Robert’s Rules of Order

- Adapted from English Parliamentary Rules
- Sometimes called “parliamentary procedure”
- First published in 1876 by General H.M. Robert
- Created to conduct business fairly at formal meetings
- Brings order out of chaos
HISTORY OF LAW MAKING

- Code of Hammurabi (1772 BC)
- Ten Commandments (1350 BC)
- Pax Romana (27 BC)
- Magna Carta (1215 AD)
- U.S. Constitution (1787 AD)
- Roberts Rules of Order (1876 AD)
By-Laws of an organization

- Dictate **Quorum**
- Unless there is a special rule in the By-Laws, a quorum is the majority of the **members** of the organization (n.b.)
- Quorum is very dependent upon the size and logistics of the organization
- If no quorum, the meeting can continue but the only vote that can be taken is to adjourn
By-Laws of an organization

- Dictate what decisions can be made at what meetings
- For Example, Annual General Meetings are usually the ONLY time By-Laws can be changed
- Changes require NOTICE OF MOTION, to provide for the members to prepare their positions
Use of Robert’s Rules

- It is critical to decide whether a meeting will be conducted formally, or informally.
- The “Rules” mostly pertain to FORMAL meetings.
- Essential in large meetings of 10 or more.
- OR for contentious issues (like?)
Robert’s Rules of Order

- “to assist an assembly to accomplish the work for which it was designed”
- That “work” is outlined on the “agenda”
- It is necessary to restrain the individual somewhat, in the interests of the whole
- If you know the rules, you can decide how to best use them, as the Chair
A Principal (Main) Motion

- Brings before the Assembly (meeting, group) any particular subject (issue, agenda item)
- Cannot make a principal motion when any other question (motion) is before the assembly (immediately pending)
- It takes precedence of nothing, and yields to all questions – is LOWEST in “order”.

- A Principal Motion must be dealt with by the assembly before another Principal Motion can be made
The Principal (Main) Motion

- The Principal Motion is a specific statement that will be the focus of debate.
- Should be no debate before a Main Motion is “put to the floor”.
- Frequently, there is too much debate or discussion before a Main Motion is made, causing great inefficiency.

- A Main Motion must be seconded; does not require that the seconder agrees with the motion.
- Main Motion should be in writing, and read by the Chair
- After seconding, debate can then proceed.
The Chair

- Role of the Chair is critical, and the Chair should be carefully chosen by the organization.
- Before a member can make any motion, or speak, they must be “recognized” by the Chair – thus, the Chair is in control.
  - Often, we allow for a “free for all”
The Chair

- If more than one person wants to speak, the Chair chooses the speaker
- Choice of speaker is based upon certain principles
  - The member that moved the motion has first right to speak
  - Each member speaks once to that motion
  - Alternate pro and con
- Should keep an order of speakers, at the very least, so the speakers know they will get a chance when it is their turn
The Parliamentarian

- Assists the Chair in interpretations of Robert’s Rules of Order
- Often given the role of mediating disputes in a meeting
- Often a lawyer by training
- Usually someone who has the respect of the assembly
The Parliamentarian

- Example of decisions:
  - Is the motion in order
  - Is the motion debatable
  - Does the motion need to be seconded
  - Can the motion be amended
The Motion

- During the process of developing the Main Motion, the mover can modify it or withdraw it.
- If Mover modifies the motion, seconder can withdraw the second.
- Time can be saved by informal remarks to alter or clarify the motion, but this should never develop into DEBATE.
- Once the Chair reads the Main Motion, it is in the hands of the assembly and the mover cannot modify or withdraw it unless NOBODY objects.
- If there is an objection, there must be a motion to Withdraw, and then a vote.
The Discussion

- Each speaker can speak to a motion only once until everyone has had their chance;
  - Normally should limit it to twice in total
- The Chair should alternate between those in favor, and those opposed
Minutes of the meeting

- Need minutes of the meeting as an official record
The Secondary (Subsidiary) Motions

- These are motions that are made which apply specifically to the Principal Motion
- Secondary Motions have an impact on the Principal Motion
- Secondary Motions assist with decisions related to the Principal Motion
- Secondary Motions cause some change in the Principal Motion
“cause some change”

- These secondary motions would cause the Main Motion to be:
  - passed,
  - defeated,
  - amended and passed,
  - amended and defeated,
  - referred,
  - tabled or
  - postponed.
The Secondary Motions (LOWEST GROUP)

- In order below .. Higher to Lower
- Lay on the Table .. “Table” (Highest)
- Previous Question … “Call the Question”
- Postpone to a Certain Day
- Commit or Refer
- Amend**
- Postpone Indefinitely (Lowest)

Example: If a motion to “Table” has been made, a motion to “Postpone Indefinitely” is OUT OF ORDER
The Incidental Questions – Undebatable

- These are questions of PROCESS and affect the business of the Assembly (meeting) but do not relate directly to the Main Motion.

Privileged Questions (Undebatable)  HIGHEST GROUP

- These questions do not directly impact the Main Motion, but do impact the Assembly.
- Example: Adjourn, or set adjourn time.
Adjourn

- Undebatable
- Cannot be made when another has the floor, or Assembly is engaged in voting
- Chair must NOT allow this high privilege to be abused
- Chair can refuse to entertain the motion to adjourn if it has been voted down recently
Appeal or Question of Order

- “Mr. Chair, I Rise to a Point of Order”
- Members are responsible to monitor the rules of the assembly
- The Chair rules immediately
- Members then have the right to “appeal the decision of the Chair”
- Often referred to as “Challenging the Chair” because it challenges decisions a chair may make in conducting the business of the meeting
- Assembly then votes
Withdrawal of a Motion

- After motion has been made, the Chair can allow it to be withdrawn if nobody objects.
- If there is objection, it requires a Motion to Withdraw.
- Cannot be debated or amended.
To Lay on the Table

- Yields to ANY Privileged or Incidental Question
- Must be seconded, but cannot be debated or amended
- If motion to table receives a majority vote, delays the motion so it can be taken up at any time (at the same meeting)
- Majority vote can take the matter up again, at any time
- Tables everything that adheres to it
Note about TABLING

- In best interests to have the power to lay aside business, *temporarily* in order to deal with something more urgent
- If used habitually to avoid questions, should be subject to 2/3 vote.
The Previous Question – “Call the Question”

- Motion to close debate and proceed to voting.
- Not debatable, and cannot be amended
- Must be seconded
- If the motion receives 2/3 majority, then the vote on the Principal Motion is called.
- If the motion fails, debate continues.
Postpone to a Certain Day

- Must be seconded
- Very limited debate, related only to the day.
- EXAMPLE: Cannot be used once a motion to table has been made because POSTPONE is a LOWER ORDER than tabling
To Commit or Refer

- Must be seconded
- Debatable and takes precedence over Amendment or Indefinitely Postpone
- Thus, if someone has moved an amendment, you can move to commit or refer and that motion must be dealt with first
- If a motion to table has been made, a motion to commit would be “out of order”
Amend

- Must be seconded
- Motion to amend can be amended, but only one time
- Is the lowest order motion, next to the Principal Motion
- May directly conflict with the spirit of the original motion
- Debatable – Chair should restate the motion
Amendments usually ..

- Insert words
- Delete words
- Change words

For example: I move to amend the principal motion by adding the words “...”.

Chair: To clarify, this would change the main motion to “da da ... da da”
Postpone Indefinitely

Takes precedence of nothing (lowest in order)

- Must be seconded
- Cannot be amended
- Opens entire question to debate
- Is the lowest order motion, next to the Principal Motion (except Amend)
- Useful when opposition is doubtful of strength, because if defeated can still struggle with main question
Rescind

Motion has no privilege

- Any action of the assembly can be rescinded

- After the meeting is over, the option is to rescind
Reconsider

- Still think we should have “best of three” votes
- Is in order at any time – but only once
- If not reconsidered on the day taken, and no meeting the next day, then it CANNOT be reconsidered – RENEW or RESCIND
- Must be made by a member who voted with the prevailing side
Principal Motion:

“ “

Moved by:
Seconded by:
Vote:
Motion to Amend:

- Moved by:
- Seconded by:
- Vote: (how do we vote?).
If the amendment passes, the Main Motion, as amended, will read:
If the amendment fails, the Main Motion will read:
Voting

- Chair can decide when to call for a vote
- Ask for “In Favor”, then “Opposed”
- Can be further debated between the call for “Yes”, and “No” votes
- For motion to pass, requires majority of the votes cast, ignoring blanks
- Some motions require 2/3 to pass
- Chair can vote to break a tie
- Can use ballots, or roll call
Ballot or Roll Call Voting

- May be required by Constitution or By-Laws
- Or, may be by majority order of the assembly or group
- The Assembly (group) can force a ballot or roll call vote
- Ballot provides secret vote
- Roll Call provides accountability and is recorded in the minutes
In a meeting, when there are more than two options you can deal with them in two ways:

1) The option gaining the most votes declared the top priority (plurality vote .. See page 66 of RRO textbook).

2) One option must get a clear majority of votes
   - Take two votes if necessary with the lowest option dropped after the first vote.
Motions Requiring 2/3 Vote

- As required by Constitution or By-Laws OR
- To Amend or Suspend Rules
- To change Order
- To Object to the Consideration of a Question
- Extend or Limit Debate
- Previous Question – Call the Question
“Order of Precedence”

- Motions that have “precedence” to other motions have a higher PRIORITY
- A guide the Chair uses to decide if a motion is “in order” – hence, another use of the word “order”
Committees

- Allow for work to be done informally
- Preliminary work done in Committee
- Votes always taken and recorded when Committee decisions are made
- Vote to “Accept” is equivalent to having the decision adopted by the assembly, so this can be dangerous
Committee of the Whole

- Allow for work to be done informally by the Assembly
- Preliminary work done
- Only motions are to amend and adopt
- Members can speak more than once
- Can provide for informal consideration of a question
Situation #1

A member rises during the New Business time of an Annual General Meeting (AGM) and proposed a new motion that no one has heard about before. It gets seconded and the Chair allows debate on this motion before Calling the Question, getting that approved, and the motion is voted on.

RIGHT OR WRONG?
Situation #1

ANSWER: Wrong!

WHY?: Motions at an AGM must first be submitted as Notice of Motions in advance (usually a month or whatever the By-laws state) in order to be considered.
Situation #2

A properly submitted Notion of Motion is now being proposed as a Principal Motion at the AGM. It is moved by the Treasurer and seconded by a Staff person. The Chair then proceeds with debate…..

RIGHT OR WRONG?
Situation #2

ANSWER: Wrong!

WHY?: Staff can’t vote, Staff can’t second anything or move anything? (Unless it is stated they can do so in the By-laws)
Situation #3

During a tough part of the meeting a Motion from the floor to “Suspend the Rules” is made. The Chair immediately calls for a vote and it is passed 24-12 with every ballot cast.

RIGHT OR WRONG?
Situation #3

ANSWER: Right!

WHY?: Works for me! Secondary Motions such as Suspending the Rules do not require debate. They do however require a 2/3 majority to pass which was the case here..
Situation #4

The AGM in question is running long and there is still one more Principal Motion to deal with. The Secretary moves to Table this Motion until the next meeting. The Chair calls the vote and the Motion to Table is passed. The meeting then adjourns.

RIGHT OR WRONG?
Situation #4

ANSWER: Wrong!

WHY?: If you “Table” something it is simply postponed until later on in the meeting. It still has to be dealt with before the meeting adjourns. A more proper motion would be to “Postpone until a Certain Day”.
Situation #5

At the beginning of the AGM the President declares herself the Chair of the meeting and reviews the Minutes of last year's AGM. She then immediately proceeds with the Notices of Motions.

RIGHT OR WRONG?
Situation #5

ANSWER: Wrong

WHY?: The Minutes of the last AGM need to be approved by vote prior to proceeding. (Also acceptable would be no one can just appoint themselves “Chair”. That has to be decided by vote if it’s in the By-laws.)
Situation #6

A properly appointed “Chair” of the meeting steps down when a Notice of Motion that would benefit him financially is brought up. Once the matter has been dealt with one way or another he resumes his role as “Chair” for the rest of the AGM.

RIGHT OR WRONG?
Situation #6

ANSWER: Right!

WHY?: The “Chair” should always be as impartial as possible and any Motion that could benefit them in any way should cause them to step away from that duty until it has been dealt with.
Situation #7

A properly presented Main Motion is being debated when the Vice President proposes an Secondary Motion of an Amendment to the Main Motion. The Chair calls for a vote on the Amendment and the Amended Motion is passed. The meeting then moves on the next Motion.

RIGHT OR WRONG?
Situation #7

ANSWER: Wrong!

WHY?: They should have voted on the Amendment first, then re-read the new Main Motion, voted on Calling the Question, then voted on the new Main Motion.
Situation #8

After lots of acrimony during debate a Secondary Motion is made to Refer the Main Motion to a Committee. The Secondary Motion is passed and discussion ensues on who should be on that Committee.

RIGHT OR WRONG?
Situation #8

ANSWER: Right

WHY?: The only problem would have been if there was already an existing Committee that the Main Motion could have been sent to. In that case they would have had to move to “Commit”. 
Situation #9

A motion to Adjourn was made properly and defeated during debate of a new properly submitted Main Motion. The same person moved to Adjourn again 10 minutes later, however the Chair ignored that and moved on with the debate.

RIGHT OR WRONG?
Situation #9

ANSWER: Right!

WHY?: The Chair has the power to ignore constant requests to Adjourn since that motion requires no debate and can be abused.