

ROBERT'S RULES OF ORDER



Robert's Rules of Order

The Full Student Senate meetings follow Robert's Rules of Order, so it is helpful for members to become familiar with the basic operating principles and practices of parliamentary procedure well enough to participate in Student Senate meetings.

The primary purpose of using Robert's Rules of Order is to provide tools to conduct effective meetings. The Rules don't have to be followed strictly, but rather provide a framework for club/org and Student Senate meetings. However, for anyone that attends the Minnesota State College Student Association meetings, parliamentary procedure is used in the official context.

The Advisor's perspective on conducting meetings is to consider Robert's Rules of Order as a "DOME":

Discussion & Decisions

One person speaks at a time

Majority rules however the minority opinion is valued

Equality, justice, courtesy and common sense

Robert's Rules of Order - Some Basics

1. About Motions

The method used by members to express themselves is in the form of moving motions. A motion is a proposal that the entire membership can take action or a stand on an issue. Individual members can: call to order, second motions, debate motions, vote on motions.

There are four basic motions:

1. **Main Motions:** The purpose of a main motion is to introduce items to the membership for their consideration. They cannot be made when any other motion is on the floor, and yield to privileged, subsidiary and incidental motions.
2. **Subsidiary Motions:** Their purpose is to change or affect how a main motion is handled, and is voted on before a main motion.
3. **Privileged Motions:** Their purpose is to bring up items that are urgent about special or important matters unrelated to pending business.
4. **Incidental Motions:** Their purpose is to provide a means of questioning procedure concerning other motions and must be considered before the other motion.

All motions must be seconded and adopted by a majority vote unless otherwise noted.

All motions may be debated unless otherwise noted.

About Motions	Purpose of Motion	To Enact Motion
Main Motion	to take action on behalf of the body	debatable; requires majority vote
Adjourn	end the meeting	not debatable; immediately voted upon and requires majority vote
Call for Orders of the Day	asks to stick to the agenda	not debatable; requires 1/3 majority to sustain
Call to Question	closes debate and forces vote	not debatable; requires 2/3 majority vote
Motion to Limit or Extend Debate	limits or extends debate	not debatable; requires 2/3 majority vote
Point of Order	is a question about the process or a particular motion	automatic if granted by Chair
Point of Information	to ask about the process or particular motion	automatic
Motion to Rescind	to change the results of a vote	requires 2/3 majority vote to reverse results of earlier vote
Motion to Suspend the Rules	suspend formal process for a short period	debatable and requires 2/3 majority vote

There are two other motions that are commonly used related to voting:

1. **Motion to table** – This motion is often used in attempt to “kill” a motion. The option is always present, however to “take from the table”, for reconsideration by the membership.
2. **Motion to postpone indefinitely** – This is often used as a means of parliamentary strategy and allows opponents of motion to test their strength without an actual vote being taken. Also, debate is once again open on the main motion.

How Are Motions Presented?

1. Obtaining the floor

- a. Wait until the last speaker has finished
- b. Rise or raise hand and address the Chairperson by saying “Mr./Ms. Chairperson or President.
- c. Wait until the Chairperson recognizes you.

2. Make your motion

- a. Speak in a clear and concise manner.
- b. Always state a motion affirmatively. Say “I move that we...” rather than, “I move that we do not....”**
- c. Avoid personalities and stay on your subject.

3. Wait for someone to second your motion

4. Another member will second your motion or the Chairperson will call for a second.

5. If there is no second to your motion it is lost.

6. The Chairperson states your motion

- a. **The Chairperson will say “it has been moved and seconded that we.....”** thus placing your motion before the membership for consideration and action.
- b. The membership then either debates your motion, or may move directly to a vote.
- c. Once your motion is presented to the membership by the chairperson it becomes “assembly property”, and cannot be changed by you without the consent of the members.

7. Expanding your motion

- a. The time for you to speak on favor of your motion is at this point in time, rather than at the time you present it.
- b. The mover is always allowed to speak first
- c. All comments and debate must be directed to the chairperson.
- d. Keep the time limit for speaking that has been established.
- e. The mover may speak again only after other speakers are finished unless called upon by the Chairperson.

8. Putting the question to the membership

- a. The Chairperson asks, “Are you ready to vote on the question?”
- b. If there is no more discussion, a vote is taken
- c. In a motion to move the previous question may be adapted.

Voting on a Motion

The method of vote on any motion depends on the situation and the by-laws of the policy of your organization. There are five methods used to vote by most organizations they are:

- 1. By Voice** – The chairperson asks those in favor to say, “aye”, those opposed to say “no”. Any member may move for an exact count.
- 2. By Roll Call** – Each member answers “yes” or “no” as his/her name is called. This method is used when a record of each person’s vote is required.
- 3. By General Consent** – When a motion is not likely to be opposed, the Chairperson says, “if there is no objection...” The membership shows agreement by their silence, however if one member says, “I object,” the item must be put to a vote.
- 4. By Division** – This is a slight verification of a voice vote. It does not require a count unless the chairperson so desires. Members raise their hands or stand.
- 5. By Ballot** – Members write their vote on a slip of paper, this method is used when secrecy is desired.

2. About Debate

Each motion that is debated receives ten minutes of debate. The member initiating the motion speaks first. The Chairperson asks for a rebuttal. All members wishing to speak about the motion receive the opportunity to speak before any one member speaks for a second time.

3. About Voting

Majority vote is more than half of the members. 2/3 vote is more 2/3 or more of the members. Be sure to announce what is being voted on before the vote.

4. Robert's Rules of Order - Summary Version

For Fair and Orderly Meetings & Conventions

Provides common rules and procedures for deliberation and debate in order to place the whole membership on the same footing and speaking the same language. The conduct of ALL business is controlled by the general will of the whole membership - the right of the deliberate majority to decide. Complementary is the right of at least a strong minority to require the majority to be deliberate - to act according to its considered judgment AFTER a full and fair "working through" of the issues involved. Robert's Rules provides for constructive and democratic meetings, to help, not hinder, the business of the assembly. Under no circumstances should "undue strictness" be allowed to intimidate members or limit full participation.

The fundamental right of deliberative assemblies requires all questions to be thoroughly discussed before taking action!

Obtain the floor (the right to speak) by being the first to stand when the person speaking has finished; state Mr./Madam Chairperson. Raising your hand means nothing, and standing while another has the floor is out of order! Must be recognized by the Chair before speaking!

- **Debate cannot begin until the Chair has stated the motion or resolution and asked "are you ready for the question?"** If no one rises, the chair calls for the vote.
- **Before the motion is stated by the Chair (the question) members may suggest modification of the motion;** the mover can modify as (s)he pleases, or even withdraw the motion without consent of the seconder; if mover modifies, the seconder can withdraw the second.
- The "immediately pending question" is the last question stated by the Chair! Motion/Resolution - Amendment - Motion to Postpone
- The member moving the "immediately pending question" is entitled to preference to the floor.
- **No member can speak twice to the same issue until everyone else wishing to speak has spoken to it once.**
- **All remarks must be directed to the Chairperson.** Remarks must be courteous in language and deportment - avoid all personalities, never allude to others by name or to motives.
- **The agenda and all committee reports are merely recommendations.** When presented to the assembly and the question is stated, debate begins and changes occur.

5. The Rules

- **Point of Privilege:** Pertains to noise, personal comfort, etc. - may interrupt only if necessary.
- **Parliamentary Inquiry:** Inquire as to the correct motion - to accomplish a desired result, or raise a point of order.
- **Point of Information:** Generally applies to information desired from the speaker: "I should like to ask the (speaker) a question."
- **Orders of the Day (Agenda):** A call to adhere to the agenda (a deviation from the agenda requires Suspending the Rules).
- **Quorum:** A quorum is the minimum number of members who have to be present at a meeting in order for business to be conducted officially. A quorum for most clubs or organizations is usually one more than half of the average attendance at meetings or the largest number of members who can be depended upon to come to regular meetings. The quorum should be stated in the by-laws for the protection of the group as a whole.
- **Point of Order:** Infraction of the rules, or improper decorum in speaking. Must be raised immediately after the error is made
- **Main Motion:** Brings new business (the next item on the agenda) before the assembly.
- **Divide the Question:** Divides a motion into two or more separate motions (must be able to stand on their own).
- **Consider by Paragraph:** Adoption of paper is held until all paragraphs are debated and amended and entire paper is satisfactory; after all paragraphs are considered, the entire paper is then open to amendment, and paragraphs may be further amended. Any Preamble cannot be considered until debate on the body of the paper has ceased.
- **Amend:** Inserting or striking out words or paragraphs, or substituting whole paragraphs or resolutions.
- **Withdraw/Modify Motion:** Applies only after question is stated; mover can accept an amendment without obtaining the floor.
- **Commit /Refer/Recommit to Committee:** State the committee to receive the question or resolution; if no committee exists include size of committee desired and method of selecting the members (election or appointment).
- **Extend Debate:** Applies only to the immediately pending question; extends until a certain time or for a certain period of time.
- **Limit Debate:** Closing debate at a certain time, or limiting to a certain period of time.
- **Postpone to a Certain Time:** State the time the motion or agenda item will be resumed.
- **Object to Consideration:** Objection must be stated before discussion or another motion is stated.
- **Lay on the Table:** Temporarily suspends further consideration/action on pending question; may be made after motion to close debate has carried or is pending.
- **Take from the Table:** Resumes consideration of item previously "laid on the table" - state the motion to take from the table.
- **Reconsider:** Can be made only by one on the prevailing side who has changed position or view.
- **Postpone Indefinitely:** Kills the question/resolution for this session - exception: the motion to reconsider can be made this session.
- **Previous Question:** Closes debate if successful - may be moved to "**Close Debate**" if preferred.
- **Informal Consideration:** Move that the assembly go into "**Committee of the Whole**" - informal debate as if in committee; this committee may limit number or length of speeches or close debate by other means by a 2/3 vote. All votes, however, are formal.
- **Appeal Decision of the Chair:** Appeal for the assembly to decide – must be made before other business is resumed; NOT debatable if relates to decorum, violation of rules or order of business.

- **Suspend the Rules:** Allows a violation of the assembly's own rules (except Constitution); the object of the suspension must be specified.

Edited by Carter McNamara, MBA, PhD. Adapted from the Field Guide to Developing and Operating Your Nonprofit Board of Directors. *This is the 9th Edition of Robert's book. Sections 1-3* www.robertsrules.org/rulesintro.htm

What is a Constitution?

A constitution is an official document that describes the organization and how it operates. A sample constitution is available on the college web site under the Student Senate link, or contact the Office of Student or the student club/org's advisor.

What are By-Laws?

By Laws are the "rules" by which an organization operates. Many organizations combine the By-Laws within their Constitution.