

Tips – Meeting Rules of Order

These tips are provided as a quick assistance during the meeting, and should not be considered to be a complete guide to Robert's Rules of Order.

The following are the foundational concepts upon which parliamentary procedure is based:

- One thing at a time. Only one main motion is allowed on the floor at a time.
- Only one person may talk at a time.
- Enough of us have to be here to decide. The group determines the minimum number of people (called a quorum) that must be present to make a decision for the whole group.
- The rights of the members who are absent are protected.
- Vote requirements are based on members' rights. If an action gives rights to the members, it requires a majority vote to pass. If an action takes away rights from members, it requires a two-thirds vote to pass.
- Silence = consent. If a member chooses to abstain from voting, that member is giving his or her consent to the decision made by the group.
- Decisions are made democratically. All voting members have equal rights. The majority rules, but the minority has the right to be heard and to attempt to change the minds of the majority.
- Since time would not allow every decision to be made by the will of the people, the parliamentary procedure system gives the power to make rulings to the chair, who has the job of facilitating the meeting.

When you're using Robert's Rules to deal with different types of rules, you need to know when to follow which rule. Among the more fundamental rules, then, are those that define the order of precedence of the different rules that an organization creates:

- Charter: The charter, if you have one, reigns supreme. It's a grant of authority by the government (if your group is incorporated) or a superior organization (if your group is a constituent unit of a larger body). A charter usually lists conditions under which you must operate, but it usually provides for your organization to be subject to bylaws specifically tailored to your organization but which may not conflict with provisions of the charter.
- Bylaws: The bylaws are the highest-ranking rules of your organization. No matter what, no rules of order or standing rules can ever be enforced if they conflict in any way with your bylaws. Because bylaws define specific characteristics of the organization itself — including which parliamentary authority will be used by the organization — bylaws are of such importance that they can't be changed without previous notice and the consent of a large majority of your members.
- Policies and Procedures, special rules of order and standing rules: These rank together as immediately subordinate to bylaws because they have one particular thing in common - they contain individual rules based on the specific need of the organization to accomplish a specific purpose for which the rule is adopted.
- Robert's Rules: a parliamentary manual. When adopted it as your parliamentary authority, then Robert's Rules is binding to the extent that it isn't in conflict with the bylaws, special rules of order, or standing rules.

- Custom: Custom is procedures that aren't written anywhere but are followed in practice just as if they were written rules. Custom is as binding as actual rules with an exception: If a written rule exists to the contrary, then the custom must yield as soon as the conflict is pointed out to the membership through a point of order.

Ways to Make Decisions or Vote

General or unanimous consent is a very effective way to take care of non-controversial issues or motions for which it looks like there will be no objection. In taking the vote by general consent, the Chair typically states "Is there any objection to . . .", and then "Hearing none, ..." If a member objects, the Chair puts the motion to a formal vote. In a formal vote, members may vote by voice, show of hands, or by ballot.

How to get members to talk about your idea or concern

You need to put the issue on the agenda. You can add your item at the meeting if it is short or urgent, but if it is more complex and requires thorough discussion, get in touch with your Chair, and ask them to put the discussion item on the agenda for the next scheduled meeting. When the Chair asks the members to approve the agenda, say: "I would like to add something to the agenda."

How to find out if members agree with your idea: Making a motion

A motion is simply a proposal to the members at the meeting. To make a motion, write out what you want to say – the clearer the motion, the better. Then raise your hand until the Chair acknowledges you. When the Chair calls on you, say: "I move that..." and say what you want. Another person who supports the motion must second it before the members can discuss it. If you didn't make the motion, but want the members to talk about it, say: "I second the motion."

How to give your opinion.

If you made the motion, the Chair will let you start the discussion. The Chair will be keeping a list of the members signaling that they wish to speak to the motion, and will call on them in turn. If you didn't make the motion, but have an opinion, raise your hand at any time during the discussion on the floor until the Chair acknowledges you. When the Chair calls on you, say what you think as clearly and as briefly as possible. Remember, you must speak to the motion. It helps to start with "I want to speak in favour of the motion because...." or "I want to speak against the motion because...." If you have already spoken on the motion, you may not speak again so long as any other member who has not spoken yet wishes to speak. The chair should let any opposing sides alternate in the order of speaking, either for against the motion.

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

After recognition by the Chair, move to amend by adding words, striking words or striking and inserting words.

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

Move to substitute your motion for the original motion. If it is seconded, debate 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 under debate.

Move to refer to a committee or working group. Try to be specific as to the charge to the committee, and the date to report back.

You want more time personally to study the proposal under debate.

Move to postpone to a definite time or date. Raise your hand and say: "I move to postpone the question to the next meeting."

You have heard enough debate.

If you think there has been full discussion, or that the discussion is going in circles, then raise your hand and, when the Chair calls on you, say: "I call the question". If someone seconds your motion, then the Chair will ask members to vote on whether to end the discussion. If 2/3 of the members vote for your motion, then the meeting must vote immediately on the motion or amendment being discussed. You may instead move to limit debate to a set period of time or to a set number of speakers. Requires a 2/3 vote. "I move that debate be limited to one speech of three minutes for each member."

You are unsure that the Chair has announced the results of a vote correctly.

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

You are confused about facts affecting the business at hand, and want clarification.

Without being recognized, call for "Request for Information". The Chair will ask you to state your question and will attempt to clarify the situation.

You see a breach of the rules, or disagree with the Chair's running of the meeting

The chair has the duty of making sure the rules of the meeting are followed. Any member may call the attention of the chair to a violation of the rules. The group as the whole, not the chair, is the final authority in judging whether the rules have been violated.

Point of Order

Without needing to be recognized, state "Point of Order". Anyone speaking stops, and the chair says "the member will state the point of order". State how you think the rules are being broken. No second is necessary, and no vote is taken. Instead, the chair rules on the point of order, briefly giving reasons.

Appeal the Decision of the Chair

If you disagree with the chair's ruling on the point of order, without needing to be recognized, state "I appeal the decision of the chair". This motion will need to be seconded. The chair first has the opportunity to explain the decision of the chair that is being appealed. Then members may speak, but each member is limited to one chance to speak on this motion, not two. At the end of discussion, the chair is again allowed to explain, and then the motion will be put to a vote.

Other Resources

- Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised, 11th edition
- Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised, In Brief, 2nd Edition
- <http://nancysylvester.com>
- <http://www.robertsrules.com/>

