what they have a right to do. Therefore, a two-thirds vote must be needed.

What is the most logical thing to do?

But, we are trying to stop debate, so we can't take the time to debate this motion. So it must be an undebatable motion.

What is the most efficient way of handling this?

We can't wait until people have talked all that all of them want to, or it will go on so long that we will each have a birthday or two during the time we debate this motion! So, this motion must be able to be made even though there is another motion pending.

What vote would be efficient? We have to be able to stop the discussion, so some kind of vote to stop debate would be the efficient thing to do. And, we have already established that the most fair and logical vote would be a two-thirds vote.

From working this example through, we can figure out that the motion to Call the Question can be made while another motion is on the floor, needs a second, is not debatable and needs a two-thirds vote.

The problem with this system is that it takes a lot of time and brain power to figure out what is fair, logical and efficient. That is why having a table of the rules in front of you during the meeting can be very helpful!

Nancy Sylvester has been a practicing professional parliamentarian since 1980 and is the author of the book [The Complete Idiot's Guide to Robert's Rules](#). She is a Professional Registered Parliamentarian, a Certified Professional Parliamentarian, and a Certified Professional Trainer of Parliamentary Procedure. She has served as parliamentarian for the National Association of Parliamentarians, making her the Parliamentarian's Parliamentarian!