

Brief notes for Robert's Rules of Order

Chapter 1

- When people want to do something as a group, they must first agree on exactly what it is they want to do and how they want to go about it.
- When the gathering reaches a size of about 12-15 persons, another threshold is crossed. You will need tighter, more formal, more carefully developed control.
- Control must not only “keep order.” It must get business done and resolve any issues in a way that’s *fair* to everyone taking part in the process.
- You will need to pick one person to “chair” the meeting and keep order.
- It is virtually impossible for any human being to perform the function of chairman fairly under all the situations that may arise, without a considerable body of established rules to go by.
- **Parliamentary procedure** is the name given to the tradition of rules and customs that has grown up in the civilized world for dealing with these problems.
- **Deliberative Assemblies** are organizations or groups that meet to decide on actions to be taken.

Chapter 2—Starting, Conducting, and Adjourning a Meeting

- One person is chosen to **preside** over the meeting. If elected specifically for the meeting, they are called a **chairman**, while if they are elected for a term of a year or more, they may have a title such as **president**. While actually presiding, they are called “**the chair**.”
- Organization should not be bound by decisions taken by an unrepresentatively small number of members who may attend a meeting.
- A **quorum**—minimum number of members who must be present—is required for a meeting to conduct substantive business.
- Organizations decide what should be the quorum for their meetings. Usually it is more than half, or the majority of members within an organization.
- Any substantive action taken in the absence of a quorum is invalid.
- A meeting begins when it is **called to order** by the presiding officer: the chairman takes his/her place and says, “**The meeting will come to order.**”
- Most meetings follow a traditional **order of business**. Simplified, a standard order of business includes: (1) Reading and approval of minutes, (2) Reports, (3) Unfinished Business, and (4) New Business.
- *Reading and Approval of Minutes:* The chairman says, “**The Secretary will read the minutes.**” Secretary reads them, chair asks, “**Are there any corrections to the minutes?**” Any corrections are made, and thereafter the chair says, “**If there are not [further] corrections, the minutes are approved.**” Very often the

Secretary sends out draft minutes of the previous meeting before the current meeting at which they are to be approved.

- *Reports:* The assembly then hears reports from officers, boards, and committees of the organization. Chair may say, “**May we have the ____’s report?**” or ask for a specific report from a member. Any recommendations for action included in a report should be debated and voted on by the group at the end of the report containing them.
- *Unfinished Business:* Are any items of business carried over from the previous meeting. If it had not been decided upon, it can be debated and voted on to reach a decision. These items include any item that was in the process of being considered when the last meeting ended, or any items that were scheduled to come up at the last meeting but were not reached before its adjournment.
- There is no type or class of business called “old business.” You should not bring up again matters that were decided upon during earlier meetings.
- *New Business:* The chair asks, “**Is there any new business?**” at which point new items may then be brought up by any member using the procedure “making a motion.”
- Instead of following a standard order of business, a group may adopt an **agenda**. An agenda sets out the order in which specific items are to be considered, and sometimes sets exact allotments of time for their consideration.
- An agenda must be adopted by majority vote of the group or soon after the start of the session. Changes should be made prior to adopting the agenda.
- To adjourn a meeting means to close the meeting.
- When the meeting has completed its work, the chair asks, “**Is there any further business?... Since there is no further business, the meeting is adjourned.**” Even if there is still business that has not been completed a majority may vote to adjourn.
- When the group wishes to take a short break from a meeting, it may vote to **recess**, potentially for a set time such as five minutes.
- The chair may cause a brief pause in the proceedings of the meeting (if no member objects) by directing the group to **stand at ease**. This means that members remain in their places, perhaps quietly talking, until the chair calls the meeting to order again.

Chapter 3—Motions

- To begin the process of making any decision, a member offers a proposal by **making a motion**. A **motion** is a formal proposal by a member that the group take a certain action.
- A **main motion** is one whose introduction brings business before an assembly.
- Only one main motion may be before the assembly for action at a time.

- To make a motion or to speak in debate during a meeting, you should stand up immediately after the previous speaker has finished and notify the chair that you wish to speak. The chair designates you as the next speaker, or recognizes you to begin speaking.
- When you are authorized to speak in this way, you are said to **have the floor**. When finished you should sit down and thus **yield the floor**.
- To make a motion, after obtaining the floor you simply say, “**I move that...**” and then clearly describe the proposal.
- Each motion has to be written down in the minutes.
- It is important to say precisely what the words of the motion are to be, and for the secretary to record them accurately. The group votes on exact language not a vague idea.
- A long or complex motion should always be written out and handed to the secretary.
- After making a motion, you should immediately sit down. You wait until later to give your reasons for making the proposal.
- A motion must be seconded in order to be considered by the group. This does not necessarily mean the seconder agrees with the motion—just that at least two members want to consider the proposal.
- To second a motion, you call out “**Second.**”
- When a motion has been moved and seconded, the chair then **states the question** on the motion, saying “**It is moved and seconded that...**” and then repeating the exact words in which the motion was made.
- When a motion has been stated by the chair, it is said to be **pending** before the group for debate and action.
- **Debate** means discussion on the merits of the question—whether the proposed action should or should not be taken.
- After stating the question on a motion, the chair should ask the maker of the motion if he/she wishes to be assigned the floor.
- A **secondary motion** is a motion which is made while a main motion is being considered, and usually interrupts its consideration (i.e., a motion to Recess or to Amend the motion currently being considered).
- When no one else seeks recognition to debate a motion, the chair may ask if there is any further debate or if the group is ready to vote on the proposal immediately. If there is still no further debate, the chair stands and puts the question to vote.
- To **vote on a motion**, the chair repeats the statement of the question and then gives any direction for the group to vote on the motion. The simplest way to vote is by voice, either saying yes or no to a motion. Other methods include raising hands or using paper to vote.

- When the voting is complete, the chair announces the result. The announcement should include which side had the majority, whether the motion is adopted (passed), the effect of the vote, and what the next item of business is.

Chapter 4—Debate

- You may speak in debate twice on any debatable motion on the same day. Each time, you may speak for up to ten minutes. Any organization may adopt special rules setting other limits. You cannot “save” time or transfer it to someone else.
- The chair should **recognize** to speak the person who rises first after the previous speaker has finished and sat down. You cannot try to signal that you want to speak next while someone is still speaking.
- If you are the maker of a motion, you have a one-time right to preference in speaking about it. Normally, they are the first to speak on the motion.
- Although everyone may speak twice on the same motion on the same day, someone who has not yet spoken on it even once has preference over anyone who has already spoken on it.
- When the chair knows that persons seeking the floor have opposite opinions on the motion, he/she should try to alternate between speakers who favor and those who oppose a proposal.
- In debate, your speech must relate to the motion under discussion. This is sometimes described as your remarks being **germane**, or having bearing on whether the pending motion is adopted.
- Debate the issues, not the person—the proposal, not the member, is the subject of the debate.
- To prevent debates from becoming personal, in debate you should speak as though you are talking to the chair, not directly to other members. This applies even if you are asking a question of another person.
- Avoid using the names of other members in debate.
- You can motion to limit or extend the limits of a debate, such as limiting the pending motion to one hour or setting a time when all debate will end and the question will be voted on. It is possible to limit speeches to a smaller period of time or allot them more time—even allow members to speak more than two times.
- There is specialized motion for when you want to end the debate altogether, called the motion to close debate immediately or the motion for the Previous Question. Adoption of this motion immediately closes debate and also prevents motioning for secondary motions such as to *Amend*, *Commit*, or *Postpone to a Certain Time*. Adopting this motion also prevents the making of further motions of the same type unless they had already been stated but not voted upon prior to the motion under question.

- The motion to close debate immediately requires a two-thirds vote and is undebatable.
- To motion to close debate immediately, a member must obtain the floor and then move for an immediate vote on the question. The move must be seconded and then adopted by a two-thirds vote. At that point, the motion in question is then voted upon and debate ended.

Chapter 5—Amending a Motion

- It is possible to propose **amendments** to a motion, which, if adopted, modify the wording and the meaning of the main motion. Such amendments must be seconded, and then can be debated until voted upon.
- Amendments should say *exactly where* in the main motion the change is to be made, and *precisely what* words to use.
- The vote on your amendment does *not* decide whether the main motion will be adopted, only whether the wording in the main motion will be changed. In the end, a vote is taken on the main motion *as amended*.
- The simplest types of amendments are those that insert or add words.
- Amendments may also strike out words, or both strike out and insert words.
- If the main motion is long, you can motion to insert or add a paragraph, strike out a paragraph, or strike out and add a different paragraph. The same logic follows for all of these types and can be expanded depending on the size of the motion to refer to sections or articles.
- In voting on amendments, the chair should state the amendment, give the main motion as it would read if the amendment were adopted, and makes clear that it is the amendment that is debated and voted on, not the main motion.
- In announcing the result of the vote on the amendment, the chair should restate the wording of the main motion as it then stands.
- An amendment to a main motion may itself be amended by a “secondary amendment,” or amendment to the amendment. Secondary amendments may not themselves be amended. A simpler approach is to vote down the pending amendment, and then offer a different version.
- Any amendment proposed must in some way involved the same question raised by the motion it amends—it must be germane.
- Once a group has voted on an amendment, that specific matter is considered settled. For example, if the group voted down to add certain words; you cannot propose another amendment to add substantially similar words in the same place.

Chapter 6—Postponing and Using Committees

- You may motion to *Postpone to a Certain Time* a main motion so that a decision can be made on a future date. You can amend the motion to postpone the decision so that, for instance, instead of later in the same meeting it will be decided at the next.
- To postpone a decision, simply move to postpone to a certain time the main motion, second the motion, and then obtain a majority vote to agree on such a postponement.
- Ordinarily, you cannot postpone a motion beyond the next regular meeting, and not beyond the third month after the present month.
- Before voting on a main motion it may be necessary or beneficial for a small group of people to redraft or further study the motion. For example, it may take too long to amend the motion or additional information is needed. In this case, turning the motion over to a committee for study or redrafting is ideal before the full group considers it further.
- The motion to *commit* (*refer* to a committee) requires a majority vote and should identify the committee (or individuals) to which the motion is to be referred. It may include instructions to the committee, such as when to report back, or to propose a written amendment to the motion to accomplish a particular purpose.
- **Standing committees** have a continuing existence and function, usually responsibility over a particular act or subject matter.
- **Special Committees** are created for a particular task, and go out of existence when that task is completed.
- You may amend the motion to commit to change any proposed instructions or change the makeup of a special committee. It is also debatable—debate should be about the desirability of referring the matter to a committee or about the details of the referral.
- The method of selection of the chairmen and members of *standing* committees differs from group to group. Most often they are appointed by the president at the beginning of his/her term of office or they are elected by the group at the same meeting the group's officers are elected. They usually serve the same period as officers of the group.

Chapter 7—Correcting Mistakes

- Once a motion has come up and been decided on in one meeting, another motion that raises the same question cannot be brought up at the same meeting in the normal way.
- For stability, the requirements for changing a previous action are generally greater than those for taking the action in the first place.

- If a motion is decided upon during a meeting and at least one member who voted on the winning side wants to have the vote reconsidered, a member on the winning side may make the motion to *Reconsider*.
- The motion to reconsider can be seconded by any member, no matter how he/she voted.
- The motion to reconsider can only be made on the same day on which the vote sought to be reconsidered was taken, or if the group meets during a session of multiple days, on no more than the day after the vote was taken.
- Keep in mind the motion to reconsider does not affect the original decision—if the motion to reconsider is passed, it brings the original question back into motion and any debate and re-vote of the original motion is conducted.
- After a meeting is over and it is too late to reconsider a motion, you may make a motion to *Rescind* a motion. You can also motion to *Amend Something Previously Adopted*.
- You may make either of these motions regardless of how you voted on the original motion and at any time after the original motion was decided.
- These motions require previous notice to be given of the intent to make one of these motions, so that members are alerted ahead of time and can make sure they attend the meeting.
- Both of these motions are main motions and are treated as such *unless* previous notice is not given, at which point a two-thirds vote or the majority of the entire membership of the group is required to decide on the motion.
- Making a motion again after it has been defeated at a previous meeting is called **renewal** of the motion. All you need to do for this motion is to make the same motion again at your next monthly meeting. You can do this regardless of how you voted on the original motion.

Chapter 8—Voting

- Normally a **majority vote** is required to adopt a motion or elect to office.
- Majority vote is defined as *more than half* of the votes cast by those entitled to vote, excluding blanks or abstentions, at a meeting at which a *quorum* is present. Only a majority of those actually voting is required.
- A member can choose not to vote—called an abstention.
- A **plurality vote** is different than a majority vote. A majority vote means that 50% of voters choose the same option. However, sometimes when there are more than two options this is highly unlikely. A plurality vote is the largest number of votes when there are three or more alternatives, and may be less than a majority.
- Under Robert's Rules of Order, *plurality votes are not used*, only majority votes can decide upon a motion or in an election.

- Sometimes a **two-thirds vote** is required. This applies when you suspend the rules, or close, limit, or extend the limits of a debate.
- A two-thirds vote is *at least two-thirds of the votes cast* by members qualified to vote, excluding blanks or abstentions, at a meeting at which a quorum is present.
- A **vote of a majority of the entire membership** is required when adopting a motion to Rescind or Amend Something Previously Adopted.
- A vote of a majority of the entire membership is a majority of the total number of those who are members of the voting body at the time of the vote, whether they are present or not.
- When it seem there is no opposition to a motion, **unanimous consent** enables a motion to be adopted or some action to be taken without the necessity of having the motion put to debate and vote.
- With unanimous consent, the chair asks the group if there is any objection to taking the desired action, and if no member objects, the chair declares the action has been agreed to.
- Any member has the right to vote unless their voting rights have been suspended as the result of a formal disciplinary process.
- The presiding officer or chair should maintain an appearance of impartiality so members of both sides feel they will receive fair treatment.
- The chair does not participate in debate on any issue unless he/she gives up the chair until the issue is disposed of.
- The chair votes only when the vote is by ballot or when the chair's vote will change the result of the vote. Thus, if there is a tie vote and the chair can sway the vote, they can do so, or if there is a difference of one and the chair can tie the vote, they can do so.
- The same rule applies on a motion that requires a two-thirds vote.
- A group can vote by voice, by show of hands, by standing, or by counting using the show of hands, standing, or ballot options.
- Ballots may also be used when there is a desire to keep secret how each member votes.
- The individual(s) responsible for distributing and collecting the ballots should ensure that no member votes more than once and that the vote is fair. They count the ballots and then prepare a written report of the results.

Chapter 9—Nominations and Elections

- A **nomination** is a formal proposal to the group suggesting a particular person to fill an office or position in an election.
- The usual process is to have nominations and then narrow the voting down to qualified and willing candidates.

- Nominating a candidate **from the floor** is done simply, with the chair calling for nominations to a certain position and any member wishing to nominate someone calling out their name. Nominations end when everyone who wishes to has made a nomination.
- It is also possible to nominate candidates through a **nominating committee**. The members of a nominating committee should be *elected*, not appointed. The committee should nominate one candidate for each office, securing the nominee's consent to serve prior to doing so. The committee then reports at the meeting at which the election is to be held (or the prior meeting), at which point those members are nominated. Nominations from the floor add to the nominees, and then a vote takes place.
- Elections are commonly conducted by ballot.
- If only one candidate has been nominated for an office, the chair may declare the nominee elected, or a ballot vote with a write-in option can take place.
- If no candidate receives majority, balloting continues until one does, retaining on the ballot all candidates except those that voluntarily withdraw.
- An election is finalized when the results are announced and the candidate accepts the service.
- Unless specified otherwise, a candidate takes office as soon as his/her election becomes final.

Chapter 10—Basic types of rules

- Rules governing a group (from highest to lowest authority):
 1. **Law: Rules prescribed by applicable law**
 2. Corporate charter: for incorporated groups
 3. **Bylaws or Constitution: Basic rules relating to principally to itself as an organization**
 4. Rules of order: written rules of parliamentary procedure, including special rules of order (specific to organization) and parliamentary authority (general book of rules like these)
 5. Standing rules: administrative details
 6. Customs
- **Law:** any federal, state, or local law governs the procedure of an organization and supersedes any conflicting provision in any of the organization's rules. **This includes, for the CAB, CCC's rules and regulations.**
- **Bylaws or Constitution:** Bylaws or a constitution can contain the group's own basic rules relating principally to itself as an organization. They usually describe the group's purpose, spell out the qualifications and method of selection of members, provide for officers, committees, and meetings (including the quorum), and may set up an executive board or board of directors. Any rules or alterations

of these require a two-thirds vote to adopt. **In CAB, these will most likely be based on the CAB Binder.**

- The activity of an organization or group must be conducted in compliance with the law and the organization's bylaws (or constitution), and any motion that violates them is not allowable.
- **Rules of order:** regulation of the conduct of business in meetings is the function of rules of order. Usually these are similar from group to group. Robert's rules of order are an example of these. If a group finds a need to vary rules from such a book, it can then adopt special rules of order that supersede any conflicting rules in the book. Any rules or alterations of these require a two-thirds vote to adopt.
- **Standing Rules:** Administrative details that are not important enough to be put in the bylaws and that do not relate to the conduct of business at meetings are put into standing rules. These require only a majority vote to adopt.
- **Custom:** when a group gets into the habit of doing something in the same way over and over again until it becomes established as if it were a rule of order. Custom can never conflict with a written rule.
- It is a good policy for every member to be given a booklet with the group's bylaws, special rules of order, and standing rules.

Chapter 11—How are rules enforced/suspended?

- The chair has the duty of making sure that the rules are followed.
- Any member can call the attention of the chair to a violation of the rules. No second is necessary, and no vote is taken. The chair stands and rules on the point of order and whether the rules were broken, giving brief reasons.
- The group as a whole, not the chair, is the final authority in judging whether the rules have been violated. If you disagree with a ruling by the chair, you can *Appeal* it to the group as a whole.
- An Appeal requires a second and can generally be debated by the members, but each member may speak only once. The vote follows whether to appeal the decision.
- When you wish to be able to do something forbidden by the rules, you can motion to *Suspend the Rules*, which requires a second and a two-thirds vote. Usually there is no debate on the matter. In motioning to suspend the rules, you do not name the rule to be suspended but rather describe what it is you want to be able to do that would violate the rules.
- If you want to ask a question about the rules and how they apply to what is going on or to something you want to do, you can make a *Parliamentary Inquiry* of the chair, who will then respond as to whether it is in violation of the rules. The chair's answers are not rulings, but rather opinions and you can disregard them and follow the appeal process if you disagree with them.