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

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”
- 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

(see page 127 and 129)

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 (highest)
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.
- It 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:

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