

## **Summary Notes on Robert's Rules of Order**

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#### **Background**

Henry M. Robert researched the rules of congress and published his first version in 1876. The rules of congress are based on Parliamentary Law. Parliamentary Law refers to both customs and rules for conducting governance business. Americans do not have the respect the English have for customs, thus we rely more heavily on strictly rules.

Robert's Rules were developed "to assist an assembly to accomplish work for which it was designed, in the best possible manner. To do this it is necessary to restrain the individual somewhat, as the right of an individual in any community, to do what he pleases, is incompatible with the interests of the whole. Where there is no law, but every man does what is right in his own eyes, there is the least of real liberty..."

#### **Guiding Principles**

The right of the majority to rule, the right of the minority to be heard and the right of the individual to participate in the decision-making process

One thing at a time, with some things justifiably allowed to temporarily interrupt other things (order of precedence)

Balance between affirmative and negative – alternating the presentation of pro and con as well as requiring both the affirmative and negative vote to be taken

Debate measures not members

#### **Order of Precedence of Motions**

When one of these motions is pending (has been stated from the floor), any motion higher on the list is generally permitted.

#### **Privileged Motions**

- ✓ Adjourn – "end the meeting"
- ✓ Recess – "temporarily end the meeting until"
- ✓ Raise a question of privilege – "an interruption with a complaint and the proposed solution"
- ✓ Call for the orders of the day – "urges compliance with an agreement concerning the timing of an item of business"

#### **Subsidiary Motions**

- ✓ Lay on the table – "move to table" (will be placed on a future meeting agenda)
- ✓ Close of debate – "call the question" (requires two-thirds vote)
- ✓ Limit or extend limits of debate (requires two-thirds vote, amendable)
- ✓ Postpone definitely (requires two-thirds vote, debatable, amendable)
- ✓ Commit or refer – "delegates to a committee to develop a recommendation-motion" (debatable, amendable)
- ✓ Amend – "to change wording of a pending motion" (must be germane or may be appealed or ruled out of order)

- ✓ Postpone indefinitely (avoids a any vote on the motion)

### **Main (or Principle) Motions**

- ✓ Main motion – “move to” or “make the motion to”

### **Definitions**

Chair – Moderator - presiding officer of the assembly

Floor – “have the floor” - chair acknowledged right to have the attention of the group

Form – typical wording, usually applied to motions or documents

Meeting – Session – official gathering of members (elders) to officially transact business

Member – a person with the right to full participation, including the right to vote

Motion – a formal proposal by a member in a meeting that the assembly take certain action

Pending – officially announced and being processed by the chair

Precedence – priority or rank, applied to motions

Question – a synonym for motion

Session – on or more connected meetings (little s, see our definition of meeting)

Table – the desk – and, by extension, the care – of the secretary (Clerk of Session)

### **General Method of Business**

#### **Unanimous Consent**

For items of business (e.g. accepting minutes, adoption of reports, etc.) that in not usual to make a motion, the Chair specifies an action and announces that “If there is not objection, the action will be considered adopted.” If no objection is heard, the Chair announces, “There being no objection, the action is adopted.”

#### **Obtaining the Floor**

A member obtains the right to speak by being recognized by the Chair, thereby assigning him the right to speak.

#### **Motions**

Before any subject is open to debate (if it is a debatable), three steps are necessary. The first step is that a motion, as defined near the end of the Preface, be made. The second step is that it be seconded (thing only means that another member wishes for the motion to move into debate, not necessarily agreeing with the motion yet). The third step is that the motion be stated (that is, announced) by the presiding officer (Moderator) or with the members help to be sure the secretary (Clerk of Session) has the motion down accurately.

#### **Opening Debate**

Technically, the fairness of debate comes from alternating pro and con arguments or points. Once member speaks, the Chair should allow all other members that desire to speak in alternation go in turn before allowing that member to speak again.

#### **Dividing a Motion**

This motion is made when a pending motion is complex yet capable of being broken down into one or more separate motions. This motion is like an amendment. It requires a second, is

not debatable and is amendable. Amendments typically arise if there are alternatives of separate motions.

### **Incidental Motions**

These motions arise out of other motions and consequently must usually be decided before the motions that gave rise to them. They are not substantively related to the other motions and may arise for minor reasons. Having no fixed order of precedence, they typically yield to privileged motions and are usually not debated or amended.

- ✓ Point of Order – an assertion that a rule is being violated, seeking enforcement by the Chair
- ✓ Appeal – with a second, the Chair will seek a decision from the assembly to sustain the Chair ruling
- ✓ Object to the consideration of a question – a two-third vote to the stated motion (debate has not been opened) upholds the objection (avoids irrelevant, unprofitable or contentious motions)
- ✓ Divide the question – see above
- ✓ Divide the assembly – a temporary break-out into smaller groups for discussion, word-smithing, further developing and collaborating on each alternative, etc.
- ✓ Read papers – exercises the right to have the paper read before the assembly
- ✓ Withdraw or modify a motion – exercises the right of the mover to change the motion
- ✓ Suspend the rules – a temporary ability for the assembly to not follow one or more established rules (including Robert's Rules) up to adjournment only

### **Miscellaneous Motions**

- ✓ Create and Fill Blanks – a means to deal with alternative choices within a motion (typically filling in dates, amounts, places, names that can be worked out later or by subsequent motions and amendments.
- ✓ Nominate and Elect – specifically the name or place version of Create and Fill Blanks.
- ✓ Reconsider and Amend After Adoption – two separate and different motions that may be used to have the assembly revisit a motion in whole or in part respectively.

### **Voting**

All members are expected to participate and are expected to respond to each voting activity. A member that has a conflict of interest is expected to “recuse” themselves from the vote and not participate or can vote “abstain”. A member that is not certain or unprepared to vote may “abstain”. However, this may be viewed as unsatisfactory participation if practiced too often or applied to non-debatable motions.

In general, a member should formulate their own position (in regards to a motion) of affirmative or negative by the end of the debate. As the question is called and the vote is taken, an affirmative or negative from each and every member delivers a true democratic process.