



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 #150 Don't SAY That!

A few phrases have crept into meetings and taken root like the nasty little weeds they are. We offer these alternatives to help you cultivate your verbal garden for a rich harvest of communication. Happy Spring!

Especially if you are the chair, count how many times you use the following phrases in your next meeting. Then pick one at a time and remove them from your meeting vocabulary. You'll find that things will run more smoothly, you'll waste less energy on useless words and phrases, and people who know better than to use them will stop cringing and listen to what you are saying.

Two-thirds majority – Actually, there's no such thing. A majority is "more than half" and a two-thirds vote means there are twice as many on one side as the other. They are two different measurements. Combining them is akin to saying you need to measure a "two-thirds half cup of sugar" for a recipe. Which is it? The voting thresholds are a majority and two-thirds, respectively – and exclusively.

I so move – Thanks but no thanks! This phrase is usually meant to be helpful, but if the motion (or rambling discussion) was not clear, it will only make things worse. Take the time to get the motion clear before stating it. Ask for a moment to write it down. (When the assembly pauses without taking a full recess, it's called "standing at ease.") Two minutes spent clarifying can save twenty minutes spent processing amendments to tweak.

Are there any abstentions? – Why do you ask? An abstention means that someone has chosen not to vote, so why make them publicly declare that fact? The only time abstentions make a difference is when the vote requirement is based on the number of people present, and asking who isn't voting won't tell you. You'll need to have that number in advance of the vote – an easy thing for most boards, and not so easy for membership meetings or delegate assemblies.

I'd like to – Who cares? This phrase is the most over-worked and unnecessary of them all. If you intend to do something (perhaps call the meeting to order or introduce a speaker) tell the audience that you are pleased to or honored to, and then do it. The focus is on the person you are introducing, not on what you like to do. To call a meeting to order, say: "The meeting will be in order."

I need – Sounds like a personal problem. When a chair says "I need" it means he or she needs to learn how to run a meeting. (Hint: tell them to get a copy of our Robert's Rules app at www.magicgavel.com.) This usually happens when the chair "needs" a motion or a second. For motions, the chair should ask: "are you making a motion?" and then help clarify the words. A chair who says "I need a motion" is admitting to allowing the assembly to talk aimlessly without a motion to focus the debate. By that time, it's better to take a break and start over. For seconds, the chair should ask: "Is there a second?" and if none comes, declares the motion not before the assembly. If there is a second, the chair processes the motion – he or she doesn't *need* anything; the chair simply responds to the current situation.

I want – Sounds like an ego problem. See above – the chair's job is to run the meeting and facilitate the business of the assembly, not to dictate the outcomes. This is why the chair is supposed to speak in the third person, to remove any personal opinions or the appearance of bias.

Signify by – Where on earth did *this* come from? The more words the chair uses to take votes, the more likely something will go wrong. The easiest way to take a vote is to use the fewest words: "Those in favor, say 'aye.'" Those opposed, say 'no.'"

And finally:

It goes without saying – shouldn't it?