

# Robert's Rules of Order

Robert's Rules of Order exists to facilitate the decision-making process at meetings. They ensure that discussion is clear, and that the rights of both the majority and the minority are protected. Below are some of the basic rules within Bob's Rules that help a meeting run more smoothly and keep discussion on track. The rules, however, are not meant to disrupt or hold-up a meeting, and may be suspended if a member is using them for those purposes.

There is provision within Robert's Rules to suspend the rules, and often at the committee level a consensus decision-making process is employed.

## Chairperson/Speaker

Each meeting is facilitated or guided by a speaker or chairperson. S/he is responsible for ensuring that the meeting runs smoothly and fairly. The chairperson remains impartial during the debate and should command the respect of all those in the room. The chairperson is not the final arbitrator of all decisions: the assembly ultimately has the authority and the responsibility to decide how the meeting should run.

## Main Motion

The basis for discussion is a formal motion. The motion is put forward of being 'moved' by a voting member of the assembly to focus discussion. Each motion must have a mover and a seconder to show that it has at least a minimum of support from the delegates. Once a motion has been put 'on the floor' for discussion, debate must focus on the substance of the motion. All other discussion is out of order and not allowed. A main motion may not be introduced if there is any other motion on the floor. The mover must state the motion before speaking and motions should be written out and handed to the chair so that everyone is clear on what is being discussed.

## Order

Once a motion is introduced, the chairperson will maintain a speaker's list to allow for discussion in an orderly manner. The seconder of the motion is given the right to speak immediately after the mover. To ensure that all members of the assembly have an equal opportunity to speak, the chairperson will allow speakers on the list who have not yet spoken before those who already have spoken.

## Amendments

At any time, a person who has the floor can introduce an amendment to the main motion being debated. An amendment is a motion that alters, adds to, subtracts from, or completely changes the main motion. Once an amendment has been moved and seconded, debate must be on the substance of the amendment. An amendment can only be amended once. For an amendment to pass, it needs a simple majority. Once an amendment has either been passed, defeated, or withdrawn, discussion reverts back to the main motion, taking into account whether or not the amendment passed. Complex or lengthy amendments should be written out for the chairperson to be able to read back to the assembly.

## Point of Order

If a member feels that the rules of order are being broken, s/he can immediately raise a 'point of order', and state what rule has been broken or not enforced by the chair. A point of order can interrupt a speaker. It cannot be used as an opportunity to get around the speakers' list - it can only be used to ask the chair to enforce the rules. The chair decides if the point is valid or not, and proceeds accordingly.

## Point of Privilege

A point of privilege can interrupt the speaker. A member who feels her/his right or privileges have been infringed on may bring up this point by stating their problem. Privilege refers to anything regarding the comfort or accessibility of the member (i.e. too much smoke, too much noise, fuzzy photocopies, etc.), or to the right of the member not to be insulted, misquoted, or deliberately misinterpreted. Again, the chair decides if the point is valid or not and proceeds accordingly.

## **Challenge the Chair**

If a member feels her/his point of order or privilege has been ruled on unfairly by the chair, s/he can challenge the chair. The chair then asks for a motion to uphold the chair, and the vote is taken. The vote decides whether the action decided upon by the chair is valid, or whether the member is correct.

## **Point of Information**

A point of information is a QUESTION. A member may interrupt the speaker to ask her/his question, but the speaker who has the floor has the privilege to refuse the question. The chair will ask the speaker if s/he wishes to entertain a question at that time. A point of information is not an opportunity to bring forward information, jump the speakers' list, harass another speaker, or generally disrupt the proceedings - IT CAN ONLY BE A QUESTION.

## **Table**

Debate may end in several ways. If a member feels that a decision on a motion needs to be postponed for some reason, then s/he can move to 'table' the motion. A member may not move to table a motion at the end of a speech, only at the time they are recognized by the chair. A specified time may be put on the tabling or the motion may be left indefinite. The only debate allowed is as to the length of tabling, or the time-line involved. A motion to table requires only a simple majority.

## **Calling the Question**

If a member feels that further debate is unproductive, s/he may 'call the question', requesting the debate be ended. If there is no objection, the meeting proceeds to the main motion. If there is objection, then the meeting must vote on whether to end debate. This vote requires a two-thirds (2/3) majority to pass, and is non-debatable. If the 'call' passes, a vote on the main motion is immediately taken, without any further debate.

## **Rescind**

A motion to rescind another motion is in order if it refers to a motion passed at another meeting on another day. This cannot be applied to actions that cannot be reversed (i.e. things that have already been carried out). This requires a two-thirds (2/3) majority to pass.

## **Reconsider**

A motion to reconsider is applicable to a motion that was passed at the same meeting. Such a motion must be moved by someone who voted with the prevailing majority on the previous vote. It requires a two-thirds (2/3) majority to pass.

## **Suspension of the Rules**

A motion to suspend the rules of order (so that the assembly may do something not allowed in the rules) must receive a two-thirds (2/3) majority vote, is not debatable, cannot be amended and cannot be reconsidered at the same meeting.

## **Adjourn**

This motion takes precedence over all others, except to 'fix the time to adjourn', to which it yields. It is not debatable, it cannot be amended, nor can a vote on it be reconsidered. A motion to adjourn cannot be made when another has the floor, nor after a question has been put and the assembly is engaged in voting.

## **Refer or Commit**

This motion is generally used to send a pending question to a committee so that the questions may be carefully investigated. This motion must be seconded and is debatable, but the debate can only extend to the desirability of committing the main motion, not to the substance of the main motion itself.

## **Committee of the Whole**

At some point the assembly may wish to informally consider a motion or a group of motions before having to deal with

them in a 'one at a time', debate fashion. Votes may be taken in committee but are not binding on the assembly unless ratified when the group re-enters the regular session. Motions are required to move in and out of committee of the whole.

## Minutes

The numbering of motions always is by date, and then by when the motion arose in the meeting (YEAR/MONTH/DAY:NUMBER IN ORDER). So the fourteenth motion during the June 23, 1996 meeting would be numbered like: 96/06/23:14.

The three numbers after either a 'CARRIED,' 'DEFEATED,' or 'TIED' are arranged in a specific order. The first number indicated the number which voted in favour; the second is the number voting against; the third is the number who abstained. Thus, a decision which saw seven members in favour, four against, and two abstaining, would look like: 7 - 4 - 2 .

If any folks are really interested in the rules, a particularly good edition to purchase for personal use is: The Scott, Foresman ROBERT'S RULES OF ORDER NEWLY REVISED 1990 Edition 9th Edition, published by Scott, Foresman and Company.

Source: <http://www.rpia.org/partybuild/robrul.htm>