

# Basics of Robert's Rules

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## Parliamentary Procedure

“Where there is no law, but every man does what is right in his own eyes, there is the least of liberty.”

— [Henry M. Robert](#), [\*Robert's Rules Of Order\*](#)

# Purpose

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- Parliamentary procedure is a set of rules for conducting orderly meetings that accomplish goals fairly. Benefits of parliamentary procedure include the following:  
More effective for larger meetings
  - Maintenance of order
  - Consideration of one item at a time
  - All sides get heard
  - Ability for each member to provide input
  - Majority rule
  - Protection of the rights of all members including the minority

# My Rights vs. Our Right

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- Individuals have rights to attend, speak at and be an active participant in meetings
- Every member of a meeting has equal right to speak (whether board member, officers or the general public (at the proper time)
  - Must balance rights of the organization to conduct business, thus the rules are in place

# Basic Principles

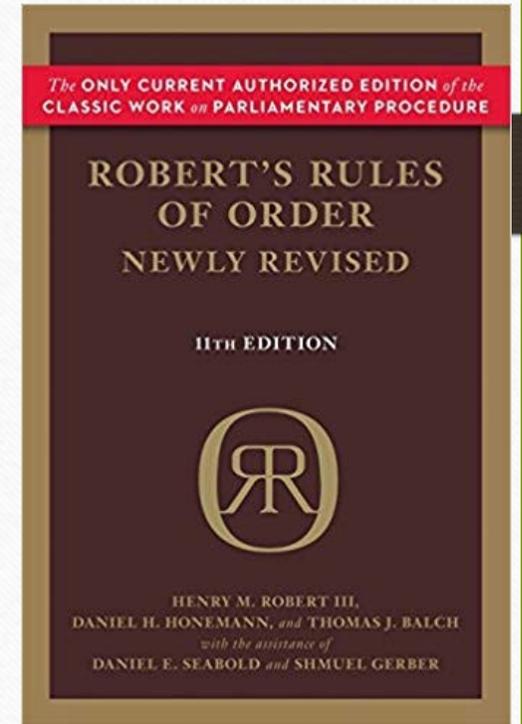
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- All members have equal rights, privileges and obligations
- No person can speak until recognized by the chair
- Personal remarks during debate are out of order
- Only one question at a time may be considered, and only one person may have the floor at any one time
- Members have a right to know what the immediately pending question is and to have it restated before a vote is taken
- Full and free discussion of every main motion is a basic right
- A quorum must be present for business to be conducted
- A majority decides a question except when basic rights of members are involved or a rule provides otherwise.
- A 2/3 vote is required for any motion that deprives a member of right in any way (e.g., cutting off debate)
- Silence gives consent. Those who do not vote allow the decision to be made by those who do vote.
- The Chair should always remain impartial

# Robert's Rules are not difficult

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- Not everyone is meant to read ALL of Robert's Rule of Order
- There are key things to understand in everyday meetings
- Practice is the best way of learning it



# The Chair

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- The person that runs the meetings, calls the votes, and ensures adherence to an agenda
  - Usually the head of the organization – for NCSS this is the President. At a chapter meeting this would be the chapter president.
  - Can be delegated to another member for the duration of a meeting (i.e. the President Elect or Vice President)
- Can be delegated to another member for segments of a meeting
  - Chair must ‘yield the chair’
  - Can be another officer, committee chair, etc
  - Must yield chair back to regular chair when done

# Quorum

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- You need certain number of board members present to conduct business
  - Ensures a sufficient amount of members are involved in decision making
  - NCSS Board Meeting
    - Regular business: minimum 60%
  - Local Chapters
    - As dictated by the Chapter By-Laws
  - Committees
    - Committees usually require at least  $\frac{1}{2}$  of the members (includes proxies)
- This is why we have a roll call
- Once established, it is maintained for the duration of the meeting, even if people leave (thus the concept of filibustering)

# The meeting

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- Call to order
- Attendance – Roll Call
- Financial Report of the Treasurer
- Committee Reports
  - Report of NSPS Delegate, Items Removed from the Consent Agenda, Special Reports, etc.
- Old Business
- New Business
- Announcements
- Adjournment

# The motion

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- A motion is a call to action
  - Can be a request to do something
  - Can be a request to vote
  - Can be a request to change something
- Essentially you are saying “I think we should consider doing this”

# Presenting an idea

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- The main motion
  - What you asking to be done
  - An actionable item that requires the group to make a decision on how to handle an item
- A secondary motion is a motion that affects the current main motion on the floor (more on this in a few minutes)

# The Second

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- The “second” makes the motion important enough to discuss
  - Eliminates unnecessary discussion on a point that only one member believes is worth discussing
  - If at least one other person believes the motion is worth discussing then they can put forth a second requiring action
  - A second doesn’t mean the person seconding agrees with the motion, but feels that it should at least be discussed
- Second can be shouted by any member, doesn’t require recognition by the chair
  - Good to note who made the second for the record

# Motions from Committee

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- Since a committee consists of more than one person, a second is implied
- If a committee recommends adoption of a motion, then its clear a majority of that committee (i.e. multiple people) believe the motion should be discussed
- **THEREFORE:** A second is not required!!
  - Common examples: Legislative committee, committee reports, etc.
  - “The committee recommends adoptions and WE do so move...”

# Discussion

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- After a motion is made and seconded, it belongs to the group; it's “on the floor”
  - The individual no longer has ownership of the motion
    - They can not voluntarily withdraw
    - They can not voluntarily change (thus why ‘friendly amendments’ don't really exist)
- Once on the floor, any further changes or withdraw of motion must be done by consensus of the members (see further motions)

# Discussion Etiquette

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- Any limits to discussion (time, number of times an individual can speak, total duration, etc.) should be defined in advance and agreed upon by the group
  - Motions to limit debate can be made “in order” but can often be construed as directed at specific members
- It is the duty of the chair to ensure discussion is orderly and relevant
  - **Individuals must be recognized by the chair before speaking**
  - Make sure discussion is directly related to the motion and its merits
- Certain motions do not allow discussion
  - Most often these are procedural motions

# Discussion Etiquette

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- Often good to alternate pros & cons
  - Helps to limit unnecessary discussion (i.e. if everyone agrees, you don't need 30 people defining why they agree if there is no dissent)
- Good for members to wait to speak a second time until all other interested members speak first
- Discussion should be directed towards the chair and not at other members
  - Reduces assumption of “direct attacks”

# Aye or Nay

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- Once the chair has recognized there is no further discussion, they can call the vote
  - A member may “call the question,” however this needs to be in order and should only be called if discussion has ended
    - Not meant to act as a way of limiting debate
- For most motions a result of  $>50\%$  ayes **of those voting** passes a motion

# Abstaining

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- How an abstention vote is counted depends on how the requirements are qualified
  - Abstentions are counted and noted, but not as a “yes” or “no” vote.
  - Abstentions do not affect the voting results
  - A member has the right to abstain and cannot be compelled to vote
  - A member has an obligation to abstain if he or she has a direct personal interest in the matter that amounts to a conflict of interest

# Types of Votes

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- Voice Votes
  - Can be utilized for a vast majority of votes to speed along the meeting
  - Chair makes decision on who is, essentially, the loudest
  - If you believe they made the wrong call, any member may call for division
    - This forces a hand count
  - Not ideal when proxies are utilized

# Types of Votes

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- Hand or standing vote
  - When called for aye or nay, the person raises their hand or stands
  - May be better for votes requiring 2/3 or when proxies are utilized (especially if one person holds several votes)
- Ballot voting
  - Mainly used for elections or important issues
  - Time consuming, limits utility

# Making changes

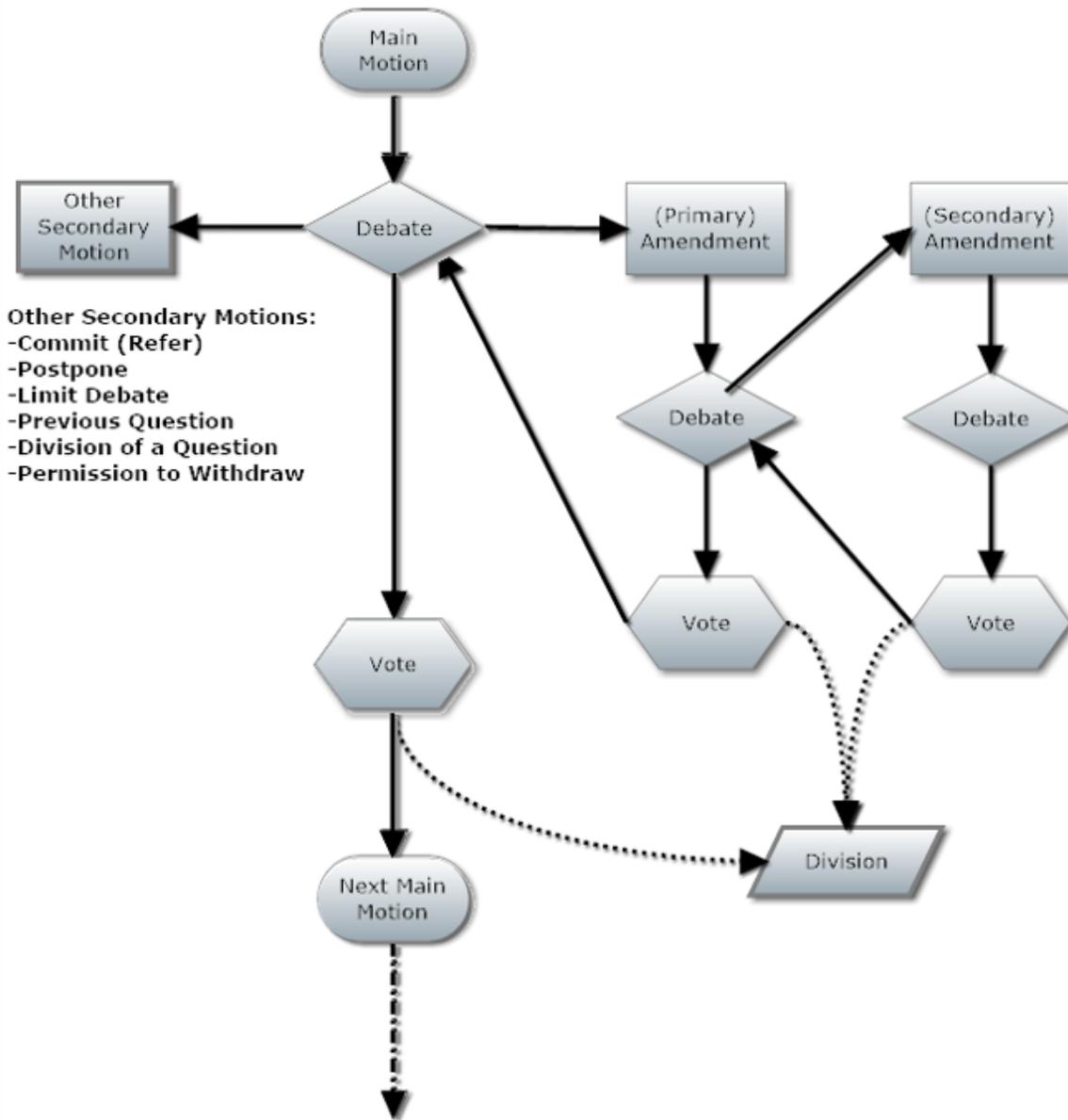
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- Motion to amend
  - Secondary motion
  - Changing the motion currently on the floor
    - Usually changing the wording of the motion or intent of the motion
  - Needs second, is debatable
    - At this point debate is limited only to whether the proposed change should be made, not on the merit of the original motion itself
  - Vote is only if the change should be made
    - Has no effect on whether main motion is accepted
    - I.e. voting on “should we make this change” not “should we do this”

# Making changes

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- Amendments may only be made to the second degree
  - i.e. you can propose a motion to amend (first degree) and a motion to amend the amendment (second degree), however these must be resolved prior to new motions coming to the floor.
- Once secondary motions to amend are made, discussion returns to the main motion
  - At this point, new secondary motions may be made



**Other Secondary Motions:**  
 -Commit (Refer)  
 -Postpone  
 -Limit Debate  
 -Previous Question  
 -Division of a Question  
 -Permission to Withdraw

# Commit/Refer

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- Motion to commit (or refer to committee)
  - Often used when its clear a motion hasn't been fully thought out
  - Can be used when more details need to be laid out for the group to make an informed decision
  - Motion must include the committee to which the motion will be referred and the proposed timeline for investigation
- Referred Committee
  - Can be one that already exists (preferred)
  - Can be to a special committee
    - If this is recommended, need to provide specifics of the committee and its purpose
- “I move the motion be referred to a committee of five members (either by naming them or by appointment of the Chair) and the committee report back at the next Board/chapter meeting”

# Postponement

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- Can be used for multiple reasons
  - You are running out of time and another more important item needs to be addressed
  - You want to think about it more before deciding
  - You don't want to deal with it right now
- Should not be used to avoid a vote or topic
  - i.e. “motion to postpone indefinitely”
  - Better to refer to committee or vote down
- Motion should include when the topic will be discussed
  - “Motion to postpone until the next board meeting”

# Division of a Question

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- Allows a longer or complicated motion to be split into two or more parts
  - No discussion on this one
  - For example, you agree that something should be done, but not for the reasons put forth in a motion
  - “I move that the Chapter host a fundraising event on May 30<sup>th</sup>, 2014 as a fundraiser for the American Red Cross”
  - Motion to divide the question into
    - First motion: I move the Chapter host a fundraising event on May 30<sup>th</sup>, 2014
    - Second motion: I move the fundraising event benefit the American Red Cross
- Once approved, the motions must then be handled as two separate main motions to be handled in sequence

# Limiting Debate

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- A right to discussion is an inherent part of participation in a meeting
  - However, must balance rights of the group, therefore this requires a larger vote, 2/3
- Ideally done in advance, such as in accepting board rules, etc.
- Various limits can be set, but motion must be specific
  - Limit total number of times an individual speaks or for how long each person speaks
  - Limit total time for discussion on a particular topic
  - Since specifics are outlined, it is amendable

# Calling the Question

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- Purpose is to end debate and call the vote
  - “Call the question” or “I move the previous question” can call this motion
- Needs to be in order as this would officially end debate
  - Group should allow reasonable amount of time for discussion before this motion is called
  - Can not call out in session, must rise and be recognized formally by the chair

# Question of Privilege

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- Consider them complaints
  - Often questions to ask for things interfering with your ability to participate in the meeting
    - Do not need to be recognized by the chair as it is something that needs to be addressed imminently
  - Most of the time deals with the setting of the meeting room itself
    - “Point of Privilege, can the chair have someone address the temperature in the room?”

# Adjourn

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- Effectively ends the meeting
  - Can be used (judiciously) to force the end of a meeting
    - Should only be used for this reason if there are time constraints, etc
  - Most often used when the agenda is completed
- If items are outstanding from the agenda, it gets put into unfinished business in the next meeting

# Point of Order

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- Calls the attention of the Chair to a potential breach of parliamentary procedure
  - Can be used if the chair makes a decision that conflicts with Robert's Rules of Order
    - They allowed a motion out of order, disregarded a motion that should have been considered, etc.
- Chair decides whether to accept or reject your point
- If you disagree with the Chair's decision, you can appeal the decision of the Chair
  - Chair then has to explain their ruling
  - The group can then debate whether or not to sustain the chair's ruling and votes to sustain or overrule the chair

# Point of information

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- Requests information or clarification to help make a decision on another motion
  - Asking how much the Board/Chapter budgeted for a given event
  - Asking what was done in previous years, etc.
- Can rise from seat, but should be acknowledged by the chair

# Permission to Withdraw

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- Requests a motion be withdrawn
  - Once a motion is seconded it belongs to the group, however it can be withdrawn as follows without a vote
  - Often debate brings to light that this is not a valid motion and you desire to retract the motion
  - Can only be done by the person who supplied the original motion
- Chair will ask if anyone objects to the withdrawal of the motion
  - If no objections, it is withdrawn
  - If there is even a single objection, there must be a vote to withdraw

# Reconsider

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- Can be moved at any point
  - Not out of order, but the action is not taken until and pending motions are finished
- Can only be called in the same meeting or the meeting immediately after the original vote
- Can only be moved by someone on the prevailing side of the original vote
  - Someone who voted 'aye' in a motion that won approval or 'nay' in a motion that failed to gain approval
  - Prevents minority from constantly bringing up a dead point
  - "I move to reconsider the vote on the Board/Chapter hosting the next educational seminar. I voted in favor of the motion"
- If a motion to reconsider is approved, the Board/Chapter addresses the previous question as a main motion

# Other Key Points

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- Amending By-Laws or Policy Manuals
  - Considered amending something previously adopted
  - Parameters often outlined in the document itself
    - 2/3 vote for By-Laws
    - Should be more difficult to amend than subordinate documents
- Nominations
  - A nomination of an individual for an office doesn't require a second
  - If no one else supports that person, they will simply lose the election

# Summary

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- Robert's Rules can be complex, but the basics are pretty easy to follow
- Helps improve participation and efficiency if used properly
- Chairs should be familiar with the basics, parliamentarians should know it well
- Practice makes perfect