

Summary of Robert's Rules of Order

The object of Rules of Order (also called *Parliamentary Procedure*) is to facilitate the smooth functioning of a meeting or assembly and to provide a firm basis for resolving questions of procedure or disagreements that may arise. The procedures are based on two universally accepted democratic principles which balance the interests of the individual and of the group:

- **Every member has equal rights and obligations.** The officers and members must deal with each other in good faith and with fairness. Each individual or minority has an opportunity to express their side of a case.
- **The majority rules.** Assured of fairness for all, and recognizing that unanimity is impossible, each member agrees in advance to accept the will of the majority in order to facilitate decision making.

Basic Principles and Procedures

- The Presiding Officer of the assembly (called the *Chair*.) follows a specific agenda, which is called the *Order of Business*.

Motions:

- A *motion* is a formal proposal by a member that the assembly take certain action.
- Under parliamentary procedure, strictly speaking, discussion of any subject is permitted only in reference to a pending motion. This facilitates keeping business "on track" and moving forward rapidly. This requirement may be relaxed in small committees or boards if desired.
- Before a member in an assembly can make a motion or speak in debate, he or she must first *obtain the floor*; that is he must be *recognized* by the chair as having the exclusive right to be heard at that time. The member raises his hand or rises to signal the chair that he or she wishes to be recognized. This requirement may be relaxed in small committees or boards if desired.
- After a member *makes* a motion, another member *seconds* the motion. The chair then *states the question* to the assembly and it is open to debate.

Debate:

- The chair may ask for a show of hands from those who wish to make statements in debate. Their names are recorded and the members are sequentially recognized.
- Unless the limits on debate are extended by the assembly, each member has the right to speak only twice on the same question on the same day, but cannot make a second speech on the same question so long as any member who has not spoken on that question desires the floor. Each speech is limited to a maximum duration of 10 minutes. A member cannot yield any unexpired portion of his time to another member, or reserve any portion of his time for a later time. These requirements may be relaxed in small committees or boards if desired.
- Debate must be confined to the merits of the pending question. Members are strictly forbidden from making derogatory remarks or attacks against other members. The measure, not the member, is the subject of the debate.
- The chair may not participate in debate. If the presiding officer wishes to participate in debate on a particular motion, he or she must do so as an individual member of the assembly by relinquishing the chair to another qualified individual for the duration of the debate on the motion. These requirements may be relaxed in small committees or boards if desired.

Voting:

- After all members have exhausted their rights and/or desire to debate, or if a *Previous Question* motion is successful, the chair or the Secretary restates the motion. Then the chair calls for the vote by *voice vote*, by a *show of hands*, by *rising* or by *written ballot*.
- If there appears to be little opposition, the chair may save time by asking for *Unanimous Consent* of the assembly to approve a motion by stating "If there is no objection, ..." Any member may voice his or her objection, in which case a formal vote must be taken.
- The chair may normally only vote in the case of a tie. This requirement may be relaxed in small committees or boards if desired. After the vote is completed, the chair announces the results of the vote.
- An informal alternative to formal voting is a *Straw Poll*. This may be used to obtain a sense of the feelings of the assembly by holding a non-binding vote. At the chair's discretion, non-voting members of the assembly may be included in the vote.

Prioritized list of Motions

(These motions are listed from the lowest priority motions to the highest priority motions. Discussions on each kind of motion may only be interrupted by motions of higher priority. Some motions require a second, some are debatable and some may be amended. Some motions require a simple majority to prevail, while others require a 2/3 majority)

1. The Main Motion

The *Main Motion* is a proposal or question brought before the assembly for debate and consideration. Such a motion may only be made when no other motion is pending. To make a motion, a member says, "I move that ____." A second is required and indicates that at least two people feel that the proposal merits consideration. If a second is not given, the item is not discussed, simply because it doesn't have enough support to be considered. To second a motion, a member says, "I second that motion."

Main motions may be debated and amended. A majority vote is required for most main motions to be adopted.

Parliamentary procedures prohibit bringing the same motion before the assembly twice in the same session except via the following special main motions:

- *Take from the Table* - If a member wishes to bring a question which was previously *Laid on the Table* before the assembly, he or she may say "I move to take a question off the table." It must be seconded, is not debatable or amendable and requires a majority vote.
- *Rescind or Amend Something Previously Adopted* - A member may motion that a previously adopted motion be rescinded or amended. This must be seconded, is debatable and amendable. It requires either a 2/3 vote, a vote of the majority of the entire membership, or by simple majority if previous notice of intent to make the motion was given in the call of the meeting.
- *Discharge a Committee* - A member may move that consideration of a question or subject be taken out of a committee's hands after the assembly has referred it to the committee and before the committee has made a final report on it. This must be seconded, is debatable and amendable. It requires either a 2/3 vote, a vote of the majority of the entire membership, or by simple majority if previous notice of intent to make the motion was given in the call of the meeting.
- *Reconsider* - Only members who voted on the prevailing side of a motion may later motion to *Reconsider* it. This can be done in order to permit the correction of hasty, ill-advised, or erroneous action, or to take into account added information or a changed situation that has developed since the taking of the vote.

2. Postpone Indefinitely

If a member wishes to kill the *Main Motion* for the duration of the meeting in a manner which avoids a direct vote, he or she can say "I move that the resolution be postponed indefinitely." This motion must be seconded, is debatable but not amendable, and requires a majority vote.

3. Amend

If a member wishes to propose to modify (or amend) the wording of a motion being discussed before that motion is itself acted upon, he or she may say "I move to amend the motion by ____." Amendments must be germane (which means they must have something to do with the motion being discussed). There can even be an amendment to an amendment, but that's all. Amendments have to be seconded, may be debated and require a majority vote. Once an motion to Amend is before the group, discussion is strictly limited to the proposed amendment in question and not to the merits of the motion which it seeks to amend.

4. Refer to a Committee

If a member wishes to propose that the question being discussed be given to a committee for investigation and refinement before further action is taken by the assembly, he or she may say, "I move we refer this matter to a committee." Furthermore, the member may propose which existing committee to send it to, or propose that an *Ad Hoc* committee be formed. The motion requires a second, is debatable, is amendable only as to which committee will handle the matter, and requires a majority vote.

5. Postpone

If a member wishes to postpone action on the question being discussed until later, he or she may say "I move that the resolution be postponed until (a specific time and/or day.)" This motion must be seconded, is debatable, is amendable as to the time to which the main question is to be postponed, and requires a majority vote.

6. Limit or Extend Debate

If a member wishes to limit or extend debate on either the question currently under consideration or for the rest of the session, he or she may say "I move we limit (or extend) debate to [a specific amount of time, number of additional speakers, numbers of speeches per person and/or time per speech] for [this question, or for the rest of the meeting.]" If there is more than one part to the proposal being considered, the member should specify whether he or she wants to limit debate to just one item under discussion or to all discussion on

the main question. The motion requires a second, is not debatable, is amendable and requires a 2/3 vote. A motion to limit debate is not allowed in a committee.

7. Previous Question (End Debate)

When a member wants to end debate and put the question being discussed to an immediate vote, he or she may say "I move we end debate" or "I move to call the question." The motion requires a second, is not debatable, is not amendable, and requires a 2/3 vote. If there is more than one part of the proposal being discussed, i.e., there are amendments, or other motions to refer to a committee, or to postpone, etc., the member should specify whether he or she is moving for a vote on the item under immediate consideration or on all matters pertaining to that question.

8. Lay on the Table

When a member wants to lay the pending question aside temporary when something else of immediate urgency has arisen (For example, if a speaker must leave the meeting to catch a flight), he or she may say "I move that the resolution be laid on the table because ____" This motion requires a second, is not debatable or amendable and requires a majority vote.

9. Call for the Orders of the Day

If a single member wishes to require that the assembly conform to its agenda or order of business, he or she may say "I call for the orders of the day" or "I demand that we follow the agenda." This motion does not require a second, is not debatable or amendable. The assembly must then follow the agenda unless 2/3 of the assembly vote to *Suspend the Rules* and set the agenda aside.

10. Raise a Question of Privilege

If a member wishes to demand that a request or motion relating to the rights and privileges of the assembly or any of its members be brought up for immediate consideration because of its urgency, he or she may say "A question of privilege!" This motion does not require a second, is not debatable, is not amendable and is ruled upon by the chair. The chair's ruling may be *Appealed*. Examples of Questions of privilege:

- Comfort of the assembly's members with respect to lighting, noise or disturbances
- Conduct of the officers, members or visitors to the assembly and possible disciplinary actions
- A motion to *Go Into Executive Session*

11. Recess

When a member wishes to suspend the meeting and take a break, he or she may say "I move we recess until ____." The motion requires a second, is debatable and amendable only as to the time of the resumption of the meeting, and requires a majority vote.

12. Adjourn

When a member wishes to end the session, he or she says, "I move we adjourn." The motion requires a second, is not debatable or amendable, and must be put to an immediate vote. It requires a majority vote for passage. Any unfinished business is then considered old business at the next meeting.

Incidental Motions

(Incidental motions deal with questions of procedure arising out of another pending motion or item of business. These must be decided before business can proceed.)

Point of Order

When a member thinks that the rules of the assembly are being violated, he or she can make a motion for a *Point of Order*, thereby calling upon the chair for an immediate ruling and an enforcement of the rules by saying "Point of Order!" The motion does not require a second and is not be debatable or amendable. The chair makes a ruling or may call for a vote in which case a majority vote is required.

Appeal

When a member wishes to reverse a decision or ruling of the chairman, he or she may say "I appeal the decision of the chair (stating the action or decision that is objected to)." This appeal requires a second. The chairperson may explain his or her reason for decision without leaving the chair. The appeal is debatable, is not amendable, requires a majority vote to overrule the chair. The appeal must be made immediately after the decision in question. The chair must recognize all appeals

Suspend the Rules

When a member wishes to make a motion that the assembly do something which cannot be done without violating a parliamentary procedure or a rule of the assembly, he or she may say "I move to suspend the rules and [take the following action.]" This procedure is

most commonly utilized in order to handle business on the agenda out of its proper sequence. It is not possible for the assembly to suspend rules contained in the Bylaws or rules protecting the rights of individuals, including absentees. This motion requires a second, is not debatable or amendable and requires a 2/3 vote.

Objection to Consideration of a Question

When a member believes that it would be strongly undesirable for a motion to come before the assembly, he or she may say "I object to consideration of the motion." This motion does not require a second, is not debatable or amendable and requires a 2/3 vote to sustain the objection.

Division of the Question

When a member wishes to consider a multi-part motion point by point, he or she may say "I request the motion be divided as follows..." or "I request that the motion be considered paragraph by paragraph." This motion must be seconded, is not debatable, is amendable and requires a majority vote.

Division of the Assembly

When the results of a vote are unclear or a member wishes to demand that a definite count be taken instead of a voice vote, he or she may say, "I call for a division" or "I call for a count of the vote." He or she may specify a method of voting if desired. This motion does not require a vote, since a single member may demand a division. If there is a conflict, the chairperson will decide the method of voting.

Requests and Inquiries

When a member wishes to obtain information or to do something which requires permission of the assembly, he or she may make a request or inquiry, including:

- *Parliamentary Inquiry* - A question directed to the chair to obtain information on a matter of parliamentary procedures or the rules of the organization.
- *Point of Information* - A request to the chair, or through the chair to an officer or another member, for information relevant to the business at hand.
- *Permission to Withdraw or Modify a Motion* - A member may request permission from the assembly to withdraw or modify a motion which he or she proposed.
- *Request to Read Papers* - If a member wishes to read from a book or paper as part of his or her speech, he may first request the permission of the assembly.
- *Request to be Excused from a Duty* - A member may request to be excused from a duty or obligation.