



Rules of Decorum

The following rules are contained within Robert's Rules of Order. These rules have been "on the books" for many, many years, but few organizations are aware of them. Even fewer organizations have decided to enforce these rules in the manner envisioned. However, making members aware of the rules and enforcing these rules will undoubtedly lead to a more civil and productive debate, which is one of the most important concepts underlying parliamentary procedure.

I. BACKGROUND

- The application of parliamentary law is the best method yet devised to enable assemblies of any size, with due regard for every member's opinion, to arrive at the general will on the maximum number questions of varying complexity in a minimum amount of time and under all kinds of internal climate ranging from total harmony to hardened or impassioned division of opinion.
- An organized society requires certain rules to establish its basic structure and manner of operation.
- A deliberative assembly that has not adopted any rules is commonly understood to hold itself bound by the rules and customs of the general parliamentary law – or common parliamentary law – to the extent that there is an agreement in the meeting body as to what these rules and practices are.
- The usual method by which an ordinary society now provides itself with suitable rules of order is therefore to include in its bylaws or ordinances a provision prescribing that the current edition of a specified and generally accepted manual of parliamentary law shall be the organizations parliamentary authority, and then to adopt only such special rules of order as it finds needed to supplement or modify rules contained in that manual.
- The object of rules of order is to facilitate the smooth functioning of the assembly and to provide a firm basis for resolving questions of procedures that may arise.
- For many organizations and counties that manual is - Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised 11th Edition.
- It is unwise for an assembly or a society to attempt to function without formally adopted rules of order.
- Customs of formality that are followed by the presiding officer and members under parliamentary procedure serve to maintain the chair's necessary position of impartiality and help preserve an objective and impersonal approach, especially when serious divisions of opinion arise.

II. AVOID THE USE OF MEMBER'S NAMES

- The presiding officer of an assembly should not be addressed or referred to by name or as you, but as Mr. Chair or Madame Chair

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- The presiding officer speaks of himself only in the third person – that is he never uses the personal pronoun “I”. In actual parliamentary proceedings he always refers to himself as “the chair” as in “the chair rules that” or “the chair is pleased to report.”
- Members generally should try to avoid mentioning another members name whenever the person can be described in some other way such as: Mr. Chairman, the previous speaker, the gentleman or lady from district 3 or at the very least preface their names with Supervisor.

III. WHEN TO SPEAK

- With a very limited number of particular exceptions, and except in small boards and committees, a member never speaks while seated.
- A member does not speak without first having risen, addressed the chair and obtained the floor
- A member has not obtained the floor until recognized by the chair - “the chair recognizes Supervisor...”

IV. ADDRESS THE CHAIR

- Address all remarks through the chair (not the body, not the gallery and not the television cameras)
- Members of an assembly cannot address one another directly, but must address all remarks through the chair.
- Direct questions to other supervisors through the chair

V. DUTIES OF THE CHAIR

- All persons present at a meeting have an obligation to obey the legitimate orders of the presiding officer
- When the Chair becomes convinced that one or more members are using parliamentary forms for obstructive purposes, she should either not recognize or rule out of order
- The Chair should protect the assembly from obviously frivolous or dilatory motions by refusing to recognize them
- The Chair should enforce the rules relating to debate and those relating to order and decorum within the assembly
- The Chair has the authority and duty to make necessary rulings on questions of parliamentary procedure
- The Chair’s ruling can be appealed but not a response to a parliamentary inquiry, since such a reply is an opinion
- The Chair must ask the member to confine his remarks to the merits of the pending question



VI. DEBATE ON THE QUESTION

- A member's remarks must be germane to the question before the assembly
- Speakers must address their remarks to the chair, maintain a courteous tone & avoid injecting a personal tone into the debate
- Each member has a right to speak twice on the same question but cannot make a second speech on the same question as long as any member who has not spoken on that question desires the floor
- No one can speak longer than ten minutes in total

VII. CHAIR SPEAKING IN DEBATE

- Except in small boards and committees, the presiding officer should not enter into discussion of the merits of pending questions unless in rare instances, he leaves the chair until the pending question has been disposed of. The presiding officer who relinquished the chair then should not return to it until the pending main question has been disposed of, since he has shown himself to be a partisan as far as that particular matter is concerned.

VIII. BRINGING BUSINESS BEFORE THE ASSEMBLY

- Business is brought before an assembly by the motion of a member. A motion may itself bring its subject to the assembly's attention or the motion may follow upon the presentation of a report or other communication
- A motion is a formal proposal by a member in a meeting that the assembly take certain action. The proposed action may be of a substantive nature or it may express a certain view, direct an investigation, findings be reported or possible further action.
- The basic form of a motion – the only one whose introduction brings business before the assembly – is a main motion. There are many other separate parliamentary motions that have evolved for specific purposes. While all of these motions propose some form of action and while all of them are said to be "brought before the assembly" when they are placed under consideration, most of them do not bring business before the assembly as a main motion does.

IX. MAKING A MOTION

- To make a main motion, a member must obtain the floor when no other question is pending and when business of the kind represented by the motion is in order.



X. OBTAINING THE FLOOR

- Before a member in an assembly can make a motion or speak in debate – the parliamentary name given to any form of discussion of the merits of a motion – he must obtain the floor; that is, he must be recognized

XI. WHO OWNS THE MOTION

- Neither the making nor the seconding of a motion places it before the assembly; only the chair can do that, by the third step (stating the question).

XII. EXPLAINING THE MOTION

- Under parliamentary procedure, strictly speaking, discussion of any subject is permitted only with references to a pending motion. When necessary, a motion can be prefaced by a few words of explanation, which must not become a speech.
- As already stated, debate is permitted only while a debatable question is immediately pending. Occasionally, however – in small assemblies when a subject is not strongly contested – brief informal consultation or discussion of a subject may assist a member in framing a proper motion.

XIII. WITHDRAWING A MOTION

- Until the chair states the question, the maker has the right to modify his motion as he pleases or to withdraw it entirely. After the question has been stated by the chair, the motion becomes the property of the assembly, and then its maker can do neither of these things without the assembly's consent.

XIV. SPEAKING TO THE MOTION

- Under parliamentary procedure, strictly speaking, discussion of any subject is permitted only with a reference to a pending question.
- Until a matter has been brought before the assembly in the form of a motion proposing a specific action, it cannot be debated.
- The general rule against discussion without a motion is one of parliamentary procedure's powerful tools for keeping business "on track" and an observance of its spirit can be an important factor in making even a very small meeting rapidly moving and interesting.



XV. INTERRUPTING A SPEAKER

- The presiding officer must never interrupt a speaker simply because she knows more about the matter than the speaker.

XVI. REFRAINING FROM ATTACK

- When a question is pending, a member can condemn the nature or likely consequences of the proposed measure in strong terms, but he must avoid personalities and under no circumstances can he attack or question the motives of another member. The measure, not the member, is the subject of debate.
- Confine remarks to the merits of the pending question

XV. SPEAKING AGAINST YOUR OWN MOTION

- In debate, the maker of the motion, while she can vote against it she is not allowed to speak against it.

XVI. PRECEDENCE IN SPEAKING

- If the member who makes the motion claims the floor and has not already spoken on the question he is entitled to be recognized in preference to other members
- No one is entitled to the floor a second time in debate on the same motion on the same day as long as any other member who has not spoken on this motion desires the floor.
- No member can speak more than twice to the same question on the same day
- A member having obtained the floor while a debatable motion is immediately pending, can speak no longer than ten minutes unless he obtains the consent of the assembly.
- A member cannot yield any unexpired portion of his time to another member, or reserve any portion of his time for a later time.

XVII. REFRAIN FROM DISTURBING

- During debate, no member should be permitted to disturb the assembly by whispering, walking across the floor, or in any other way. The key words here are “disturbing the assembly.”

XVIII. READING FROM REPORTS, QUOTATIONS, ETC.

- If any member objects, a member has no right to read from – or to have the secretary read from – any paper or book as part of his speech without permission of the assembly. Members are



usually permitted to read short, pertinent, printed extracts in debate, however, so long as they do not abuse the privilege.

XIX. ASSIGNING THE FLOOR

- The member who rose and addressed the chair first after the floor was yielded is entitled to be recognized
- A member cannot establish “prior claim” to the floor by rising before it has been yielded. In principle it is out of order to rise or be standing while another person has the floor.
- While a motion is open to debate, there are three important cases where the floor should be assigned to a person who may have not been the first to arise and address the chair
 - (1) If a member who made the motion claims the floor and already has not spoken – he is entitled preference
 - (2) No one is entitled to the floor a second time in debate on the same motion as long as any other member who has not spoken desires the floor.
 - (3) In cases where the chair knows the person seeking the floor have opposite opinions on the question – the chair should let the floor alternate, as much as possible, between the favoring and the opposing.

XX. CONTENT OF THE MINUTES

- They should contain mainly a record of what was done at a meeting and not what was said by the members
 - The kind of meeting: regular, special, adjourned regular or adjourned special
 - The name of the society or assembly
 - The date and time of the meeting and the place, if it is not always the same
 - The fact that the regular chairman and secretary were present, or in their absence, the names of the persons who substituted for them
 - Whether the minutes of the previous meeting were read and approved
 - All main motions
 - All secondary motions that were not lost or withdrawn
 - The complete substance of oral committee reports
 - All notices of motions
 - All points of order and appeals
 - The hour of adjournment

Source: Robert’s Rules of Order, Newly Revised 12th Edition