

# Robert's Rules of Order Made Simple

## Points

The following three points are always in order:

- **Point of Order:** a question about process, or objection and suggestion of alternative process. May include a request for the facilitator to rule on process.
- **Point of Information:** a request for information on a specific question, either about process or about the content of a motion.
- **Point of Personal Privilege:** a comment addressing a personal need - a direct response to a comment defaming one's character, a plea to open the windows, etc.

## Motions

All motions must be seconded, and are adopted by a majority vote unless otherwise noted.

All motions may be debated unless otherwise noted.

Motions are of four types: **privileged, subsidiary, incidental** and **main**.

- **Privileged** motions have precedence over all other motions. They fall within a list of precedence.
- **Subsidiary** motions yield precedence to the privileged motions and take precedence over main motions. They fall within a list of precedence.
- **Incidental** motions do not properly fall within the list of precedence, since they usually arise out of the business of the assembly. They may be proposed at any time, and must be decided as they arise. They fall within no list of precedence among themselves.
- **Original main motions** and **incidental main motions** differ principally in the nature of their subject matter. Original motions bring business before the group, and incidental motions bring a question again before the group. Those motions are of the lowest rank and take precedence over no others. They fall within no list of precedence among themselves.

The following Motions are in order of precedence: motions may be made only if no motion of equal or higher precedence is on the floor (i.e., don't do a number 5 (move to end debate) when the body is discussing a number 4 (move to suspend rules).

1. **Motion to Adjourn:** not debatable; goes to immediate majority vote.
2. **Motion to Recess:** not debatable. May be for a specific time.
3. **Motion to Appeal the Facilitator's Decision:** Not debatable; goes to immediate vote. Allows the body to overrule a decision made by the chair.
4. **Motion to Suspend the Rules:** suspends formal process for dealing with a specific question. Debatable; requires 2/3 vote.

5. **Motion to End Debate and Vote or Call the Question:** applies only to the motion on the floor. Not debatable; requires 2/3 vote.
6. **Motion to Extend Debate:** can be general, or for a specific time or number of speakers. Not debatable.
7. **Motion to Refer to Committee:** applies only to the main motion. Refers question to a specific group with a specific time and charge.  
**Motion to Divide the Question:** breaks the motion on the floor into two parts, in manner suggested by mover.
8. **Motion to Amend:** must be voted for by a majority to be considered and to be passed.
9. If amendment is accepted as "friendly" by the proposer of the amendment then many bodies will allow it to be accepted without a formal vote; this is a way of including a consensus-building process into procedure without endless debate over amendments to amendments. Strictly speaking, however, once the main motion is made it is the property of the body to amend.
10. **Main Motion:** what it is you're debating and amending.

Motions can also be classified according to purpose or special situation.

**To modify a motion:** Amend (Subsidiary)

**To suppress debate or hasten action:**

- Call for orders of the day (Privileged)
- Previous question (Subsidiary)
- Limit debate (Subsidiary)
- Suspend rules (Incidental)
- Take from the table (Main)
- Make special order of business (Main)

**To delay action:**

- To lay on the table (Subsidiary)
- Postpone to a definite time (Subsidiary)
- Refer to committee (Subsidiary)

**To prevent action:**

- Postpone indefinitely (Subsidiary)
- Object to consideration (Incidental)
- Withdraw a motion (Incidental)

**To consider more carefully:**

- Extend debate (Subsidiary)
- Divide question (Incidental)
- Committee of the whole (Incidental)

**To change a decision:**

- Reconsider (Main)
- Rescind (Main)

**To maintain rules and order:**

- Question of privilege (Privileged)
- Question of order (Incidental)
- Appeal from decision of chair (Incidental)
- Parliamentary inquiry (Incidental)
- Request for information (Incidental)

**To close a meeting:**

- To fix time of next meeting (Privileged)
  - Adjourn (Privileged)
  - Recess (Privileged)
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**Glossary****Amend**

An amendment is a motion to change, to add words to, or to omit words from, an original motion. The change is usually to clarify or improve the wording of the original motion and must, of course, be germane to that motion.

An amendment cannot interrupt another speaker, must be seconded, is debatable if the motion to be amended is debatable, may itself be amended by an amendment to the amendment, can be reconsidered, and requires a majority vote, even if the motion to be amended requires a two-thirds vote to be adopted.

The chair should allow full discussion of the amendment (being careful to restrict debate to the amendment, not the original motion) and should then have a vote taken on the amendment only, making sure the members know they are voting on the amendment, but not on the original motion.

If the amendment is defeated, another amendment may be proposed, or discussion will proceed on the original motion.

If the amendment carries, the meeting does not necessarily vote immediately on the "motion as amended." Because the discussion of the principle of the original motion was not permitted during debate on the amendment, there may be members who want to speak now on the issue raised in the original motion.

Other amendments may also be proposed, provided that they do not alter or nullify the amendments already passed. Finally, the meeting will vote on the "motion as amended" or, if all amendments are defeated, on the original motion.

An amendment to an amendment is a motion to change, to add words to, or omit words from, the first amendment. The rules for an amendment (above) apply here, except that the amendment to an amendment is not itself amendable and that it takes precedence over the first amendment.

Debate proceeds and a vote is taken on the amendment to the amendment, then on the first amendment, and finally on the original motion ("as amended," if the amendment has been carried).

Only one amendment to an amendment is permissible.

Sometimes a main motion is worded poorly, and several amendments may be presented to improve the wording. In such cases it is sometimes better to have a substitute motion rather than to try to solve the wording problem with amendments.

An individual (or a group of two or three) can be asked to prepare a substitute wording for the original motion. If there is unanimous agreement, the meeting can agree to the withdrawal of the original motion (together with any amendments passed or pending) and the substitution of the new motion for debate.

### **Point of Order**

This motion permits a member to draw the chair's attention to what he/she believes to be an error in procedure or a lack of decorum in debate. The member will rise and say: "I rise to a point of order," or simply "Point of order." The chair should recognize the member, who will then state the point of order. The effect is to require the chair to make an immediate ruling on the question involved. The chair will usually give his/her reasons for making the ruling. If the ruling is thought to be wrong, the chair can be challenged.

A point of order can interrupt another speaker, does not require a seconder, is not debatable, is not amendable, and cannot be reconsidered.

### **Requests and Inquiries**

**a. Parliamentary Inquiry.** A request for the chair's opinion (not a ruling) on a matter of parliamentary procedure as it relates to the business at hand.

**b. Point of Information.** A question about facts affecting the business at hand-directed to the chair or, through the chair, to a member.

**c. Request for Permission to Withdraw or Modify a Motion.** Although Robert's Rules of Order specify that until a motion has been accepted by the chair it is the property of the mover, who can withdraw it or modify it as s/he chooses, a common practice is that

once the agenda has been adopted, the items on it become the property of the meeting. A person may not, therefore, withdraw a motion unilaterally; he or she may do so only with the consent of the meeting, which has adopted an agenda indicating that the motion is to be debated.

Similarly, a person cannot, without the consent of the meeting, change the wording of any motion that has been given ahead of time to those attending the meeting—for example, distributed in printed form in advance, printed on the agenda, a motion of which notice has been given at a previous meeting, etc.

The usual way in which consent of a meeting to withdraw a motion is obtained is for the mover to ask the consent of the meeting to withdraw (or change the wording). If no one objects, the chairperson announces that there being no objections, that the motion is withdrawn or that the modified wording is the motion to be debated.

If anyone objects, the chair can put a motion permitting the member to withdraw (or modify) or any two members may move and second that permission be granted. A majority vote decides the question of modifying a motion—similar to amending the motion. A two-thirds majority is needed for permission to withdraw a motion, as this has the effect of amending the agenda.

#### **d. Request to Read Papers**

#### **e. Request to be Excused from a Duty**

#### **f. Request for Any Other Privilege**

The first two types of inquiry are responded to by the chair, or by a member at the direction of the chair; the other requests can be granted only by the meeting.

#### **Motions Related to Methods of Voting**

A member can move that a vote be taken by roll call, by ballot or that the standing vote be counted if a division of the meeting appears to be inconclusive and the chair neglects to order a count. Such motions may not interrupt another speaker, must be seconded, are not debatable, are amendable, can be reconsidered, and require majority votes. (Note: By-laws may specify a secret ballot for such votes as the election of officers.)

#### **Quorum of Members**

Before a meeting can conduct business it requires a quorum--the minimum number of members who must be present at the meeting before business can be legally transacted. The requirement of a quorum is a protection against unrepresentative action in the name of the association by an unduly small number of people.

## **Postpone Indefinitely**

Despite its name, this motion is not one to postpone, but one to suppress or kill a pending main motion.

If an embarrassing main motion is brought before a meeting, a member can propose to dispose of the question (without bringing it to a direct vote) by moving to postpone indefinitely. Such a motion can be made at any time except when a speaker has the floor. If passed, the motion kills the matter under consideration. It requires a seconder, may be debated (including debate on the main motion), cannot be amended, can be reconsidered only if the motion is passed, and requires a majority vote.

## **Refer**

When it is obvious that a meeting does not have enough information to make a wise decision, or when it seems advisable to have a small group work out details that would take too much time in a large meeting, a member may move: "That the question be referred to the \_\_\_\_\_ committee" (or "to a committee"--not named).

A motion to refer cannot interrupt another speaker, must be seconded, is debatable only as to the propriety or advisability of referral, can be amended, can be reconsidered if the group to which the question has been referred has not begun work on the matter, and requires a majority vote.

If a motion to refer is passed, the committee to which the matter is referred should report on the question at a subsequent meeting. Sometimes the motion to refer will state the time at which a report will be required.

## **Table (Lay on the Table)**

Sometimes a meeting wants to lay a main motion aside temporarily without setting a time for resuming its consideration but with the provision that the motion can be taken up again whenever the majority so decides. This is accomplished by a motion to table or to lay on the table.

The motion has the effect of delaying action on a main motion. If a subsequent meeting does not lift the question from the table, the effect of the motion to table is to prevent action from being taken on the main motion. Indeed, rather than either pass or defeat a motion, a meeting will sometimes choose to "bury" it by tabling.

## **Adjourn**

A member can propose to close the meeting entirely by moving to adjourn. This motion can be made and the meeting can adjourn even while business is pending, providing that the time for the next meeting is established by a rule of the association or has been set by the meeting. In such a case, unfinished business is carried over to the next meeting.

A motion to adjourn may not interrupt another speaker, must be seconded, is not debatable, is not amendable, cannot be reconsidered, and requires a majority vote.

### **Recess**

A member can propose a short intermission in a meeting, even while business is pending, by moving to recess for a specified length of time.

A motion to take a recess may not interrupt another speaker, must be seconded, is not debatable, can be amended (for example, to change the length of the recess), cannot be reconsidered, and requires a majority vote.

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## Rules for Common SSU Academic Senate Motions

**Amend a pending motion** – needs second, debatable, amendable, requires majority vote, can be reconsidered. An amendment to an amendment of an amendment motion is not considerable.

**Committee of the whole, go into** - needs second, debatable, amendable, requires majority vote, can be reconsidered only if negative.

**Debate, close** - needs second, not debatable, not amendable, requires 2/3 vote, can be reconsidered.

Or alternatively **Call the Question** (technically to Order the Previous Question) – needs second, not debatable, not amendable, requires 2/3 vote.

**Divide the motion (on demand)** – appropriate when another has the floor, no second, not debatable, not amendable, automatic on demand, cannot be reconsidered.

**Divide the motion (not on demand)** – Need second, not debatable, amendable, majority vote, cannot be reconsidered.

**Parliamentary inquiry** (a question regarding parliamentary law, by-laws or other rules) - appropriate when another has the floor, no second, not debatable, not amendable, decided by Chair, cannot be reconsidered.

**Point of Order** (used when a rule has been violated) - appropriate when another has the floor, no second, not debatable, not amendable, decided by Chair, cannot be reconsidered.

**Refer** – needs second, debatable, amendable, majority vote, can be reconsidered.

**Table, lay on/take from** – needs second, not debatable, not amendable, majority vote, can be reconsidered.

And not used currently, but perhaps of interest. . .

**Reconsider a debatable motion** - (must be moved by the prevailing side of the previous vote on the motion under reconsideration unless vote was by ballot) - appropriate when another has the floor, needs second, debatable, not amendable, majority vote, can be reconsidered only if no action has been taken on previous matter.

**Reconsider an undebatable motion** – (must be moved by the prevailing side of the previous vote on the motion under reconsideration unless vote was by ballot) - appropriate when another has the floor, needs second, not debatable, not amendable, majority vote, can be reconsidered only if no action has been taken on previous matter.