



PARLIAMENT
OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

FACT SHEET

6

DECORUM IN THE HOUSE

Decorum requires that members pay attention to the manner in which they conduct themselves in the House. A lack of decorum and disrespect for the rules and the authority of the Chair can negatively affect Parliament as an institution and bring it into disrepute and undermine public confidence in parliamentary processes. The underlying principle is that of showing respect to the House and to all other members. The conduct of members should not cause disruption of proceedings.

The rules include a number of provisions relating to the conduct of members in the Assembly and order in debates. In terms of conduct, members must at all times accord the presiding officer and members due respect and conduct themselves with dignity and in accordance with the decorum of the House. In this regard, the following conventions, among others, are followed to uphold the decorum of the House:

- To be seated when the bells stop ringing to mark the start of proceedings.
- To dress in a manner befitting the dignity of the House, provided that no party symbols may be displayed.
- Not to bring dangerous or threatening objects into the House, cultural objects would be allowed provided that the permission of the Speaker was obtained.
- Not to take photographs or video footage during proceedings, speak on a cell phone, eat, read newspapers or in any other way conduct themselves in a manner not befitting the dignity and decorum of the House. Members are permitted to drink water.
- To enter and leave the House with decorum.
- Not to stand in the aisles or cross the floor during proceedings. This Rule is firmly imposed by presiding officers, and there have been several rulings in this regard.
- Not to converse aloud during debate. A quiet conversation between two members will not be objected to, but members will be called to order by the presiding officer if the noise tends to drown out the member speaking or distracts attention from what is being said.
- Not to interrupt the member who has the floor, except to call attention to a point of order or a question of privilege. This Rule is not interpreted to mean that a member must be heard in silence, and it is applied with some exceptions.
- The Chair has discretion to allow interjections to the extent that they are relevant to the debate and not disruptive. A member should avoid attempting to have a dialogue with the member at the podium. The volume and frequency of interjections, heckling or interruptions must not prevent the member at the podium from being heard.



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- Another type of interruption that is allowed in practice is when a member, during debate, rises to ask the Chair whether the member at the podium is willing to answer a question. The Chair will then seek an indication from the member speaking as to whether he or she is willing to respond. A negative response requires the questioner to resume his or her seat. The Chair will not allow this form of interruption to be used deliberately to disrupt the member speaking.
- Sit in the waiting benches before being called to the podium. Members should anticipate their speaking turn and take their place in the waiting bench in good time. Once there, they should sit quietly and not make interjections. Other members should not insult, ridicule or otherwise interfere with a member on his or her way to or from the waiting bench or podium.
- The Speaker and Deputy Speaker must be referred to as “honourable Speaker”, or “honourable Deputy Speaker” or “Mister” or “Madam Speaker” and “Mister” or “Madam Deputy Speaker”, as the case may be, and the other presiding officers must be referred to as “honourable Chairperson”.
- To rise, if possible, when the presiding officer enters the Chamber at the start of proceedings and to remain standing until invited to be seated.
- On adjournment of the House, to rise, if possible, and remain in their allocated seats until the presiding officer has left the Chair.

It is the duty of the presiding officer to maintain order and decorum in the House. The rules vest in the Chair authoritative powers to enforce the rules and conventions of the House in order to deal with disorder and lack of decorum.