

## Things to Know Going Into an AGM

Today, we want to talk about some of the motions and parliamentary tools that you could encounter at the ASCA AGM—or any AGM for that matter. Knowing what these are and how they work will help to demystify some of the meeting for you and, we hope, help you to get more out of it.

### Motions and Resolutions

#### Is there a Difference?

Members are all familiar with motions because they use them in their councils. When motions are long, complex, or they require a degree of formality, they are often presented as a resolution. They are almost always written out and submitted ahead, not done “on the fly.” So, a resolution is just a form of a motion—all the same rules apply. So when I’m talking about one, I’m talking about both.

### Amendments

**First, what is an Amendment?** A motion to Amend is a motion to modify the wording, and within limits, the meaning, of a pending motion or resolution. Next to a Motion, amend is the most common motion because people see a Main Motion and mostly like it but think that with a bit of their help, it will be better, so they decide to offer an amendment. I say, mostly like it, because if they don’t like it at all, they probably won’t try to amend the main motion, but rather, will try to defeat it.

**When is it used?** Well, you see a main motion/resolution that you generally want it, but you also want to improve a bit—this is what an amendment is for. While debate of the main motion is going on, you just wait for your turn to speak and then say, “I move to amend the motion by…” or something like that. You *do* need to have a seconder.

A word of caution: don’t get in the habit of amending just to amend—just to tweak up some parts of the motion because they’re not the way you’d say them or because you want to put your stamp on the motion. Ask yourself, what is the purpose of the motion?—will the motion accomplish what it should with its current wording?—is it accurate? Who is the audience? Will that person or group understand the motion as it is worded? Perhaps the motion needs an amendment, perhaps not…

#### How do you amend a motion or resolution?

There are 3 main ways of amending a motion or resolution:

**1<sup>st</sup>:** to insert words into a sentence or add them at the end of a sentence; or in a resolution, to insert a paragraph into the resolution or add it at the end.

**2<sup>nd</sup>:** to strike out words from a sentence or a paragraph from a longer resolution

**3<sup>rd</sup>:** a combination of the first two: to strike out and insert words or to substitute a paragraph or an entire resolution or main motion by striking out one and inserting another in its place.

Once an amendment has been made, all debate on the main motion stops—If you’ve been waiting to make comments on the main motion, you have to hold your comments until later. The only debate that is allowed is on the amendment—members discuss whether they want it or not. Then a vote is taken on the amendment. If it passes, members go back to debating the main motion, as it has been amended. If the amendment is defeated, members go back to debating the main motion in its original form.

**Can you show how these could work?**

### **Slide 2**

**1<sup>st</sup>: To insert words.**

So here we have a main motion—it’s jibberish, but we’re not concerned with the meat of the motion here, just how to handle the amendment.

### **Slide 3**

Wait your turn to speak and make the motion to amend: I move to insert the words “and the horses” after the word “afdi” in the second sentence. Very simple. It would be equally simple if the motion were “to add words at the end of the second sentence after the word ‘ghbir.’”

### **Slide 4**

What you can’t do is something like this...These are three separate amendments...these cannot be offered as one amendment.

### **Slide 5**

**The 2<sup>nd</sup> way to make an amendment is To strike out words.**

I move to strike the word “skien” in the first sentence.

As with adding words, you can’t move to strike words throughout the motion all in one motion to amend.

### **Slide 6**

**The 3<sup>rd</sup>: way to make an amendment is To strike out and insert words or to substitute an entire paragraph of a Motion/Resolution.**

3.a. Let’s look at Strike out and Insert words first

I move to strike out the words “eid afdi etnjej” in the second sentence and insert the one word “primarily” in their place.

### **Slide 7**

3.b the second part—To substitute:

**OR:** I move to substitute the Main Motion with the motion

You could also substitute one paragraph of a long resolution that has several paragraphs. BUT, Caution: You can never offer a substitution for anything less than a complete paragraph or resolution.

Also, when you offer a substitution...whole bunch of rules...Chair needs to go slowly and cautiously.

### **Slide 8**

Now, I said earlier that you can't change words all throughout a motion, but there is a time when you can—here's an example

### **Slide 9**

I move to amend the resolution by striking out "Finance Committee" wherever it appears and inserting "Audit Sub-Committee" in its place.

You can see that it wouldn't make sense in this case to make 4 separate amendments that are exactly the same—these are called conforming amendments.

### **Slide 10**

Now, one more thing: An amendment can itself be amended. The very same process occurs as for an amendment, but what is being amended is an amendment. Let's look at our earlier example.

### **Slide 11**

After this amendment has been made, and while members are debating whether to add these words or not, another member makes the following amendment to the amendment:

I move to amend the amendment by inserting the words "and the cattle" after the word "horses."

Now, debate on the amendment about horses stops and members only discuss whether the idea of cattle should be added. This is then voted on. If it passes, debate now is on whether to add the phrase "after the horses and the cattle." If it is defeated, debate goes back to being only on whether to add the phrase "after the horses." An amendment to an amendment is certainly not as common as an ordinary amendment—nor should it be—when a motion gets to this point, the members can get very bogged down in process and sometimes lose sight of what the motion is trying to accomplish.

**No more slides**

Finally, amendments can be friendly—or more formally, made by unanimous consent. Amendments sometimes seem to be simple or acceptable that they may be adopted by unanimous consent. If the Chair senses that there is general approval, he/she may verify that there is no objection, and if there is none, the amendment is simply made.

## **Unanimous Consent**

### **Speaking of Unanimous Consent, what exactly is that?**

No opposition to something, the procedure of UC can be used to adopt a motion without taking steps of a motion. The Chair checks to determine if there is any objection to whatever motion or action is being proposed, then it's agreed on. If an objection, the usual processes are followed.

UC does not mean that every member present is in favour of the proposed action; only mean that a member doesn't feel that the issue is important enough to oppose or discuss their objection. "pick your battles"

Electronic meetings: well suited to this setting—especially for procedural motions. Easier for the Chair to ask if there is any objection than to wait while 100 members cast their e-votes and have them tabulated. Minutes, accepting the agenda, taking a recess, adjourning or other procedural items. Also for substantive motions in some cases, such as for some amendments as I mentioned above, and occasionally for others, usually at the discretion of the Chair.

## **Calling the Question**

**First, what is it?** A motion to Call the Question, or as it's also called, to Move the Previous Question, brings an immediate vote on one or more pending questions. If it passes, then debate is over and that motion is voted on immediately.

**When do you use Call the Question?** Debate is becoming perhaps circular or redundant or no new points are being brought up or debate has just dragged on too long. Should not be used because a member just wants to get out of the meeting sooner or thinks that other motions have taken too long. Each motion needs to be given its fair place before the assembly.

**How do you use Call the Question?** Although there is only one actual motion, there are three common forms seen at large conventions, so let's look at the non-motion two first.

**Very informally, "Question, Question"** No real standing, and in some assemblies consider highly disruptive and can get the member in trouble; but most often, they simply serve to let the Chair know that at least a few members are getting antsy on the topic.

***Still informally, but less so,*** a member asks the Chair to call the question or go to the vote. This is still not a motion. This may lead the Chair to go directly to the mover of the motion for closing comments or check if there is anyone who has not yet spoken who still wishes to speak or even to seek unanimous consent to close debate.

***As a formal motion.*** Motion to call the question or move the previous question, with a seconder. No debate on it; it's not amendable, and it needs a 2/3rds majority to pass. It needs 2/3rds to pass because of rights of members. If it passes, the vote taken immediately, with no further debate, including no closing comments. If it fails to get a 2/3rds majority, debate just continues on as if the motion to call the question was never made.

If there is just a main motion on the floor, process is straightforward; however, if there are other motions attached to it, process can be very complicated because it can apply to one or more of these.

## **Raising A Point of Order**

**First, what is it?** It is a member's way of saying that they think that a rule of the assembly has been violated and they would like the Chair to make a ruling and enforce the rules if the member is right.

**When do you raise a Point of Order?** Breach of the rules, Chair normally corrects. If Chair misses, any member can make Point of Order. The general rule: raise promptly right at the time. For example, no seconder to a motion after debate has already begun or already on the next motion. A few exceptions to this—breaches that are of an ongoing or continuous nature—e.g., the adoption of a motion that conflicts with your bylaws.

Pick your battles carefully—RRONR: "In ordinary situations, it is undesirable to raise points of order on minor irregularities of a purely technical nature if it clear that no one's rights are being infringed upon and no real harm is being done to the proper transaction of business." Sometimes, it's okay to let little things go for the sake of a smooth meeting...

And always: Use the Point of Order to help the Chair ensure fairness for all members.

**How do you call a Point of Order?** Stand up and say, "Point of Order." In an electronic meeting, standing rules of the meeting—maybe by raising your hand, or writing in the Chat window, or turning on your mic and speaking out if you have that ability.

No seconder. Anyone speaking immediately stops. The Chair then asks the member to state their point of order. The member should say what the problem is, "I make the point that ..." or "Chair, there was no seconder for that motion." Or "The speaker used inappropriate language." Or whatever. The chair might have to consult with someone else because remember, the Chair

him/herself missed the breach. The Chair then makes their ruling, agreeing or not with the person who raised the point of order.

If any two members disagree with the ruling, they have the right to Appeal. I won't go into that whole process now, but just to let you know, that it is possible.

## **Making a Request for Information (sometimes called a Point of Information)**

**First, what is Request for Information?** A request for information is a request, always in the form of a question, directed to the Chair or through the Chair to someone else for information relevant to the business at hand. If the information is to be asked of a member who is speaking, the speaker has the choice to consent or not to being interrupted, because this will eat into their time.

**How do you make a Request for Information?** Member says, "Request for information" same as for a PofO and the Chair says, "Member, state your request or question." The member then makes their request: "Can the treasurer tell us..." "Will the convention committee be reporting on the number of delegates who..." or "Will the speaker allow a question on..." or "I would like to ask the speaker a question about..."

May also be for purpose of reminding a speaker of a point, but it still *must be in the form of a simple question*.

A common abuse of this is seen when members bring arguments for their own position, under the assumption that they are making "points" with "information." Not appropriate.

## **Raising a Parliamentary Inquiry**

**First, what is a Parliamentary Inquiry?** A question directed to the Chair to obtain information on a matter of parliamentary law or the rules of the organization that has to do with the business at hand. It can't be about something hypothetical. The Chair has to answer such questions when it could help a member to understand what to do in a particular situation.

Lingo??

**How do you raise a Parliamentary Inquiry?** Member says, "I rise to a parliamentary inquiry" or "I have a question about whether I can do something here or about the effect of passing this motion or whatever" or "Can I ask the Chair a question?" Chair says, "State your inquiry" or "Go ahead." Member: "If we pass this motion, does it mean that the ASCA position on XX will change from what it is now?" Other examples: What do our bylaws say about this? I would like to withdraw my motion—is that possible?

It's not a motion, so it's not voted on.

## **Raising a Point of Privilege?**

**First, what is a Point of Privilege?** A way to up something that relates to the rights and privileges of the whole assembly or any of its members for immediate consideration. Because of its urgency, it has to interrupt the business going on, but should wait until between speakers.

### **Did you say there are two kinds—one for the assembly and one for individual members? Can you give an example?**

For the assembly: in a big conference room, unless the windows were closed on the west side of the room, no one on that half of the room will be able to hear the speakers because there's a busy highway just outside.

For an individual member: a member with a health condition makes a motion and then the discussion went on for a long time, so that the mover of the motion got to the point where they had to leave the room to go to their room and take some specific medication. The member asks for a 10-minute recess. This would likely be granted, but only because they were the mover of the motion.

### **How do you raise a Point of Privilege?**

Same as the other Points. When the Chair asks what the Point is, just say, this is a Personal Point of Privilege, or this is a Point of Privilege for the Whole Assembly—and what it is.

Usually, it's ruled on the Chair—when the meeting is in person, the Chair often gets a good sense by looking around and seeing if there is general head nodding.

Remember what I said about knowing the lingo—if you can't remember the term, and you just ask.

That's our offerings for today!

We hope that familiarity with these few motions and parliamentary tools help to make you more comfortable going into an Annual General Meeting of Alberta School Council or of any organization that follows general parliamentary procedures for passing motions and getting their business done.