

# ROBERT'S RULES OF ORDER

## Parliamentary Procedure

### A Simplified (ARGA) Reference Summary

Author: Professor David G. Powers, Ph.D.,  
University of City of N.Y.

Consultants: R. Lewinson, N.Y. County Law and Bar Association  
Professor H. P. Kerr, Ph.D., Howard University

#### 1. Principles.

- ✘ A majority rule must prevail.
- ✘ The rights of members with a minority opinion must be protected.
- ✘ Respect for dignity of members must be assured.
- ✘ Logical order of business must be provided.

#### 2. Constitution, By-Laws, Standing Rules.

A. Constitution. Defines the structure, purpose and organization of the group.

Contains:

- ✘ Name of organization
- ✘ Purpose and aim of group
- ✘ Qualification of members
- ✘ Officers and method of their election
- ✘ Time and place of regular meetings
- ✘ Means of amending the constitution

B. By-Laws. The constitution contains the policy; the by-laws specify the means of carrying out this policy. The By-Laws detail (1) term of office and authority of officers, (2) standing (permanent) committees and their functions, (3) dues, fines, bills and other assessments, (4) date and method of nominations and elections, (5) order of business for meetings, (6) number of members needed for a quorum, (7) means of amending the By-Laws.

C. Standing Rules (House Rules). Covers matters pertaining to the orderly process of business not significant enough to be in the by-laws. Majority vote is sufficient for their establishment and they may be amended or rescinded by a 2/3 vote.

3. Types of Meetings. A meeting is the assembly of the members for any length of time. "Session" refers to a series of meetings (constituting a session, a session of Congress, etc.)

A. Regular Meeting. Held at specified times and deals with general business of the organization.

B. "Special" Meeting. Convened to treat a special problem. No other business is in order.

#### **4. Types of Procedure.**

A. Formal Procedure. Does not permit discussion of a subject until it is offered as a motion, then seconded and restated by the Chair. This procedure results in quick, orderly action.

B. Informal Procedure. The membership is permitted to discuss the subject prior to framing of motions. The informal procedure forms better motions by permitting the group to arrive at a general opinion (the sense of the meeting") before the making of a motion.

#### **C. Conduct of the Meeting.**

Addressing the Chair. Whether formal or informal procedure is used, the Chairman controls all discussion. Members address the Chairman as Mr. (or Madam) Chairman. The Chairman refers to himself in the third person: "The Chair rules ..." or "The Chair disagrees ..."

Recognizing members. The Chairman need not rise when recognizing a member who wishes to speak. The Chair must recognize members in the order in which they raise their hands.

#### **5. Agenda: Order of Business.**

##### A. Sequence.

- ✿ Call to Order
- ✿ Minutes of previous meeting
- ✿ Reports of officers, boards, standing committees
- ✿ Reports of special committees
- ✿ Announcements
- ✿ Unfinished business
- ✿ New business
- ✿ Adjournment

B. Purpose. The Order of Business provides a logical system for group considerations and the procedure by which the Chair advances from one matter to another:

- ✿ It reviews actions taken at the last meeting
- ✿ Reports actions of the elected officers
- ✿ Contributes knowledge gained by special committees
- ✿ Reminds of actions still pending
- ✿ Furnishes knowledge and facts recently attained. The Order of Business can be rearranged at any time by a 2/3 vote. NOTE: Written copies of the agenda should be available at the start of each meeting.

**6. Agenda: Call to Order.** The President of an organization usually presides at its meetings as the Chairman. Should he be absent the Vice President presides, and next, the Secretary.

**A. Quorum.**

1. The Chair opens the meeting by inquiring of the Secretary if a quorum is present. A quorum is a simple majority in legislative bodies, but in social and professional organizations, it can be as low as 25% of the membership. The specific number for a quorum is in the by-laws.

2. To open the meeting, the Chairman stands, raps the gavel, and announces: "The meeting will please come to order." When no quorum can be had, he says: "As there is no quorum, a motion to adjourn is in order." The motion is made by a member, seconded, and the Chairman adjourns the meeting.

**B. Call the Roll.** Usually the roll is called only if there is a question as to whether there is a proper quorum or to identify all individuals present and not present.

1. In cases of extreme urgency, the Chair may conduct a meeting without a quorum. Any actions ratified must be approved at the next legal meeting. An action undertaken, however, which breaks the faith or inflicts injury by repealing or rescinding is illegal.

2. Should a meeting start with a quorum and lose it (member leave before adjournment), discussion may continue but no vote can be taken.

**7. Agenda:** Minutes of Previous Meeting. Minutes are the official record of the actions of the group. They are read and approved at the opening of each meeting to establish continuity of action and to check on the group's affairs. Reading the minutes may be postponed by a majority vote but then must be read at the beginning of the next meeting. Chairman: "The Secretary will please read the minutes."

**A. Contents of the Minutes Report.**

- ✿ Name of the group
- ✿ Kind of meeting, i.e., regular or special
- ✿ Place, date, and time of meeting
- ✿ Name of presiding officer
- ✿ Approval of the minutes of previous meeting
- ✿ List of motions introduced, their proposers, and their final disposition
- ✿ Time of adjournment of meeting

B. Sanctioning of the Minutes. The minutes are read and the Chair announces: "You have listened to the minutes. Are there any corrections? (The Chair waits). If there are none, the minutes stand approved as read." (Approval is given by silent consent). If objection to the correction arise, a vote must be taken. Form: "Shall the proposed correction (state the correction) be made? Those in favor say 'aye' - those opposed say 'nay.'" The Chair announces the results. The process is repeated if other corrections arise. The Chair finally announces: "There being no further corrections, the minutes stand approved as corrected." NOTE: Minutes may be corrected at any time, but if already approved, a two-thirds vote is required to change them. If notice of the desired correction is posted or distributed for the membership to read prior to the consideration, a majority vote is sufficient.

The Tools of the Meeting: The Basic Parliamentary Motions. Every participant should know the operation of motions. Motions are listed in the order in which they have the right of presentation and discussion (precedence) over motions in other categories and within groupings. Example: Prior to a vote, discussion on a **MOTION TO AMEND** (see Motion 23) can be stopped by a higher ranked subsidiary Motion, such as, TO **LIMIT DEBATE** (see Motion 20). Action on this motion can be diverted by a motion from Group B, e.g., **DIVIDE THE QUESTION** (see Motion 12) can itself be superseded before the vote by a motion to **RECESS** (see Motion 3), which because it is a Privileged Motion with higher precedence, requires immediate action. The table below shows the purpose, rules and voting requirements of each motion.

**NOTES:**

==> When a motion is "**NOT DEBATABLE**," it usually requires immediate action.

==> "**TAKES SUBSIDIARY MOTION**" means motions 18-24 are applicable.

**Table of Motions and Their Uses**

Motions by Category & Precedence		Purpose of Motions		Interrupt Speaker		Needs Second	
Amendable	Debatable	Can Be Considered		Takes Subsidiary Motion		Required Vote	

**Privileged Motions:** Arise from questions of meeting arrangements, comfort, member's rights; requires immediate action.

1	Fix Time, Place For Next Meeting	Close Meeting	No	Yes	Yes	Yes (a)	Yes	Yes	Majority	1
2	To Adjourn	Close Meeting	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	Majority	2
3	To Recess	Interrupt Meeting	No	Yes	No (a)	Yes (b)	---	Yes	Majority	3
4	Question of Privilege	Assert Rights	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	Chair (a)	4

5	Orders of the Day	Assert Rights	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	Majority (a)	5
---	-------------------	---------------	-----	----	----	----	----	----	--------------	---

1. May be used to arrange a special meeting. It is a required motion for an organization without a regular time and place for assembly. (a) Cannot be debated if moved when another question is before the house.

2. *"I move that the meeting be adjourned."* In a group that meets regularly, this motion causes the business to come up before next meeting as unfinished business. If adjournment brings the session to a close, then unfinished business cannot come up unless introduced by new motions.

3. *"I move that we now take a recess (for twenty minutes or until one o'clock or subject to the call of the Chair)"*. (a) Amendable only as to time ... (b) Undebatable if another motion is pending.

4. *"I rise to a question of privilege."* Any disturbance to the group (e.g., noise, presence of non-members, quarrels between members, etc.) justifies a question of privilege. (a) Majority vote needed if there is objection to Chair's decision.

5. *"I call for the orders of the day."* Group must have regular orders of they cannot be called for. If this motion is defeated, group continues to discuss business before the meeting. "Call" can be repeated again at any time. (a) Two-thirds vote needed to change "orders."

**Incidental Motions:** Relate to questions that arise from other motions or business. (No order of precedence in this group).

6	Point of Order	Assert Rights	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	Chair (a)	6
7	Appeal Decision of the Chair	Assert Rights	Yes	Yes	No	Yes (a)	Yes	Yes	Majority	7
8	Object to Consideration	Prevent Action	Yes	No	No	No	Yes (a)	No	2/3	8
9	Reading of Papers	Present Information	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	Majority	9
10	Withdrawal of a Motion	Prevent Action	No	No	No	No	Yes (a)	No	Majority (b)	10
11	Suspend Rules	Speed Up Action	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	2/3(a)	11
12	Divide Question	Simplify Complex Motion	Yes	Yes (a)	Yes	No	No	Yes	Majority	12
13	Nominate	Elections	No	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	Majority	13

14	Parliamentary Inquiry	Clarify Rules	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	Chair (a)	14
15	Divide The Assembly	Count Vote	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	---(a)	15
16	Point of Information	Request Information	Yes (a)	No	No	No	No	---	Chair (b)	16
17	Committee Of The Whole	Consider Informally	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Majority	17

**6.** *"I rise to a point of order."* (a) The chair's decision can be appealed (See 7). When a member thinks there is a breach of order, he should insist upon correction of any irregularities.

**7.** *"I appeal from the decision of the Chair."* Chair puts question *"Shall the decision of the Chair stand?"* (a) Undebatable if it concerns a lack of decorum, business priority, any transgression of speaking rules or if proposed while there is division of the assembly, or if made when the question which is pending is undebatable.

**8.** *"I object to consideration of the question."* Must be introduced immediately after disputed motion has been stated and before debate begins. Chairman then puts question of consideration to a vote. *"Shall this question be considered?"* (a) If vote is affirmative, "motion to reconsider" cannot be reconsidered again.

**9.** Allowed if member desires information. If another member objects, it must be put to a vote.

**10.** Once motion has been made, seconded, and stated by the Chair, it becomes the property of the group and cannot be withdrawn except by general consent. (a) Affirmative vote cannot be reconsidered. (b) Chair may grant withdrawal request. Vote needed only if a member objects.

**11.** *"I move that the rules concerning \_\_\_\_\_ be suspended."* It is not permissible to make a blanket motion suspending the rules; the motion must be specific. (a) Many constitutions require a unanimous vote.

**12.** This motion separates a complex main motion into distinct propositions and specifies the form of the division. (a) No second is necessary if components are unrelated.

**13.** *"I nominate \_\_\_\_\_ for President (or other office)."*

**14.** *"Mr. Chairman, I rise to a parliamentary inquiry."* Chairman may answer the parliamentary inquiry. (a) If information is appealed, a majority vote follows.

15. "I call for division of the house" or "division." (a) Chair must comply.

16. "I rise to a point of information." (a) Speaker decides whether to yield to hear the question. (b) See 7 also.

17. "I move we form a Committee of the Whole." No action can be taken while the group is in this form. It must rise and report before a regular meeting can resume and deal with matters discussed by the Committee of the Whole.

**Subsidiary Motions:** Act upon motions in order to dispose of them. Do not amend these motions.

18	To Table	Delay Action	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	Majority	18
19	Order Previous Question	Close Debate	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	2/3	19
20	Extend or Limit Debate	Speed (Suppress) Debate	No	Yes	Yes (a)	No	Yes	Yes	2/3	20
21	Postpone to a Definite Time	Delay Action	No	Yes	Yes (a)	Yes (b)	Yes	Yes	Majority	21
22	Refer to Committee	Further Study (Delay)	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes (a)	Yes	Majority	22
23	Amend	Modify Motion	No	Yes	Yes (a)	Yes (b)	Yes	Yes	Majority (c)	23
24	Postpone Indefinitely	Prevent Action	No	Yes	No	Yes	No (a)	No (b)	Majority	24

18. "I move that the question be laid on the table." You cannot include in this motion a time at which the question will be taken from the table. This requires the motion "To take from the table (27)."

19. "I call for the previous question." The Chair then says: "Shall the main question be put?" If decision is affirmative, vote is taken first on the amendments only. In such cases, it affects only the amendment to which it applies. This still allows debate on the main motion.

20. Motion sets hour for closing debate, limits length of debate, sets time for speeches. (a) Amendable only as to the time limits.

21. "I move that question be postponed until \_\_\_\_\_." Allows time for study. (a) Amendable only as to time. (b) Debatable only on propriety of the motion.

22. "I move the question be referred to the \_\_\_\_\_ committee." (a) It cannot be reconsidered once the committee has begun its study. Committee can be discharged by a motion to that purpose on a two-thirds vote.

23. "I move to amend the motion by striking out (inserting, substituting)."  
 Amendment must be germane. No limit to number of amendments that can be voted upon in turn. (a) Cannot amend to the third degree. (b) Motion is undebatable when motion to which it is applied is itself undebatable. (c) Changes in the Constitution, by-laws, etc., require previous notice and two-thirds vote.

24. "I move the question be postponed indefinitely." Prevents action on the main motion, opens main question to debate, and enables opponents of main motion to sound out the group. (a) If vote is negative, "postponement" cannot be reconsidered; if affirmative, it can be. (b) No subsidiary motions allowed except the motion to "limit debate" or to "extend the limits of debate," or to "order the previous question."

**Principal Motions:** Directly concerns a proposition, idea or Main Motion (30). (No order of precedence for these motions).

25	Reconsider	Change a Decision	Yes	Yes	No	Yes (a)	No	Yes	Majority	25
26	Rescind (Repeal)	Change a Decision	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes (a)	Yes	2/3(b)	26
27	Take From the Table	Renew Discussion	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	Majority	27
28	Special Order of Business	Speed Up Action	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	2/3	28
29	Discharge Committee	Speed Action	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	2/3(a)	29
30	Main Motions (30)	New Business	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority	30

25. "I move to reconsider the motion." One who voted with the prevailing side must make this motion. (a) If question to be reconsidered is undebatable, motion for reconsideration is undebatable; and, vice versa.

26. (a) If vote is affirmative, "repeal" cannot be reconsidered. (b) Constitutions need two-thirds vote for repeal of a rule and may require previous notice of desired change.

27. "I move to take (state proposal) from the table."

28. "I move this matter (state resolution) be made a Special Order at the meeting of \_\_\_\_\_."

29. "I move that the \_\_\_\_\_ committee considering \_\_\_\_\_ be discharged," or "that the \_\_\_\_\_ being considered by the \_\_\_\_\_ committee be brought to the floor." This motion cannot be referred to a committee. (a) Majority is sufficient if previous notice has been given.

30. The Chair states the motion: "*It has been moved and seconded that (states specific action desired). Are there any remarks?*" Once the motion has been stated it becomes the property of the group and cannot be withdrawn except by general consent or by a motion to withdraw.

Reviewed by  
ARGA Parliamentarian