

Robert's Rules of Order Cheat Sheet for Nonprofits

Robert's Rules of Order is a lengthy manual of parliamentary procedure that governs most boards of directors, which was first created in 1876 by Henry Martyn Robert as an adaptation of the rules and practices of Congress. With the latest versions of the manual totaling around 700 pages, a Robert's Rules of Order cheat sheet is useful for highlighting the most common processes used by today's boards.

To help simplify Robert's Rules of Order, we'll provide an overview of the following topics:

- The basics of Robert's Rules
- 6 categories of motions
- Steps for making a motion
- How to handle points of order
- Robert's Rules of Order cheat sheet
- Tips and reminders for board chairs

What is Robert's Rules of Order, and what is it used for?

Robert's Rules is a framework that is comprised of a set of codes and rules of ethics that helps groups hold orderly meetings that allow the majority to rule while allowing minority voices to be heard.

There are four primary types of motions in Robert's Rules of Order:

1. Main motions
2. Subsidiary motions
3. Incidental motions
4. Renewal motions

Robert's Rules of Order for meetings is the general standard for how nonprofit boards, committees and other established groups govern discussions and decision-making. Most nonprofits and groups use Robert's Rules because it ensures order and creates a ripe environment for [productivity](#).

Parliamentary procedure

A parliamentary procedure can be any set of rules and guidelines a group formally establishes to govern themselves, with Robert's Rules of Order being the most common type.

The goal of the parliamentary procedure is to set forth the order of discussions and ultimately get to a place where all group members can agree on what they want to accomplish or how to move

forward. By using an established set of rules and guidelines, members of the group can reach a consensus in a respectful, collegial manner.

Robert's Rules basics

New board members should learn the basics of Robert's Rules as soon as they join a board. Board members will use the basic rules for making decisions at most meetings.

Here is a general outline of the essential elements of Robert's Rules:

- **Motion** – A member makes a motion to propose an action or make a decision by saying, “I move to...”. Another member must second the motion by saying, “I second the motion.” Once someone seconds the motion, the group votes on the motion. It passes by a majority vote or a [quorum](#) depending on the rules in the bylaws.
- **Amend a motion** – Members use this process to change a motion and can do so by stating, “I move to amend the motion on the floor.” Again, this motion must be seconded and voted upon.
- **Commit** – Members use this type of motion to transfer a motion to a committee. As with other types of motions, it must be seconded and voted upon. Once it moves to a committee, the committee presents a report on the committed motion at the next meeting.
- **Question** – Members say, “I call the question” to end a debate or discussion. The motion must be seconded and voted upon without further discussion. A call for the question requires a two-thirds majority vote to pass. At this point, the members must immediately vote on the motion on the floor.
- **Adjourn** – This refers to moving to end the meeting. A member would say, “I move to adjourn,” and another member would second the motion. If the majority then votes to adjourn, the meeting is over.

If anything out of the ordinary comes up, board members can look up the rules during the meeting. When you store a copy of Robert's Rules in your [board management system](#), it is quickly and easily accessible if there is a question on proper meeting protocols.

Making a Motion

Board members must discuss one issue at a time to keep order in the boardroom. The board chair should only allow one person to speak at a time. Any member who wants to make a motion must request the floor—and be granted it—before speaking.

Robert's Rules classifies motions into the below categories.

6 categories of motions

1. **Main motion:** Introduces a new item
2. **Subsidiary motion:** Changes or affect how to handle a main motion (vote on this before the main motion)
3. **Privileged motion:** Brings up an urgent or essential matter unrelated to pending business
4. **Incidental motion:** Questions procedure of other motions
5. **Motion to table:** Kills a motion
6. **Motion to postpone:** Delays a vote (can reopen debate on the main motion)

You can read more about [these motions here](#).

Robert's Rules of Order motion steps

1. **Motion:** A member rises or raises a hand to signal the chairperson.
2. **Second:** Another member seconds the motion.
3. **Restate motion:** The chairperson restates the motion.
4. **Debate:** The members debate the motion.
5. **Vote:** The chairperson restates the motion, and then first asks for affirmative votes, and then negative votes.
6. **Announce the vote:** The chairperson announces the result of the vote and any instructions.

You can read more about the motions and how to use them in this article, [“Robert's Rules of Order: Types of Motions”](#).

TIP! If the board is in obvious agreement, the chairperson may save time by stating, “If there is no objection, we will adopt the motion to...” Then wait for any objections. Then say, “Hearing no objections, (state the motion) is adopted.” And then state any instructions.

If a member objects, first ask for a debate, then vote, and then announce the vote.

Points in Robert's Rules of Order

Certain situations need attention during the meeting, but they don't require a motion, second, debate, or voting. It's permissible to state a point during a meeting where the chairperson needs to handle a situation right away. Board members can declare a Point of Order, Point of Information, Point of Inquiry, or Point of Personal Privilege.

- **Point of Order:** A member draws attention to a breach of rules, improper procedure, breaching of established practices, etc.
- **Point of Information:** A member can ask for a point of information if they want more information on a motion. A point of information should not be used as a means for the person calling for a point of information to present information.
- **Point of Inquiry:** A member may use a point of inquiry to ask for clarification in a report to make better voting decisions.
- **Point of Personal Privilege:** A member may use a point of personal privilege to address the physical comfort of the setting such as temperature or noise. Members may also use it to address the accuracy of published reports or the accuracy of a member's conduct.

**Note: A member may make a motion to reconsider something that was already disposed of; however, the reconsidered motion may not be subsequently reconsidered. A motion to reconsider must be made during the same meeting and can extend to a meeting that lasts for more than one day.*

Robert's Rules: Tips and reminders for chairpersons

Robert's Rules of Order was developed to ensure that meetings are fair, efficient, democratic and orderly. A skilled chairperson allows all members to voice their opinions in an orderly manner so that everyone in the meeting can hear and be heard. The following tips and reminders will help chairpersons run a successful and productive meeting without being run over or running over others.

- Follow the agenda to keep the group moving toward its goals.
- Let the group do its work — don't over-command.
- Control the flow of the meeting by recognizing members who ask to speak.
- Let all members speak once before allowing anyone to speak a second time.
- When discussions get off-track, gently guide the group back to the agenda.
- Model courtesy and respect and insist that others do the same.
- Help to develop the board's skills in the parliamentary procedure by properly using motions and points of order.
- Encourage members to present motions positively rather than negatively.
- Give each speaker your undivided attention.
- Keep an emotional pulse on the discussions.
- Allow a consensus to have the final authority of the group.

Furthering your board's knowledge of Robert's Rules of Order

All board members should be familiar with Robert's Rules of Order, which they can find [online](#) and in bookstores, and this Robert's Rules of Order cheat sheet for 2023 is a handy resource for your board and all new members.

Now that we've covered the basics, a deeper understanding of Robert's Rules is essential. The next step is to learn how to handle abstentions for a more streamlined board procedure. In our article, [the six reasons why nonprofit board members abstain](#), we discuss this topic in length.

Robert's Rules of Order for meetings is an informative and fascinating topic. The more board members learn about how to use Robert's Rules, the more effectively they will govern, and effective governance is the hallmark of a quality board.