



# DECORUM

## INTRODUCTION

A basic principle of parliamentary procedure is that proceedings should be conducted through free and civil debate. Freedom of speech is the most important privilege enjoyed by parliamentarians, but this freedom is circumscribed by the need to maintain order and decorum.<sup>1</sup> To this end, the Senate has developed rules and practices to govern the conduct of senators to ensure respect between them and towards the institution of Parliament.

All senators have the right to raise a point of order to ensure that the rules, practices and customs of the Senate are observed. The *Rules of the Senate* assign to the Speaker the authority to settle points of order and to preserve order and decorum.<sup>2</sup> In cases not covered by the Rules, the Senate and its committees follow the practices and customs of either house of Parliament with appropriate modification. The practices of other similar assemblies may also be considered where appropriate.<sup>3</sup>

## DECORUM DURING SITTINGS

### *RULES RESPECTING DEBATE*

A senator who wishes to speak must stand in their assigned place and wait to be recognized by the Speaker. When speaking, the senator addresses the other senators directly, not the Speaker.<sup>4</sup> When the Speaker stands, all senators must take their seats or remain seated.<sup>5</sup>

Senators are expected to refrain from using unparliamentary language in debate.<sup>6</sup> There is no definitive list of words or expressions that are deemed unparliamentary. It is left primarily to the judgment of the Speaker, based to a great extent on the circumstances and tone of the debate, to determine what constitutes unparliamentary language.<sup>7</sup>

***RULES OF CONDUCT IN SENATE CHAMBER***

Certain rules and customs are followed in the Senate in order to ensure that debate takes place in an orderly fashion and that appropriate respect is shown to the Speaker and all senators:

- Senators and other persons allowed on the floor of the Senate Chamber must not pass between the Speaker's chair and the table, or between a senator who has the floor and the chair.<sup>8</sup>
- When entering, leaving or crossing the Senate Chamber, senators must bow to the Speaker.<sup>9</sup>
- Senators should hold any private conversations outside the bar of the Senate Chamber, otherwise the Speaker may order them to do so.<sup>10</sup>
- Senators are forbidden to use electronic devices which produce any disruptive sound.<sup>11</sup>
- When the Senate adjourns, senators must stand until the Speaker has left the chamber.<sup>12</sup>
- Senators are expected to wear appropriate attire (normally this is contemporary business clothing) to sittings of the Senate.<sup>13</sup>
- The use of exhibits and props is not allowed.<sup>14</sup>
- Taking photos or videos during sittings of the Senate is prohibited, except with the explicit permission of the Senate.

**PRESENCE OF STRANGERS IN THE SENATE<sup>15</sup>**

Disturbances that interfere with the Senate's proceedings are not tolerated. The Speaker may, when considered necessary, order the galleries to be cleared. At any sitting of the Senate, if a senator objects to the presence of strangers, the Speaker will immediately put a question to a vote ordering strangers to withdraw.<sup>16</sup> A stranger is defined as anyone who is not a senator or official of the Senate. When the Senate orders strangers to withdraw, the galleries are cleared and only authorized individuals continue to have access to the Senate Chamber.

**MACE**

The mace is the symbol of royal authority and, consequently, of the authority of Parliament. It is brought into the Senate Chamber by the Mace Bearer during the Speaker's procession at the beginning of each sitting and is placed on the table where it remains for the duration of the sitting. The Senate cannot sit if the mace is not present and the mace must not be touched during proceedings.<sup>17</sup> At the end of the sitting, it is carried out of the chamber. When the Senate sits in Committee of the Whole, the mace is placed under the table.

**FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ON DECORUM**

[Senate Procedure in Practice](#) (Chapter 5)

**FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ON OTHER POINTS COVERED IN THIS NOTE**

[Senate Procedural Note No. 3, Debate](#)

[Senate Procedural Note No. 8, Committee of the Whole](#)

[Senate Procedural Note No. 9, The Speaker of the Senate](#)

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**References**

<sup>1</sup> For additional information, see *Senate Procedure in Practice*, June 2015, pp. 60-61.

<sup>2</sup> Rules 2-1(1), 2-5(1), 2-5(2) and 2-6.

<sup>3</sup> Rule 1-1.

<sup>4</sup> Rule 6-1.

<sup>5</sup> Rule 2-7(2).

<sup>6</sup> Rule 6-13(1).

<sup>7</sup> See Speaker's rulings, *Journals of the Senate*, May 2, 2023, pp. 1471-1472; October 2, 2012, p. 1586; and December 16, 2011, pp. 798-799. See also *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, 3rd ed. (2017), p. 623.

<sup>8</sup> Rules 2-7(1)(b) and 2-7(1)(c).

<sup>9</sup> Rule 2-7(1)(a).

<sup>10</sup> Rule 2-8(a).

<sup>11</sup> Rule 2-8(b). See also Speakers' rulings, *Journals of the Senate*, May 16, 2006, p. 155-156 and May 2, 2007, p. 1415.

<sup>12</sup> Rule 2-7(5).

<sup>13</sup> *Senate Procedure in Practice*, June 2015, p. 60 and *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, 3rd ed. (2017), p. 611.

<sup>14</sup> See Speaker's rulings, *Journals of the Senate*, November 5, 2020, p. 148 and February 15, 2018, p. 3013.

<sup>15</sup> Rule 2-13.

<sup>16</sup> Rule 2-13(12)

<sup>17</sup> *Journals of the Senate*, April 30, 2014, p. 798. For details about the mace, refer to Wilding, N., and Laundry, P., *An Encyclopædia of Parliament*, 4th ed., London: Cassell, 1972; and Pike, C. and McCreery, C., *Canadian Symbols of Authority: Maces, Chains, and Rods of Office*, Toronto: Dundurn, 2011.