

ROBERT'S RULES OF ORDER FOR ST. THOMAS UNIVERSITY, SCHOOL OF LAW'S ASSEMBLY AND INTER-CLUB COUNCIL SECTIONS OF THE STUDENT BAR ASSOCIATION (2020)

What are Robert's Rules of Order?

The first edition of the book was published in February, 1876 by U.S. Army Major Henry Martyn Robert. Its procedures were loosely modeled after those used in the United States House of Representatives. Robert wrote *Robert's Rules of Order* after presiding over a church meeting and discovering that delegates from different areas of the country did not agree about proper procedure. The book is now in its 10th edition; *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised (RONR)*.

Robert's Rules of Order provides applicable rules governing key matters of meeting and general procedures, including:

Establishing a Constitution and Bylaws for your student organization.

Structure of the meeting Agenda and debate.

Motions; including making, seconding, debating, modifying and amending motions.

Sufficient majority and simple majority and which decisions are appropriate to them.

Establishment of a quorum.

Definition of membership.

Voting rights of presiding officer and voting procedures.

AN OUTLINE OF BASIC PARLIAMENTARY PROCEDURE

I. PURPOSES OF PARLIAMENTARY PROCEDURE

- A. Ensure majority rule
- B. Protect the rights of the minority, the absentees and individual members
- C. Provide order, fairness and decorum
- D. Facilitate the transaction of business and expedite meetings

II. BASIC PRINCIPLES OF PARLIAMENTARY PROCEDURE

- A. All members have equal rights, privileges and obligations.
- B. A quorum must be present for the group to act – if the bylaws of the organization do not establish a quorum, the general rule is that a majority of the entire membership must be present in order to transact business.
- C. Full and free discussion of every motion is a basic right.
- D. Only one question at a time may be considered, and only one person may have the floor at any one time.
- E. Members have a right to know what the immediately pending question is and to have it restated before a vote is taken.
- F. No person can speak until recognized by the chair.
- G. Personal remarks are always out of order.

- H. A majority decides a question except when basic rights of members are involved.
- I. A two-thirds vote is required for any motion that deprives a member of rights in any way (e.g., cutting off debate).
- J. Silence gives consent. Those who do not vote allow the decision to be made by those who do vote.
- K. The chair should always remain impartial.

III. TYPICAL ORDER OF BUSINESS

- A. Call to Order
- B. Opening Exercises, if applicable
- C. Roll Call/Determination of a Quorum
 - i. SBA ASSEMBLY: For the purpose of conducting business, a quorum shall consist of fifty percent (50%) of the Senate with at least two (2) Executive Board members present.
 - ii. ICC: For the purpose of conducting business, a quorum shall consist of over fifty percent (50%) of the member organizations with at least the SBA Vice President (or, in their absence of the Vice-President and with his or her permission, the President) and Secretary present.
- D. Adoption of the Agenda (subject to 2/3 vote)
- E. Reading and Approval of the Minutes of the Previous Meeting
- F. Reports of SBA Officers
- G. Reports of Standing Committees, if applicable
- H. Reports of Special (Ad hoc) Committees, if applicable
- I. Unfinished Business
- J. New Business
- K. Announcements
- L. "Good of the Order"
 - i. "Good of the Order" refers to the portion of the agenda during which members may make statements or offer observations about the character or work of the organization without having any particular item of business before the meeting
- M. Adjournment (time recorded by SBA Secretary)

IV. ROLE OF THE PRESIDING OFFICER (MADAME/MR. CHAIRMAN)

- A. Remain impartial during debate - the presiding officer must relinquish the chair in order to debate the merits of a motion
- B. Vote only to create or break a tie (or 2/3 for matters requiring a 2/3 vote) – exception: the presiding officer may vote on any vote by ballot
- C. Determine that a quorum is present before transacting business
- D. Introduce business in proper order
- E. Recognize speakers
- F. Determine if a motion is in order
- G. Keep discussion germane to the pending motion
- H. Maintain order
- I. Put motions to a vote and announce results

- J. Employ unanimous consent (general consent) when appropriate
- V. **GENERAL PROCEDURE FOR HANDLING A MOTION**

NOTE: Nothing goes to discussion without a motion being on the floor.

- A. A member must obtain the floor by being recognized by the chair. To do this, the member raises a hand when no one else has the floor, and the chair proceeds by recognizing the member by name
- B. The member makes the motion: “I move that (or "to") . . .”
- C. Another member seconds the motion: “I second the motion” or “I second it” or “Second.”
- D. The chair then puts the motion to a vote. The chair states the motion: “It is moved and seconded that . . .”
- E. Before the motion is restated by the chair, any member can rise, without waiting to be recognized, and:
 - i. object to hearing the motion
 - ii. suggest a modification (amendment) of the wording in order to clarify the motion
 - iii. request to divide the motion into parts to be voted upon separately
- F. The maker of the motion can choose to accept or reject the modified wording (this act does not require a second).
- G. The chair asks: “Are you ready for the question?” (Meaning, do any of the members wish to debate the motion at play?)

i. **RULES OF DEBATE**

- 1. A member seeking to claim the floor and start debate must first obtain the floor by being recognized by the chair. To do this, the member raises a hand when no one else has the floor, and the chair proceeds by recognizing the member by name
- 2. Before any member is allowed to speak in debate, the member must properly obtain the floor as described in 1
- 3. The maker of the motion has first right to the floor if he or she claims it properly
- 4. Debate must be confined to the merits of the motion
- 5. No member may speak a second time until every member who wishes to speak has had the opportunity to do so
- 6. No member can speak more than twice to each motion
- 7. No member can speak more than ten minutes
- 8. All remarks must be addressed to the chair – no cross debate is permitted
- 9. It is not permissible to speak against one’s own motion (but one can vote against one's own motion)
- 10. Debate must address issues not personalities – no one is permitted to make personal attacks or question the motives of other speakers

11. The presiding officer must relinquish the chair in order to participate in debate and cannot reassume the chair until the pending main question is disposed of
12. When possible, the chair should let the floor alternate between those speaking in support and those speaking in opposition to the motion.
13. When a large number of people wish to speak to a motion it may be advisable for the chair to make a speakers' list
14. If a member thinks that the discussion has gone on for too long and the motion needs to be voted on immediately without further discussion, the member, after recognition, may move to cease the debate by saying: "Madame/Mr. Chairman, I move the previous question"
15. Another member must second the motion: "I second the motion" or "I second it" or "Second."
16. Debate can then be closed by order of a 2/3 vote of the assembly
17. Debate can only be closed by order of a 2/3 vote of the assembly ("previous question") or by the chair if no one seeks the floor for further debate.
18. Other Debate Interrupting Motions:
 - a. **FURTHER AMENDING MOTIONS** (*When a member wants to change some of the wording that is being discussed*)
 - i. After recognition, "Madame/Mr. Chairman, I move that the motion be amended by adding the following words _____."
 - ii. After recognition, "Madame/Mr. Chairman, I move that the motion be amended by striking out the following words _____."
 - iii. After recognition, "Madame/Mr. Chairman, I move that the motion be amended by striking out the following words, _____, and adding in their place the following words _____."
 - b. **REFER TO A COMMITTEE** (*When a member feels that an idea or proposal being discussed needs more study and investigation*)
 - i. After recognition, "Madame/Mr. Chairman, I move that the question be referred to a committee made up of members Smith, Jones and Brown."
 - c. **POSTPONE DEFINITELY** (*When a member wants the assembly to have more time to consider the question under discussion and he or she wants to postpone it to a definite time or day, and have it come up for further consideration*)

- i. After recognition, "Madame/Mr. Chairman, I move to postpone the question until _____."
- d. **LIMIT DEBATE** (*When a member thinks discussion is getting long, but he or she wants to give a reasonable length of time for consideration of the question*)
 - i. After recognition, "Madame/Mr. Chairman, I move to limit discussion to two minutes per speaker."
- e. **POSTPONE INDEFINITELY** (*When a member wants to kill a motion that is being discussed, or he or she is against the motion just proposed and want to learn who is for and who is against the motion*)
 - i. After recognition, "Madame/Mr. Chairman, I move to postpone the question indefinitely."

Debate Etiquette

1. Listen to the other side and allow the speaker to finish their point before speaking
2. Focus on issues, not personalities
3. Avoid questioning motives
4. Be polite – NO foul language or name calling

- H. If no one rises to claim the floor, the chair proceeds to take the vote.
- I. The chair says: "The question is on the adoption of the motion that ("to") . . . As many as are in favor, say 'Aye'. (Pause for response.) Those opposed, say 'Nay'. (Pause for response.) Those abstained please say 'Aye'."
- J. The chair tallies and announces the result of the vote: "The ayes have it, the motion carries, and ... (indicating the effect of the vote)" or "The nays have it and the motion fails"
- K. Any member may challenge the chair's count by demanding a "Division of the Assembly."

VI. OTHER TYPES OF MOTIONS

- A. **DIVISION OF THE ASSEMBLY** (*When a member wants to challenge the chair's voice vote by demanding an actual count of the votes to verify the voice vote*)
 - i. Without recognition but before a new motion is passed, "Madame/Mr. Chairman, I call for a division of the assembly."
- B. **OBJECTION TO THE CONSIDERATION OF A QUESTION** (*When a member wants to suppress business that is irrelevant or inappropriate and undesirable to be discussed*)
 - i. The objection must be made immediately
 - ii. The objection does not require a second, is not debatable, and requires a two-thirds vote opposed to consideration in order to pass.
 - iii. Without recognition, "I object to consideration of this question."

- C. **DIVISION OF A QUESTION** (*When a member wishes to divide a motion containing two or more provisions that can stand alone, so that each provision can be considered and voted upon separately*)
- i. This motion is not debatable but it must be seconded.
 - ii. Without recognition, "Madame/Mr. Chairman, I move to divide this question."
 - iii. Chairman: "State your division."
 - iv. Member: "Motion A as . . . Motion B as . . . Motion C as . . ."
- D. **TAKE FROM THE TABLE** (*when a member wishes to resume consideration of a motion laid on the table earlier in the same session or in the immediately preceding session*)
- i. This motion is not debatable
 - ii. After Recognition, "Madame/Mr. Chairman, I move to take from the table item 2, previously moved to item 6."
- E. **RECONSIDER** (*When a member wants to reopen a motion to debate that has already been voted upon in the same session*)
- i. The motion to reconsider can only be made by a member who voted on the prevailing side.
 - ii. This motion suspends action on the motion to which it refers until this motion has been decided.
 - iii. This motion cannot be postponed beyond the next regular business session.
 - iv. After Recognition, "Madame/Mr. Chairman, I move to reconsider passed motion number 1."
- F. **RESCIND** (*When a member wants to repeal a motion for which it is too late to reconsider*)
- i. Requires a two-thirds vote of those present.
 - ii. A motion to rescind cannot be applied to action that cannot be reversed.
 - iii. *During meeting 2* after recognition, "Madame/Mr. Chairman, I move to rescind motion 5 of meeting 1."
- G. **POINT OF PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY** (*When a member is confused about some of the parliamentary rules*)
- i. Without recognition, "Point of parliamentary inquiry."
- H. **POINT OF ORDER** (*When it is obvious that the meeting is not following proper rules*)
- i. Without recognition, "I rise to a point of order," or "Point of order."
- I. **POINT OF INFORMATION** (*When a member is wondering about some of the facts under discussion, such as the balance in the treasury when expenditures are being discussed*)
- i. Without recognition, "Point of information."
- J. **POINT OF PERSONAL PRIVILEGE** (*When the noise outside the meeting has become so great that a member is having trouble hearing, AKA side-bar conversations are too noisy*)

- i. Without recognition, "Point of personal privilege."
 - ii. Chairman: "State your point."
 - iii. Member: "There is too much noise, I can't hear."
- K. **PERMISSION TO WITHDRAW A MOTION** (*When a member has made a motion and, after discussion, is sorry he or she made it*)
 - i. After recognition, "Madame/Mr. Chairman, I ask permission to withdraw my motion."
- L. **CALL FOR ORDERS OF THE DAY** (*When a member finds that the chairman is not following the order of the adopted agenda that was approved at the beginning of the meeting*)
 - i. Without recognition, "Call for orders of the day."
- M. **SUSPENDING THE RULES** (*When the agenda has been approved and as the meeting progressed, it became obvious that an item that a member is interested in will not come up before adjournment*)
 - i. After recognition, "Madame/Mr. Chairman, I move to suspend the rules and move item 5 to position 2."
- N. **COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE** (*When a member is going to propose a question that is likely to be controversial and he or she feels that some of the members will try to kill it by various maneuvers. Also when the member wants to exclude visitors from hearing discussion.*)
 - i. After recognition, "Madame/Mr. Chairman, I move that we go into a committee of the whole."
- O. **APPEAL FROM THE DECISION OF THE CHAIR**
 - i. Without recognition, "I appeal from the decision of the chair."
- P. **RECESS** (*When a member wants to take a break for a while*)
 - i. After recognition, "Madame/ Mr. Chairman, I move to recess for ten minutes."
- Q. **ADJOURNMENT** (*When a member wants the meeting to end*)
 - i. After recognition, "Madame/Mr. Chairman, I move to adjourn."

VII. VOTING

A. DEFINITIONS

- i. **MAJORITY VOTE** - defined as more than half of the votes cast by those present and voting (i.e., excluding abstentions) unless the organization's rules specify otherwise (e.g., majority of those present, or majority of the entire membership)
- ii. **TWO-THIRDS VOTE** - defined as at least two-thirds of those present and voting, unless otherwise specified by the organization's rules. Examples of motions that require a two-thirds vote: to close, limit, or extend debate; to suspend the rules; to amend the constitution and bylaws; to close nominations; to remove an officer or expel a member; or to object to the consideration of a motion.
- iii. **VOTING BY THE CHAIR** - except when there is a ballot vote, the chair only votes when his/her vote would affect the result.

B. METHODS OF VOTING

- i. **VOICE VOTE** - method normally used (i.e., “As many as are in favor, say ‘Aye’. (Pause for response.) Those opposed, say ‘Nay’. (Pause for response.) Those abstained please say ‘Aye’.”)
- ii. **SHOW OF HANDS OR RISING VOTE** - used to verify an inconclusive voice vote or on motions requiring a two-thirds vote
- iii. **BALLOT** - normally used for election of officers and when ordered by a majority vote
- iv. **ROLL CALL VOTE** - used when it is desired to have a record of how each member voted. Can be ordered by a majority vote unless the organization’s bylaws specify otherwise.
- v. **PROXY VOTING** – prohibited unless specifically provided for in the bylaws.

ROBERTS RULES CHEAT SHEET

To:	You say:	Interrupt Speaker	Second Needed	Debatable	Amendable	Vote Needed
Adjourn	"I move that we adjourn"	No	Yes	No	No	Majority
Recess	"I move that we recess until..."	No	Yes	No	Yes	Majority
Complain about noise, room temp., etc.	"Point of privilege"	Yes	No	No	No	Chair Decides
Suspend further consideration of something	"I move that we table it"	No	Yes	No	No	Majority
End debate	"I move the previous question"	No	Yes	No	No	2/3
Postpone consideration of something	"I move we postpone this matter until..."	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority
Amend a motion	"I move that this motion be amended by..."	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority
Introduce business (a primary motion)	"I move that..."	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority

The above listed motions and points are listed in established order of precedence. When any one of them is pending, you may not introduce another that is listed below, but you may introduce another that is listed above it.

To:	You say:	Interrupt Speaker	Second Needed	Debatable	Amendable	Vote Needed
Object to procedure or personal affront	"Point of order"	Yes	No	No	No	Chair decides
Request information	"Point of information"	Yes	No	No	No	None
Ask for vote by actual count to verify voice vote	"I call for a division of the house"	Must be done before new motion	No	No	No	None unless someone objects
Object to considering some undiplomatic or improper matter	"I object to consideration of this question"	Yes	No	No	No	2/3
Take up matter previously tabled	"I move we take from the table..."	Yes	Yes	No	No	Majority
Reconsider something already disposed of	"I move we now (or later) reconsider our action relative to..."	Yes	Yes	Only if original motion was debatable	No	Majority
Consider something out of its scheduled order	"I move we suspend the rules and consider..."	No	Yes	No	No	2/3
Vote on a ruling by the Chair	"I appeal the Chair's decision"	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Majority

The motions, points and proposals listed above have no established order of preference; any of them may be introduced at any time except when meeting is considering one of the top three matters listed from the first chart (Motion to Adjourn, Recess or Point of Privilege).