

Robert's Rules of Order (est. 1876) sets out the parliamentary procedures and rules organizations can adopt as a guide for establishing the conduct of the organization and the management of its meetings. Robert's Rules provide guidance for most organizational functions, including establishing an organization and the rules that govern it, presiding over and participating in organizational meetings, including making motions and debating those motions and calling for and conducting elections within the organization. In a nutshell, Robert's Rules make meetings run smoothly and be meaningful.

THE FOLLOWING HIGHLIGHTS ARE FROM ROBERT'S RULES, INCLUDING RULES TO MANAGE A BOARD MEETING.

PARTICIPATING IN MEETINGS AS A MEMBER:

Fundamental to effective meeting participation is knowing how to get the attention of your presiding officer so you can be recognized and permitted to speak. Just as important is understanding the way to avoid getting personal in debate by asking questions of the other members through the chair.

ADDRESSING THE PRESIDING OFFICER

In meetings, your presiding officer should be addressed by title, such as "Madam Chairman" or "Mr. President." Robert's Rules provides that an officer's title should be used as defined in the *bylaws*, or the rules of order. In Robert's Rules, "Chairman" is considered gender neutral.

SPEAKING THROUGH THE CHAIR

When addressing another member, you never go wrong by speaking through the chair. Refrain from using the member's name if you can avoid it. Respect is conveyed by depersonalizing comments made in debate. For example, "Mr. Chairman, does the member who just spoke have information on the cost of his proposal?" works much better than, "Dang it Fred, have you thought about how much your stupid idea is going to cost us?" Formality has its benefits.

WAITING FOR RECOGNITION BEFORE SPEAKING

Before you launch into your speech, get recognition. When you and your fellow members properly seek recognition and refrain from speaking until the chair has recognized you, you allow the presiding officer to do his job. A presiding officer who understands the rules for preference in obtaining recognition and applies them impartially has the control necessary to conduct balanced debate, and this control gives him the respect due to the station.

ABOUT MOTIONS

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

ABOUT DEBATE

Each motion that is debated receives ten minutes of debate. The member initiating the motion speaks first. The Chair 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.

ABOUT VOTING

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

The Robert's Rules Association, the National Association of Parliamentarians, and the American Institute of Parliamentarians recognize Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised as the authoritative work on parliamentary procedure.

Sources: www.robertsrules.com/ | www.dummies.com/how-to/content/roberts-rules-for-dummies-cheat-sheet.html
Carter McNamara, MBA, PhD, Authenticity Consulting, LLC. Also see Carter's Board Blog (for for-profits and nonprofits).

MAKING AND HANDLING MOTIONS

Below are the eight steps required to make a motion. Each step is a required part of the process.

#	STEP	WHAT TO SAY
1.	Member addresses the chair.	"Madam Chairman. . . ."
2.	Chair recognizes the member.	"The chair recognizes Ms. Smith."
3.	Member makes a motion.	"I move to"
4.	Another member seconds the motion.	"Second."
5.	Chair states the motion.	"It is moved and seconded to"
6.	Members debate the motion.	"The chair recognizes Ms. Smith to speak to her motion. . . ."
7.	Chair puts the question and the members vote.	"All those in favor of adopting the motion to ... will say 'aye,' [pause] those opposed will say 'no', [pause] any abstentions."
8.	Chair announces the result of the vote.	"The ayes have it and the motion carries, and ... will be done."

TYPES OF MOTIONS

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's majority vote
Motion to Limit or Extend Debate	limits or extends debate	not debatable; requires 2/3's 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's 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's majority vote

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A Motion Chart for Robert’s Rules

The following chart can come in very handy when you’re in the thick of debate on a main motion. It’s designed to help you choose the right motion for the right reason. (In the chart, the subsidiary and privileged motions are listed in descending order of precedence; that is, motions lower on the list can’t be made if anything higher is pending.)

Consult a book on Robert’s Rules for clarification on the exceptions.

Making a Motion: Mistakes to Avoid

Robert's Rules are designed to facilitate the transaction of business by your group, not to hinder it. If you're going to be effective in meetings, you need to know the right — and wrong — ways to use parliamentary motions.

		Can Interrupt	Requires Second	Debatable	Amendable	Vote Required	Can Reconsider	
S E C O N D A R Y	P R I V I L E G E D	Fix the Time to Which to Adjourn	S		A	M	R	
		Adjourn	S			M		
	S U B S I D I A R Y	Recess	S		A	M		
		Raise a Question of Privilege	I				Chair decides	
	M O T I O N S	S U B S I D I A R Y	Call for Orders of the Day	I			Chair decides	
			Lay on the Table	S			M	Negative Only*
		Previous Question	S				2/3	R*
		Limit or Extend Limits of Debate	S		A	2/3	R*	
		Postpone Definitely	S	D	A	M	R*	
		Commit (or Refer)	S	D	A	M	R*	
Amend		S	D*	A*	M	R		
Postpone Indefinitely		S	D			M	Affirmative Only	
Main Motion		S	D	A	M	R		
* See text for exceptions		M = Majority vote						

The following list clues you in to the more frequent Robert's Rules of Order errors:

- **SPEAKING WITHOUT RECOGNITION:** It's a mistake to make just about any motion without first being recognized by the chair. Rise and address the chair ("Mr. President" or "Madam Chairman") and seek recognition in proper form.
- **MOVING TO "TABLE!":** Many people think tabling a motion is tantamount to killing it, but the motion to *Lay on the Table* is used to set a pending motion aside temporarily in order to take up something else more pressing or urgent. If you want to *kill* a main motion, you move to *Postpone Indefinitely*.
- **CALLING THE QUESTION:** When members get tired of hearing the same arguments go back and forth on a pending motion, inevitably somebody calls out, "Question!" or "I call the question!" Your presiding officer may take the opportunity to tell the members that *calling the question* actually requires a formal motion from a member after being recognized by the chair. Generally, the presiding officer waits until it's clear no one else wants to speak to the issue; calling out "Question" without first obtaining the floor is just plain rude.
- **TABLING IT UNTIL NEXT MONTH:** This is yet another misuse of the word *table*. What the member who makes this proposal really wants to do is to *Postpone to a Certain Time*, not *Lay on the Table*. The order of precedence and the rules covering whether the motion is debatable, amendable, and so forth make distinguishing motions important.

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- **"RECONSIDERING" A VOTE:** Under Robert's Rules, *reconsider* has a very specific meaning sometimes at odds with the word's meaning in general usage. In a meeting run under Robert's Rules, you can reconsider *only with respect to a decision made in the current meeting* (or on the next day, if the session lasts more than one day).
- **REQUESTING A POINT OF INFORMATION:** Some people think this motion means they can get the floor to *give* information. In reality, a *point of information* is made to enable the member to *request* information, not to give him an opportunity to speak again!
- **OFFERING FRIENDLY AMENDMENTS:** Most everybody has encountered a well-intended member who offers, "I want to make a friendly amendment." But the fact is, when a motion is on the floor, the maker of the motion no longer owns it. Any motion to amend a main motion depends upon the acceptance of the assembly, not the person who made the original motion.

Offering a friendly amendment is really patronizing. The best thing to do is to simply get recognition of the chair, move your amendment, and tell the membership why you're offering the amendment.

- **MAKING A MOTION TO ACCEPT OR RECEIVE REPORTS:** Except in some specific situations, motions to *accept* or *receive* reports after they're presented shouldn't be entertained. Instead, the chair should simply thank the reporting member and go on to the next item of business.

Sometimes, a report contains recommendations or suggests the need for the group to take some specific action. In those cases, the presiding officer states the question *on the motion that arises* from the report, not on whether to adopt the recommendations contained in the report, and not on whether to receive, adopt, or accept the report.

- **DISPENSING WITH THE MINUTES:** You don't want to dispense with the minutes; you want to dispense with the reading of the minutes. Minutes must be approved in order to become the official record of the assembly's action. Dispense with their reading if you must, but ask for corrections and approve them at some point in order to have a complete and official record of your meetings.
- **WASTING BREATH ON "I SO MOVE":** If you just say, "I so move," in response to the presiding officer saying, "The chair will entertain a motion to take a recess," for example, you haven't actually made a motion.

When you make a motion, propose your action as exactly and specifically as you can. Leave no doubt as to what it is you're asking the membership to agree to.