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## Snippet #202 Preference vs. Precedence

Preference and precedence are two terms with specific parliamentary meanings. Although they look a lot alike, they are not related to each other, and confusion about their specific usage can create serious problems in meetings. The rules regarding preference are applied to people and how they are recognized to speak on a motion. The rules regarding precedence are applied to motions and whether a motion is taken up when it is made.

Let's start with preference in recognition. A common misunderstanding is that the chair has free rein to decide who gets to speak and when, but there are rules that govern these situations to keep things fair. The first rule of preference is a simple one: the maker of the motion has the right to speak first. Once a motion is made and seconded and properly placed on the floor, the chair turns to the maker to ask if she wishes to speak on her motion. If the maker so chooses, she is given first opportunity to speak in favor of the motion. (The maker may not speak opposed to the motion.) If the maker chooses not to speak first, she has an automatic "speak next" card to use at any time during the debate – for one use only. The second rule of preference in recognition is alternating between pro and con speakers. This is done so the assembly gets a balanced debate, rather than a one-sided argument. A speaker who wants to speak opposite the previous speaker gets preference in recognition over one who is speaking on the same side. The third (and last) rule of recognition is whether a person has already spoken on the motion. Those who have not yet spoken are recognized in preference to those who have already had a turn – even if they are speaking on the same side as the previous speaker. These rules make it a lot easier for the chair to keep things balanced. Remembering the order is simple: maker, pro/con, 1<sup>st</sup> timers.

Precedence is the term used to determine whether a motion is in order at the time it is made, and it depends only on motions currently on the floor. This is also sometimes referred to as rank. There are twelve motions that are classified in an order of precedence (or rank); other motions are used for different situations and are taken up as applicable, depending on what is pending, or currently on the floor. For example, while a main motion is pending, another member might be recognized and move to amend the main motion. An amendment has a higher level of precedence (outranks the main motion), so the amendment is taken up and the main motion waits until the amendment is voted on. While the amendment is pending, another motion that has a higher precedence would be in order and, if made and seconded, is taken up while the amendment (and the main motion) wait for its disposition.

Members who intend to make a motion that has a higher level of precedence do not get recognized in preference to anyone else simply because the motion they want to make outranks the motion currently on the floor. The concept of precedence begins after a member is recognized, not before. It is not related to motions that interrupt because of urgency of the situation.

Just remember, preference depends on the people and governs who is recognized to speak. Precedence depends on the motion and whether the motion can be taken up when it is made. Preference and precedence work together to help keep things orderly and focused, but each must be used correctly to work effectively.