



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 #163 Reconsider

At its core, the job of a board or assembly of members is to make choices – all motions must be framed in such a way that a “yes” or “no” choice can be made. But what if we learn something new and change our minds? The answer depends on when that epiphany takes place. It’s all in the timing.

One of the roles of the chair is to ensure that there is a decision to be made before putting the item on the agenda. A second role is to ensure that there is a safe atmosphere for all points of view and that the major pros and cons for agenda items are brought out and deliberated.

But even with due diligence, the information on which the decision was based might change. There are three conditions that must be met in order to erase that vote: (1) action must be proposed during the same meeting; (2) there must be a reasonable chance that, if a new vote is taken, the result might turn out differently; and (3) the assembly must agree to deliberate and vote on the item again. Remember the six steps of a motion:



(If you don’t understand these steps, get the six steps snippet from the snippet niche.) Once the six steps have been completed, the motion is kept by the secretary, who returns it at the next meeting in the draft minutes. But before the meeting is adjourned, it can be retrieved from the secretary and placed back on the floor (step four), reopening debate and retaking the vote. (After the meeting is adjourned, the motion is a part of the record and changing it requires the use of the motions to rescind or amend something previously adopted.)

So, how do we meet the requirements listed above? First, we must still be in the same meeting where the vote on the motion was taken. For the second criterion, we need to remember that Robert’s Rules requires that the maker of the motion must have voted on the prevailing side. For example, suppose the motion failed by a vote of 4/6. We can assume that those who voted for the motion will likely vote for it again, and if they changed their vote the result would be the same: the motion fails. However, if someone who voted against the motion (in this case, the prevailing side) wanted to reconsider, there’s a reasonable chance that the vote will turn out differently – or at least the vote count would be different. So, for this example, only someone who voted against the motion could move to reconsider.

The last criterion is agreement by the assembly to reopen debate and vote on the motion; reconsider requires a majority vote. When a motion to reconsider passes, the motion being reconsidered is placed on the floor in step four as if the previous vote had never been taken. Debate on whether to reconsider the motion can also extend to the motion itself – it gets a full hearing before the decision is made. But once a motion has been reconsidered, that decision is final. It can’t be reconsidered again, except by a two-thirds vote to suspend the rules. If you’ve gotten that far down this path, seriously consider hiring a professional parliamentarian to avoid getting into these procedural snarls!

More often than not, excessive use of the motion to reconsider is the result of trying to rush something that’s not ready for a decision.