

(Almost) All I Need to Know about Robert's Rules I Learned in Kindergarten

Sarah Holland, October 2013

Agenda

- Why this topic is important
- Fundamental principles and kindergarten
- Rules governing an assembly
- Not following the rules and breaches
- Common Issues
- Questions

Why this topic is important

- Have you ever been to a meeting where:
 - It took ages to settle something that should have been simple?
 - People talked when they weren't supposed to?
 - People didn't get a chance to contribute?
 - Something felt like it was rammed through?
 - You left wanting to pound your head against the wall?
- People typically don't attend meetings for the fun of it
- People want to get things done, and work together to make decisions
- Every time a meeting get over just a few people, you will see the need for some sort of **mutually understood rules**

What are the goals of the mutually understood rules?

- Conducting good meetings, without any more formality than is absolutely necessary, to protect the rights of everyone and keep things orderly
 - Rules are there to help, not hinder
- "The Assembly meets to transact business, not to have Members exploit their knowledge of parliamentary law."
 - Never be too technical or more strict than is necessary for the good of the meeting.

Things we learned in Kindergarten

- Naps are good.
- Don't do too much at once.
- Take turns.
- Listen to the teacher.
- Put your hand up when you need something.
- Don't hit people.
- Be polite.
- Everyone gets a turn.
- Play fair.
- When you go out into the world, watch out for traffic, hold hands, and stick together.
- Warm cookies and cold milk are good for you.

Fundamental Principles of Kindergarten

- Get things done
 - Naps are good.
 - Don't do too much at once.
 - Take turns.
- Maintain Order
 - Listen to the teacher.
 - Put your hand up when you need something.
 - Don't hit people.
 - Be polite.
- Ensure justice, courtesy, fairness and equal treatment for all members
 - Everyone gets a turn.
 - Play fair.
 - When you go out into the world, watch out for traffic, hold hands, and stick together.
 - Warm cookies and cold milk are good for you.

Fundamental Principles of Robert's Rules

- Get things done - Expedite Business
 - Use simplest and most direct procedure
 - Only consider one question at a time
 - No member may speak twice to the same question until all others have had an opportunity to speak
- Maintain Order
 - Members must be recognized before speaking
 - Remarks are directed through the chair
 - Members may not question the character or motives of other members
- Ensure justice, courtesy, fairness and equal treatment for all members
 - All members have equal rights
 - Minority rights must be protected
 - Discussion is an essential right

We are at a meeting for a purpose

- We are at a meeting to make decisions
- To start making decisions, a member offers a proposal by making a motion
 - A motion is a formal proposal that the assembly take an action
 - The motion may follow a report on a subject, or may bring the subject to the assembly's attention
- If we are not at a meeting to make decisions, do we really need to have a meeting?

What are the rules that apply?

- Law
- Constitution & Bylaws
- Rules of order
- Standing rules
- Custom

Law

- School Act
- (1) A parent of a student of school age attending a school is entitled
 - (c) to belong to a parents' advisory council established under section 8.
- (6) Voting at an election ... must be by secret ballot.
- Your constitution and bylaws cannot conflict with this – this has precedence over your bylaws

More from School Act

- (3) There must be only one parents' advisory council for each school...
- (5) A parents' advisory council, in consultation with the principal, must make bylaws governing its meetings and the business and conduct of its affairs, including bylaws governing
 - (a) the dissolution of the parents' advisory council,
 - (b) the election of members to represent the parents' advisory council on the school planning council, and
 - (c) the election of a member to represent the parents' advisory council on the district parents' advisory council.
- (7) An employee of any board is not eligible for election ... to the School Planning Council as a parent representative

What is a parent?

- "parent" means, in respect of a student or of a child registered under section 13,
 - (a) the guardian of the person of the student or child,
 - (b) the person legally entitled to custody of the student or child, or
 - (c) the person who usually has the care and control of the student or child;

Corporate Charter

- Applies if your PAC or DPAC is a society, registered with BC Societies

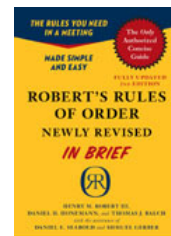
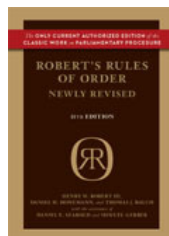
Constitution and Bylaws

- Under your control – write good bylaws
- Your purpose
 - Be careful if you do anything outside of your purpose in your constitution
- Qualification and selection of members
 - For PACs, primarily covered by School Act
- Officers and Executive
 - Qualifications, term of office, ways to remove, power of Executive
- Methods of voting
- Committees, meetings, quorums
- Provisions for amendment

Rules of order

- Regulation of conduct of business in meetings
 - Motions, amendments, debate, order of business
- Benefit from consistency of rules between association
- State in bylaws:
 - "The rules contained in the current edition of *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised* shall govern the Society in all cases to which they are applicable and in which they are not inconsistent with these bylaws and any special rules of order the Society may adopt"
- This is the part that scares people the most
- You only need about 10% of RONR 90% of the time

Get the Right Books



Two Sets of Rules of Order - Small or Large Meetings

Informal: Under a Dozen Members	Formal: Over a Dozen Members
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Do not need to be recognized before speaking □ Motions do not need to be seconded □ Can speak any number of times □ Can discuss a subject while no motion is pending. □ When all the members know what they are voting on, having a formal motion before voting is not necessary (but is the best procedure) □ Chair can enter into the discussion □ Chair usually makes motions and votes (unless board custom dictates otherwise) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Must be recognized before speaking □ Motions must be seconded □ Default - can speak twice, for 10 minutes at a time, let others speak before 2nd time □ Must have formal motion before discussion □ Chair should be seen to be neutral: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ should not enter into debate □ should not make motions □ should not vote unless necessary, or by secret ballot

Small or Large Meetings

- Informal meetings – assemblies for under 12 people
- Chair can make motions, discuss motions, and publically vote on motions
- members can often discuss ideas before they make a motion
- seconder is not required
- members can speak any number of times, and there is usually no motion to close debate
- members should still follow an agenda and limit discussion to the subject of the meeting
- Smaller meetings **can** use more formal rules

Lots of misinformation around!

If told:

- “You have to do this because that’s what it says in Robert’s Rules of Order”

Lots of misinformation around!

If told:	Say:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ “You have to do this because that’s what it says in Robert’s Rules of Order” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ “Please show me where it says to do it that way.”

For example...

Gary Novosietzki
Work
Members: 5,240 posts
Location: New Jersey
#5

Posted Today, 06:35 AM

What surprises me is that the practice of the secretary casting a single ballot is a more durable myth than the tooth fairy, yet with considerably less evidence.

Unless otherwise indicated, citations refer to the [current edition](#) of RONR as of the date of posting. The rules in your bylaws supersede those in RONR.
—
=GPN

*"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world, indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."
—Margaret Mead*

Standing Rules

- Administrative details not important enough to be put into bylaws
- Written, either in policy or in previous motions
- Try to make these **proactive**, not just reactive to problems – put them in before you have the problem
- Majority vote to adopt
- Amend – either majority vote with previous notice, or two thirds vote without notice, or a majority vote of the entire membership

Custom

- Groups form habits, followed as if they are a written rule
 - "This is the way we've always done it"
- A custom can never conflict with a written rule – if the conflict is pointed out, the written rule must be followed
- Your group probably has customs that are followed in error

Rules are there to help, not hinder

- Good judgment is essential: the assembly may be of such a nature, through its unfamiliarity with parliamentary usage and its peaceable disposition, that strict enforcement of the rules, instead of assisting, would greatly hinder business
- In large assemblies, where there is much work to be done, and especially where there is liability to trouble, the only safe course is to require a strict observance of the rules.

Not following the rules

- It is the right of every member who notices a breach of the rules to insist on their enforcement
- Done through Point of Order motion – can interrupt other people:
 - Member makes Point of Order
 - Chair makes ruling on Point of Order
 - A member may Appeal the Ruling of the Chair - vote of membership decides Ruling
 - Undesirable to raise points of order on minor irregularities, if no one's rights are being infringed on, and no real harm is being done to the proper transaction of business
- If a member is uncertain, can make a parliamentary inquiry of the chair
- It is the ruling, and not the Chair, that is being questioned.

Continuing Breaches

- A question of order must be raised promptly at the time the breach occurs.
- Exception - with breaches that are of a continuing nature, a point of order can be made at any time during the continuance of the breach.
- In all such cases, it is never too late to raise a point of order since any action so taken is null and void.

What is a continuing breach?

- a main motion has been adopted that conflicts with the bylaws of the organization,
- a main motion has been adopted that conflicts with a main motion previously adopted and still in force, unless the subsequently adopted motion was adopted by the vote required to rescind or amend the previously adopted motion,
- any action has been taken in violation of applicable procedural rules prescribed ... law,
- any action has been taken in violation of a fundamental principle of parliamentary law (absentee voting without bylaw support, non-members voting)
- any action has been taken in violation of either a rule protecting absentees, a rule in the bylaws requiring a vote to be taken by ballot, or a rule protecting a basic right of an individual member

Two examples

- No seconder to motion
 - OK if point of order raised promptly
 - Can't be used retroactively to rescind motion
 - Doesn't really matter that much
- Non-members voted
 - Continuing breach
 - Never too late to bring forward

Meeting Issues - Notice

- Is notice required? Check your bylaws:
 - "General meetings will be held monthly during the school year, on a regular schedule. The annual general meeting will be held in June.
 - Members may call a special meeting by presenting a request signed by at least 50 members to the Chair, who shall call the meeting within fifteen (15) days of the receipt of request.
 - Additional meetings shall be held at the discretion of the Executive.
 - Members will be given reasonable notice of general meetings."

But what does "reasonable notice" mean in the bylaws?

- That is up to your group to decide
- Each society decides for itself the meaning of its bylaws. When the meaning is clear, however, the society, even by a unanimous vote, cannot change that meaning except by amending its bylaws.
- An ambiguity must exist before there is any occasion for interpretation.
- If a bylaw is ambiguous, it must be interpreted, if possible, in harmony with the other bylaws. The interpretation should be in accordance with the intention of the society at the time the bylaw was adopted, as far as this can be determined. Again, intent plays no role unless the meaning is unclear or uncertain, but where an ambiguity exists, a majority vote is all that is required to decide the question.
- The ambiguous or doubtful expression should be amended as soon as practicable.

Meeting Issues - Quorum

- Your quorum should "approximate the largest number that can be depended on to attend any meeting except in very bad weather or other extremely unfavorable conditions."
- Don't set by percentage of members
- You cannot do any real business without a quorum
- Recess, set a time to meet again, etc.
 - "A quorum for general meetings will be 8 voting members."
 - "If at any time during a general meeting a quorum ceases to be present, business then in progress must be suspended until there is a quorum present or until the meeting is adjourned or terminated"

Meeting Issues – Call to Order, Welcome, Introductions

- Introductions are not in Rules of Order
- Might be a wonderful thing to put into your Standing Rules, that new members are welcomed and introductions are made
- May be a standing rule or custom that the call to order takes place at exactly the meeting start time – don't start late

Meeting Issues – Agenda and Minutes

- Approve by unanimous consent – "If there is no objection, we will approve the minutes/agenda as presented/amended"
 - Minutes are corrected by offering corrections, but should not be voted on
- Minutes do not need to be read out loud
- Chair does not "set the agenda", but common for chair to prepare a proposed agenda
- Agenda becomes binding only if it is adopted by the full assembly, after option for amendments
- Don't have "old business" on agenda

Meeting Issue – Making a Decision

- "We have a request to fund the grade 7 class graduation party"
- Discussion should not happen without a motion on the floor (unless small board/committee rules)
- Motion: "that the PAC grants \$200 for a grade 7 class grad party"
 - May speak twice to the motion, 10 minute maximum (may wish to change time limits in your bylaws), must let others who haven't spoken speak
 - May amend, postpone to a specific time, or send to a committee

6 Steps to Adopt Motion

- STEP 1. A member is recognized, and makes a motion
 - Common Mistake: Members do not wait to be recognized, and typically start to discuss their motion before completing steps below!
- STEP 2. Another member seconds the motion
 - Common Mistake: The person seconding the motion dives into the merits of the motion.
- STEP 3. The presiding officer restates the motion to the assembly
 - Common Mistake: Motion is restated differently from the wording of the maker! Beware because the motion that is adopted is the one stated by the presiding officer.

6 Steps to Adopt Motion

- STEP 4. The members debate the motion;
 - Common Mistake: Debate gets out of control in temper, in duration, in relevance! Members talk at each other across the room rather than through the presiding officer.
- STEP 5. Presiding officer asks for the affirmative votes & then the negative votes
 - Common Mistake: The presiding officer states 'All in favor' and fails to tell the members what to do as a matter of voting (for example, 'say aye', 'stand up', 'raise your hand', etc.); or the negative vote is never requested or counted!
- STEP 6. The presiding officer announces the result of the voting; instructs the secretary to take action; and introduces the next item of business.
 - Common Mistake: Presiding officer fails to pronounce the result of the voting! No one is instructed to take action.

Do we need to go through the whole motion process?

- Can make a decision by **unanimous consent**, also known as **general consent**
 - "If there is no objection..." / "Is there any objection to...?"
 - [pause]
 - "Hearing no objection..."
- Can speed up business in case of non-controversial business, with no opposition to matter
 - If **anyone** objects, then matter goes through typical steps of a motion and a vote
- It is the duty of the Chair to ensure that people know they are passing a motion
 - Do not mistake discussion for decision

Amending Motions

- Move to amend words of motion by inserting or deleting specific words during debate
- Requires same steps
 - Debate is on **amendment**, not motion as a whole
- If passed, meeting then can continue to debate main motion as *amended*
- Amendments can be made by unanimous consent
- Common error: no such thing as "Friendly Amendment" in RONR
 - Once the motion has been restated by chair, the motion belongs to assembly – needs approval of the assembly

Changing Decisions

- **Reconsider:**
 - If you change your mind about a motion in the current meeting
 - Member who voted on prevailing side can make motion to Reconsider
 - If Reconsider motion passes, then the effect is to erase the original vote, and puts the assembly in the same place it was before the original vote
 - A complicated motion

Changing Decisions

- **Rescind or Amend Something Previously Adopted**
 - If you change your mind about a motion at any time
 - Can be made by any member, no matter how they voted
 - Can't Rescind something that has already been done
 - If notice of motion is given, requires majority vote
 - Without notice, takes either:
 - Two thirds vote of members present and voting
 - Majority of entire membership

Ways that Decision Making Get into Trouble

- Not clear what is discussion and what is decision
- Not knowing the rules, laws, and bylaws
- Members not willing to speak up!
- Some tools for members include:
 - ▣ *Find out more*: Request for Information, Parliamentary Inquiry
 - ▣ *Decide later*: Refer to Committee, Postpone to a Certain Time
 - ▣ *Stop or lengthen debate*: Call the Question, Limit or Extend Debate

Meeting Issues – Voting

- All members attending have one vote each, by default, unless otherwise defined in bylaws
- Sample bylaws:
 - ▣ "Except as provided elsewhere in these bylaws, all matters requiring a vote will be decided by a **simple majority** of the votes cast.
 - ▣ In the case of a tie vote, the chair does not have a second or casting vote and the motion is defeated.
 - ▣ Members must vote in person on all matters. Voting **by proxy** will not be permitted.
 - ▣ Voting is by a show of hands or, where requested by two voting members present or for elections, by secret ballot."
- Abstentions usually don't count – depends on wording

How to vote?

- Need to know what type of vote is required for motion to pass – majority, two thirds.
 - ▣ Don't get fancy: Majority is over half; two thirds is at least two thirds
- By default, requires vote of members present and voting
 - ▣ can have requirement of vote of members present, or vote of all members
- Chair should be seen to be neutral
 - ▣ Should refrain from voting except when the vote is by ballot, or the chair's vote will affect the result
- Voting methods:
 - ▣ Ballot vote, rising vote, show of hands, voting cards, counted vote, roll-call voting

Meeting Issue - Committee

- Committee has power to do what assembly has authorized it to do
- Committee reports aren't voted on
- Committee may make recommendation to assembly, as a motion
- Small group rules

Meeting Issue – Reports

- Like committee reports, treasurer reports and principal reports should not be voted on to be approved
- Non-members, such as the Principal, attend by the permission of the members
- Don't unnecessarily exclude non-members, but remember they cannot vote

Meeting issue – Conflict of Interest

- Under the rules in RONR, no member can be compelled to refrain from voting simply because it is perceived that he or she may have some "conflict of interest" with respect to the motion under consideration.
- If a member has a direct personal or pecuniary (monetary) interest in a motion under consideration not common to other members, the rule in RONR is that he *should not* vote on such a motion, but even then he or she cannot be *compelled* to refrain from voting
- Your bylaws may differ.

Meeting Issue – The Chair

- The Chairperson is symbolized by a gavel, not a crown
- Not your kindergarten teacher
- More responsibility, not more power
- Has 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.
- Group as the whole, not the chair, is the final authority in judging whether the rules have been violated
 - "Point of Order"
 - "Appeal the Decision of the Chair"

Role of the Minutes in Decisions

- In summary: handy but not required.
 - The minutes should be correct and complete, but whether they are or not has no bearing on the motions they refer to.
 - What's important is what was actually decided and done at the meeting.
- It is important that the minutes correctly describe what was done, but even if the minutes stated something incorrectly, or left out some item of business, or were destroyed in a fire, each motion as actually adopted, and not how it may (or may not) have been described in the minutes, is the controlling factor.
- Make sure the minutes describe, not what was supposed to happen, nor what was intended to happen, nor what we wish had happened, but what actually happened.
- Please never say: "we affirmed the decision by approving the minutes"

Meeting Issue – Useful Motions, Often Misused

- “Call the Question”
 - Use when you think there has been full discussion
 - When recognized by chair, 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.
- “Point of Information” – now “Request for Information”
 - Chair will ask you to state your question and will attempt to clarify the situation.
 - Revised from previous versions of the book – it is meant to ask questions, and not answer them in the guise of asking

Meeting Issue – Nominations & Elections

- Nominating committee – is it required?
 - Chair should not serve on this committee
- There is not a “slate”
- Nominations should be called for from the floor
 - Don’t need seconds for nominations
 - Can nominate yourself
- Elections – use ballots, see School Act
 - Do not need to have pre-printed ballots, pieces of paper work fine
- Bylaws should specify:
 - If positions can be shared
 - Who can and can’t serve?
 - Do you need a majority or a plurality of the vote?

Executive Board - Sample Bylaws

- “The executive will include the Chair, Vice-chair, Secretary, Treasurer, and such other executive members as the general membership decides. These members may include positions such as Volunteer Coordinator, Communications Coordinator, or Events Coordinator.
- Officer positions may be shared, with approval of the general membership.
- Any voting member of the Council is eligible to serve on the executive, including teachers and other employees of the school district, with the exception of the position of the Chair. Teachers, employees, or elected officials of school district 57 or the Ministry of Education are not eligible to serve as Chair.”

Having IPP is a bad idea

- Setting up an “official” Immediate Past President (IPP) position is not a particularly good idea
- Some reasons:
 - Bitter race for presidency
 - President resigns and wants nothing to do with organization
 - President was removed from office
 - President dies / moves / on bed rest
- You can have the “old” President serving as another position on the Executive Board, if need be
- You could have “the most recent past president willing and able to serve” in bylaws

Executive Board – Taking Office and Term Limits

- Would take office immediately, unless other wording in bylaws:
 - “The executive will hold office from July to the end of June, or until their successor has been elected.”
- No term limits by default in rules of order
 - “No person may hold the same executive position for more than two consecutive years. No person may be on the executive for more than four consecutive years.”

Executive Board – Getting Rid of People

- If the bylaws state a fixed term for the officer, such as “two years,” or if they say the officer serves for a specified term “and until [the officer’s] successor is elected” (or words to that effect), then the group must use formal disciplinary proceedings - appointment of an investigating committee, preferal of charges, and the conduct of a formal trial.
- If the bylaws state a term for the office but add “or until [the officer’s] successor is elected,” or contain other wording explicitly indicating that the officer may be removed before the term expires, then the officer can be removed from office by a two-thirds vote, by a majority vote when previous notice has been given, or by a vote of the majority of the entire membership -- any one of which will suffice.

Executive Board – Getting Rid of People

- If the bylaws themselves establish a procedure for removal from office, that procedure must be followed:
 - “If an executive member resigns or ceases to hold office for any reason, the remaining executive members may appoint an eligible member of the Council to fill the vacancy until the next annual general meeting.
 - Members may remove from office any of the elected or appointed executive, by a two-thirds (2/3) majority vote by voting members present, and may elect an eligible member to complete the term. Members must call a special meeting for this purpose, by presenting a request signed by at least 50 members to the Chair, who shall call the meeting within fifteen (15) days of the receipt of request.”

Power of the Executive Board

- Only has what power has been granted by the general membership, through the bylaws!
- “The executive will manage the Council’s affairs between general meetings.”

Possible areas to add to bylaws

- What to do if tie vote in election
- How to change quorum if you can't get quorum
- Ways to allow proxy or absentee voting (careful!)
- Teleconference or web conference meetings
- How to decide things through emails
- How to fill vacancies
- Authorizing spending

Conclusion

- Use your knowledge for good, not evil
 - Don't have any more formality than is absolutely necessary, to protect the rights of everyone and keep things orderly
- Plan ahead - write things down before you run into problems
 - bylaws, standing rules/policies
- You can specify almost anything in your bylaws
 - "Stupid but constitutional"
- Don't forget the principles:
 - Expedite Business and move things along
 - Maintain Order
 - Ensure justice, courtesy, fairness and equal treatment for all members
- Get home from your meeting at a reasonable hour
- Have cookies

Questions?