

ROBERTS RULES – SIMPLIFIED *for general use*

WHY HAVE RULES OF ORDER?

Key principles

- Everyone has the **right to participate** in discussion in a balanced way
- Everyone has the **right to know** what is happening at all times **with limited interruption**
- Only **one topic (motion)** at a time

WHAT IS A MOTION

and why do they matter?

- A **motion** introduces a topic for discussion: the chair **recognizes** a party **to introduce** an item; or **entertains** the motion
- Once a motion is on the floor, it is the only topic of discussion; all other motions must either relate to the one being discussed (as amendments), or fall into a limited category of **privileged** motions
- Before you move on to another topic, the motion on the floor must be **disposed** in one of a few ways: passed, defeated, tabled, referred, or postponed (this also applies to any amendments introduced).

GENERAL PROCEDURES *for a MOTION*

- Once a topic is reached on the Agenda, generally a member should be recognized by the Chair, and introduce a motion related to the item using the formula: **"I move that ..."**
- If action follows a report or other information, it is perfectly reasonable to hear that report or information first, and then **entertain** a motion related to the action you need to take *afterwards*. If the Chair states the motion to be entertained (e.g. "I will entertain a motion to approve"), the mover need only say **"So moved,"** if they agree with the proposition
- Once a motion is made, another member of the body should **second** the motion, which opens the floor for **discussion**; once moved and seconded and opened for discussion, **the motion belongs to the whole group**
- An individual making a second **need not agree with the premise of the motion – only that it be discussed.**

LET'S DISCUSS!

- Discussion should follow a principle of **balance**: the mover should be allowed to make their case as to approval of the motion; this should be followed by someone opposed, alternating as such until debate is ended naturally or by a **call for the question**.
- If there is likely to be no objection, the Chair can call for **unanimous consent** to the motion by asking "Is there any objection?" and awaiting long enough to make a determination. If there is none, then the Chair can order the motion as passed by unanimous consent, or **"done without objection."**
- In the course of discussion, **other motions are possible**, but they should pertain to the **original** motion in some fashion, as described in the next section.

ACTIONS POSSIBLE DURING DISCUSSION

- **Motion to Amend (or Substitute)**: this allows the original motion to be tweaked in some way, or even completely substituted for a different motion. The new amendment or motion must now be addressed, and then either integrated into the original motion, or voted on as the alternative.
- **Motion to Refer**: this sends the motion to a smaller committee for refinement and eventual return
- **Motion to Postpone**: this is what people usually mean when they say "table" – it puts the original motion off to some defined time in the future
- **Motion to Table**: this one is tricky – it implies that you might deal with the motion later (after at least one other item is considered); it also could mean that, if the motion remains on the table by the end of the next meeting, the motion is **dead**. A motion can be **tabled indefinitely** (read: killed) by a 2/3 vote
- **Motion to Limit Debate**: cuts off the debate to a set time limit or number of speakers; requires 2/3 vote
- **Motion to Close Debate**: also known as **"calling the question"**; ends debate immediately and requires a vote on the pending question; requires 2/3 vote

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LESSER KNOWN MOTIONS *and* PRIVILEGES

- There are many motions that will only be encountered rarely (or in the most strictly adherent assemblies), or which take precedence over the motion on the floor because of their technical nature; they include:
- **Move to Recess or Adjourn:** it is generally bad form to use one of these motions to halt debate; use the Motion to Limit Debate, or Call the Question
- **The following do not require a second:**
- **Call for the Orders of the Day:** this is useful if the matter under discussion no longer seems to pertain to the item on the Agenda. It can only be overruled by a 2/3 majority of the members
- **Point of Information, Order, or Parliamentary Inquiry:** this seeks a ruling from the Chair regarding whether a motion is “in order,” whether a member has the floor to speak, or whether there has been some other breach of the rules. The Chair must make a decision that may or may not be appealed to the whole assembly
- **Question of Privilege:** also known as “personal privilege,” this addresses an issue of comfort, safety, or the inability to participate for some reason (unable to hear, no materials to read, etc.)

VOTING

- Once debate on a motion has reached its natural (or unnatural, if there was a limitation) conclusion, it is put to a vote.
- Voting follows a generalized hierarchy, that may be constrained by other requirements (public meeting laws, for example)
- A member who is dissatisfied with the accuracy of any vote may call for **Division** which then advances to the next in the hierarchy (or any other means besides that which was already taken)
- **Voice Vote:** the Chair asks for all in favor to make one sign (usually “aye”), all opposed to make another sign (usually “nay” – though *occasionally* a Chair may ask for the “same sign,” which is a confusing practice and should be avoided).
- **Show of Hands**
- **Standing Division,** which also includes the possible use of special voting chambers or spaces in a meeting room
- **Roll Call:** this requires the Secretary or Recorder to call the names and record each vote in sequence
- **Secret Ballot,** which is generally verboten in public meetings
- **Abstentions,** or the recording of an individual’s desire to not have a particular vote indicated on their behalf (or via unanimous consent) ought **never to be sought;** people should not be invited to avoid their voting privilege, though they may indicate their desire independently (which is, essentially, a point of personal privilege)

BUT ... WAIT

- Two motions govern a vote that has already taken place:
- **Motion to Reconsider** can be raised by an individual who voted ***in favor of*** an item that **passed** the body earlier in the **same meeting;** if the reconsider motion passes, the previous motion is brought back as though a vote never occurred
- **Motion to Rescind** addresses an item that was passed in a **previous meeting;** if you provide written notice of the intent to rescind, it can pass with a simple majority, otherwise it requires a 2/3 vote to succeed

WHAT MUST BE SECONDED?

EVERYTHING except a Call for the Orders of the Day; a point of inquiry, order, or privilege; or an objection to a Unanimous Consent decree requires a second

WHAT REQUIRES A 2/3 MAJORITY?

Only **Limit Debate, Close Discussion, and Rescind without Notice** require 2/3 majority

WHAT CAN'T BE DISCUSSED?

- The following motions cannot be subject to discussion, and go immediately to a vote: **Limit Debate, Table (or Table Indefinitely/Kill), Close Discussion, Recess, Adjourn**