

Robert's Rules of Order – the Basics

What is Roberts Rules of Order:

Parliamentary procedure is a set of rules for conducting orderly meetings that accomplish goals fairly. Most Committees and Councils use Roberts Rules of Order. Benefits of parliamentary procedure include the following:

- Justice and courtesy for all
- Maintenance of order
- Consideration of one item at a time
- All sides get heard
- Ability for each member to provide input
- Majority rule
- Protection of the rights of all members including the minority

Basic Principles of Roberts Rules of Order:

- All members have equal rights, privileges and obligations
- No person can speak until recognized by the chair
- Personal remarks during debate are out of order
- Only one question at a time may be considered, and only one person may have the floor at any one time
- Members have a right to know what the immediately pending question is and to have it restated before a vote is taken
- Full and free discussion of every main motion is a basic right
- A quorum must be present for business to be conducted
- A majority decides a question except when basic rights of members are involved, or a rule provides otherwise.
- A 2/3 vote is required for any motion that deprives a member of right in any way (e.g., cutting off debate)
- Silence gives consent. Those who do not vote allow the decision to be made by those who do vote.
- The Chair should always remain impartial

Basic Definitions:

Motion – A formal proposal made to bring a subject before an assembly for its consideration and action. Begins with “I move that...”

Second – A statement by a member who agrees that the motion made by another member be considered. Stated as “Second,” or “I second the motion.”

Amendment – Before the vote is taken on a motion, it may be amended by:

- Striking out words
- Inserting or adding words
- Striking out words and inserting others in their place
- Substituting one (1) paragraph or resolution for another

Quorum - the minimum number of members who must be present in order for a Committee to conduct business. Committees cannot take votes on business matters unless a quorum is present.

Presiding officer/Chair – The individual who facilitates the meeting, usually the President/Chair. In the absence of the President, the Vice President/Vice Chair.

Role of the Presiding officer:

- To remain impartial during debate – the presiding officer must relinquish the chair in order to debate the merits of a motion and may not chair the meeting again until after a vote has been taken on the motion has been disposed of
- To vote only to create or break a tie (or 2/3 for matters requiring a 2/3 vote) – exception: the presiding officer may vote on any vote by ballot
- To introduce business in proper order per the agenda
- To recognize speakers
- To determine if a motion is in order
- To keep discussion germane to the pending motion
- To maintain order
- To put motions to a vote and announce results

General procedure for Handling a Main Motion:

- A member must obtain the floor by being recognized by the chair
- Member makes a main motion
- A motion must be seconded by another member before it can be considered
- If the motion is in order, the chair will restate the motion and open debate
- The maker of a motion has the right to speak first in debate
- The main motion is debated along with any secondary motions that are debatable.
- Debate on Subsidiary, Privileged and Incidental motions (if debatable or amendable) take precedence over debate on the main motion and must be decided before debate on the main motion can continue.
- Debate is closed when: Discussion has ended, or A 2/3 vote closes debate (“call the previous question” or “call the question”)
- The chair restates the motion, and if necessary clarifies the consequences of affirmative and negative votes
- The chair calls for a vote by asking “All in favor?” Those in favor say “Aye.” Then asking “All opposed?” Those opposed will say “no”
- The chair announces the result

General rules of Debate:

- No member may speak until recognized by the chair
- All discussion must be relevant to the immediately pending question
- No member can speak more than twice to each debatable motion. The second time takes place after everyone wishing to debate the motion has had an opportunity to speak once
- No member can speak more than ten minutes or as decided by members. Many PTAs limit debate to three (3) minutes per speaker by general consent at the beginning of the meeting.
- All remarks must be addressed to the chair – no cross debate is permitted
- It is not permissible to speak against one’s own motion (but one can vote against one’s own motion)
- Debate must address issues not personalities – no one is permitted to make personal attacks or question the motives of other speakers
- The presiding officer must relinquish the chair in order to participate in debate and cannot reassume the chair until the pending main question is disposed of
- When possible, the chair should let the floor alternate between those speaking in support and those speaking in opposition to the motion

- Members may not disrupt the assembly
- Rules of debate can be changed by a 2/3 vote or general consent without objection

How to do things during a meeting:

You want to bring up a new idea before the group.

After recognition by the president of the board, present your motion. A second is required for the motion to go to the floor for discussion, or consideration.

You want to change some of the wording in a motion under discussion.

After recognition by the president of the board, move to amend by

- adding words,
- striking words or
- striking and inserting words.

You like the idea of a motion being discussed, but you need to reword it beyond simple word changes.

Move to substitute your motion for the original motion. If it is seconded, discussion will continue on both motions and eventually the body will vote on which motion they prefer.

You want more study and/or investigation given to the idea being discussed.

Move to refer to a committee. Try to be specific as to the charge to the committee.

You want more time personally to study the proposal being discussed.

Move to postpone to a definite time or date.

You are tired of the current discussion.

Move to limit debate to a set period of time or to a set number of speakers. Requires a 2/3rds vote.

You have heard enough discussion.

Move to close the debate. Also referred to as calling the question. This cuts off discussion and brings the assembly to a vote on the pending question only. Requires a 2/3rds vote.

You want to postpone a motion until some later time.

Move to table the motion. The motion may be taken from the table after 1 item of business has been conducted. If the motion is not taken from the table by the end of the next meeting, it is dead. To kill a motion at the time it is tabled requires a 2/3rds vote. A majority is required to table a motion without killing it.

You believe the discussion has drifted away from the agenda and want to bring it back.

“Call for orders of the day.”

You want to take a short break.

Move to recess for a set period of time.

You want to end the meeting.

Move to adjourn.

You are unsure the president of the board announced the results of a vote correctly.

Without being recognized, call for a "division of the house." A roll call vote will then be taken.

You are confused about a procedure being used and want clarification.

Without recognition, call for "Point of Information" or "Point of Parliamentary Inquiry." The president of the board will ask you to state your question and will attempt to clarify the situation.

You have changed your mind about something that was voted on earlier in the meeting for which you were on the winning side.

Move to reconsider. If the majority agrees, the motion comes back on the floor as though the vote had not occurred.

You want to change an action voted on at an earlier meeting.

Move to rescind. If previous written notice is given, a simple majority is required. If no notice is given, a 2/3rds vote is required.

Example of Handling a Main Motion:

Member rises and addresses the chair:

Madam (Mister) President.

Chair recognizes member (by title or name).

Member makes the motion.

I move that...

Another member seconds the motion (without recognition).

Second [or] I second the motion.

The chair states the motion and opens debate.

It is moved and seconded that...

Is there any debate? Or Are you ready for the question?

Chair recognizes members wishing to speak.

After debate concludes. Chair restates the motion and puts the question to a vote.

The question is on the motion to...

Those in favor of the motion say "aye." Those opposed say "no."

Chair announces the result of the vote and what action will be taken.

The "ayes" have it, and the motion is adopted. We will [stating action to be taken].

The chair continues with the next business in order.

Common methods of taking a vote:

General consent:

"If there is no objection, we will..." (Pause) "Since there is no objection, we will..."

Voice vote: *"As many as are in favor, say "aye." As many opposed, say "no." The "ayes/noes" have it and the motion is adopted/lost."*

Rising vote (not counted): *"Those in favor will rise. Thank you, be seated. Those opposed will rise. Thank you, be seated. There is a majority (or 2/3) in the affirmative and the motion is adopted." Or "There is less than a majority (or 2/3) in the affirmative and the motion is lost."*

Methods of Amending:

By striking out: *"I move to amend the motion by striking out the word "Denver."*

By inserting: *"I move to amend the motion by inserting the word 'Las Vegas' after the word 'Portland' and before the period."*

By striking out and inserting: *"I move to amend the motion by striking out the word '\$35' and inserting the word '\$50.'"*

Helpful terminology

- Recommendations, bylaws, rules, resolutions, budgets, and audits are **adopted**.
- Reports are **filed**.
- Resignations are **accepted**.
- Bills and minutes are **approved**.
- If corrections were made to the minutes, the minutes are then **approved as corrected**.
- Treasurer's statement is neither approved nor adopted; but after questions are answered regarding any item as reported, it is **placed on file for audit** as stipulated in the bylaws.
- Motions are recorded as **"adopted" or "lost."**