



# Harvard Model Congress

## Europe 2024

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# GUIDE TO PARLIAMENTARY PROCEDURE

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### *A Brief Primer*

What is **parliamentary procedure**? In short, it is the set of rules that structure how elected officials conduct their work. This structure is important – it ensures everybody acts with decorum and respect for the institution of which they are part, and it creates a system to ensure the institution moves forward on the topics and debates it considers.

With regard to Congress, you may be surprised to learn that many of the rules are not permanent, but rather created by each Congress following each election. The US Constitution outlines the responsibilities and jurisdictions of each branch of government; in particular, Article I outlines the role of Congress. This document provides the basis for everything the legislative branch can, and cannot, consider. It does not instruct Congress on how it should be run; rather, it provides the body with the power to set its own rules at the start of each Congress (Article I, Section 5).

While lawmakers have the ability to set entirely new rules for each Congress, they typically only make limited changes; the core of parliamentary procedure has slowly evolved from the earliest days of the US. Thomas Jefferson wrote the first book on parliamentary procedure in the US, entitled *A Manual of Parliamentary Procedure for the Use of the Senate of the United States* (though it is commonly referred to as *Jefferson's Manual*). The House of Representatives later adopted it as the foundation for its parliamentary procedure as well.

Note that international governmental bodies also use certain rules that structure how officials speak and interact. While these institutions do not use US parliamentary procedure, the fundamental idea is the same. If you are in one of these committees, your chairs will explain any important distinctions in the procedure you will be using. In general, a basic understanding of parliamentary procedure will serve you well regardless of your committee, so be sure to diligently read the next section.

### *The Essential Motions*

While each chamber in Congress has hundreds of pages of rules and procedure, we don't expect you to know it all! At HMC, we emphasize the key aspects of

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parliamentary procedure so that you can get better insight into how policymakers act on Capitol Hill day-to-day.

In this section, we've provided a walkthrough of the essential motions you will use at committee, from the beginning to the end. This section should provide you with a picture of what the committee will look like. We encourage you to read through this a couple of times and even take notes on the motions you may be less familiar with. While it may seem like a lot, remember that all of HMC's staff members are here to help you along the way and ensure your experience does not get bogged down in the procedure. Much more important is the quality of your ideas and willingness to participate. That said, preparing and knowing the essential motions before coming to the conference will certainly allow you to feel more comfortable with the style of the committee.

*Note: the glossary at the end of this document will list and define all motions we discuss here.*

## Opening Debate

At the beginning of committee, after attendance has been taken and all delegates are situated, the beginning of committee normally starts with a **motion to open debate**. This is a formal start to begin committee and move into debate for the session. If there are multiple topics (more than one briefing) for a committee, delegates will first debate the order in which they should be addressed. Following this, another delegate will need to **second the motion**, or indicate their support of the motion, by raising their placard and saying, "I second it." Afterward, a **motion to set the agenda** can be introduced, allowing for a vote to pick which topic will be discussed and voted on first. This follows the format of "I move to set the order of the agenda to (propose an order of the topics)." Similarly, this needs a second. In order to pass, this requires a **simple majority** (more than 50% of the total committee members must vote in favor) in order to pass.

## General Speaker's List

After debate has been opened and the topic order has been chosen, the next step is diving into discussion. You won't actually motion for this; once the agenda has been set, your chair will automatically move into a general speaker's list. This part of committee gives you the opportunity to speak about your (role's) views on the topic overall. It is a fantastic opportunity to give a speech, given that all you have to do is give your thoughts on what your priorities will be in the coming debates and discussions.

## Caucuses

Once onto more specific issues, delegates normally **motion to move to a moderated caucus** in which delegates are able to make short comments in front of the committee on issues and points they see as important to the topic at hand. In order to motion to move to a moderated caucus, a delegate must define (1) the topic, (2) the length of the caucus, and (3) the speaking time per person. For example, a delegate may raise their placard and say, "I move to introduce a moderated caucus for 10 minutes

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with a speaking time of one minute on (topic name).” Like previous motions, this requires another delegate to second. After this, the chair(s) will establish a speakers list of all those wishing to come in front of the committee. After the order of speakers is established, delegates are called forward by the chair(s), who will keep track of time.

Delegates can also **motion to move to an unmoderated caucus** in which delegates leave their seats to discuss ideas with other delegates, talk with allies, and draft legislation. In order to motion to move to an unmoderated caucus, delegates must define the length they want the caucus to last. For example, a delegate may raise their placard and say, “I move to introduce an unmoderated bipartisan caucus for 10 minutes.” Another delegate must then second the motion. If the motion passes, the chair(s) will then time the caucus, for the duration of which delegates are free to move around and discuss.

There are two types of unmoderated caucuses, and you will have to specify which kind you request when you motion for one. A **bipartisan unmoderated caucus** allows members of both parties to freely interact with one another. In contrast, a **partisan unmoderated caucus** splits committee members up by party, meaning each side only speaks with themselves.

In order to pass motions to move to either moderated or unmoderated caucus, it is required that the motion receives a simple majority vote.

## Introducing a Bill

During caucus and general speaking time, delegates may have drafted legislation that they wish to debate before the committee. In order to do this, delegates can **motion to introduce a bill**. If this motion receives a second and passes a simple majority vote, the bill will then be read before committee. Afterward, the bill’s author(s) will be given time to speak in favor of their legislation (called the **authorship speech**). Following this, the chairs will create a pro- con speaking list to speak for or against the bill. This will rotate back and forth (the authorship speech then a con speech then a pro speech, etc.) until there is a **motion to move to the previous question** on the bill, which is basically a vote deciding whether or not to yet vote on the bill itself. If this receives a second, delegates will then vote on ending debate and taking a vote on whether or not to pass the legislation. This, unlike many other motions, requires a 2/3 majority in order to pass. Given that the motion passes, the bill as a whole will then be voted on, requiring a simple majority to pass. If the motion to move to the previous question does *not* pass, then the committee will return to pro-con debate until there is another motion to move to the previous question.

## Amending a Bill

During any point after a bill is introduced and its authorship speech is given, delegates can work to amend a portion of the legislation. In order to do this, delegates must write out their amendments (with the wording they wish to be reflected within the bill) and pass this to the chair(s). After this, a delegate must **motion to amend**, in which case the chair(s) will then read the amendment out loud. If the amendment is supported by all signatories, it is considered a **friendly amendment** and automatically added to the bill. However, if not all of the bill’s signatories agree, it is

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considered an **unfriendly amendment**. In this case, the amendment must be seconded and must pass a simple majority vote in order to be debated before committee. Given that this simple majority vote passes, the author of the amendment is given time to argue for their amendment and then the bill's author(s) is/are given time to argue against the amendment. The chair will then allow a motion for a moderated caucus to discuss the amendment. At any point, however, delegates can motion to move to the previous question which, if seconded and passed by a 2/3 majority vote, allows delegates to finally vote on whether or not to pass the amendment.

## Adding to the Speaker's List

At any point, if a delegate wishes to be added to the speaker's list, they may raise their placard and **motion to be added to the speaker's list**. While this requires a second, it does not require a vote. A delegate may request this by saying something like, "I move to be added to the speaker's list on the pro side" if it is regarding a bill, or simply "I move to be added to the speaker's list" if it is a moderated caucus.

## Points of Information and Parliamentary Inquiry

All of Harvard Model Congress' staff members understand that this process can be confusing and, especially for first-time delegates, tough to gain a grasp of. At any point if you are unsure what's going on, please don't be afraid to interrupt or let your chair(s) know. We are all here to help you and guide you throughout your HMC experience. There are two key points you can use to clarify things once recognized by the chair(s). A **point of information** is used to clarify substantive matters such as questions about the content of the briefing or the issue itself or the content of a particular bill or amendment. A **point of parliamentary inquiry** can be used to clarify any aspect of parliamentary procedure. For example, a common point of parliamentary inquiry is: "What is the vote required to pass an amendment?" Actual members of Congress use this all the time, so don't feel at all wary of making these pointsearly and often!

## Point of Personal Privilege

The **point of personal privilege** may be invoked at any time during committee and is used for a student's personal needs. As such, it should be used with discretion. For example, you may invoke a point of personal privilege to leave for the restroom, or to ask a speaker to increase their volume so that you may hear.

## *Glossary*

**Authorship Speech** – Speech given by a bill's author(s) when a bill is introduced for consideration before the committee

**Bipartisan Unmoderated Caucus** – An unmoderated caucus in which members of both parties may freely interact with one another

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**Friendly Amendment** – When all the authors of a bill support a proposed amendment, that amendment is considered “friendly” and included into the bill without debate or vote

**Motion to Introduce a Bill** – The motion required to submit a written bill for consideration before the committee

**Motion to Amend** – A motion made by the author of an amendment to initiate consideration of their proposed amendment before the committee

**Motion to Move to a Moderated Caucus** – The motion invoked to set a caucus in which delegates make short comments in front of the committee on a specific subject, chosen by the person who makes the motion

**Motion to be Added to the Speaker’s List** – Motion invoked by a delegate in order to be added to the list of speakers (can be for a general speaker’s list, a moderated caucus, debate on an amendment, etc.)

**Motion to Move to an Unmoderated Caucus** – The motion invoked to set a caucus in which delegates freely strategize with one another and write legislation

**Motion to Move to Previous Question** – Motion that calls for debate on a bill or amendment to end and have the committee vote on whether or not to pass it; it can be invoked by any member of the committee (note – this is not voting on passing a bill, but rather a vote on whether to have a vote on the bill)

**Motion to Open Debate** – A formal start to begin committee and move into debate for the session

**Motion to Set the Agenda** – A motion that allows for a vote on which topic the committee will first consider

**Parliamentary Procedure** – The set of rules that structure how elected officials conduct their work

**Point of Information** – Concerns substantive matters such as questions about the content of the briefing or the issue itself, or the content of a particular bill or amendment

**Point of Parliamentary Inquiry** – Used to clarify any aspect of parliamentary procedure in committee

**Partisan Unmoderated Caucus** – An unmoderated caucus in which committee members are split by party and only allowed to speak with their side

**Seconding a Motion** – A motion made by a delegate in support of another delegate’s motion in order to move forward with it; many – but not all – motions require a second

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**Simple Majority** – Refers to the vote count needed for many motions or bills to pass in committee – requires more than 50% of members who are present (this body of present members is called the “quorum”)

**Unfriendly Amendment** – When not all authors of a bill support a proposed an amendment, that amendment is considered “unfriendly” and must be debated and voted on before committee