

Some of the discussion at this year's Town Meeting Tune-up workshop placed a lot of emphasis on educating the public about parliamentary procedure. Many moderators are doing their very best to educate voters about the rules for making motions, speaking, amending the rules, and so on. What are some tricks of the trade that moderators can share with their town meeting legislators – the voting public?

One of the most difficult aspects of town meeting for many voters, in those towns that vote from the floor, is speaking in public. One study has shown that in the United States, glossophobia, the fear of speaking in public, afflicts more than 75% of the population. For most voters, much of this trepidation grows out of not knowing the rules of the game for participating at the meeting. Moderators can address this lack of knowledge in these ways:

- Hold a pre-town meeting informational meeting. While this is required by law for Australian ballot voting, it is not required for floor voting. Moderators can use this opportunity to teach voters how to make motions, how to amend motions, how to appeal decisions of the moderator, etc.
- Many moderators have created their own “How to Participate at Town Meeting” handouts. Typically, these are distributed to voters at the beginning of the meeting. Topics covered include how to make motions, how many votes are required for a motion to pass, and other rules for participation at town meeting. VLCT also maintains a file with samples of these handouts.
- Many towns include the moderator’s “How to Participate at Town Meeting” handout in the Town Report. This is an excellent way for voters to read the rules of the game prior to the meeting.
- Make yourself, as moderator, available to the voters. Some moderators in small towns give out their phone numbers well before Town Meeting!

- Brian Monaghan, Attorney, VLCT Municipal Assistance Center

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