

Robert's Rules of Order – the Basics

(This sheet should not be a substitute for *Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised*, 11th Edition, but is meant to supplement the full set of rules.)

Parliamentary procedure is a set of rules for conducting orderly meetings that accomplish goals fairly. 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

- 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.

Quorum - the minimum number of members who must be present in order for the Association to conduct business. The quorum can be found in the bylaws.

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

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 three (3) minutes
- 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