The Standing Orders of Parliament are the agreed rules under which procedure, debate and the conduct of Members in the House are regulated. The main purpose of the Standing Orders is to prescribe the procedure for the functioning of Parliament in an orderly and meaningful manner. It is the most important source of Parliamentary Procedure and provide ample opportunity for debate and enable decisions to be taken under consideration. The Standing Orders have the status of rules under the Constitution of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka.

According to the available records in the Library of Parliament, the first set of Standing Orders was adopted by the then Legislative Council in 1912. These were based on those of the British Parliament at that time. Thereafter new such Standing Orders were introduced at different stages in the history of Parliament.

Article 74 of the 1978 Constitution of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka states that, Parliament can by resolution provide for Standing Orders. The on going set of Standing Orders was framed under the 1978 Constitution with suitable modifications to the earlier Standing Orders and was adopted in 1979. The Standing Orders can be amended from time to time by the House. Under Standing Order 116 Committee on Standing Orders shall be appointed.

The Committee should consist of the Speaker, the Deputy Speaker, Deputy Chairman of Committees and six other members to be nominated by the Committee of Selection. The task of the Committee on Standing Orders is to consider matters of procedure and conduct of business in Parliament and recommend any amendments to the Standing Orders as it deems necessary. Any Member of Parliament may propose amendments by giving notice of the same to the Committee which may consider and include it in its report. The report should be submitted to the House for formal adoption.

The current set of Standing Orders regulates the proceedings of the first meeting after a General Election, Seating of Members, Election of a Speaker, Deputy Speaker and Deputy Chairman of Committees, Official Oath/Affirmation of newly elected Members and fixing of date and time for meetings. Quorum and Business of Parliament are also governed by the Standing Orders. Procedure for Urgent Bill, Private Member’s Bill, Appropriation Bill, voting and division are laid down in Standing Orders. Standing Orders clearly direct the rules for debate, rules for Members speaking as well as not speaking in Parliament and the rules of Order in the House.

The procedure to be followed for the impeachment of the President, Judges and other officials is specifically given in the Standing Orders. Similarly, there is provision for the removal from office, the Secretary-General of Parliament, Auditor-General, Commissioner of Elections and Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration.

The Standing Orders contain guidelines for the conduct of the business of the Committees such as the Committee of the whole House, Select Committees, Consultative Committees and also of Committees established for special purposes such as House Committee, Committees on Selection, Standing Orders, Parliamentary Business, Public Accounts, Public Enterprises, Public Petitions, Privileges and High Posts.

The House is empowered to suspend Standing Orders by a motion whenever necessary. If the Standing Orders are silent on matters before the House, the Speaker has a residuary power to regulate such matters. It is the duty of the Secretary-General of Parliament to ensure compliance with the Standing Orders by giving assistance to the Speaker and through the Speaker to the individual members as to the correct interpretation and the application of Standing Orders.
Standing Orders of Parliament

Code of Conduct for Members of Parliament