

Robert's Rules of Order – Parliamentary Procedure

Adapted from: Vixman, Rachel. *Robert's Rules of Order*. New York: Jove Books (1977).

Article I — Organizational Principles

There is a great need for more democratic policies on organization, communal and national levels. Since millions of men and women are banded together in hundreds of thousands of organizations — athletic, business, civic, cooperative, cultural, educational, ethnic, fraternal, labor, philanthropic, political, professional, recreational, religious, scientific, social, etc., etc. — the faithful observance of democratic principles would become a major and impressive influence in shaping a stronger American democracy.

Through the ages, parliamentary law has been introduced as organization principles - rules of conduct. It is based on freedom of speech, respect for the dignity of man, equality and justice for all, the principle of majority rule, the right of the minority to be heard, and the duty to abide by the will of the majority.

Robert's Rules of Order has been accepted throughout the United States as the standard authority on parliamentary law and procedure. Hundreds of books have been written to simplify, clarify, and amplify these rules - all based on **Robert's Rules of Order**, rarely changing or superseding this approved work.

There seems to be the mistaken notion that only presidents or aspiring presidents need a knowledge

of these rules. It is the member who can change the whole course of the meeting if he has acquired a knowledge of the fundamental laws and procedures. He is then in a position to make a most effective contribution to the group needs; also, he can be on guard to protect the organization when parliamentary law is misused or abused.

General Robert said that if there were no rules or established customs to guide an assembly of persons, and if each could talk on any subject as long and as many times as he pleased, and if all could talk at the same time, it would be impossible in most cases to ascertain their deliberate judgment on any particular matter. Experience has shown the necessity for rules, for a presiding officer to enforce them and to preserve order, and for a recording secretary to keep a record of the business transacted by the assembly.

Article II — Primary Rule

All business is brought before the meeting by a motion or resolution, a report of a committee or a communication. The terms *motion* and *question* are synonymous; when first stated, it is a motion, and when repeated by the chairman, it is referred to as a question.

Only one such proposal can be considered at a time. It must be made by a member and seconded by another member. The maker of a motion must get the floor by rising, addressing the presiding officer and obtaining recognition. The motion

should be worded in the affirmative whenever possible.

The presiding officer restates the motion and asks, "Are there any remarks?" This opens debate on the question. The maker of the motion is entitled to speak first on the motion. All remarks must be addressed to the chairman. No one may speak a second time on the same question if another member desires to speak on the subject, but he may speak a second time if one who has not spoken is not seeking recognition. But in formal meetings, if anyone objects, he may not speak more often without permission from the assembly.

Motions and resolutions are the same. A resolution usually has a preamble or introduction and is much more descriptive, with several paragraphs, starting with "Whereas," and ending with "Therefore, be it resolved." It is subject with slight variations to the same rules as a motion. It is presented in writing. When a main motion is before the assembly, it must be accepted or rejected or be disposed of in some way, before another subject can be introduced, except for privileged or other motions which will be described in following sections. When a group is prepared to accept a motion in its given form, nothing more is required but to take the vote and get the result. But more often, this is not the case. The assembly may prefer some other course to an immediate decision on the motion in the form in which it is presented. Therefore, it is debated, and secondary motions are introduced,

which may more clearly meet the wishes of the group.

These secondary motions must be made after the main motion is stated and before the vote is taken. When stating the motion, the chairman should make perfectly clear what it is, and, after the vote is taken, state the result.

Motions must not be in violation of local and Federal laws, the organization's constitution and by-laws, or standing rules.

The business of the meeting cannot be conducted unless a quorum is present; the number should be stated in the by-laws. The chairman should know the rules; when motions can be made, amended, debated, order of precedence, whether they require a majority or two-thirds vote, etc.

Article III — Motions by rank

Section I — Privileged motions

Privileged motions have nothing to do with the pending question or motion, but are of such urgency and importance that they are allowed to interrupt the consideration of other questions, and take precedence over them. They are undebatable because of their high rank. When privileged motions do not interrupt other business, they are main motions and are without privileges.

Section II — Incidental motions

Incidental motions are those which arise out of a pending question and must be decided before any other business is taken up; or are something connected with the business of the assembly that must be attended to and which requires a temporary interruption. They have no special rank among themselves, but they yield to privileged questions. They are dealt with individually as they arise, but they take precedence

over the subsidiary motions. Most of them are undebatable.

Points of order, parliamentary inquiries, and requests for information do not require action by the assembly. The presiding officer takes care of these unless they need to be referred to the group for consideration.

Section III — Subsidiary motions

The *subsidiary motions* are the most frequently used motions in parliamentary procedure. They are made while a main motion is pending, for the purpose of assisting or modifying it or to delay action or otherwise dispose of the main motion. The subsidiary motion supersedes the main motion for the time being and must be dealt with before action can be taken on the main motion. However, all subsidiary motions must yield to privileged and incidental motions.

The first, as listed, is of higher rank than every motion listed below it. This means that a motion of higher rank can always be entertained while a motion of lower rank is pending before the house, but a motion of lower rank cannot be entertained if a motion of higher rank is before the body.

Article IV — Constitution & bylaw

It is assumed that the groups are already organized and have adopted a constitution and bylaws. Sometimes they are one and the same. If divided, the most important rules are placed in the constitution, those most likely to be changed, in the bylaws. The pages listed above from Robert's Rules of Order give the rules for drafting and adopting a constitution, etc.

Once the organization adopts the basic structure and rules by which it is to be guided, these rules must be adhered to, and supersede standard parliamentary laws and only such

rules which are not included are governed by the standard parliamentary authority adopted.

Provision should be made for amendments to the constitution and bylaws. This provision should not be too rigid, since emergencies do arise which cannot be foreseen. Usually, amendments are presented at annual meetings and conventions, and require a two-thirds vote of those voting and notice given in advance at a time period listed, or three-fourths vote of those voting if no notice has been given.

General Robert states that if the constitution, bylaws, and rules of order that have been adopted contain no rule for their amendment, they may be amended at any regular business meeting by a vote of the majority of the entire membership. Another possibility is if the amendment was submitted in writing at the previous regular business meeting, then they may be amended by a two-thirds vote of those voting (a quorum).

In writing a constitution, it is customary to use Roman numerals for article headings but simple figures for sections.

National organizations provide their chapters or units with "model" constitutions conforming to notional policy, to be filled in with minor details for local needs.

No motion or resolution is in order that conflicts with the constitution and bylaws or standing rules, if any have been adopted.

Article V — Miscellaneous

Section I — Definitions

- Accept, Adopt, Approve: applied to reports and motions agreed upon; not to be confused with "received."
- Adjourn: to bring the meeting to a close.

- Agenda: the order of business to be brought up at a meeting.
- Amend: to change or modify a motion by striking out, or by adding or by substituting.
- Assembly: a group, society, club, sometimes called "the house."
- Business: motion: resolution, subject, the proceedings; the agenda.
- Bylaws: code of rules or regulations accepted by a society for its own guidance.
- Chair: the presiding officer at a meeting.
- Clerk: same as secretary.
- Commit: to refer to a committee.
- Constitution: same as bylaws, sometimes combined, or in two parts. The constitution contains the more basic essentials, the order, procedures.
- Debate: to discuss the pros and cons of a motion.
- Division of the House (also the Assembly): calling for a recount of the vote.
- Division of a Question: separating a motion and voting on each part separately.
- Executive Secretary: a salaried executive, as a general manager under the board and executive committee.
- Ex-officio: by virtue of official position, usually of boards and committees.
- Fiscal Year: the financial year of an organization.
- Floor (Obtain the): when a member is recognized by the Chair, he has "the floor."
- Floor (On the): a motion is on the floor when it is being considered by the assembly.
- General Consent: unanimous, silent, used in routine matters, if there is no objection, avoiding a formal vote.

- Germane: relevant, pertinent to the pending question.
- Good of the Order, Good and Welfare, after the business, if there is time, general discussions, constructive criticism, informal suggestions.
- House: same as assembly, meeting, et.
- Main Motion: the motion that introduces the business or a proposal to the assembly for action.
- Majority: more than half the votes cast.
- Minutes: the official record of proceedings at a meeting.
- Motion: Main or Principal, See Main Motion.
- Order of Business: same as agenda - the schedule of business to be considered.
- Orders of the Day: program or order of business adopted that should be followed.
- Parliamentarian: one skilled in parliamentary procedure; advises the presiding officer concerning questions of parliamentary procedure.
- Parliamentary Law: accepted rules for deliberative bodies, mostly derived from the usage of the English Parliament and later from the United States Congress.
- Pending and Immediately Pending: the question before the assembly for discussion and action.
- Plurality: term used in an election when one candidate has the largest number of votes.
- Point of Order: a question concerning a breach of parliamentary rules.
- Postpone Indefinitely: a motion to suppress, eliminate, or "kill" the main motion.
- Preamble: an introduction or a preface to a resolution.

- Precedence: priority in rank.
- Prevailing Side: the side having secured the most votes.
- Previous Question: a call to close debate and take the vote.
- Privilege (Questions of): It refers to rights and privileges of the assembly or any of its members.
- Pro Tem: for the time being, temporary.
- Putting the Question: placing the motion before the assembly for a vote.
- Question: same as motion, when stated by the Chair for a vote.
- Quorum: a specified number of members required, according to the bylaws, to hold a legal meeting.
- Recess: a motion used to halt the proceedings temporarily.
- Refer: see Commit.
- Seriatim Consideration: consideration of a motion, line by line and paragraph by paragraph.
- Sine Die: without a day, indefinitely, final adjournment.
- Table a Motion: to put aside the pending question temporarily.
- Table (Take from): a motion used to restore a question for consideration again.
- Ticket: a slate of candidates for office.
- Two-thirds Vote: two-thirds of the vote cast; it should be a rising vote.
- Viva Voce: by the voice; usually is the method of voting.
- Voting: those actually casting a vote.
- Yield: concede to, outranked by, give way to.

Section II — Parliamentary don'ts

- Don't be late for the meeting. You may be needed to complete a quorum.
- Don't sit in the rear. Leave the rear seats for the late ones.
- Don't say "I move you." Omit the "you."
- Don't say "I make a motion to," say "I move to"...
- Don't wait to obtain the floor in order to second a motion.
- Don't stand while another is speaking.
- Don't fail to take part in the debate if you have a viewpoint to express, or want information or parliamentary assistance.
- Don't claim the floor the second time if there are others who wish to speak the first time.
- Don't be silent during the debate and then criticize after the meeting.
- Don't address a woman chairman as chairlady - say "Madam Chairman."
- Don't carry on a conversation with your neighbor while someone is speaking.
- Don't forget to notify the chairman of a committee of which you are a member if you cannot attend a committee meeting.
- Don't delay paying your dues on time.
- Don't accept an office unless you are willing to assume the responsibilities of the office.
- Don't use your knowledge of parliamentary law to hinder business by constantly raising points of order, and insisting upon the strict observance of every rule at a meeting in which the majority of the members have no knowledge of these rules.
- Don't leave the meeting, unless necessary, until the president declares the meeting adjourned. You may be needed for a quorum,

or something very important may come up at the last moment.

Section III — Duties of members

- To obtain the floor before speaking.
- To stand when speaking, if convenient.
- To avoid speaking upon any matter until it is properly brought before the house by a motion.
- To keep upon the question then pending.
- To yield the floor to calls for order.
- To abstain from all personalities in debate.
- To avoid disturbing, in any way, speakers of the assembly.

Section IV — Rights of members

- To offer any motion that is germane to the organization.
- To explain or discuss that motion, or any matter properly before the meeting.
- To call to order, if necessary. (A point of order can interrupt a speaker. It is raised to ensure orderly procedure, particularly when there is a breach or violation of rules or bylaws, or when a member is not speaking on the motion before the house.)
- To hold the floor, when legally obtained, until through speaking.
- To appeal from the decision of the chair to that of the assembly.