

Effective Meetings



Using Robert's Rules of Order

This workshop is being facilitated on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded shared lands of the Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw (Squamish), səl̓ilwətaʔ (Tsleil-Waututh), and xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam) nations.

What are rules of order?

- Formal procedures used by **deliberative assemblies** (boards, senates, councils, etc.) to govern debate, and to decide on possible courses of action
- Also called “parliamentary procedure,” the rules of order are commonly-accepted ways for groups of people to come together and conduct business in a way that is **democratic**, and **respects the minority**

What are the benefits?

- Make meetings more **efficient**
- Leadership is more **credible**
- Helps **prevent unlawful actions**
- Develops **communication skills**



Basic principles

- All members are treated **fairly** and with **respect**
- Only **one subject** can be considered at a time
- Protection for the rights of **absent members**
- Protection for the rights of the **minority**
- For decisions, **majority rules**

An appeal to meeting chairs

- Yes, you need to enforce the rules, but you also need to be helpful
- If you can tell what someone is *attempting* to do, then assist them
- Your role is to **facilitate**, not to **police**

***Robert's Rules* is not something that you “win,” and it’s not the *purpose* of the meeting. Your goal is to make good decisions, to participate fully, and to exercise the care, diligence, and skill of a reasonably prudent person. *Robert's Rules* can help you do that, but no one should be able to force through a crappy decision for the sake of “rules.”**

Who else uses this?

- university boards
- university senates
- student governments
- school boards
- corporate boards
- strata councils
- professional associations
- legislative assembly
- parliament



About *Robert's Rules*

Why Robert's Rules is awesome

- Of organizations using some sort of parliamentary procedure, at least **85% of organizations** choose *Robert's Rules of Order*, or something close to it
- Nearly every student society uses *Robert's Rules of Order* (and chances are your university/college board of governors and senate use it too)

History of *Robert's Rules of Order*



“Where there is no law, but every man does what is right in his own eyes, there is the least of real liberty.”

Henry M. Robert

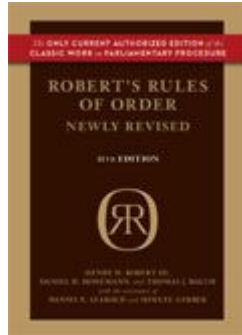
History of *Robert's Rules of Order*

- Prepared by **Henry M. Robert**
- Engineer, and U.S. army general
- First edition was published in **1876**
- We're on the 11th edition right now
- Most popular parliamentary authority
- Over **5 million copies** are in print

Official books

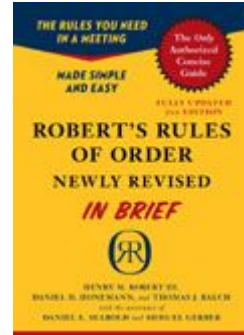
Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised, 11th ed.

- Better as a technical reference for chairs and resource-persons



Robert's Rules of Order In Brief Newly Revised, 11th ed.

- Better for people learning *Robert's Rules*, who only need basic rules and examples



How do meetings work?

Quorum

- Quorum is the number of voting members needed to **transact business**
- Your student society's bylaws should have rules establishing quorum
- In the absence of a specific rule, quorum is a **majority** of voting members

Participating in meetings

- Raise your hand to be “recognized” by the chair
- Remain quiet while other are speaking
- Avoid disruptions if leaving or re-entering
- If speaking with guests present, remember to identify yourself and your role
- Do not use cell phones during meetings
- Everyone gets to speak twice on any motion (usually)

Setting the meeting's agenda

- A meeting's agenda sets order of business
- Must be approved by a majority vote
- Once approved, it belongs to the group (i.e., can only be changed by vote)

Motions

What is a motion?

- A motion is a proposal to **take an action**
 - Only one subject can be considered at a time
 - Cannot be moved when another motion is under consideration
- To make a motion, you say **“I move that...”**
- A motion must be seconded
- Once seconded, the chair “states the motion”
- Most motions are debatable
- When discussion is done, motion is decided by a vote

Main motions

About main motions

- A main motion brings a **proposal to take an action** to the group
- Main motions can only be moved when nothing else is being considered
- Main motions must be seconded
- Main motions can be amended
- Main motions are subject to debate
- Main motions can be approved by majority vote*

* unless your bylaws say that something is a higher or lower threshold

Here's an example...

Member A raises their hand.

Chair: "Yes, Member A?"

Member A: **"I move that the 2018-2019 budget be approved."**

Member B: "Second!"

Chair: "It's moved, and seconded, that the budget be approved..."

Objections to consideration of a question

- Sometimes a motion is so offensive to the dignity of the board, senate, or committee that a number of members object to its being considered at all
- An objection must be seconded
- An objection cannot be amended
- An objection **cannot be debated**
- Once debate has started, it's too late!
- Objection must be sustained by a **two-thirds vote**

Subsidiary motions

About subsidiary motions

- A subsidiary motion **changes** a main motion, or **how** the motion is managed
- These have an **order of precedence** (i.e., some motions can only be moved if they “outrank” the other motions that are already being considered)

About motions to “postpone indefinitely”

- A motion to postpone something forever – essentially, this lets the board or the senate “send a motion away” without ever letting it come to a direct vote
- Can only be moved while a main motion is being considered
- Must be seconded, cannot be amended, and is subject to debate
- Must be adopted by majority vote

About amendments

- A motion to **change the text of an existing motion to improve it**
- Can be moved while main motion, or amendment, is being considered
- Amendments must be seconded
- Amendments can be amended (usually)
- Amendments are subject to debate, if main motion is debatable
- Must be adopted by majority vote
- You can amend an amendment, but that's it! (No more layers!)

About motions to refer

- A motion to refer proposes to send a question to committee for study
- Can be moved on a main motion, or main motion *with its amendments*
- A motion to refer must be seconded
- A motion to refer can be amended
- A motion to refer is subject to debate
- Must be adopted by a majority vote
- The board or senate's referral motion can also include instructions

About motions to postpone to a date or time

- Used to postpone a motion to a future time, date, or meeting
- Can be moved while a main motion is being considered (and its amendments)
- A motion to postpone must be seconded
- A motion to postpone can be amended
- A motion to postpone is subject to debate
- Must be adopted by a majority vote

Here's a special note...

- You might be thinking, “Oh, I already know how to **table** motions!”
- To “table” a motion is to set it aside temporarily, due to something sudden or urgent arising, and to take up the tabled business again afterward; when you “table” a motion, it is not carried forward to a future meeting
- This is frequently used incorrectly!

Motions to limit or extent debate

- You get to speak up to twice on any debatable motion
- A motion to limit or extend debate creates special rules for debate that apply to the current motion, or to a set of motions
- A motion to change debate rules must be seconded
- A motion to change debate rules can be amended
- A motion to change debate rules **is not debatable**
- Must be adopted by a **two-thirds vote**
- **Note:** You can speak as many times as you want in committees, unless the board or senate decide otherwise; committees cannot move to limit debate

About “calling the question”

- To “call the question” is a proposal to close debate on the current motion
- Can be used on only the current motion, or all pending motions
- It also prevents further subsidiary motions
- To call the question requires a seconder
- This motion cannot be amended
- This motion is **not debatable**
- Must be adopted by a **two-thirds vote**
- **This motion cannot be used in committees**

Privilege

About points of privilege

- A question of privilege is something that affects the privileges of the board or the senate as a whole, or the privileges of an individual member
- Complaints about privileges can be raised as a **point of order**
- You can **interrupt** another speaker (but be polite about it...)
- A point of privilege does not need a seconder
- A point of privilege cannot be amended
- A point of privilege is **not debatable**
- A point of privilege is not voted upon – the chair **makes a ruling**
- **What are some examples of questions of privilege?**

About motions to recess

- Allows the board, senate, or a committee to take a brief break
- Can be moved during any other motion (except adjournment motions)
- This is a type of **question of privilege**
- A motion to recess must be seconded
- A motion to recess can be amended (for the amount of time)
- A motion to recess **cannot be debated**
- Must be adopted by a majority vote

About motions to adjourn

- This motion ends the meeting and defers any incomplete business
- Can be moved at any time
- This is a type of **question of privilege**
- A motion to adjourn must be seconded
- A motion to adjourn cannot be amended
- A motion to adjourn **cannot be debated**
- Must be adopted by a majority vote
- Let's take a moment to talk about "adjourned meetings"...

Incidental motions

Motions to suspend the rules

- This kind of motion is used to enable the board or the senate to do something that it would not usually be allowed to do by **suspending the usual rules**
- A motion to suspend the rules must be seconded
- A motion to suspend the rules cannot be amended
- A motion to suspend the rules cannot be debated
- Must be adopted by a **two-thirds vote**
- Committees cannot suspend rules set for them by board or senate

How to divide a motion

- Motions that have multiple clauses can be divided, to make it easier for the body to more easily navigate debate and make clear decisions
- Example: “I move that the 2018-2019 budget be approved, **and** that up to \$3,000 be released to attend the professional development conference”
- If the clauses can stand on their own independently, it happens automatically
- Otherwise, a motion divide must be seconded
- A motion to divide cannot be amended
- A motion to divide is not debatable
- Must be adopted by a majority vote

Parliamentary inquiries

- You have the right to the information you need to do your job!
- If you are unsure of the procedure, ask!
- You can **interrupt** a speaker, but be polite about it...

Requests for information

- A “request for information” is used to ask straight-forward, fact-based questions (e.g., what does an acronym stand for?)
- These requests can **interrupt** the speaker, but be polite!
- You cannot use a request for information to **provide** details or jump the queue

Points of order

About points of order

- Points of order enforce the rules of the board, senate, and committees
- Used when it is felt that the rules of order are not being followed
- A point of order can **interrupt** the speaker
- No votes are taken on points of order, the chair makes a ruling

Supremacy of the assembly!

- At the end of the day, it is the assembly that “owns” the rules
- If folks disagree with the chair’s decision, it can be **appealed**
- An appeal can **interrupt** a speaker
- Appeals must be seconded
- Appeals cannot be amended
- Appeals are debatable (if the ruling was on a debatable motion)
- Common sense applies – if there cannot possibly be two reasonable opinions, then the chair can rule an appeal out of order
- An appeal prompts the motion “that the decision of the chair be sustained,” and this is the only motion in *Robert’s Rules* where a **tied vote is adopted**

Making a decision

How does voting work?

- When there is a motion on the floor, and debate ends, there is a vote
- **Be attentive** – when the speakers' list ends, it's decision time!
- The chair should repeat the motion just before the vote (**always, always**)
- Ask for votes for and against – asking for abstentions is unnecessary
- A majority vote means there are more “yes” votes than “no” votes
- Two-thirds votes are where there are 2 “yes” votes for every 1 “no” vote
- Abstentions are completely irrelevant when calculating the vote
- Tied votes, generally, are defeated

Unanimous consent

- This is a *Robert's Rules* magic wand that can make our lives much easier
- Chair is free to test the “unanimous consent” waters on routine issues
- Any one member can deny unanimous consent – and that’s okay!

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Questions?