

**Parliamentary Opinion**  
**On**  
**Use of Gavel During FFA Parliamentary Procedure Events**

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I have been asked by the Kansas FFA to render a parliamentary opinion concerning the proper use of the gavel during FFA parliamentary procedure competitive events. Guidelines for using the gavel are not currently included in the written rules for the National FFA Parliamentary Procedure Career Development Events.

**Evidence:**

In researching the proper use of the gavel I have found the following references.

1. Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised (10th edition, 2000), the current parliamentary authority and primary reference for the National FFA Parliamentary Procedure CDE, includes the following statements:
  - A. If such a motion is adopted, the chair announces the result as follows: Chair: The ayes have it and the meeting stands recessed [or A in recess≡] for fifteen minutes [rapping once with the gavel if desired] (p. 225)
  - B. The adjournment may be signaled by a single rap of the gavel if desired. (p. 234)
  - C. The chair simply raps lightly [for breaches of conduct] (p. 626)
2. The National FFA Manual (1999, p. 23) and the FFA Student Handbook (2000, p. 55-56) both include the following rules for the use of the gavel.
  - A. All officers and members should understand the use and meaning of the gavel. It is the symbol of authority and, used correctly, ensures orderly meetings.
  - B. One tap follows the announcement of adjournment, the completion of a business item, or is a message to the members to be seated following the opening ceremony.
  - C. Two taps of the gavel calls the meeting to order.
  - D. Three taps of the gavel is the signal for all members to stand in unison on the third tap.
  - E. A series of sharp taps is used to restore order at a meeting. For instance, if

discussion ventures away from the main motion and attention needs to be brought back to the matter at hand, the chairman should rap the gavel a number of times to get the group's attention.

**Decision:**

Based on the evidence outlined above, and discussions with experienced national parliamentary procedure judges, I have concluded the following:

1. Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised (10th edition, 2000) and the FFA guidelines for the use of the gavel (FFA Manual and Student Handbook) are in agreement on the use of the gavel to announce the results of a vote (recess), and adjournment. The guidelines differ in the use of the gavel for breaches of conduct.
2. The use of the gavel guidelines that appear in both the FFA Manual and FFA Student Handbook have the effect of established custom. Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised states: AIn some organizations a particular practice may sometimes come to be followed as a matter of established custom so that it is treated practically as if it were prescribed by a rule of order. (RONR, 2000, p. 17, line 4-7).
3. The use of the gavel guidelines would therefore be treated as a Astanding rule≡ of the National FFA Parliamentary Procedure CDE.
4. Therefore, I conclude that the proper use of the gavel during FFA parliamentary procedure competitive events should be:
  - A. One tap follows the announcement of adjournment, the completion of a business item, or is a message to the members to be seated following their entrance to the event.
  - B. Two taps of the gavel calls the meeting to order [if event includes the start of the meeting].
  - C. Three taps of the gavel is the signal for all members to stand in unison on the third tap [to be used if questions are asked by judges at the end of the demonstration].
  - D. A series of sharp taps is used to restore order during the event.