

## Fundamentals of Parliamentary Procedure (aka: Robert's Rules of Order)

### Definitions:

- **Parliamentary procedure** offers democratic practice through a set of rules for conducting a meeting.
- **Robert's Rules of Order** is a manual of parliamentary procedure that was created in 1876 by Henry Martyn Robert as an adaptation of the rules and practices of Congress. Many nonprofits, local municipal and tribal governments, and corporate boards use these rules in whole or in part to convene formal meetings. The full manual (over 700 pages) is available [online](#) and in bookstores.

**Below are the high-level basics that are instituted most often by nonprofits. This document does not serve as legal guidance. It is intended to be an accessible guide to the use of these rules.**

A few key reminders:	
<b>Roles of everyone in the room:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All participants and their rights are equal.</li> <li>• A quorum must be present to do business – state law sets a minimum of three people to be on a board. The number that constitutes a quorum is noted in your bylaws.</li> <li>• Some boards live by consensus decisions and some by majority rules. Your bylaws will define this for your organization. If your bylaws are silent, then majority rules is typically the default process.</li> <li>• Silence on a vote equals consent.</li> <li>• It is rare to see a whole room of voting participants who understand parliamentary procedures. If the organization is committed to using the rules, then everyone needs to be trained in their use. We advise a level of grace in the room to help everyone use the rules well and with the best intentions.</li> </ul>
<b>Role of the chair</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The president or board chair cannot make motions – but they can “entertain a motion.” <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ That means if they want a motion, they will need someone else to make it.</li> <li>○ “So moved,” is what someone can say to make the motion called for by the chair.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Mechanics of a meeting:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Calling the meeting to order is the first item of business in Robert's Rules.</li> <li>• A recess is called for a meeting to cease temporarily (for a speaker, entertainment, meal, etc.) and then to reconvene to conduct the remaining business.</li> <li>• When there is a request for information, you do not need a second.</li> </ul>

**It's all about motions: A snapshot of the four types of motions**

Type	Basic Rules	Example Language:
<b>Main</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Used to present new business.</li> <li>Used to present amendments to bylaws.</li> <li>A motion cannot be made when another motion is in action.</li> <li>Each motion must be "seconded" before it can be discussed or voted on unless it is a motion for unanimous consent.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Person 1: "I move that the board authorize the executive to sign the lease agreement with xx not to exceed \$."</li> <li>Person 2: "I second the motion."</li> <li>Chair: "There is a motion and a second, is there any discussion?" (Once discussion is complete the chair will call for a vote.)</li> </ul>
<b>Subsidiary</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Is used to change or affect how the main motion is handled before it has been decided.</li> <li>These changes have to be voted on BEFORE the main motion.</li> </ul>	<p>"I move we ask the executive director to research the situation and provide this critical information before we proceed with the motion." Or (Amendments? To Main?)</p>
<b>Privileged and Incidental Motions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>These do not require the eight steps usually needed to make a motion.</li> <li>Privileged motions are of immediate importance and take precedence over any main motion.</li> <li>Incidental motions do not relate directly to the substance of the pending motion but to the method of transacting the business of the motion.</li> </ul>	
<b>Privileged Motions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Are urgent, about special or important matters NOT relating to pending business.</li> <li>A second is not required.</li> <li>May not be amended and does not require a vote.</li> <li>Question of Privilege: If one can't see or hear the meeting, one may stop the meeting and have the problem corrected.</li> <li>Call for the Orders of the Day: Used to move discussion to the item scheduled for that particular time on the agenda.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"I cannot hear the main speaker."</li> <li>"I move that we recess the meeting to eat lunch."</li> </ul>
<b>Incidental</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Are questions of procedure that arise out of other motions.</li> <li>Must be considered BEFORE the other motion.</li> <li>Does not require that the person be recognized.</li> <li>Does not require a second.</li> <li>Cannot be amended or debated.</li> </ul>	<p>"I believe the main motion did not receive a second, so we can't vote on it."</p>

<b>Points</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• These Incidental motions do not require a vote.</li> <li>• Points can be made at any time.</li> </ul>	
<b>Point of Parliamentary Procedure</b>	This is made when a member questions the parliamentary procedure that just happened (not what happened from a previous meeting).	<i>“Chair a Point of Parliamentary Procedure.” “The Chair is in error because there was a second on the amended motion to go to the Health Food Restaurant.”</i>
<b>Point of Order</b>	Used when it is believed that the order of the meeting is out of whack, that is to say people are speaking out of order, or items are being discussed in an order not specified by the agenda or other parliamentary rules are not being followed.	<i>“Point of Order, there is nothing on the agenda that says we have to have this conversation.”</i>
<b>Point of Information</b>	Used to stop action to call for clarification of the process or consequences of the debate. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This incidental motion requires a 2/3 vote.</li> </ul>	
<b>Object to Consideration</b>	This motion is made to kill a sensitive or embarrassing motion before it is discussed by the group.	<i>“I move that we set aside the bylaws so that new board members can be appointed with a 4/5 majority of board members instead of a simple majority.”</i>
<b>Point of Personal Privilege</b>	Typically, the person will stand up or raise their hand and wait to be recognized by the chair. Once recognized, the person may use personal privilege to introduce motions that deal with a personal need, i.e.: needing a bio-break, not being able to hear, turning up the heat, etc.	
<b>Point of Clarification</b>	Used to clear up confusion. Can be used to reword the motion, ask a question about the motion, etc.	

### Eight steps to present a motion and example language

Step	Action	Example Language
1	Raise your hand (or rise) and address the chair.	
2	Receive recognition from the chair.	
3	<p>Make the motion.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>When called on (stand up if expected) and state the following <i>“President/Chair, I move to/that...”</i></li> <li>Then state what you want to happen (or not to happen) clearly and concisely (have a specific wording in mind first).</li> <li>After the motion (sit down).</li> <li>Hints: Do not use double negatives. If it’s longer than one sentence, write it down and hand it to the person taking minutes.</li> </ul>	<i>“I move that/to...”</i>
4	<p>Receive a second to the motion from another voting member.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A motion must be seconded to bring it up for discussion. Seconding a motion does not mean the person agrees with it, but they want to put it in the room for discussion and consideration. The chair must hear a second or the motion is lost (unless it is a motion for unanimous consent).</li> </ul>	
5	Chair restates the motion.	<i>“It has been moved and seconded that...”</i>
6	<p>After the motion and second, the chair will ask for discussion/debate.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The debate can be stopped by running out of people with opinions, putting a time limit on debate, or by the chair moving on because of repetitive debate.</li> <li>Each person who wants to speak on the motion is first recognized by the chair. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No member shall speak twice to a motion until all members who want to speak have been heard.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	
7	<p>The chair puts the motion to a vote.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The chair will restate the motion and will state how the votes will be cast. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Unless stated, the majority is usually 50% + 1 of the active voting members present (also known as a simple majority).</li> <li>Voting can take place by raised hand, voice, standing, ballot.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<i>“All in favor say Aye? All opposed say Nay”</i>
8	Then the chair calls for a vote. Chair announces the result of the vote.	

### Additional tips on motions

#### Motions are unnecessary when:

- A report is made.
- The president can assume a motion; for example, “If no objection, the minutes are approved as read/presented/corrected.”
- The treasurer’s report is not approved—it is filed.
  - It is common to accept the monthly financial statements and audits.

#### Renewing a motion

- If a motion is defeated it usually cannot be brought up again (unless it is amended) at that meeting.
- However, the original motion can be brought up again at another meeting.

#### Documenting decisions in the minutes

- Reminder that the motion, second, all amendments, nature of the discussion, and the vote tally are noted in the official meeting minutes.

### Amending a Motion – aka “Perfecting a Motion”

Motions are amended to change the wording to make it make more acceptable before taking final action.

*“Chair I move to AMEND the motion to say.... (state what you want to happen)”*

The amendment must relate to the original motion.

- This can be used to clarify a motion, make it more specific, change specifics, or add to or detract from a motion.

There are three ways to change the wording of a motion to make it more acceptable before taking final action.

- To add words or phrases
- To strike out words or phrases
- To substitute by striking out and inserting; or substitute an entire motion or paragraph

Modifications can be made:

- Between the time a motion is made and before the chair states the motion
- After the chair has stated the motion
- Before the motion is voted upon

Debate is given on the amendment as if it were a new motion, then a vote is taken to add the amendment to the original motion.

The board then votes on only the amended portion; if that passes, then the chair returns to the original motion as amended to vote on in its entirety.	
If the amended portion fails, then the board returns to vote on the motion as it was originally worded.	

**Parliamentary Procedure**  
**A Reference Guide to Moving the Meeting Along**  
**(without going outside to settle the question)**

<i>TO DO THIS</i>	<i>YOU SAY THIS</i>	<i>MAY YOU INTERRUPT SPEAKER?</i>	<i>SECOND NEEDED?</i>	<i>IS THE MOTION DEBATABLE?</i>	<i>WHAT VOTE IS REQUIRED?</i>
Adjourn the meeting	I move that we adjourn.	No	Yes	No	Majority
Recess the meeting	I move that we recess until...	No	Yes	No	Majority
Complain about noise, room temperature, etc.	Point of privilege	Yes	No	No	No vote
Suspend further consideration of item	I move we table it.	No	Yes	No	Majority
End debate	I move the previous question.	No	Yes	No	2/3 vote
Postpone consideration of item	I move we postpone this matter until...	No	Yes	Yes	Majority
Have something studied further	I move we refer this to committee.	No	Yes	Yes	Majority
Amend a motion	I move to amend this motion.	No	Yes	Yes	Majority
Introduce business (a primary motion)	I move that...	No	Yes	Yes	Majority
Object to procedure or to personal affront	Point of order	Yes	No	No	No vote; chair decides
Request information	Point of information	Yes	No	No	No vote
Ask for a count to verify voice vote	I call for a division of the house.	No	No	No	No vote
Object to considering item	I object to consideration of this.	Yes	No	No	2/3 vote
Take up a matter previously tabled	I move to take from the table...	No	Yes	No	Majority
Reconsider something already acted on	I move we reconsider action on	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority
Consider item not on agenda	I move we suspend the rules and...	No	Yes	No	2/3 vote
Vote on a ruling by the chair	I appeal the chair's decision	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority

\*Items in shaded boxes are not amendable