



What's a Snippet? Glad you asked! A Snippet is short article about meetings or parliamentary procedure. New snippets are released on the first day of every month at www.agreatmeeting.com.



Snippet #182 Adjourn

Meetings start when the chair calls them to order and end when the chair declares the meeting adjourned. That seems simple enough, until we look at the nuances, complications, and unintended consequences. And, there's no rule that the agenda must be completed before the meeting can be adjourned.

Assume there's a motion on the floor, the hour is growing late, and a member decides the meeting has stopped being productive. The member waits to be recognized and makes the motion to adjourn. When made under these conditions, the motion to adjourn requires a second and, as with most procedurally-focused motions, is not debatable. A majority vote adopts the motion – but that doesn't mean it ends the meeting, only that no more decisions will be made (no more votes will be taken). Following an adopted motion to adjourn, the chair may still make announcements, allow a member to give notice of something to be taken up at a later time, and allow a member to move to reconsider a motion from earlier in the meeting (in which case the actual reconsideration will have to be taken up at the next meeting). Once this business has been taken care of, the chair can declare the meeting adjourned. What happens to agenda items that were left? These items are put on the next agenda as unfinished business. The motion that was on the floor when the motion to adjourn was made comes back at the same procedural point it left off. For example, if an amendment was pending, the assembly will take that motion up again at the amendment.

There are some situations in which the motion to adjourn is not privileged. For example, if there is no motion on the floor and a member makes a qualified motion to adjourn, such as "I move we adjourn at 9:30," the motion to adjourn is a main motion and fully debatable (and might even be amended as to the time of adjournment). For a convention with a house of delegates whose terms do not extend beyond the end of the meeting, adjourn is a main motion because it dissolves the assembly.

Perhaps the hour is late, but there is business that really needs to be accomplished before the next regular meeting. Wouldn't it be helpful if we could somehow set an interim time to continue this meeting agenda and finish all the business before the next regular meeting? That is the purpose of the one motion that outranks adjourn, called by the confusing title of "fix the time to which to adjourn." What that really means is to set a continuance of this meeting but, for some reason, statutes refer to that continuation as an "adjourned meeting." Even if a motion to adjourn is pending, a member can move to fix the time to which to adjourn the meeting to a specific date and time, such as "Tuesday at 1:00pm." If adopted, selected items can be postponed to the adjourned meeting or, if the meeting is to adjourn immediately, the remaining agenda items can be taken up at the adjourned meeting. The terminology is far more confusing than the concept.

There are also times when the motion to adjourn is not necessary. If the meeting agenda has a time already set for adjournment (which no agenda should do without a notation that all times are approximate), the chair simply announces that the meeting is adjourned when that time arrives. Or, if the agenda has been completed, the chair should ask if there is further business. If none, the chair announces the meeting is adjourned. However, if a member seeks recognition to bring up another item of business, the chair must recognize that member. Even if the chair incorrectly adjourns the meeting, it must be called back to order to hear from the member who sought recognition.

It is the assembly, not the chair, that decides when the meeting is adjourned. This is done by adopting the agenda with a time established for adjourning, completing the business on the agenda, or adopting a properly made motion to adjourn.