



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 #143 Postponing

A Chinese proverb states: “If you are in a hurry, you will never get there.” At times more harm is done when an assembly rushes to a decision instead of taking the time necessary to ensure the motion is ready for a decision.

There are three main ways, under *Robert's Rules*, that a motion can be set aside and taken up at another time. They are: Postpone Indefinitely, Postpone to a Definite Time and Lay on the Table. Each has its own purpose and effect, and the latter (often called “tabling”) is the most misused of the lot. Which motion you use depends on what you want to happen. This snippet will deal with postponing; tabling is another situation for another snippet.

Want to avoid action all together? Use Postpone Indefinitely. If adopted, the assembly has chosen to take no action on the motion. An affirmative vote is not a vote in favor of the motion, only a vote in favor of *not taking any action at all*. If adopted, the motion is set aside for the rest of the meeting. It has an interesting characteristic – the motion is debatable, not only on whether to postpone indefinitely, but also on the merits of the main motion. In other words, before deciding to set aside a properly made and seconded motion, the assembly must have the opportunity for a full debate on whether to continue toward a decision or take no action. This motion can come in very handy in cases where the assembly finds itself in a position where it just wants the motion to go away quietly.

Want to do it later? Do you want to do it at a general time or at a specific time? Either requires Postpone to a Definite Time, but the vote required will depend on the intent. If set for a general time, (such as after a report, the next day in a multi-day meeting, or at the next meeting), a majority vote is required to postpone. If adopted, the motion will *not be taken up before* that time, and when that time arrives it will not interrupt if something else is on the floor; the postponed motion is taken up after the current business has been completed. If postponed to the next meeting, the motion is placed on the agenda and will automatically come up. You may have seen the heading “Unfinished Business and General Orders” in the past. (*See Snippet #127 – Unfinished Business for more information.*) Guess what? A motion postponed to the next meeting has been ordered by the assembly to be put on the agenda at the next meeting at a general time – it's a general order.

Perhaps you want the motion to come up at an exact time or to have preference over other business in some other way. This requires a two-thirds vote, because the special order will interrupt and take priority. Elections are often set for specific times so that members will know exactly when to be present for this important business. If set aside until the next meeting, special orders come up before general orders – they take priority. An extreme case would be to set THE special order for a meeting, which is basically what a special meeting is.

Caveat: an agenda adopted with exact times by majority vote creates special orders for those times, unless the agenda itself includes a disclaimer such as “all times approximate.” Also, postponing beyond the next meeting is not allowed because it would be too easy to lose track of the motion. However, you can postpone to the next meeting and then keep postponing – but doing things this way allows you to keep track of that motion in the minutes.