

Voting Procedures
Compiled by Patrick Wilson, September 2011

The rule of law is nothing but a profound commitment to honor technicalities.
— Holman W. Jenkins, Jr.

Parliamentary rules governing voting procedures are designed to protect members' rights by ensuring that election results and adopted motions truly reflect the will of the majority, while at the same time expediting business.

Verification: An inconclusive voice vote must be verified by a rising (standing) vote on the demand of a single member. (A show of hands is used only in a small committee or very small assembly.) Votes are never retaken by the same method.

Counting: The majority (not an individual member) may order a counted rising vote.

Ballot votes: The majority (not an individual member) may order a ballot vote. Votes are counted by tellers who have no direct personal interest in the question. Once the tellers have tallied the votes, the chairman of tellers reads the tellers' report aloud. The chair of the assembly then reads the report aloud a second time and declares the official result (i.e., who was elected or whether a motion was adopted).

Voting by the chair: The chair may vote only when his or her vote will affect the outcome—except when the vote is by ballot, in which case the chair may cast a ballot along with other members.

Absentee voting—which includes voting by email and applies to committees as well as the assembly as a whole—is strictly prohibited unless explicitly authorized by the bylaws (i.e., Faculty Handbook). “It is a fundamental principle of parliamentary law that the right to vote is limited to the members of an organization who are actually present at the time the vote is taken in a legal meeting” (RONR [10th ed.], p. 408, l. 31–34).

Straw polls are out of order: “A motion to take an informal straw poll to ‘test the water’ is not in order because it neither adopts nor rejects a measure and hence is meaningless and dilatory” (RONR [10th ed.], p. 415, l. 4–7).

Points of order regarding the conduct of a vote cannot interrupt a vote but may be raised immediately after the chair declares the result of the vote.