

Robert's Rules Workshop

Rutgers University Shared Governance Orientation

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Why Parliamentary Procedure?

- Parliamentary procedure as a system for **fair, orderly, efficient deliberation**
- **The fundamental principles:**
 - The majority has the right to decide
 - The minority has the right to be heard
 - Members have equal rights
 - Only one question is considered at a time
 - Rules protect the assembly, not the chair
- **Basic Framework:**
What is currently before the assembly? → Who has the floor? → What does the member want the assembly to do? → What parliamentary tool accomplishes that?

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Anatomy of a Meeting

- Typical Agenda:
 - Call to order
 - Quorum
 - Approval of minutes
 - Reports
 - Old business
 - New business
 - Adjournment
- What an **agenda** does—and when the assembly can change it
- Chair vs. members: who actually controls the meeting?

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The Main Motion: The Basic Building Block

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Obtain the floor 2. “I move that...” 3. Second 4. Chair states the question 5. Debate 6. Chair puts the question 7. Vote 8. Chair announces the result | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A second does not mean you support the motion • Once the chair states the question, the motion belongs to the assembly • Debate is on the pending question—not generally on whatever members want to discuss • Why wording a motion precisely matters |
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Debate: Who Gets to Speak and When?

- Recognition by the chair
- Debate through the chair
- Germane debate
- Limits on debate
- Preference for members who have not yet spoken
- The maker of a motion's right to speak first
- Personal remarks and decorum
- What the chair can and cannot do to control debate
- Difference between **discussion** and formal debate

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Practical Skills: Amendments to Proposals

- “I move to amend...”
- Insert/add words
- Strike words
- Strike and insert
- Amendment vs. substitute
- Amendments must be germane
- An amendment can pass while the underlying motion ultimately fails
- Amendments to amendments (can't go three deep though!)

Main motion

↳ Amendment

↳ Amendment to the amendment

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Practical Skills: Common Motions

- **Amend** — change the proposal
- **Refer/Commit** — send something to a committee
- **Postpone to a Certain Time** — deal with it later
- **Postpone Indefinitely** — dispose of it without a direct vote
- **Previous Question*** — close debate and move toward a vote
- **Suspend the Rules*** — use for adding items to the agenda, etc.
- **Adjourn**

*requires 2/3 supermajority to pass

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When Something Goes Wrong: Points, Questions & Appeals

- **Point of Order** — “We’re violating a rule.”
- **Parliamentary Inquiry** — “What is the correct procedure?”
- **Request for Information** — “I need information relevant to the business.”
- **Point of Personal Privilege** — “I can’t hear, can’t log in, etc.”
- **Appeal Decision of the Chair** — essential principle: the chair rules initially, but *the assembly is the ultimate authority*

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Voting

- Voice vote
- Show of hands/rising vote
- Ballot
- Roll call where applicable
- Majority vs. plurality vs. two-thirds
- Majority of those **present and voting** vs. majority of members present vs. majority of entire membership
- Abstentions
- Tie votes (they fail)
- When the chair votes
- Unanimous consent: “Without objection...”

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Reconsidering or Undoing Decisions (Intro)

- Reconsider
- Rescind
- Amend Something Previously Adopted
- Renewal of motions
- Why “we voted on this already” isn’t always the end of the story

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Scenario #1

The premature “call the question.” During debate, a member says, “I call the question!” The chair immediately ends debate and calls for a vote on the resolution. *What was wrong?*

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Answer: The member can move the Previous Question, but one member cannot unilaterally end debate; closing debate requires the appropriate vote.

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Scenario #2

The reluctant second. A senator says, “I think this proposal is terrible, so I refuse to second it.” Another member says, “I’ll second it even though I oppose it.” *Can someone second a motion they oppose?*

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Answer: Yes—a second means the member thinks the assembly should consider the question, not that they support it.

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Scenario #3

The disappearing motion. A member moves to endorse a proposal, it is seconded, and the chair states the question. During debate, the maker says, “Actually, I withdraw my motion.” *Does that automatically withdraw it?*

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The disappearing motion. A member moves to endorse a proposal, it is seconded, and the chair states the question. During debate, the maker says, “Actually, I withdraw my motion.” *Does that automatically withdraw it?*

Answer: No. Once the chair has stated the question, it belongs to the assembly; the maker needs the assembly’s permission to withdraw it.

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Scenario #4

The hostile amendment. A member strongly opposes a resolution but realizes they have the votes to change it. They move an amendment that substantially alters it. The original mover objects: “That’s a hostile amendment! I don’t accept it.” *Can the amendment still be considered?*

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Answer: Yes. RONR does not give the maker veto power over a “hostile” amendment; if it is otherwise in order, the assembly decides.

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Scenario #5

The friendly amendment. Someone proposes an amendment and the maker says, “That’s friendly—I accept it.” *Does that automatically amend the motion?*

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The friendly amendment. Someone proposes an amendment and the maker says, “That’s friendly—I accept it.” *Does that automatically amend the motion?*

Answer: Once the motion is pending before the assembly, no; the assembly still controls it. Unanimous consent can make the process quick.

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Scenario #6

Amendment inside an amendment. A motion is pending. Member A moves to amend it. Member B moves to amend A's amendment. Member C now wants to amend B's amendment. *Is that allowed?*

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Answer: No—you can have a primary and secondary amendment, but not a third-degree amendment.

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Scenario #7

The completely unrelated amendment. A Faculty Council is debating a resolution about parking. Someone moves to amend it by adding a provision calling on the university to open a faculty dining hall. *Is the amendment in order?*

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Answer: No, if it is not germane to the subject of the pending motion.

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Scenario #8

“Table it until next month.” The Senate doesn’t have enough information to decide an issue, so someone says, “I move to table this until our October meeting.” *Is Lay on the Table the right motion?*

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Scenario #8

“Table it until next month.” The Senate doesn’t have enough information to decide an issue, so someone says, “I move to table this until our October meeting.” *Is Lay on the Table the right motion?*

Answer: No. If the intent is to resume consideration at a specified later time, Postpone (Definitely) to a Certain Time is generally the appropriate motion.

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Scenario #9

Sending it back to committee. The Senate receives a complicated proposal but members think significant additional work is needed.
What motion should someone make?

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Sending it back to committee. The Senate receives a complicated proposal but members think significant additional work is needed.
What motion should someone make?

Answer: Refer/Commit.

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Scenario #10

The chair makes the rules. A chair rules that an amendment is out of order. A member believes the ruling is wrong. *Is the chair's ruling final?*

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Answer: No. The member can Appeal from the Decision of the Chair, subject to the rules governing appeals.

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Scenario #11

Something goes wrong. The chair begins voting on a motion even though an amendment to that motion is still pending. *What can a member do immediately?*

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Answer: Raise a Point of Order.

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Scenario #12

Debating the person instead of the proposal. A senator says, “Anyone who supports this proposal clearly doesn’t understand how this university works.” What parliamentary principle is implicated?

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Scenario #12

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Answer: Decorum. Debate should address the merits of the pending question rather than attacking another member personally.

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Scenario #13

The abstention mystery. The vote is 21 yes, 19 no, and 15 abstentions. The motion requires a majority vote. *Does it pass?*

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Answer: Assuming the rule is the ordinary majority of votes cast by persons entitled to vote, yes; abstentions are not votes cast.

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Scenario #14

The tie. The vote on an ordinary main motion is 20–20. *What happens?*

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Scenario #14

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Answer: The motion fails because a majority was required for adoption.

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Scenario #15

“Without objection...” The chair says, “Without objection, we’ll extend discussion for five minutes.” Nobody objects. *Was a formal motion, second, and vote required?*

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Answer: No. This is unanimous consent, a very useful tool for routine matters.

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Scenario #16

One person objects. The chair says, “Without objection, we’ll approve the minutes as distributed.” One member says, “I object.”
Does the objection defeat the proposal?

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Scenario #16

One person objects. The chair says, “Without objection, we’ll approve the minutes as distributed.” One member says, “I object.”
Does the objection defeat the proposal?

Answer: No—it means the assembly must use the regular procedure rather than unanimous consent.

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Scenario #17

The amendment passes—now what? The assembly votes 30–10 to adopt an amendment to a resolution. The chair says, “The amended resolution is adopted.” *What’s wrong?*

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Scenario #17

The amendment passes—now what? The assembly votes 30–10 to adopt an amendment to a resolution. The chair says, “The amended resolution is adopted.” *What’s wrong?*

Answer: Adopting the amendment changes the main motion; the assembly still has to dispose of the main motion as amended.

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Scenario #18

The “Point of Order!” interruption. A member interrupts another speaker with “Point of order!” and then launches into an argument about why the speaker’s policy position is wrong. *Is that a proper point of order?*

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Scenario #18

The “Point of Order!” interruption. A member interrupts another speaker with “Point of order!” and then launches into an argument about why the speaker’s policy position is wrong. *Is that a proper point of order?*

Answer: No. A Point of Order identifies an alleged breach of the assembly’s rules; it isn’t a device for jumping the speaking queue.

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Scenario #19

The ultimate authority scenario. The chair makes a parliamentary ruling. A member appeals. The chair says, "I'm the presiding officer, so my interpretation of Robert's Rules is final." *Who ultimately decides the appeal?*

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Scenario #19

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Answer: The Assembly

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Scenario #20

Final Exam ☺...A resolution is pending. Senator A moves to amend it. Senator B moves to amend the amendment. Senator C shouts, “I call the question!” The chair immediately takes a vote on the original resolution, which passes 31–25. *Identify everything that went wrong.*

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Simulation Time!

Distribute motion cards. Time to practice!

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