Robert's Rules of Order: Fundamentals

The Basics

Robert's Rules of Order is the standard guide to parliamentary procedure. It was written by Henry Martyn Robert, an Army engineering officer who was unexpectedly asked to preside over a community church meeting and realized he did not know how. After studying the few resources available, and finding that members from different parts of the country each followed different procedures, he wrote the rules to bring order to meetings. The book is now in its twelfth edition, kept current by people directly connected to the original author's work. Its goal is a fair meeting where the majority decides, the minority is heard, and every member has equal rights.

Core Principles

- One item of business at a time
- The majority decides, and the minority is heard
- Every member has equal rights
- Speak only when recognized by the chair, one person at a time

Standard Order of Business

1. Call to order
2. Reading and approval of the minutes
3. Reports of officers, boards, and committees
4. Unfinished business and general orders
5. New business (always after unfinished business and general orders)
6. Announcements
7. Adjournment

Types of Motions

- Main Motion: Introduce a new item
- Subsidiary Motion: Change or affect how to handle a main motion (vote on this before main motion)
- Privileged Motion: Urgent or important matter unrelated to pending business
- Incidental Motion: Questions procedure of other motions (must consider before the other motion)
- Motion to Table: Kills a motion
- Motion to Postpone: Delays a vote (can reopen debate on the main motion)

How a Motion Works

1. Get **recognized** by the chair.
2. Say "**I move to...**"
3. Another member says "**Second**."
4. The chair **restates the motion**.
5. Members **debate**.
6. The chair calls the **vote**.
7. The chair **announces** the result.

Phrases to Know

- "I move to..." (make a motion)
- "Second" (support a motion)
- "Point of order" (flag a rules violation)
- "Point of information"(ask a question about facts or procedure)
- "I move the previous question" (end debate)
- "I move to adjourn" (end the meeting)

Voting Methods

- Voice (aye/no)
- Show of hands
- Standing
- Roll call
- Secret Ballot (elections)

Voting Terms

- Quorum: Minimum number of members who must be present for business to be valid, usually set in the bylaws.
- Majority: more than half of the votes cast, with abstentions not counted
- Two-thirds: needed when a motion limits members' rights
- Proxy voting: When a member allows another member to vote for him or her (not allowed unless the bylaws or law permit it)

Duties of the Chair

Under Robert's Rules of Order (Section 47:7), the chair, also called the presiding officer, is a neutral facilitator who serves the assembly rather than setting policy. The chair's core duties are to:

OPEN THE MEETING

Call it to order at the scheduled time once a quorum is present.

ANNOUNCE BUSINESS

Take up agenda items in the proper order.

RECOGNIZE SPEAKERS

Give the floor to members who have the right to speak.

STATE AND PUT QUESTIONS

Restate each motion, call the vote, and announce the result.

REFUSE DILATORY MOTIONS

Rule out motions meant to waste time, disrupt the meeting, or block business.

KEEP ORDER

Enforce proper conduct, respect, and the rules of debate.

EXPEDITE BUSINESS

Keep the meeting moving without overriding members' rights.

RULE ON POINTS OF ORDER

Decide procedural questions, subject to appeal by the members.

ANSWER INQUIRIES

Respond to questions about procedure or the status of business.

AUTHENTICATE RECORDS

Sign minutes, resolutions, and other official documents.

ADJOURN THE MEETING

Adjourn once business is complete or at the scheduled time.