The Basic Debate Process, Defined

**MOTION:** the ‘unit of business’ debated by an assembly

**MAIN MOTIONS:** must be seconded and are debatable, amendable, and reconsiderable. They are the motions to which all other motions react.

**ALL OTHER MOTIONS:** There are 86 kinds of motion that can be made under Robert’s Rules of Order, including more than one kind of main motion. They act on the business of the assembly in different ways. See the chart included in this booklet for common examples, and how they are handled.

**DEBATE:** a structured discussion about a motion

To enter debate, a member must be recognized by the **CHAIR** as **HAVING THE FLOOR**. She/he has a limited time to speak, and must stay on topic and respect **DECORUM**.

Debate proceeds with one speaker for and one speaker against until the motion is put to a **VOTE**.

**AMENDMENT:** a formal process used to propose changes to motions

Only certain types of motions can be amended. See the chart for information on which motions can be amended, and how a motion that proposes an amendment is to be handled.

**VOTE:** the mechanism by which an assembly decides whether to support a proposed motion

When put to a vote, motions **PASS** or **FAIL**.

A motion that **PASSES** has a majority (as defined in the organization’s bylaws) in favour, and is **CARRIED** or **ADOPTED**, meaning it is carried out.

A motion that **FAILS** does not have a majority in favour. The motion is not acted upon by the organization.

Other Key Terms, Alphabetical

**CHAIR:** the person who is responsible for ensuring that the rules are observed

A Chairperson may be voting or non-voting. Though a Chairperson may be able to participate in discussion if she/he is a voting member, her/his primary responsibility is to facilitate the meeting by enforcing the rules, and so she/he must be **IMPARTIAL**.

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DECORUM: practices and customs that ensure debate is carried on in a respectable and orderly manner

- Debate is confined to the merits of the MOTION before the assembly.
- Members refer to one another respectfully, often in the third person and without using first names.
- Members do not attack the motives of one another.
- Members do not interrupt one another or disturb the assembly.
- Members do not speak against their own motions.
- Members do not speak badly of business that has already been concluded.

POINTS: a type of motion that allows a member to ask a question and/or interrupt debate on a matter of procedural urgency

REQUEST FOR/POINT OF INFORMATION: a member asks a question not related to procedure of another member (including the Chair). This point cannot interrupt a speaker.

POINT OF ORDER: a member believes that proper procedure is not being followed and brings it to the attention of the Chair and the assembly. This point can interrupt a speaker, but must be raised as soon as possible after the infringement.

POINT OF PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY: a member asks a question related to procedure. This point cannot interrupt a speaker, and must be directed to the Chair.

POINT OF PRIVILEGE: something is occurring that is preventing a member from participating in the debate. This point can interrupt a speaker. It cannot be used if one simply disagrees with what is being said or feels slighted.

For more information on the use of points, see the chart.