

Parliamentary Procedure

Almost all organizations have an adopted parliamentary authority. For approximately 95% of the organizations in the United States, that parliamentary authority is *Robert's*. The proper reference you should be using is *ROBERT'S RULES OF ORDER NEWLY REVISED*, the 10th edition, sometimes referred to as the 2000 edition. There are many other editions of Robert's in bookstores, but the only up-to-date one is *ROBERT'S RULES OF ORDER NEWLY REVISED, 10th edition.*

Most organizations have a set of bylaws, which are the governing documents of the organization. Remember that the rules contained in the organizations bylaws are of higher authority than the rules contained in the organizations parliamentary procedure authority (*Robert's*). Therefore, if the bylaws and *Robert's* conflict, the rules in the bylaws are the ones the organization must follow.

In order to have a better understanding of parliamentary procedure, we will examine the following areas of parliamentary procedure: Agenda, tools that are in place to assist with the running of the meeting, processing a motion and the script of a motion.

AGENDA

The following is the agenda for organizations that are governed by *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised*:

The agenda follows a very specific format. Some people find it helpful to set up a template for the agenda, making it very easy to change from one meeting to the next.

If you use Microsoft Word, you will find an Agenda Wizard that is very helpful.

1. **Approval of minutes**

If the minutes are printed and distributed to the members before the meeting, then they do not need to be read during the meeting. It is adequate for the presiding officer to say: Are there any corrections to the minutes as printed and distributed? (Pause) Hearing none, if there is no objection, the minutes are approved as printed.

2. **Reports of:**

a. **Officers**

The officers reports are given in the order that the officers are listed in the bylaws.

b. **Boards**

If the organization has a board of directors, the secretary usually reports on actions taken and decisions made by the board.

c. **Standing Committees**

Standing committees are the committees that are listed in the bylaws. They are the same committee from one year to the next with the only change from year to year being who is on the committee.

d. **Special Committees (select, ad hoc, task force, etc.)**

Special committees are committees set up to perform a specific task. They remain in existence for as long as they need to perform the task. After they have given their final report, they cease to exist. Check the bylaws to determine who has the authority to set up special committees and who has the authority to appoint members to the special committees.

3. **Special Orders (order from governing documents)**

Special Orders are not used very often in modern day society. The time when you will most likely use them is when the bylaws indicate that a specific thing will occur at a specific meeting. For example, if the bylaws indicate that the election of officers shall take place at the November meeting, then at the November meeting, Election of Officers should be under the heading of Special Orders.

4. **Unfinished business**

Of all the items on the agenda, this one is probably the most frequently misunderstood. It is many times referred to as "Old Business" which is incorrect parliamentary language and adds to the confusion. The correct terminology is "Unfinished Business" because the business that goes in this category is business that was begun but not yet finished. Two examples:

- a. Last month's meeting had three items under the New Business category. We ran out of time after completion of the second item. The third item was begun (since it was on the agenda), but since we did not get to it, it was not finished. This month, it is included on the agenda under the category of Unfinished Business.
- b. Last month we were discussing a motion when it was decided that we needed more information before we made a decision. The motion was postponed until this month's meeting. That motion is on this month's agenda in the category of Unfinished Business.

5. **New business**

Basically, anything that does not fit in any of the above categories, fits here.

TOOLS IN PLACE TO ASSIST WITH RUNNING THE MEETING:

Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised has rules that will assist in the efficiency and effectiveness of meetings.

A. One set of those rules are the rules under the heading **Decorum in Debate**.

They cover the following major headings:

1. **Confining remarks to the merits of the pending question**

It is the responsibility of the presiding officer to make sure that the discussion does not wonder off of the specific topic that is being addressed in the motion.

2. **Refraining from attacking a member's motives**

3. **Addressing all remarks through the chair**

The advantage of this rule is that there are no side conversations or debates between members. The chair is expected to control the meeting and this rule helps do that.

4. **Avoiding the use of members' names**

5. **Refraining from speaking adversely on a prior action not pending**

In other words, when we are finished with an issue, let it go, so we can move on to other business.

6. **Refraining from speaking against one's own motion**

7. **Reading from reports, quotations, etc., only without objection or with permission**

8. **Refraining from disturbing the assembly**

B. **PROCESSING A MOTION:**

1. **Step 1: A Member Makes a Motion**

It must be a member of the body who is meeting. For example, at your chapter board of directors meeting, a member of the organization who is not a member of the board of directors may not make a motion. They are a member of the chapter, but this is a meeting of the board of directors and they are not a member of the board of directors.

It is strongly recommended that the motion be in writing. One word difference can make a huge difference in the meaning of the motion. Don't expect the secretary to get the wording down exactly as you want it.

- a. **The member words the motion properly: I move that (followed by specific statement of proposed action).**
- b. **The member who made the motion has the first right to speak on the motion.***(During Step 4)*
- c. **The member who made the motion can not speak against the motion, but may vote against it.***(Therefore, the member should word the motion in a way that the member can support that wording.)*
- d. **The presiding officer has the right to request that the motion be in writing, unless the rules indicate otherwise.***(A method that works very well is to have NCR paper, paper that is used for forms and that makes multiple copies, available at the meeting. Then the member writes the motion, keeps the bottom copy for themselves and gives a copy to the chair and a copy to the secretary. People will resist writing the motions at first, but they will see the benefit after awhile.)*

2. **Step 2: Another Member Seconds the Motion**

- a. **In seconding a motion, a person may only be agreeing that the issue should be discussed and decided upon.***You may choose to second a motion which you are opposed to simply so that a decision will be made on the issue and it can be put to rest!*
- b. **A motion that comes from a committee does not need a second.***The principle here is that the motion that is reported out from a committee has been voted on in committee and therefore already has more than one person supporting it.*
- c. **If there is no second, the presiding officer tells the assembly that the motion dies for lack of a second.***The principle here is that the group should not waste time on an issue that does not have the interest of at least two of the members.*

3. **Step 3: The Chair States the Motion, Therefore Formally Placing It Before the Assembly**

- a. **Do not overlook this step. It is crucial because:**
 - o *At the completion of this step, ownership of the motion is transferred from the individual who made the motion to the members present. The concept of ownership of the motion is important because it answers a lot of questions that may arise during the next step of the motion (which is frequently the longest step in the process). Up until the completion of Step 3, the motion belongs to the maker and if the maker wants to change the motion or withdraw it, it is theirs, so they may do so. After the completion of Step 3, the ownership of the motion is transferred to the body. If there is going to be a change to it or a withdraw of it, it must be done with the permission of the body. The permission of the maker of the motion is no longer of any importance since it does not belong to that member.*

- *After this step, the motion belongs to the body, not an individual. Therefore, if there is to be any changes made to it, permission must be granted by the owner, the body. If at this stage a member wants to make an amendment, it is not appropriate to ask the maker of the motion for permission. It does not belong to that person any more! If you want to change the motion, you must ask the owners, the members present. The way you ask their permission is by making an amendment and then having a vote (a majority vote is permission to change it).*
- b. **Proper restatement of the motion by the presiding officer:**
- *Helps make sure everyone has heard the motion, exactly as it was proposed. Because not everyone is always paying close attention or the maker of the motion may not have spoken loudly or clearly enough, it is important for the presiding officer to restate the motion. This action keeps the body focused on the specific motion that is before the body.*
 - *Helps keep everyone on target as to the exact wording of the motion to be debated. Remember, during debate the members are debating the specific motion as worded. They are not debating the general subject area. It is important to make sure they know the specific wording of the motion they are to focus their debate on.*
- c. **If the presiding officer is unclear about the exact wording, there are two places the presiding officer can go to for assistance:**
- *Use the written motion provided by the maker of the motion.*
 - *Ask the secretary to read the motion.*
4. **Step 4: The Members Debate the Motion** This is potentially the longest step in the motion process.
- a. **During this time the motion is**
- *considered pending. Throughout Robert's you will find reference to the word pending. Pending means the motion is in Step 4 of the processing of the motion.*
 - *can have secondary motions applied to it. It is at this time that the motion is fixed by the body. If a member does not like the wording or wants to change the motion, it is done at this time. If an amendment is offered at this time, the amendment is a motion and the amendment must go through the 6 steps of processing a motion before you proceed with the main motion.*
- b. **Assignment of the floor:** While a motion is open to debate, the first person to rise and address the chair shall be assigned the floor by the chair. Cases where the floor should be assigned to a person who may not have been the first to rise and address the chair are:
- *If the member who made the motion has not yet spoken on the question,*
 - *When the person seeking the floor has not already spoken on the same motion on the same day; and*
 - *In cases where the chair knows the opinions of the persons seeking the floor, then the assignment should alternate between those favoring and those opposing the question. When you know that a particular motion is going to be rather controversial and have a lot of debate, it is sometimes advisable to set up in advance the situation where the chair will alternate speakers based on pro and con. After the maker of the motion speaks in favor of the motion, the chair may ask "Is there anyone who would like to speak against the motion?" After*

that person is finished, the chair asks "Is there anyone who would like to speak in favor of the motion?" And so on. This method has a lot of advantages.

5. **Step 5: The Chair Puts the Question to a Vote**

- a. **This should include restatement of the motion to be voted on. This restatement serves as a reminder of what the membership is voting on.** *It is very important for the presiding officer to restate the motion right before the vote. When this is not done, you will frequently see people, right before they vote, ask their neighbor "What are we voting on now?" The restatement of the motion before the vote is of utmost importance when multiple motions are on the floor at the same time (e.g. main motion, amendment, previous question, motion to close debate, etc.)*
- b. Even in obvious votes, the presiding officer should call for votes for and votes against the motion. The only exception here is with courtesy resolutions (e.g. the resolutions at the end of the convention that thank everyone who worked on the convention.)
- c. If the presiding officer requests that those voting in favor of the motion indicate with an affirmative response, the presiding officer should not call for negative votes with a call for same sign. E.g. A All those in favor say aye, those opposed, same sign.
- d. The presiding officer should be very comfortable with being able to determine the results of the vote. If in doubt, it is the duty of the chair to verify the vote beyond reasonable doubt, and to the satisfaction of the members.

6. **Step 6: The Chair Announces the Results of the Vote**

The content of a complete announcement of the results of the vote includes:*If you want to be considered an effective presiding officer, then you will be sure to make this complete announcement. Members find this announcement process to be very clear and complete, and therefore help them move on to the next item of business.*

- a. Announcement of which side has the necessary votes, and is thus the prevailing side. In a counted vote, the presiding officer should first give the count before announcing the prevailing side.
- b. Declaration as to whether the motion is adopted or lost.
- c. A statement indicating the effect of the vote
- d. Where applicable, announcement of the next item of business.

C. SCRIPT OF A MOTION:

You might find yourself in the position of chairing a meeting and not really feel like you know what to say. Ironically, even though you have been to thousands of meetings in your life, the words to use to process the motion are usually not stuck in your brain

Script of a Main Motion

Ever wonder how in the world presiding officers remember every step in the motion making process? While it's certainly the case that many presiding officers have a complete understanding of parliamentary procedure and know exactly what to say in almost every circumstance, a lot of presiding officers rely on what some might call "cheat sheets" but in the parliamentary world are called "scripts." That's right – they read from a prepared document which tells them exactly what they need to say and do for any particular motion. Here is a script of what you should say in processing a main motion. It is meant to make you more comfortable in a meeting. Take it to meetings with you that you chair so you are prepared to say it correctly!

You can also download this script as a [MS Word Document](#) or [Adobe PDF](#)!

Script: Main Motion

Member: I move that . . .

Chair: Is there a second to the motion? [This statement is eliminated if a member calls out "second" or if the motion is made on behalf of a committee.]

Second member: I second the motion.

Chair: It is moved and seconded that [state the motion]. Is there any discussion? [Since the maker of the motion has first right to speak on the motion, the chair should call on the maker of the motion first.]

[It is during this time that a motion is considered pending and secondary motions may be applied to it.]

[After discussion] Is there any further discussion? Are you ready for the question? [Pause] The question is on the adoption of the motion to [clearly restate the motion].

Voice vote:

Those in favor, say aye. [Pause for response]

Those opposed, say no. [If the chair is in doubt of the results of a voice vote, the chair should state "The chair is in doubt, therefore a rising (or counted) vote will be taken." Then proceed with a rising or counted vote.]

Show of hands vote:

Those in favor of the motion, please raise your hand. [Pause] Please lower your hand. Those opposed to the motion, please raise your hand. [Pause] Please lower your hand.

Rising vote:

Those in favor of the motion, please stand. [Pause] Please be seated. Those opposed to the motion, please stand. [Pause] Please be seated.

Ballot vote:

Please mark your ballots clearly, fold them one time, and hand them directly to a teller.

Roll call vote:

The clerk will now call the roll.

Chair: [Announces the voting results]

Uncounted voice, rising, or show of hands vote:

The affirmative has it, the motion is adopted, we will [state the effect of the vote] and the next business in order is . . .

or

The negative has it, the motion is lost and [state the effect of the vote] and the next business in order is . . .

Counted majority vote:

There are _____ votes in the affirmative and _____ votes in the negative. There is a majority in the affirmative and the motion is adopted. We will [state the effect of the vote] and the next business in order is . . .

or

There are _____ votes in the affirmative and _____ votes in the negative. There is less than a majority in the affirmative and the motion is lost [state the effect of the vote] and the next business in order is . . .

Counted two-thirds vote:

There are _____ votes in the affirmative and _____ votes in the negative. There is a two-thirds vote in the affirmative and the motion is adopted. We will [state the effect of the vote] and the next business in order is . . .

or

There are _____ votes in the affirmative and _____ votes in the negative. There is less than a two-thirds vote in the affirmative and the motion is lost [state the effect of the vote] and the next business in order is . . .

Rules for a Main Motion:

- Needs a second
- Is debatable
- Is amendable
- Needs a majority vote