

Formulating motions with teeth:

1. Motions should propose definite action.

This	Not that
That the society purchase a new desk.	to recommend purchasing a new desk.

A committee might adopt a motion to recommend to the society that it take an action, but the society itself must adopt a motion to take the action, not to recommend the action.

2. Motions should be stated in positive language.

This	Not that
That we oppose action taken by the government.	That we do not support action taken by the government.

Failure to adopt a motion to oppose is not equivalent to a motion to endorse. It is a statement that the society is not taking a position. Likewise, failure to endorse is not equivalent to opposition.

3. Motions should be concise.

This	Not that
That the society purchase a new desk.	That, because the offices haven't been redecorated in 20 years; the lunch room is overcrowded; the file cabinet is jammed; the desk top is too high for safe keyboard operation; and the desk chair has a rip, the society purchase a new desk.

The conditions in the office can provide rationale for the motion to purchase a new desk. That information should be part of the debate, it should not be part of the motion. The motion should focus only on the action that should be taken.

4. A motion should be unambiguous.

This	Not that
That the society purchase a new desk and executive style chair if existing furnishings cannot be repaired.	That, the society considers purchasing a new desk and executive style chair if the situation warrants.

The proposal to consider an action under the right conditions is meaningless.

5. A motion should be complete.

This	Not that
That the society purchase a new desk at a cost not to exceed \$500.	That the society purchase a new desk at a reasonable price.

Include any limitations that may be placed on the action.

Or

This	Not that
That a committee appointed by the president be charged with investigating the purchase of a new desk and chair; the committee is to provide 3 purchasing options and a recommendation as to best option at the October meeting of the society.	That a committee be formed to investigate purchasing a desk.

When a motion seeks to form a committee include: who is on the committee or how members will be selected; what is the committee charge or terms of reference; and when and to whom the committee should report.

6. A motion to reaffirm a previous action is not in order. The previously adopted motion does not cease to have effect unless it is rescinded or amended.
7. A motion to refrain from actions should not be offered if the same result can be accomplished by not making a motion. An exception applies if the society wishes to provide direction to a subordinate body. For example, the membership should not adopt a motion “not to endorse candidate “A.” The same result is achieved by not adopting a motion to endorse the candidate. However, the membership could tell the board not to take an action such as “that the board be directed not to endorse candidates in the upcoming election.”