

So you want to be a ...

Chairperson (chair)

What is a chairperson?

The chair has two main roles (neither of which is being sat on):

To make sure the meeting runs effectively, and within the groundrules of the meeting. This involves preparation beforehand as well as being in charge during the meeting.

The chair also represents the school council at formal occasions. For instance, it might be the chair's job to meet with the headteacher and the governors.

What kind of person makes a good chair?

- A spokesperson – the chair will need to be able to sum up other people's views and be happy to put them across to all kinds of people, including large groups.
- An organiser – to make sure everyone is prepared for meetings: knows when and where they are going to be and what is going to be discussed.
- A communicator – to make sure that everyone understands what is going on.
- An action person – the chair needs to make sure that meetings aren't just talking shops, that they have a purpose and result in action.
- A mediator – sometimes the chair will need to help find a compromise between two people or two conflicting ideas. He or she will need to be fair and not let his or her own feelings get in the way.

So if I were chair what would I actually have to do?

Well, the first thing you would have to do is to get selected as chair.

Different councils do this in different ways, but the two most common are:

- All the people at the meeting vote for who they would like to be the chair for the next year.
- The chair rotates, this means that different people take it in turn to be the chair.

The second option means that more people get to have a go at being the chair, but can mean that some meetings don't run as well as others.

Once you're selected as chair you have several things you need to do for every meeting. The first is to help prepare the agenda (the list of things you will discuss at the meeting), you should do this with the secretary and the vice-chair, you may find it useful to get advice from the link teacher.

The items on the agenda should come from the whole school, so you will need to remind the school councillors to give you the ideas

that have come from their class or year councils. Make sure you give people enough time to collect ideas and bring them to you. The agenda needs to go out well before the meeting so reps can discuss it with their class.

In the meeting it's your job to run the discussion – this does NOT mean that you do all the talking.

Chairing a meeting means making sure that:

*Everyone knows what the rules and point of the meeting are;
Everyone keeps to time so that everyone has a chance to speak;
Every discussion ends in clear action points.*

But the role of the chair isn't just about meetings. It's also your job to make sure that everyone who agrees to do something actually does it.

You are the representative of the whole school council, so you will have to talk to staff and governors about what the school council thinks and is doing.

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That's quite a job, what can I do to make it easier?

Most councils have a vice-chair as well to help the chair and take over when she or he isn't there.

In a meeting you might ask the vice-chair to keep time whilst you run the meeting. You could also ask him or her to watch how you chair and give you feedback after the meeting to help you improve. You could take chairing in turns to give yourself a break.

Another way to make things easier on yourself is to get your council working well together, then they won't need much chairing.

If your council is getting bored or angry, could you stop and play a quick game? These give people an opportunity to have a break and come back to the problem with a different perspective. Also, think about how the room is laid out. Does everyone feel comfortable? Can everyone see each other? Is there anything that could be distracting people?

Running meetings is a skill lots of people use at work all the time. Are there people you could observe or chat to for tips? Your headteacher, chair of governors, or local business people for instance?

When would I need to do all these things?

Well, each school is different but this is what we recommend:

When?	What?	With whom?
Once a year	Stand for election. Probably once as a class rep and then in the meeting to be chair.	Your class/form/tutor group and council.
Throughout the year.	Represent the council and your school at events.	It depends on the event.
Two weeks before each meeting.	Send out a reminder for any agenda items (it may take them a week to get to you) and last meeting's minutes.	The secretary. Send to all school councillors.
A week before each meeting.	Work out the agenda and send it out to everyone who is coming to the meeting.	The secretary, vice-chair and link teacher.
At the meeting	Make sure the meeting runs smoothly and that the secretary is keeping minutes showing who, when and what is to be done.	Everyone, especially the secretary and vice-chair.
In between meetings	Make sure that every one who has agreed to do something actually does it.	Other councillors.
After each meeting	Make sure that the headteacher, other staff and the governors are kept informed of what the school council has been discussing.	The link teacher, other councillors.

Can I get any more information on being a chairperson?

Go to www.schoolcouncils.org, click 'resources' and go to 'download resources', there you'll find a list of links to other info about being a chair.

In the resources section you will also see our Handbooks for primary and secondary students which give you loads more ideas about how to run effective meetings and make sure your school council gets things done.