



# ROBERT'S RULES

Prepared for Staff Senate by Dr. Leanne Merrill



WHAT ARE THEY?

# History

- “Robert’s Rules” refers to the book *Robert’s Rules of Order, Newly Revised* by Henry Robert. (Available on permanent reserve in the library.)
- The book describes a system of rules for running meetings for any organization. The stated goal of the system is:

*“To enable assemblies of any size, with due regard for every member's opinion, to arrive at the general will on the maximum number of 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.”*

*-General Henry Robert, author*

# Best Practices

- Assume positive intent
- Critique ideas, not people
- Listen for understanding
- Keep comments focused on current issue or question
- Speak only when you have the floor



HOW DO THEY  
WORK?

# Nuts and Bolts

- Any member may bring a proposal, called a “main motion,” to the floor of the senate.
- The motion is then debated and potentially modified by amendments.
- If you need more time to research or think about the motion, you can table it until the next meeting.
- After debate has ended, the motion is voted upon (yes or no).
- Robert’s Rules provides structure and a script for how this debate happens.

# Common Motions During Debate

<b>Motion</b>	<b>You say:</b>	<b>Debatable?</b>	<b>Amendable?</b>	<b>Vote Needed</b>
Amend Item X	"I move to amend item X to read...."	Yes	Yes	Majority
Table (next mtg.)	"I move to table item X"	No	No	Majority
Postpone (other length of time)	"I move to postpone item X until (insert time/date)"	Yes	Yes	Majority
End debate & vote	"I move the previous question"	No	No	2/3
Kill Item X	"I move to postpone item X indefinitely"	Yes	No	Majority
Reconsider an action	"I move to reconsider our vote on (insert issue)"	Yes	No	Majority
Refer to a Committee	"I move to refer the motion to X committee"	Yes	Yes	Majority
Ask for information	"Point of information" followed by question	n/a	n/a	n/a
Ask about procedure	"Point of Parliamentary Inquiry" followed by question	n/a	n/a	n/a
Remark on noise, etc.	"Point of Privilege" followed by remark	n/a	n/a	Chair decides
Recess Briefly	"I move to recess for (insert amount of time)"	No	Yes	Majority
Adjourn	"I move to adjourn."	No	No	Majority

## Procedures for Debate, Amendment, and Voting

**Step 1:** Main motion is brought to the floor



**Step 2:** Sponsor of the main motion makes their presentation (this can be skipped if the item is in Old Business)



**Step 3:** Members of the Senate debate the motion. Remember that each senator may only speak twice on each motion, and may only use their second opportunity after everyone who wishes to has spoken once. To speak, you must secure recognition from the Senate President.

During this step, you may want to amend the motion. The same motion can be amended several times, and each amendment must be considered separately.



**Step 4:** After debate on the main motion and any amendments has concluded, senators either.....

Vote to table or postpone, if the motion is in New Business

or

Vote on the motion itself, or to table or postpone, if the motion is in Old Business

### Amendment Loop (optional):

**Step 3a:** If a senator would like to change the motion, they say "I move to amend the motion to read..." followed by their proposed change. Another senator must second the amendment to continue.



**Step 3b:** The senators now debate *the amendment*. During this time, no other amendments to the original motion can be proposed, but senators can make "friendly amendments" to the amendment currently on the floor. (For example, a wording clarification or other small change.)



**Step 3c:** After debate on the amendment is concluded, senators vote on the amendment. Passing the amendment is not the same as passing the main motion.

### Who decides *when* to vote?

There are two ways a vote can be initiated:

- If debate is clearly over, the President may say, "we will now vote on the previous question."
- Alternatively, any senator may use their time on the floor to say, "I move the previous question." This is a *motion to vote*. It must be seconded and receive a 2/3 vote to pass. If it passes, a vote occurs.

This applies to voting on all debatable motions.