



ROBERT'S RULES OF ORDER AND PARLIAMENTARY PROCEDURE

A summary guide to assist in running advisory group meetings

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Robert's Rules of Order is the standard for facilitating discussions and group decision-making. Although they may seem long and involved, having an agreed - upon set of rules makes meetings run easier. **Robert's Rules** will help your group have better meetings, not make them more difficult. Your group is free to modify them or find another suitable process that encourages fairness and participation, unless your bylaws state otherwise.

Background

Parliamentary procedure (or law) originally referred to the customs and rules for conducting business in the British Parliament and later referred to deliberative assemblies in general. In Great Britain, these procedures form a part of the unwritten law of the land, and in our own legislative bodies they are the authority in all cases where they do not conflict with existing rules or precedents.

Henry Martyn Robert was an engineering officer in the regular U.S. Army in the late 1800s. Without warning he was asked to preside over a church meeting, and to his embarrassment he realized that he did not know how. He discovered and studied the few books then available on the subject. In 1876, General Robert set out to bring the rules of parliamentary law (by then adopted by the U.S. Congress) to members of ordinary societies and organizations with the publication of the *Pocket Manual of Rules of Order*. It sold half a million copies before it was completely reworked in 1915 and published as *Robert's Rules of Order Revised*. In 1970, it was substantially expanded and became *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised*.

The Basics of Parliamentary Procedure

1. The purpose of parliamentary procedure is to make it easier for people to work together effectively and help groups accomplish their purposes. Rules of procedure should assist a meeting, not inhibit it.
2. A meeting can deal with only one matter at a time. This helps keep the agenda on track.
3. All members have equal rights, privileges and obligations. One of the chairperson's main responsibilities is to use the authority of the chairperson to ensure that all people attending a meeting are treated equally--for example, not to permit a vocal few to dominate the debates.
4. A majority vote decides an issue. In any group, each member agrees to be governed by the vote of the majority. A simple majority is one more than half of the advisory group members present.
5. The rights of the minority must be protected. Although the ultimate decision rests with a majority, all members have these basic rights of the right to be heard and the right to oppose.
6. Every matter presented for decision should be discussed fully. The right of every member to speak on any issue is as important as each member's right to vote.
7. Every member has the right to understand the meaning of any question presented to a meeting and to know what effect a decision will have. A member always has the right to request information on any motion they don't thoroughly understand.

The Basics of *Robert's Rules*

1. **Motion:** To introduce a new piece of business or propose a decision or action, a motion must be made by a group member ("I move that.....") to the chairperson. A second motion must then also be made (raise your hand and say, "I second it.") After limited discussion the group then votes on the motion. A majority vote is required for the motion to pass (or quorum as specified in your bylaws.)
2. **Postpone Indefinitely:** This tactic is used to kill a motion. When passed, the motion cannot be reintroduced at that meeting. It may be brought up again at a later date. This is made as a motion ("I move to postpone indefinitely..."). A second is required. A majority vote is required to postpone the motion under consideration.
3. **Amend:** This is the process used to change a motion under consideration. Perhaps you like the idea proposed but not exactly as offered. Raise your hand and make the following motion: "I move to amend the motion on the floor." This also requires a second. After the motion to amend is seconded, a majority vote is needed to decide whether the amendment is accepted. Then a vote is taken on the amended motion. In some organizations, a "friendly amendment" is made. If the person who made the original motion agrees with the suggested changes, the amended motion may be voted on without a separate vote to approve the amendment.

4. **Commit:** This is used to place a motion in committee. It requires a second. A majority vote must rule to carry it. At the next meeting the committee is required to prepare a report on the motion committed. If an appropriate committee exists, the motion goes to that committee. If not, a new committee is established.
5. **Question:** To end a debate immediately, the question is called (say "I call the question") and needs a second. A vote is held immediately (no further discussion is allowed). A two-thirds vote is required for passage. If it is passed, the motion on the floor is voted on immediately.
6. **Table:** To table a discussion is to lay aside the business at hand in such a manner that it will be considered later in the meeting or at another time ("I make a motion to table this discussion until the next meeting. In the meantime, we will get more information so we can better discuss the issue.") A second is needed and a majority vote required to table the item being discussed.
7. **Adjourn:** A motion is made to end the meeting. A second motion is required. A majority vote is then required for the meeting to be adjourned (ended).

Remember, these processes are designed to ensure that everyone has a chance to participate and to share ideas in an orderly manner. Parliamentary procedure should not be used to prevent discussion of important issues.

Introducing a motion

When no one else has the floor, address the chairperson and ask to be recognized.

- Now that you have the floor and can proceed with your motion say, "I move that..." Always state a motion affirmatively. Say, "I move that we..." rather than "I move that we do not..."
- Another member may second your motion. A second merely implies that the seconder agrees that the motion should come before the assembly and not that they are in favor of the motion.
- Once the motion is presented to the membership by the, it cannot be changed by you without consent of the members.
- If there is no second, the chairperson says, "The motion is not before you at this time." The motion is not lost, as there has been no vote taken.
- If there is a second, the chairperson states the question by saying "It has been moved and seconded that ... (state the motion). . ., is there any discussion?"

Putting the question to the membership

- The time for you to speak in favor of your motion is at this point in time, rather than at the time you present it. The mover is always allowed to speak first.
- All comments and debate must be directed to the chairperson.
- Keep to the time limit for speaking, if one has been established.
- The mover may speak again only after other speakers are finished unless called upon by the chairperson.
- Asking a question or a brief suggestion is not counted in debate.

Voting on a motion

- The method of vote on any motion can vary.
 - By voice**--The chairperson asks those in favor to say "aye," those opposed to say "no." Any member may move for an exact count. The chairperson should also ask for abstentions.
 - By roll call**--Each member answers "yes" or "no" as his name is called. This method is used when a record of each person's vote is required.
 - By general consent**--When a motion is not likely to be opposed, the chairperson says, "If there is no objection..." The membership shows agreement by their silence; however, if one member says, "I object," the item must be put to a vote.
 - By division**--This is a slight verification of a voice vote. It does not require a count unless the chairperson so desires. Members raise their hands or stand.
 - By ballot**--Members write their vote on a slip of paper; this method is used when secrecy is desired.
- **Abstentions**--If you don't wish to vote due to circumstances such as a conflict of interest on the vote, you feel you don't have enough information or because the vote (such as approving meeting minutes) is related to a previous meeting you didn't attend, you may abstain from the vote.
- **Amending a vote**--If you approve the idea of the motion but want to change it, amend it or submit a substitute for it.
- **If you want advice or information to help you make your decision**, move to refer the motion to committee with instructions to report back.
- **If you feel that there are pending questions and the vote should be delayed so more urgent business can be considered**, move to table the motion.
- **If you want time to think the motion over**, move that consideration be deferred to a certain time.
- **If you want to kill the motion**, move that it be deferred indefinitely.
- **A majority vote** is more than half of the votes cast by persons legally entitled to vote.
- **A 2/3 vote** means at least 2/3 of the votes cast by persons legally entitled to vote.
- **A tie vote** is a lost vote since it is not a majority.

Action	Purpose	What to say	Second?	Vote needed
Main Motion to introduce business	Used to start a motion	"I move that we ... "Second!"	Yes	Majority
Amend a Motion	Changes to main motion wording or to add clarity of the motion with corrections	"I move to amend the motion by" (adding words, striking out words, substitute words)	Yes	Majority
Limit debate	To limit the length of discussion on debate for a motion	"I move that the debate on this motion be limited to <one speech of two minutes for each member, for example>	Yes (no debate)	Majority
End debate and amendments	To stop discussion and move on	"I move to end debate."	Yes	2/3majority
Reconsidering previous motion	Used to bring a question again before the group	"I move to reconsider..."	Yes	Majority
To hold off on a motion	To defer a vote to a later time and lay a motion aside temporarily	"I move to table ..."	Yes	Majority
To postpone an action to an unspecified time	'Lay on the table' the motion	"I move to table..."	Yes (no debate)	Majority
To take up a tabled matter	To bring back a tabled item	"I move to take from the table..."	Yes	Majority
Take intermission	To take a recess	"I move to recess for <time>..."	Yes (no debate)	Majority
Send to committee	To move an action item to a committee for further discussion and action	"I move the motion be referred to ..."	Yes	Majority
Adjourn meeting	To end the meeting officially	"I move to adjourn"	No	Majority
Complain about something	To bring up a point of meeting	"I rise to a question of privilege..."	No	No Vote
Approval of minutes	To make them the official record of that meeting	"I move to accept the meeting Date>> as is." If minutes need corrections, discuss after the second motion then approved or tabled	Yes	Majority
Allocate funds	To allocate an amount of money for an event, service, resource or other and acknowledge the pricing	"I move to allocate an amount not to exceed \$____ to _____ for their _____ from the _____ fund"	Yes	Majority