Robert’s Rules of Order: A Primer

BY: JASON SEILER
NATIONAL PARLIAMENTARIAN
Brief History

Written by Brigadier General Henry Martyn Robert, US Army

- Civil War veteran
- Died 1923

Wrote the *Pocket Manual of Rules of Order for Deliberative Assemblies* ("Robert's Rules of Order") in 1876

- Wrote the manual in response to his poor leadership at a church meeting that erupted into open conflict
- Based his procedures loosely on those of the US House of Representatives, but intended them to be used for local groups

Result is the most widely-used set for parliamentary procedure

- Roughly 80% of all groups use Robert’s Rules
The purpose of Robert’s Rules is to ensure that...

- A meeting runs smoothly and efficiently
- Everyone who has a right to speak may be heard
- Everyone who has a right to vote may do so at will
- Those with strong personalities do not dominate weaker ones
- The result is the will of the deliberative body

"The application of parliamentary law is the best method yet devised to enable assemblies of any size, with due regard for every member’s opinion, to arrive at the general will on the maximum number of questions of varying complexity in a minimum amount of time and under all kinds of internal climate ranging from total harmony to hardened or impassioned division of opinion."

Hierarchy of Governing Documents

ASIE Article 1, § C(1)
General Outline of a Meeting

Call to Order
Role Call
Approval of Minutes of Previous Meeting
Officer Reports
Old Business
New Business
Adjournment
Types of Meetings & Notice

Regular Meetings
- Declared at the beginning of the term. Monthly, Quarterly, and/or Annual meetings

Special or Called Meetings
- Meetings between regular meetings
- Convened for a specific purpose. Purpose must be advertised not less than 2 weeks in advance, and only that purpose may be discussed and/or voted upon at it

AMC Bylaws, Article VII, § 1
- “Notice of any special or called meeting of the American Mensa Committee shall be prominently posted...not less than fourteen (14) days prior to the date of said special or called meeting. Such notice shall include...all business items to be presented at the meeting.”

AMC Bylaws, Article IX, § 8
- “Annual dues may only be changed by the adoption of a motion passed by the American Mensa Committee at two consecutive regular meetings.”
- Motion must be “published in the meeting agenda at least 30 days prior.”
Basic Definitions

Quorum – The minimum number of voting members in attendance in order to conduct business. Unless modified by the board (Bylaws, ASIESs, etc.), this is a simple majority of the board of officers. AML quorum is 5 (Bylaws Article VII, § 2(a))
  ◦ Without a quorum, only actions are to seek a quorum, fix a time to adjourn, to adjourn, or to take a recess
  ◦ A quorum is always understood to exist until it is questioned

Motion – Formal proposal by a member of the board, in a meeting, to the assembly, so that the body takes some action
  ◦ Main Motion – Introduce item for consideration
  ◦ Subsidiary Motion – Change or affect how a main motion is handled. May amend, refer, postpone, limit debate, withdraw, etc.
  ◦ Privileged Motion – Bring up urgent business. Undebatable
  ◦ Incidental Motion – Questions procedure of other motions. Undebatable
Motions vs. Voting

Any person who is a member of the board may make motions
  ◦ Includes elected and appointed

Any committee whose designation is Action or Empowered, or whose charge is to make a motion, may make motions
  ◦ Motions from committees do not require a second

Committees who are solely advisory or whose charge is to bring back a recommendation may make reports
  ◦ Any member of the board may then move that the report be accepted as a motion

Voting at the board level may be reserved to elected members of the board, depending on a group’s bylaws
Voting Misconceptions

The Chair may vote
- The Chair must remain impartial; however, she may vote in any instance where her vote affects the outcome of the motion and/or vote is taken by ballot.

Abstentions are not counted as votes
- If 15 voting members are present, and the vote is 8 Yes, 4 No, and 3 Abstain, the motions passes by a 2/3 majority.
  - Bylaws may state number of members voting, of members present, or of members total.

Votes may be taken in Executive Session
- Record must be kept of the votes, and a statement must be made of generally what was discussed and the outcome. Minutes shall reflect the full outcome, but that section shall remain closed to those who did not attend that session.
Main Motions

Made to the assembly to cause it to perform some *action*
- If the motion is not to have an action, it is out of order. This includes “sense motions,” straw polls, etc.

Proper form:
- Member gains attention of the Chair – Chair recognizes member by name
- Member says, “Madam Chair, I move to…” and states the question.
  - For example, “Madam Chair, I move that the AMC amend ASIE 1234.5 to state blue as Mensa’s color of preference.”
- If required, the Chair calls for a second.
  - Not all motions require a second. If a second is required and none is made, the motion is not brought before the assembly.
- Discussion / Debate
- Vote
Subsidiary & Privileged

**SUBSIDIARY**

Motions applied to other motions. They must be disposed of before any main motion can be considered

Examples:
- *Table a motion*
- Move the previous question (aka “call the question”)
- Limit or extend debate
- *Postpone definitely*
- *Commit or refer (to committee)*
- *Amend*
- Postpone indefinitely

**PRIVILEGED**

Motions that do not relate to questions raised, but are of great importance. They take precedence before other motions, and they are undebatable

Examples:
- Fix time to adjourn
- *Adjourn*
- Take a recess
- Raise a question of privilege
  - Complaints about temperature, noise, conduct of members, etc.
- Call for orders of the day
  - Only applies if the agenda is adopted
Incidental & Other

INCIDENTAL

Motions arising out of other questions. They yield to privileged motions, but they are also undebatable.

Examples:
- Questions of order and appeal
- Suspend the rules
- Object to the consideration of the question
  - Must be done before any discussion or debate
- Division of a question
- Division of the assembly; methods of voting; open/close polls
- Parliamentary inquiry, request for information, *withdraw a motion*, etc.

OTHER

Unclassified motions exist.

Examples:
- *Take from the table*
- Reconsider
  - Only called by one who voted on the winning side, on the same day as the original motion
- Rescind
- Renewal
- *Ratify*
  - Dilatory, absurd, or frivolous motions
General Rules for Motions and Debate

Once made and seconded, motions belong to the assembly
- “Friendly amendments” are not in order unless ruled on by the Chair and without objection from the Assembly at large

Any member who makes a motion has the right to speak first on it in debate

All comments are made to the Chair, not to individual members

No member may speak a second time on a motion unless everyone who desires had had a chance to speak on it once. No member may speak more than twice on a given topic
- Direct responses to questions, as directed by the Chair, are allowed

All privileged motions are undebatable

Any motion to limit a person’s right to speak requires a 2/3 vote
How to Amend a Motion

The motion to make Mensa’s color of preference blue is made.

A member wishes to change this

- A motion to amend that Mensa should not pick a color is not in order, as that is too different from the original. Instead, the mover should argue to defeat the motion
- A motion to amend to make the color green, pink, purple, etc., is in order; must be seconded

Subsidiary motion to Amend is made and seconded

- “Mr. Chairman, I would like to amend the motion to make turquoise the color of preference.”

Subsidiary motion is debated and voted on.

Main motion is voted on only after all subsidiary and incidental motions are disposed
Ending Debate

Debate has gone on for too long. How do you end it?

- Refer to a committee
- Table, postpone definitely, postpone indefinitely
  - Differences as to when to revisit and whether to reopen debate
- Call the question
  - Requires 2/3 vote
- Vote
  - Chair can call for a vote when (s)he feels debate has ended and nobody wishes to speak
  - Methods of voting
    - Voice
    - Roll Call
    - General Consent
    - Division
    - Ballot
I Don’t Know It All, and I’m an Expert!

Robert’s Rules of Order, Newly Revised (RONR) 11th Edition has 816 pages
- None of us know, or are expected to memorize, every possible rule, code, procedure, and nuance listed.

Ask questions!
- If I know, I will give you the whole answer.
- If I don’t know, I will research it and get the answer to you.
Thank You
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RANKING MOTIONS</th>
<th>Can interrupt Speaker</th>
<th>Need Second</th>
<th>Can be debated</th>
<th>Can be amended</th>
<th>Vote required</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Privileged motions</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For the time to which to adjourn</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Majority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjoin</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Majority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take a recess</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Majority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raise a question of privilege</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Chair rules</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Call for the order of the day</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Chair rules</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subsidiary motions (when main motion is pending)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lay the table</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Majority</td>
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<tr>
<td>Previous question</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Two-thirds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limit or extend debate</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Two-thirds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postpone definitely</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Majority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commit or refer</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Majority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amend</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Majority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postpone indefinitely</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Majority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main motion</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Majority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motions that bring a question again before the assembly (same rank as main motions)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take from the table</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Majority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Record or amend something previously adopted</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Majority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discharge a committee</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Majority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reconsider</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Majority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>NON-RANKING MOTIONS</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Incidental motions (procedural)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appeal the decision of the chair</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Majority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consideration by paragraph or sentence</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Majority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Division of a question</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Majority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Division of the assembly</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Majority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objection to the consideration of a question</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Two-thirds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentary inquiry</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Point of information</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Point of order</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Chair rules</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Request permission to withdraw a motion</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Majority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suspend the rules</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Two-thirds</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Others Parliamentary Procedure Sets

**Robert’s Rules of Order, Newly Revised (RONR)**—80%

**Sturgis Standard Code of Parliamentary Procedure**—15%, mostly medical associations

**Demeter’s Manual of Parliamentary Law and Procedure**—5%, mostly labor unions

**Riddick’s Rules of Procedure**—Hybrid between RONR and Standing Rules of the US Senate

**Mason’s Manual of Legislative Procedure**—Often used in State legislatures

**Bourinot’s Rules of Order**—Used in Canada