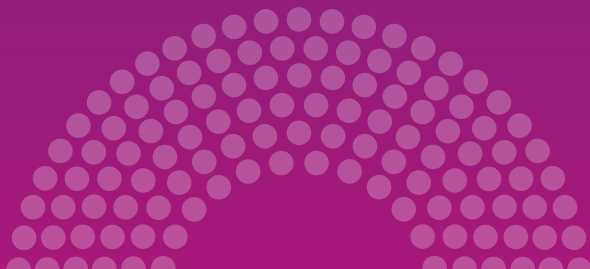




The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

# Presiding Officer's Guidance on Conduct in the Chamber

Stiùireadh an Oifigeir  
Riaghlaidh air Giùlan  
san t-Seòmar





## Introduction

Rule 7.3. of the Parliament's Standing Orders requires Members to conduct themselves in a courteous and respectful manner and in an orderly manner.

The Code of Conduct for MSPs provides further detail and requires Members to abide by guidance issued by the Presiding Officer on Members' conduct in the Chamber. The Parliament's Standing Orders provide for sanctions in relation to these matters.

This Guidance sets out the standards expected by the Presiding Officers, in order to clarify what behaving in a courteous and respectful manner in the Chamber means in practice.

These standards are important in maintaining respectful conduct so that all Members are able to participate and be heard.

## Attendance

Hybrid proceedings are now well established as the default approach to meetings of the Parliament, giving Members a considerable amount of flexibility. Where you are present in the Parliament campus, you should attend the Chamber in person to participate in parliamentary business, including voting.

If you wish to participate in a debate, you should attend the whole debate. As a minimum, you should be present during all of the opening and closing speeches and should remain in the Chamber to hear at least the two speeches following your contribution. It is particularly important that closing speakers are able to reflect on all of the contributions made during a debate.

Where you wish to participate in a question session, either by asking one of the selected/drawn questions or by seeking a supplementary question, you should be present for the whole of the question time session.

Where you are aware that you may not be present for a portfolio or general question time session, you should ensure that your name is not entered in the ballot for that session. Members whose names are drawn but who fail to lodge a question, or withdraw it before the question session, deprive other Members of the opportunity to put a question to the Scottish Government.

Where you wish to ask a question on a Ministerial statement, you should attend for the whole of the statement.

If, in exceptional circumstances, you wish to speak in a debate or participate in a question session but cannot attend for the whole session, you should seek advance permission from the Presiding Officers. If this is granted, you are expected to apologise to the Chamber when making your contribution. If you have not received advance permission, you should make alternative arrangements, such as arranging for another Member to take your speaking slot where rules for the item of business allow for that.

When the Chamber is sitting, Members should not cross the well of the Chamber, and should avoid crossing the line of sight between the Presiding Officer and the Member who is speaking.

Docking stations with power and internet connectivity are available at all Members' desks in the Chamber. Members should use devices that can be connected to the docking stations to ensure they have a power source and are accessing the most reliable internet connection for votes.

## Speaking

Calling of speakers is at the discretion of the Presiding Officers. In order to allocate speaking time roughly according to party balance across the Chamber, a debate management framework is agreed at the start of each session.

This allocates a number of speaking slots per party for each debate, depending on the length of the debate. Current convention is that parties decide how these slots are allocated to their Members.

The debate management framework is reviewed where any changes in representation occur during a session.

There is usually some flexibility in each debate, and the Presiding Officers may use this time to allow Members additional time – for example, where they have taken interventions.

Where additional Members wish to request to speak, they can write to the Presiding Officer's office prior to the debate and the Presiding Officer in the chair will consider calling them if time allows.

To show courtesy and respect to your colleagues, you should always phrase contributions to address the Presiding Officer in the Chair. Members should avoid directing their remarks towards other Members – such as by using “you” to refer to other Members.

For example, questions should be put in the following way, “What action will the Minister take...” rather than “Minister, what action will you take...”.

To help ensure transparency of our proceedings, Members should refer to each other by their full name (or by referring to the Minister, the Cabinet Secretary, the Deputy First Minister or the First Minister).

This helps maintain the tone and objectivity of debate and focusses it on scrutiny of policies, decisions and actions, rather than personal comments. Members should not use nicknames.

When speaking, you should face the Presiding Officer in the chair. Please do not turn your back on the Presiding Officer as this has an impact on the sightlines of the Presiding Officers and on the sound quality.

The television cameras and microphones covering proceedings for broadcast have been placed to give the clearest coverage of Members while addressing the Chamber through the chair, and the Official Report relies on the feed from these microphones to record what you say accurately.

Please ensure that your microphone is angled towards you when speaking.

Members should not use props to illustrate their speeches. The effect and meaning of such illustration cannot be conveyed through the Official Report.

Members can make brief reference to visitors in the public gallery, where relevant to the subject matter of a question or debate, but this must not be phrased in a way that might encourage those in the gallery to comment or seek to influence debate.

## Language

You must ensure that your choice of language in the Chamber is appropriate and meets the high standards expected of Members by the general public.

It is for the Presiding Officers to make judgements on these matters and all Members must respect the decisions of the Chair.

Members being able to express, debate, explore and challenge views is key to the proper functioning of the Parliament and will always be protected by the Presiding Officers.

The European Convention on Human Rights has recognised that freedom of expression is an essential part of democracy and that it is especially important for elected members in representing their electorates.

The Presiding Officers act impartially and treat all Members equally. The judgements of the European Court of Human Rights support the principle that there will be a wide range of beliefs that are equally worthy of protection.

While the expression of certain beliefs might be offensive to some, the Presiding Officers chair in the interests of freedom of expression for all Members.

There is no list of banned words. There can be sensitivities of language in debate, and different views about terms.

Whether or not the use of a term is appropriate is generally a matter for Members to debate, not a matter for the Presiding Officer in the chair to rule on.

The Presiding Officers will not, however, tolerate views being expressed in a way that is personally insulting or that might give rise to harassment.

While protecting freedom of expression, we are equally determined that Members act with courtesy and respect.

Members must not use language or otherwise behave in a way that is, or can be perceived to be, demeaning, discriminatory or harassing towards another Member based on that Member's protected characteristics.

While challenging the accuracy of opinions and facts put forward by another Member is perfectly in order, an accusation that a fellow Member has been deliberately untruthful is unacceptable.

Challenges can be made in many ways without resorting to personal insults.

Words such as “lies”, “lying” or “liar” will not be tolerated when used to make an accusation that a fellow Member has been deliberately untruthful, and preferably should not be used at all.

Members must not conduct themselves in a manner which would constitute a criminal offence or contempt of court. Members must avoid referring to cases in which legal proceedings are active, except to the extent specifically agreed by the Presiding Officer under Rule 7.5 (sub judice).

The Chamber is not the place for electioneering. The focus of the Parliament is on scrutiny of issues that are the responsibility of the Scottish Government and debating issues agreed by the Parliament.

## Question times

In order to maximise the opportunity for all Members to represent their constituents' interests and to be able to put questions to the Scottish Ministers on the most important issues of the day, questions and answers should be as concise as possible.

Questions should normally be put within 45 seconds, and answers normally concluded within one minute.

Questions and answers on Ministerial statements are expected to be more concise to maximise the number of Members who can be called.

Supplementary questions must be on the same subject matter as the substantive question asked, and must be put briefly.

## Listening

When seated in the Chamber and entering or leaving, you must take care that your private conversation or observations on debate do not disturb proceedings or make it difficult to hear whoever is speaking.

You should remember that the TV cameras do not focus only on the Member speaking.

## Remote participation

Where you wish to participate virtually from a location away from the Parliament campus, unless there are exceptional circumstances agreed with the Presiding Officers in advance, you will only be able to do so if you use a Scottish Parliament digital background.

Please ensure that your device camera is switched on when voting or making a speech, intervention or any point of order. You may participate in Chamber business only from a secure location where you will not be disturbed.

Clerks can direct you to information on how you can use a Scottish Parliament digital background on a Zoom call.



## Interventions

You may intervene briefly on someone else's speech, but only if the Member who has the floor gives way. Where you wish to make an intervention, press the intervention button, make a verbal indication and, if able to, stand up if you are in the Chamber to ask the Member concerned if they will take an intervention.

If the Member makes clear that they are not giving way, you must resume your seat. An intervention should relate directly to what has just been said and not be a short speech of its own.

It is a discourtesy to others to seek to make an intervention shortly after arriving in the Chamber, and to leave again shortly afterwards. At the very least you must have been present for the whole of any speech you seek to intervene on.

## Points of Order

Rule 8.17 of Standing Orders permits Members to make a point of order to question whether proper procedures have been or are being followed.

Where you wish to make a point of order, press the button for a point of order, make a verbal indication that you wish to make a point of order and, if able to, stand up if you are in the Chamber to make the point of order.

It is a discourtesy to other Members to use points of order to seek to continue debating points.

## Use of electronic devices

Members may use digital devices in the Chamber for the purpose of engaging in and commenting on parliamentary business (including through social media). When doing so, Members must bear in mind their responsibility under Standing Orders and the Code of Conduct for MSPs to conduct themselves at all times with courtesy and respect.

As communications through social media do not form part of the parliamentary proceedings, the Presiding Officers should not be expected to rule on the content of social media postings made during meetings of the Parliament.

Digital devices should not be used to photograph, film or record in the Chamber without the prior permission of the Presiding Officer. Members should not make telephone calls or listen to voicemails in the Chamber. All devices should be switched to silent mode during meetings of the Parliament.

## Dress

The way in which Members dress should demonstrate respect for their constituents, for the Chamber and for the privilege of serving as an elected representative. Outdoor coats should not be worn in or otherwise be brought into the Chamber.

Members are the only people who are ordinarily entitled to use their voices in the Chamber to debate issues of importance to the people of Scotland.

Dress that distracts from debate does not fit with the obligation on all Members to treat each other with courtesy and respect. Members are asked not to wear anything in the Chamber that could be considered a prop, or overtly political or campaigning in nature.

Wearing scarves, T-shirts, or large badges displaying brand names or slogans, or other forms of advertising of either political or commercial causes, is not appropriate.

The Presiding Officers exercise some latitude around Members discreetly showing their support for a particular cause or their association with a particular organisation, such as through wearing pin badges or small ribbons.

## Bags

Rucksacks, suitcases, briefcases and other large bags should not be brought into the Chamber.

## Food and drink

Water is provided at the back of the Chamber. Other food and drink should not be brought into the Chamber, unless you have alerted the Presiding Officer in the chair that you need them for health reasons.

## Advice

The Clerks are available to assist all Members, and you should feel free to approach them for advice.

All Members, Members' staff, Parliamentary Service staff and building users are expected to behave in a way that aligns with the values of the Parliament. We should at all times be mindful of the impact of our behaviour on others.

Section 9 of the Code of Conduct for MSPs and the accompanying Guidance on the Code sets out the procedures for the enforcement of the rules in the Code of Conduct for MSPs.

The SPCB is committed to ensuring that everyone is, at all times, treated with dignity, courtesy and respect. The Independent Support Service is available to support anyone experiencing bullying, harassment, and sexual misconduct on the parliamentary campus or while carrying out parliamentary work.

The Independent Support Service can be contacted via telephone on 0808 196 2703. It will provide guidance through options for dealing with the behaviour, including the option to make a formal complaint. These conversations are confidential.

# Contact

If you have any queries about the information in this booklet or would like to find out more, please contact the office of the Presiding Officer at:

**[presidingofficers@parliament.scot](mailto:presidingofficers@parliament.scot)**