

Overview of Robert's Rules of Order

This is a condensed version of Robert's Rules of Order. It is intended to provide a basic background in parliamentary procedure in order to conduct business in as efficient and orderly a manner as possible.

Addressing the chair

All meetings should be conducted from the "chair" (usually president). Members addressing the chair should refer to the presiding officer as "Brother President".

Obtaining the floor

Before a member may make a motion or speak in debate, he must obtain the "floor". To claim the floor, a member raises his hand and waits to be "recognized" by the chair. The chair will recognize the member by announcing his name or title. This member then has the floor and can stand and speak until he yields the floor by resuming his seat. While a motion is open to debate, there are three important cases where the floor should be assigned to a person who may not have been the first to rise and address the chair. These cases are:

1. If the member who made the motion claims the floor and has not already spoken on the question, he is entitled to be recognized in preference to other members.
2. No one is entitled to the floor a second time as long as any other member who has not yet spoken to the pending motion requests the floor.
3. The chair should attempt to alternate opposite opinions on a question if he is aware of members requesting the floor which have opposing views.

Making a motion

1. First, a member makes a motion. Though he makes a motion, he uses the word "move" to make the motion (for example: "I move to allocate...").
2. Another member seconds the motion by saying, "I second it" or simply, "Second". It should be noted that a second by a member merely implies that the motion should come before the meeting and not that he necessarily favors the motion. A member may second a motion because he would like to see the assembly go on record as rejecting the proposal, if he believes a vote on the motion would have such a result.
3. The chair then states the "question" on the motion. Neither the making nor the seconding of a motion places it before the council; only the chair can do that by this step (stating the question). When the chair has stated the question, the motion is pending and is then open to debate (providing it is a debatable motion). If the council decides to do what a motion proposes, it adopts a motion or it is carried. If it decides against the motion, it is rejected or lost.

Amending a motion

The motion to amend is a motion to modify the wording (within certain limits) of a pending motion before it is acted upon. An amendment must be germane; that is, it must be closely related to or have some bearing on the subject of the motion to be amended.

A motion to amend is handled the same way as a main motion and requires a second to be considered. An amendment is adopted by a majority vote even in cases where the motion to be amended requires a 2/3 vote for adoption.

Point of order

When a member thinks that the rules of the meeting are being violated, he may make a "point of order", thereby, calling upon the chair to make a ruling and enforce the regular rules.

A point of order:

- can be applied to any breach of the meeting's rules
- is in order when another has the floor
- does not require a second
- is not debatable unless the chair, being in doubt, submits the point to a vote of the meeting; in which case, the rules governing its debatability are the same as for an appeal

Previous question

The previous question is the motion used to bring the meeting to an immediate vote on one or more pending questions. The motion for the previous question:

- takes precedence over all debatable or amendable motions to which it is applied
- can be applied to any immediately pending debatable or amendable motion
- is out of order when another has the floor
- must be seconded
- is not debatable
- is not amendable
- requires a 2/3 vote

Postpone indefinitely

A motion to postpone indefinitely is a motion that the assembly declines to take a position on the main question. Its adoption kills the main motion, at least for the duration of the session, and avoids a direct vote on the question. It is useful in disposing of a badly chosen main motion that cannot be either adopted or expressly rejected without possibly undesirable consequences. The motion to postpone indefinitely:

- is out of order when another has the floor
- must be seconded
- is debatable
- is not amended
- requires a majority vote

Adjourn

To adjourn means to close the meeting. The motion to adjourn is a motion to close the meeting immediately, made under conditions where some other provision for another meeting exists and where no time for adjourning the present meeting has already been set. The motion to adjourn:

- is not applied to any motion and no motion can be applied to it
- is out of order when another has the floor
- does not need to be seconded
- is not amendable
- requires a majority vote