



STUDENT
GROUP
SERVICES

ROBERT'S RULES OF ORDER

- ▲ THE BASICS
- ▲ MEETING UNDERWAY
- ▲ MOTIONS & VOTING
- ▲ KEY DEFINITIONS
- ▲ OTHER RESOURCES

SGS HANDBOOKS

Welcome to the Student Group Services Robert's Rules of Order Handbook!

This Handbook is an introduction to Robert's Rules of Order, which are commonly used to structure group meetings. However, Robert's Rules cover almost everything that could possibly happen during a meeting - this is by no means a complete guide. This handout is a simple introduction to meeting structure using the Rules and it includes the basics of how a motion is formed, debated, and passed. Take a look at the other resources at the end for even more assistance, or use this as an overview for your group!

Sincerely,

Student Group Services

Compiled by Ian Dalsin, Administrative Assistant 2012-2013

Contact Information:

Student Group Services

University of Alberta Students' Union

780.492.9789

clubs@su.ualberta.ca

www.su.ualberta.ca/studentgroups

www.facebook.com/uasgs

<http://twitter.com/uasgs>

0-040A SUB

8900-114th Street

Edmonton, AB

T6G 2J7

Table of Contents

1 :: The Basics	p.4
What are Robert's Rules of Order?	
What are they used for?	
Chairing the Meeting	
2 :: Meeting Underway	p. 5
3 :: Motions & Voting	p. 6
Motions	
Points	
4 :: Key Definitions	p. 8
Basic Terms	
Motions	
Points	
5 :: Other Resources	p. 10



1 :: *The Basics*

What are Robert's Rules of Order?

In 1876, US Army Colonel Henry Martyn Robert published a book whose full title was *Pocket Manual of Rules of Order for Deliberative Assemblies*. Shortened to Robert's Rules of Order, it is easily the most popular parliamentary authority used today. Eleven editions have been published to date.

What are they used for?

Running meetings in an orderly fashion can be an incredibly difficult process. People interrupt each other, nobody agrees on anything, and debates can easily become sidetracked. Robert's Rules exist to help solve all of these problems.

Chairing the Meeting

The person in charge of enforcing the rules in each meeting, and running things smoothly, is the **chair**. The chair of a meeting is usually the highest-ranking person in the room—president, CEO, or someone else who is delegated to be in charge. The chair sits at the front of the room, facing the rest of the group.

The chair will probably be too busy to take **minutes** (a record of everything) of the meeting, so a secretary is recommended. That person also sits at the front of the room, facing the crowd. They **call roll** (take attendance) at the beginning of meeting, record all **minutes** and **motions**, and perform any other administrative tasks required.

Before the meeting begins, the secretary must count the people in the room. Most organizations require a certain number of people to be present for the meeting to be official—this is known as **quorum**. Quorum is often $\frac{2}{3}$ of the group, 50% + 1 person, or some other percentage. This should be defined in your constitution—if it's not, make sure to talk to Student Group Services for help making and formalizing amendments.

Everyone else in the room sits facing the chair and the secretary. Now we're ready to get started!



2 :: Meeting Underway

In order for the meeting to stay orderly, only one person at a time may speak. The person speaking **has the floor**, and nobody is allowed to interrupt them. At all points in time, the chair overrules whoever has the floor. The chair is also responsible for ensuring that speakers stay on topic and that they respect **decorum** (principles and practices to ensure orderliness and respect during debate).

To **obtain the floor**, or have permission to speak, the person must raise their hand (or stand, in some versions of the Rules) and be recognized by the chair. Once the chair recognizes you, you have permission to speak. It is customary to stand while speaking; however, this may be too formal for some groups.

Order of Business

Most meetings using Robert's Rules run according to a fixed order of business. Here is an example commonly used:

- 1. Call to Order:** The chair quiets the room, and everyone begins to pay attention.
- 2. Roll call of members present:** The secretary lists the names of all people who should be present, to check for absentees. When a person's name is called, they should respond with "here" or "present."
- 3. Reading of minutes of last meeting:** The minutes of the previous meeting should be handed out in paper or electronic form to everyone present, so they can be brought up to speed with what is going on.
- 4. Approval of the Agenda:** Every meeting should have an agenda of items to be discussed. Everyone should be given a copy of the agenda when they enter. During the approval of the agenda, anyone has the right to ask for something else to be included on the agenda, or removed from the agenda. The room then votes on the agenda, to make sure everyone agrees, and proceeds.
- 5. Officer Reports:** All officers (President, Vice-President, Treasurer, etc.) come to the front of the room and read their reports, if any. Once a report is finished, the officer may ask if there are any questions from the floor.
- 6. Committee Reports:** Any committee that may exist (event planning team, recruitment committee, audit committee) reports on their progress or activity.
- 7. Special Orders:** Important issues that have been designated for consideration at this meeting. If this meeting involves elections or other important votes, this would be when they would occur.

8. Unfinished Business: Any motions or votes held over from the previous meeting must be dealt with, or further tabled.

9. New Business: Motions or votes from the floor can be brought up and debated.

10. Announcements: Anything that needs to be said that doesn't fit into the above categories.

11. Adjournment: The chair entertains a final motion from the floor, to end the meeting. All present must vote to end the meeting.



3 :: **Motions and Voting**

During the period of new business, anyone from the floor may form a motion. A motion is a proposal that the organization does something. It could be anything from a motion to approve the budget, to a motion to form a committee, to a motion to buy pizza for the next meeting. Motions are easily the most complicated part of Robert's Rules, but they begin to make sense after practice.

Motions

There are many types of different motions under Robert's Rules, but here are the main types:

1. Main motions: These are the ones mentioned above- any motion to do something. For the purpose of our example, let's use the following:

"I move that we buy pizza for meeting next week."

2. Subsidiary motions: These motions change the main motion. For example:

"I move to amend the motion to limit our spending to \$30 worth of pizza."

There are several kinds of subsidiary motions: you can motion to postpone indefinitely (stop talking about this motion and not vote on it this meeting), amend (change the main motion), refer (send this motion to a person or committee, and have them report back with more information), postpone to a certain time (delay the motion and deal with it later), limit debate (set a certain amount of time for the debate about this to continue), call to question (stop talking and vote immediately, with no further debate) or table (suspend the discussion of the motion, deal with other things, and come back later). If someone has a subsidiary motion, that motion must be voted on before the main motion.

3. Incidental motions: Their purpose is to provide a way to question procedure, and must be considered before other motions. It is key that incidental motions are not used to debate under the guise of providing information.

Points

1. Point of Information – A member can ask a question that is not related to the procedure. The goal of the question should be to gain more information or to bring up information that must be considered before other motions. For example:

“Point of information – can the treasurer tell us how much the pizza will cost?”

2. Point of Order – A member can question the infraction of a procedure in order to correct it. For example:

“Point of order - By my knowledge of procedure, this vote requires a 2/3 majority.”

3. Point of Privilege – This type of point is used whenever there is a personal issue or matter of urgency that must be dealt with

“Point of privilege- there is a angry looking grizzly bear in the meeting room.”

So, let's look at the process of a motion! First, someone makes a motion.

“I, John Doe, move that we submit a team for Antifreeze, on January 14-19.”

Now that John has made a motion, it needs to be seconded. This requires a second person to agree that this is a motion that should be considered.

“I second.”

At this point, the chair allows one person to speak in support of the motion, and one to speak against it. They each have a turn to give a brief speech to support their side.

“Point of information: Antifreeze is actually happening January 7-11.”

This incidental motion simply points out an error that would interfere with the motion. The chair notes it, and can change the first motion.

“Point of information: Our Antifreeze team last year was really, really bad.”

This is not really a point of information, it's part of debate. This is out of order, and can be overruled by the chair.

“I, Jane Smith, move to amend the motion to the following: That we submit a team for Antifreeze, with John Doe as the captain.”

This is Jane amending the motion to say who is specifically in charge of the team. The meeting must vote on this amendment first.

“All those in favor of the amendment of John being in charge of the team, please raise your hand. Any abstentions? Amendment passes.”

John has now been voted in charge of the team, if there is a team.

“The main motion now reads: I move that we submit a team for Antifreeze on January 7-11, led by John Doe. All those in favor, please raise your hand. Any abstentions? Motion passes.”

The motion passes, and John is now in charge of leading a newly formed team.



4 :: Key Definitions

BASIC TERMS

- | | |
|-------------------------|--|
| Amendment | The process of proposing changes to motions or to the constitution itself. Before an amendment can be made, it must be proposed by a member, seconded by another member and passed by at least 2/3rd of majority given that quorum is met. |
| Call roll | Calling the names from the list (roll) for attendance. |
| Call to order | To formally begin the meeting. |
| Call to question | To ask those assembled to immediately vote after a motion has been made and debated. |
| Chair | The person who is responsible for making sure that the meeting runs smoothly, ensures that the rules are followed and that debate stays on topic and respect decorum. |
| Quorum | The minimum number of members that need to be assembled for meeting to conduct business. Quorum is usually set at 2/3rds of the group or a certain percentage of the group. This should be defined in the group's constitution. |
| Debate | A formal discussion of a motion. To participate in a debate, the individual must be acknowledged by the chair and have permission to speak (obtain the floor). During debate, it is expected that individuals follow decorum. |

Decorum	Decorum is the proper etiquette or customs during a debate. This includes treating others with respect and avoiding the use of first names (using official titles instead), interruptions, and improper conduct or remarks.
Minutes	A written record of the proceedings of the meeting.
Motion	A proposal that requires the membership to take action on. A motion must be proposed by a group member, seconded by another, and formally stated before discussion and voting on the motion.
Postpone	To set aside for a later time. A motion can be postponed indefinitely or to a certain time.
Refer	To direct the motion back to a particular person and have them report back with more information.
Second	To support the proposal of a motion. A motion must be seconded in order to proceed with the discussion and voting on the motion.
Table	To suspend the discussion of the motion and consider the business or motion at a later time.

MOTIONS

Incidental Motions	A type of motion used to question the procedure or to bring attention to matters of procedural urgency. Points are a type of Incidental Motion.
Main motion	Main motions are motions that require the assembly to take action or vote on and take precedence over subsidiary and incidental motions. A main motion cannot be introduced when another motion is on the floor.
Subsidiary motions	A type of motion used to change how a main motion is handled and is voted on before a main motion.

POINTS

Point of information	A question not related to the procedure of another member. This type of point generally applies to information desired from the member making the point and cannot interrupt the speaker.
-----------------------------	---

Point of order

A type of point used when a member believes that there has been an infraction on the proper procedure or improper decorum. This type of point can interrupt a speaker and must be raised immediately after the error is made.

Point of Privilege

A type of point used to matters of urgency unrelated to pending business. This pertains includes the need to be excused for illness, personal matters or emergencies. This type of point may interrupt the speaker only if necessary.



5 :: **Other Resources**

For more information on Robert's Rules of Order, including a glossary, Wisdom for Committee Chairs, and Reasons Why to Use Robert's Rules, and many more meeting resources, check out **Discover Governance** at: <http://su.ualberta.ca/governance/discover/resources/>

The handbook of Robert's Rules is available both in full and brief forms, from most bookstores, for less than \$15. They are a good investment for groups ready to commit to running meetings that way.

Also, online resources exist that can explain the basics of parliamentary procedure. Here are some of the ones we recommend:

- [http://nasbla.org/files/public/Enf%20%26%20Training/Roberts%20Rules\(t\).pdf](http://nasbla.org/files/public/Enf%20%26%20Training/Roberts%20Rules(t).pdf)
- http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/reg_svcs/Council%20stuff/council%20orientation/2008%20Training/Handouts/Tab%20D.Roberts%20Rules%20of%20Order.pdf
- <http://www.youtube.com/user/RobertsRulesOfOrder>

