



Book Robert's Rules Of Order Newly Revised In Brief

Henry M. Robert III, William J. Evans, Daniel H. Honemann and Thomas J. Balch
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Recommendation

In conference rooms and assembly halls around the world, people often lead and participate in meetings according to the processes detailed in *Robert’s Rules of Order*. The people at most sessions, however, need only about 20% of the rules and guidelines in the original book. That’s why Henry M. Robert III, William J. Evans, Daniel H. Honemann and Thomas J. Balch abbreviated the encyclopedic master text into this handy, easier-to-use version, focusing on the more up-to-date rules and uses. They cover all the basics, including how to introduce motions, participate in debates and take votes. The book also describes the jobs of the officers and board members, as well as providing templates, charts and examples of what to say and do to run meetings smoothly and fairly. Although the rules may be old-fashioned in some settings, they remain useful meeting management guidelines, particularly in forums where accountability matters. Whether you have to direct a corporate board or run a charity committee, *BooksInShort* recommends this concise reference book.

Take-Aways

- In 1876, Henry Martyn Robert published *Robert’s Rules of Order*, a guide to running meetings. He is now the accepted authority on procedures for group deliberations.
- All organizations require a process for running meetings fairly and efficiently.
- “Parliamentary procedure” consists of the rules, processes and customs that govern assemblies.
- A meeting should either follow standardized steps or pursue a specific agenda.
- A “motion” is the vehicle members use to put proposals before the assembly.
- After a member introduces a motion, the assembly debates its merits.
- People introduce amendments to change motions.
- You can apply various voting methods depending on the subject and the size of the group.
- Rules and bylaws define an organization’s purpose and procedures.
- The chairperson is responsible for ensuring that meetings run smoothly and that participants follow the rules.

Summary

The Role of the Rules

When people gather to make decisions, they must have processes in place to ensure that their rulings are fair. Groups of less than six people would be foolish to follow a formal structure, but groups of six to twelve need an agreed-upon format for several reasons. A process ensures that everyone stays on subject and leaves with a clear understanding of what the group did. Rules also prevent an assertive individual from dominating the meeting or taking advantage of less outspoken people. Groups of more than twelve demand even more structure to guarantee fairness. Questions that might arise include, “Who has the right to speak first and for how long?”, “Will

everyone get a turn?”, How will the group stay on point?”, “How will the members handle disagreements and resolve conflicts?” and “What is the best way to deal with ongoing issues?”

“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.”

“Parliamentary procedure” has evolved over time. It specifies rules, processes and customs that govern assemblies of all kinds. Some organizations may have their own procedures, but rules are necessary. If every group first had to define its rules before making any mutual decisions, meetings would become inefficient. Henry Martyn Robert published the first edition of *Robert’s Rules of Order* in 1876 to serve as a guide to running meetings. It has since become such an authority on the subject that people generally refer to “Robert’s Rules” when citing procedure. Robert revised his book several times in response to the hundreds of letters he received. His work establishes common ground on how to organize meetings in a way that gives all the participants room to voice their opinions, helps the sessions go “smoothly” and leads to solid decisions.

The Components

The “chairman” or “president” leads the meeting, and the secretary keeps its minutes. Enacting decisions made during a meeting requires having a “quorum,” or minimum number of representatives present. The chair begins with a “call to order,” announcing, “The meeting will come to order.” Meetings should follow a specific agenda or use this standard format:

- **“Reading and approval of minutes”** – The secretary distributes or reads the minutes from the previous meeting for approval or corrections.
- **“Reports”** – Committee chairpersons, board members or officers give reports to provide information or present recommendations for action.
- **“Unfinished business”** – The members consider and discuss ongoing issues.
- **“New business”** – Members introduce new business by offering motions.

“Motions”

A “motion” is the vehicle members use to put proposals before the assembly. To introduce a motion, you must request permission to speak. When the chair recognizes you, you “have the floor.” Begin your statement with, “I move that...” Follow with a precisely worded proposal. Before the members can discuss the motion, someone must “second” it to demonstrate that at least two people consider the suggestion worth considering. Someone must simply call out, “second.” The chairperson then “states the motion” by saying, “It is moved and seconded that...” The chair determines if the motion is succinctly worded and if the suggestion aligns with the organization’s rules. When a motion is “on the floor,” it is open to discussion with the goal of deciding what action the group will take. When members finish debating a motion, the chair takes a vote and announces the result in the following order: “Reporting which side ‘has it’; declaring that the motion is adopted or lost; indicating the effect of the vote, if needed or appropriate” and “announcing the next item of business, when applicable.”

“Debate”

Each member has the right to participate in the debate about a motion and may speak twice for up to 10 minutes each time. However, the assembly may change this time limit with a two-thirds vote. No time limit restricts the length of the debate. If you want to speak to the subject, the chair must recognize you. Obtain recognition by standing once the current speaker takes his or her seat. Do not try to get the chairperson’s attention while another member is debating. Usually, the person who makes the motion speaks first. The chair gives preference to those who have not yet spoken and tries to alternate between speakers with opposing views.

“Parliamentary procedure...provides processes through which an organization, large or small, can work out satisfactory solutions to the greatest number of questions in the least amount of time.”

When you are debating, ensure that your remarks are “germane” to the topic. Keep statements impersonal, so that you criticize the subject, not a person. The formal language used in debates helps keep arguments from becoming personal. For instance, speak to the chairperson, not the other members. Use titles instead of names.

“The primary purpose of the sort of meeting that uses rules of order is for the group to make decisions.”

A member may end the debate by saying, “I move the previous question,” “I call the question” or “I move we vote now.” Another participant must second that motion and then the group must confirm it by a two-thirds vote. Sometimes a group decides to delay voting on a motion, because the members need more information or the motion requires additional examination. You can put off a vote by moving to “postpone to a certain time,” or you can refer the motion to a committee for redrafting or additional study. The two kinds of committees are “standing” and “special.”

“Amendments”

Perhaps you agree to a motion with some changes. For example, if you feel the motion, “That the Golf League open a youth division” should limit the new division to teenagers, you can propose an amendment. Amendments must be clear and precise. Here, the amendment would be, “I move to amend by replacing the words ‘youth division’ with the words ‘division for teenagers aged 14 to 18’.” The group must first vote to adopt the amended version and then may debate it further. It is also possible to suggest amendments to the amendment. Amendments can insert or add words, strike words out or replace words.

“To begin the process of making any decision, a member offers a proposal by making a motion.”

Even after debate and consideration, groups may make mistakes. For instance, say that a board turns down a motion to donate \$500 to a designated charity because, as the winning side argues, the group has insufficient philanthropic funds. Later in the meeting, the treasurer reports that a rental property generated unexpected income. A member of the winning side may make a “motion to reconsider.” If you learn after the meeting that, indeed, the group has adequate funds, you could introduce the same request, as a “renewal” motion, at the next meeting. If you wish the group to “rescind or amend” a previously approved motion, you also may move to have the members consider that change. Alert them ahead of time by giving “previous notice.” If you do not, the motion will need a two-thirds or majority vote by the entire

membership.

“Voting, Nominations and Elections”

Adopting a motion or electing someone to office requires a “majority” vote, that is, a vote of more than half the members. A “plurality” vote is the largest number of votes received when members select among three options or more. Some resolutions, such as motions to suspend or change rules, require “at least two-thirds of the votes cast by persons legally qualified to vote.” Some motions necessitate the participation of the entire voting membership, even if the whole membership is not present at the meeting. Because chairpersons seek to remain impartial, they do not participate in debates and only cast votes by ballot or when their vote affects the outcome. The voting methods are:

- **“Standing vote”** – The chair says, “Those in favor of the motion will rise. Be seated. Those opposed will rise. Be seated.” The chair can determine the outcome without necessarily counting each person. Chair people ask for standing votes when they are unsure of the result of a voice vote, when a two-thirds vote is required or when a member asks for one by calling out, “Division!”
- **“Show of hands”** – A simple way for small groups to vote.
- **“Counted vote”** – Usually the chair determines the vote outcome without actually counting hands. However, in some cases, he or she may take an actual count.
- **“Ballot vote”** – Elections require a ballot vote. When only one candidate is in contention, the chair may announce the nominee’s election. Election results are final when the chair declares a winner and the candidate accepts the position.

Rules and Bylaws

The bodies of rules that govern a legislative entity are:

- **“Law”** – Federal, state and local laws supersede organizational laws.
- **“Corporate charter”** – A corporate charter is the body of laws adopted and followed by an incorporated organization.
- **“Bylaws or constitution”** – A group’s bylaws describe its purpose, and provide parameters for officers, committees and gatherings. They define requirements for selecting members or being a member, and may establish an executive board.
- **“Rules of order”** – Rules of order are guidelines for routinely and politely conducting business in a meeting format.
- **“Standing rules”** – Rules that are not weighty enough to be included in the rules of order, such as a requirement that attendees must sign a register before a meeting, are called standing rules.
- **“Custom”** – When a habit is ritualized and repeated, it becomes a custom. However, a custom cannot take precedence over a written rule.

“Minutes are a record of what was done at a meeting, not a record of what was said.”

The chair is responsible for ensuring that all the participants follow the rules. However, if a member believes someone violated a regulation, he or she may call out, “Point of order!” The chair then makes a ruling. If you disagree with the ruling, you may appeal to the group by saying, “I appeal the decision of the chair.” Someone must second this appeal. The appeal goes to debate, although members may only argue their points once. Overruling the chair’s declaration requires a majority vote.

“In a land where perhaps most persons are members of one or more societies, some knowledge of parliamentary [procedure] may be justly regarded as a necessary part of the education of every man and woman.” [– Henry M. Robert]

Presidents and chair people should:

- **Know frequently used processes** – Gain a thorough knowledge of the procedures used at every meeting, such as managing a vote.
- **Ensure that everyone knows the subject being debated and decided** – Save time and focus the discussion by repeating motions and amendments word-for-word before the debate begins.
- **Be able to manage a vote** – Understand what wording you need to use and the various voting methods so you can put a motion to vote.
- **Understand the stages of a meeting** – Know the meeting’s flow and your role in conducting it. For instance, stand when calling the meeting to order, taking a vote or ruling on a point of order.
- **Control the processes for “points of order and appeals”** – Be ready to mediate disputes and rule on conflicts.
- **Master parliamentary procedure** – Become well-versed in Robert’s rules; know them better than any of your members and keep relevant reference materials on hand.

“Parliamentary procedure should normally be followed as a matter of course...It’s not something to look to only when you get into trouble.”

The secretary is responsible for pre- and postmeeting functions. He or she informs members of the day, time and place of the next meeting, drafts the minutes and prepares the agenda. During the meeting, the secretary reads or distributes the minutes, records the exact wording of every motion and assists the chair with voting. The minutes should not include what every member says, but they should record each outcome and decision. The secretary also maintains the bylaws, rules, membership lists and reports. The treasurer is responsible for tracking the organization’s funds. The president may ask the treasurer to give an update or report at regular meetings. He or she is also responsible for producing an annual report or financial statement.

About the Authors

Henry M. Robert III, William J. Evans, Daniel H. Honemann and Thomas J. Balch were authorized by the Robert’s Rules Association Council to update *Robert’s Rules of Order*. Robert is the grandson of General Robert, the author of the original *Rules*. Evans is former president of the National Association of Parliamentarians. Honemann is an attorney. Balch is a lobbyist and analyst.