

Robert's Rules of Order – Basics

Purpose

- Ensure Majority Rule
- Protect the rights of the minority, the absentees and individual members
- Provide order, fairness and decorum
- Facilitate the transaction of business and expedite meetings

Principles

- All members have equal rights, privileges and obligations
- Full and free discussion of every motion is a basic right
- Only one question at a time may be considered, and only one person may have the floor at any one time
- Members have a right to know what the immediately pending question is and to have it restated before a vote is taken
- No person can speak until recognized by the chair
- Personal remarks are always out of order
- A majority decides a question except when basic rights of members are involved
- A two-thirds vote is required for any motion that deprives a member of rights in any way (e.g. cutting off debate)
- Silence gives consent. Those that do not vote allow the decision to be made by those who do vote
- The chair should always remain impartial

Order of Business (typical)

1. Call to order
2. Roll call of members present
3. Reading of minutes of last meeting. Vote on approval
4. Officer reports
5. Committee reports
6. Special business (items designated for consideration at this meeting)
7. Unfinished business
8. New business
9. Announcements
10. Adjournment

Role of the Presiding Officer

- Remain impartial during the debate – the presiding officer must relinquish the chair in order to debate the merits of a motion
- Vote only to create or break a tie (or 2/3 for matters requiring a 2/3 vote) – exception: the presiding officer may vote on any vote by ballot
- Introduce business in proper order
- Recognize speakers
- Determine if a motion is in order
- Keep discussion germane to the pending motion
- Maintain order

- Put motions to a vote and announce results

Handling a Motion (a proposal that the entire membership take action or a stand on an issue)

- A member must obtain the floor by being recognized by the chair
- Member makes a main motion
- A motion must be seconded by another member before it can be considered
- If the motion is in order, the chair will restate the motion and open debate (if the motion is debatable)
- The maker of the motion has the right to speak first in debate
- The main motion is debated along with any Subsidiary motions (e.g. “I move to amend the motion by...”), any Privileged motions (e.g. “I move to postpone the motion to...”) and any Incidental motions (e.g. “I move to divide the question...”)
- Debate on Subsidiary, Privileged and Incidental motions (if debatable) takes precedence over debate on the main motion and must be decided before debate on the main motion can continue
- Debate is closed when
 - Discussion has ended, or
 - A two-thirds vote closes debate (“Call the question”)
- The chair restates the motion, and if necessary clarifies the consequences of affirmative and negative votes
- The chair calls for a vote by asking “All in favor?” Those in favor say “Aye” (or hold up a Green card). Then asking “All opposed?” Those opposed will say “No” (or hold up a Red card). And finally by asking “All abstained?” Those abstaining will say “Aye” (or hold up a Yellow card)
- The chair announces the result

General Rules of Debate

- No members may speak until recognized by the chair
- All discussion must be relevant to the immediately pending question
- No member can speak more than once to each motion
- No member can speak more than three minutes
- All remarks must be addressed to the chair – no cross debate is permitted
- It is not permissible to speak against one’s own motion (but one can vote against one’s own motion)
- Debate must address issues not personalities – no one is permitted to make personal attacks or question the motives of other speakers
- The presiding officer must relinquish the chair in order to participate in debate and cannot reassume the chair until the pending main question is disposed of
- When possible, the chair should let the floor alternate between those speaking in support and those speaking in opposition to the motion
- Members may not disrupt the assembly
- Rules of debate can be changed by a two-thirds vote