

Robert's Rules of Order

WHAT IT IS

The term **rules of order** refers to written rules of parliamentary procedure formally adopted by an assembly or an organization to conduct the orderly transaction of business during a meeting. Robert's Rules of Order (RRO) is often used as the official procedure.

WHAT TO KNOW

It is important to know the basics – Robert's Rules provides for both **informal** and **formal** procedures. Because strict application and formality can be perceived negatively and weigh down the flow of a small meeting where consensus exists, understanding both the informal short cuts and the more strict rules that can promote order and fairness is useful.

HOW TO USE IT

Within this framework, a board or organization is free to adopt any rules it wishes and its **organizational bylaws** should provide information on this point. Therefore, first, you should be familiar with the rules of order as prescribed in your bylaws. **Bylaws have priority, so know what your bylaws say with respect to procedure and rules of order.** Second, have a general knowledge of RRO to rely on when both informal procedures may be used and when a particularly controversial situation arises that may call for the use of more strict rules.

Unanimous Consent

Decisions can be made by **unanimous consent** or **general consent**. This can be used during small meetings and for routine actions or recommendations of little importance or when no opposition is expressed. The chair can say: ***"Is there any objection to the ...? Hearing none, the ... is approved."*** No vote is taken.

THE MOTION

Making a Motion

The *motion* is the means by which business is brought before a board. A motion is a formal proposal that asks that a board take certain stated action. The main motion sets the pattern from which all other motions are derived. The person making the motion is said *to move* the particular proposal *to the floor*. Language can be “*I would like ‘to move,’ ‘make a motion’ or even ‘offer the proposal.’*”

Another member can second the motion. The second only implies that another member agrees that the motion or question should come before the board and not that he/she agrees with it. A second is not necessarily required and does not affect the validity of the question or vote.

The chair should formally restate the motion to offer it for debate. Such as “it is moved and seconded that” Formally, neither making the motion nor seconding it places the question before the board, only the chair can do that. The motion is *pending* while it is *on the floor* for debate. The board *adopts the motion* or *the motion is carried* if it decides to do what the motion proposes. If the board decides against it, the motion is *lost* or *rejected*.

Strictly speaking, discussion of any subject is permitted only with reference to a pending motion. However, RRO makes exceptions for smaller meetings. These rules may be relaxed with constructive effect if the members are not accustomed to working under these standard rules and formality.

Formal: Six Formal Steps to Every Motion (From the Book)

- 1. A member stands up, is recognized, and makes a motion.**
Common Mistake or more informal procedure: Members do not stand up, do not wait to be recognized, and typically start to discuss their motion before completing steps 2, 3 and 4 below.
- 2. Another member seconds the motion.**
Common Mistake: The person seconding the motion dives into the merits of the motion.
- 3. The presiding officer restates the motion to the board.**
Common Mistake: Motion is restated differently from the wording of the maker. Beware because the motion that is adopted is formally the one stated by the presiding officer, not the one stated by the maker of the original motion. This can cause confusion of what was decided.
- 4. The members debate the motion.**
Common Mistake: Debate gets out of control in temper, in duration, in relevance. Members talk at each other across the room rather than through the presiding officer. If controversial, you may want to set a time limit for debate and discussion.
- 5. Presiding officer asks for the affirmative votes and then the negative votes.**
Common Mistake: The presiding officer states 'All in favor' and fails to tell the

members what to do as a matter of voting (for example, 'say aye', 'stand up', 'raise your hand', etc.); or the negative vote is never requested or counted.

6. The presiding officer announces the result of the voting; instructs the corresponding officer to take action.

Common Mistake: Presiding officer fails to pronounce the results or no one is instructed to take action.

Process of Amendment

While the motion is *pending* the board can change the wording of it through the process of amendment. Once made, the amendment takes precedence over main motion. An amendment can be accepted through general consensus (does not require a vote).

Friendly Amendments

The term *friendly amendment* is used to describe an amendment offered by someone who is in sympathy with the purposes of the main motion, in the belief that the amendment will either improve the statement or effect of the main motion, presumably to the satisfaction of its maker, or will increase the chances of the main motion's adoption.

Formally, members of the board should only address the chair, or they can address other members through the chair.

THE AGENDA

Among other things, RRO specifies the order of the *agenda*. The agenda details the items of business to be addressed and in what order.

Remember, the reaction your board members have to the meeting is based on their expectations and needs. The agenda of a meeting allows you to choreograph the meeting, set expectations and control the flow of reports and decision making. The agenda provides a guide for moving the discussion along, keeping order during difficult discussions, not getting off track, and keeping to a time schedule.

Roll Call (Attendance and establishment of quorum)

Can be a simple statement that quorum has been reached. *Quorum* is the minimum number of members who must be present at the meetings of a deliberative assembly for business to be legally transacted and is a protection against unrepresentative action. Your bylaws should specify the number of members that constitute a quorum.

Call to Order (Called by the chair once quorum is established)

Agenda (The order of business)

1. Approval of the Agenda

Agreement that the group will take up the items as presented on the agenda. **NOT** an opportunity to review items and add new ones. **Agreement can be handled by unanimous consent.**

2. Reading and Approval of Minutes

Some groups may prefer to have the minutes read, however in organizations where copies of the minutes of each previous meeting are sent to all in advance, the actual reading aloud may be waived if no member objects. This can be done informally.

The chair should ask if there are any changes to the minutes. **Both approval of the minutes and changes can be handled by unanimous consent.** A formal motion to approve and a vote taken are not necessary unless a dissenting voice is anticipated or expressed during discussion.

3. Reports of Officers, Boards and Standing Committees

- A report is NOT voted on. However an issue or recommendation may be raised within the report that requires a ***motion***. Motions that fall under a committee report should be handled immediately under that agenda item.
- The board member raising an issue or making the recommendation should NOT move its implementation.
- A treasure's report is a report. It is NOT voted on unless it has been officially audited.

4. Reports of Special Committees

5. Special Orders

6. Unfinished Business and Old Business

Unfinished Business refers to the continuing discussion of items that have not yet been concluded. This is different than ***Old Business***, which refers to the reconsideration of matters that have already been concluded. Both unfinished business and old business should NOT be listed on the agenda unless there is actual unfinished business or old business to be discussed. This should be determined prior to the meeting.

7. New Business

Formally, all business to be discussed should be provided to the chair in advance of the meeting and listed on the agenda. However, informally, this would be the time on

the agenda to ask if there is new business to be discussed and for members to introduce new items. New items can be addressed at this time, saved for the next meeting as an agenda item, or discussed and **tabled** if no decision is made and added to the agenda for the next meeting under unfinished business.

8. Adjournment

An adjournment should be in the form of a motion, should be seconded, and is not debatable.

RESOURCES

- <http://www.robertsrules.com/>
- <http://www.roberts-rules.com/>
- <http://www.agreatmeeting.com/>