

This is one in a series of articles on parliamentary procedure and how to conduct more effective organizational meetings. For a complete list in this series go to the [Parliamentary Procedure resource](#).

A common question of parliamentary procedure is whether or not a board can change its mind on a decision once it has been adopted. The answer is, yes, it can be done. That being said, from a practical standpoint some decisions, if already carried out, cannot be undone (such as issues with a contract being let, an already completed purchase or a person given official notification of expulsion from membership).

As a [professional registered parliamentarian](#) working for [Michigan State University Extension](#), I often consult the gold standard of parliamentary procedure, [Robert's Rules of Order](#), a book that had its first printing in 1876.

According to *Roberts Rules of Order, 11th Edition* (RONR), there are two ways a decision of the board can be changed. If a member wants to change a decision made in the same meeting they would use a motion to reconsider. If it is necessary to change a decision that was adopted at a previous meeting a member would make a motion to rescind. These two motions have some similar characteristics but it is important to highlight their differences so that board members know when and how to use them properly. This article provides a basic primer on the motion to rescind. (Also see: [What is the motion to reconsider?](#)).

The motion to rescind

The motion to rescind is one of a group of motions that bring a question again before the assembly. It can be applied to any decision adopted by the board at any time (if it is during the same meeting as the decision the motion to reconsider is used). It differs from the motion to reconsider in that there is no time limit on making this motion and any member regardless of how the member voted on the original question can make it.

Unlike a motion to reconsider, which only needs a majority vote to pass, a motion to rescind is more of a challenge. In order to rescind something previously adopted by a majority vote, the board must have received notice of the intent to present such a motion either at a previous meeting or with the call of the meeting (as long as the time between meetings is within a quarter). If that pre-meeting notice does not occur, then the vote required to rescind is two-thirds of those present and voting or a majority of the entire membership of an organization (not just those present).

The motion to rescind can be introduced at a time when no other business is pending. After being recognized by the chair, a member makes the motion to rescind. The motion should include a description or reference to the decision in question (worded as closely as possible to any notice that has already been provided). Another member then must second the motion. The chair restates the motion to rescind and asks for debate. During debate, any member may propose amendments (changes that are greater than the scope of notice are not in order). After full debate, the vote is taken on rescinding the motion.

If the original motion has been acted upon and that action cannot be undone the motion cannot be rescinded. However, any unexecuted part could be rescinded or amended.

Parliamentary Motions Guide

Based on *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised (11th Edition)*

The motions below are listed in order of precedence. Any motion can be introduced if it is higher on the chart than the pending motion.

YOU WANT TO:	YOU SAY:	INTERRUPT?	2ND?	DEBATE?	AMEND?	VOTE?
§21 Close meeting	I move to adjourn	No	Yes	No	No	Majority
§20 Take break	I move to recess for	No	Yes	No	Yes	Majority
§19 Register complaint	I rise to a question of privilege	Yes	No	No	No	None
§18 Make follow agenda	I call for the orders of the day	Yes	No	No	No	None
§17 Lay aside temporarily	I move to lay the question on the table	No	Yes	No	No	Majority
§16 Close debate	I move the previous question	No	Yes	No	No	2/3
§15 Limit or extend debate	I move that debate be limited to ...	No	Yes	No	Yes	2/3
§14 Postpone to a certain time	I move to postpone the motion to ...	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority
§13 Refer to committee	I move to refer the motion to ...	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority
§12 Modify wording of motion	I move to amend the motion by ...	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority
§11 Kill main motion	I move that the motion be postponed indefinitely	No	Yes	Yes	No	Majority
§10 Bring business before assembly (a main motion)	I move that [or "to"] ...	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority

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Incidental Motions - No order of precedence. Arise incidentally and decided immediately.

YOU WANT TO:	YOU SAY:	INTERRUPT?	2 ND ?	DEBATE?	AMEND?	VOTE?
§23 Enforce rules	Point of order	Yes	No	No	No	None
§24 Submit matter to assembly	I appeal from the decision of the chair	Yes	Yes	Varies	No	Majority
§25 Suspend rules	I move to suspend the rules which ...	No	Yes	No	No	2/3
§26 Avoid main motion altogether	I object to the consideration of the question	Yes	No	No	No	2/3
§27 Divide motion	I move to divide the question	No	Yes	No	Yes	Majority
§29 Demand rising vote	I call for a division	Yes	No	No	No	None
§33 Parliamentary law question	Parliamentary inquiry	Yes (if urgent)	No	No	No	None
§33 Request information	Request for information	Yes (if urgent)	No	No	No	None

Motions That Bring a Question Again Before the Assembly - no order of precedence. Introduce only when nothing else pending.

§34 Take matter from table	I move to take from the table ...	No	Yes	No	No	Majority
§35 Cancel or change previous action	I move to rescind/ amend something previously adopted...	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	2/3 or maj. w/ notice
§37 Reconsider motion	I move to reconsider the vote ...	No	Yes	Varies	No	Majority