

Robert's Rules of Order – Brief Primer

If you've never participated in a meeting using "Robert's Rules of Order", you can muddle through one if you remember these six concepts.

1.) To discuss a topic it must first be moved

Example:

Member A, "I move that we...."

2.) When a motion is seconded it is then open for discussion and debate.

Example:

Member B, "I second that motion."

All members have the opportunity to express their opinion on the motion. At this time, discussion and debate is limited to only the motion on the "table". Any other discussion is considered out of order**.

3.) Motions can be amended, but the amendment must first be moved.

Example:

Member C: "I move to amend the motion by..."

4.) When an amendment is seconded it is then open for discussion and debate.

Example:

Member D: "I second that motion."

At this point all discussion should be focused on the amendment, not the initial motion. Debate and discussion that is not focused on the amendment is considered out of order**.

5.) When discussion on an amendment is complete, a vote can be called and tallied.

6.) After action on the amendment is complete, discussion on the initial motion can continue and a vote called. Please note that the amendment is resolved first and then the initial motion. All motions -- the initial motion and subsequent amendments (maximum of two) -- are discussed and voted on starting with the last and moving toward the first.

Pretty easy, huh? This is how it looks in the most condensed version:

Move to discuss it. Second it. Discuss it. Vote on it. Next topic.

Or, when condensing a more complex version it looks like this:

Move to discuss it. Second it. Discuss it.

Amend it. Second it. Discuss it.

Amend it. Second it. Discuss it. Vote on it.

Final discussion of it. Vote on it.

Final discussion on it. Vote on it. Next topic.

**Now you can muddle through a meeting without feeling lost. As you get more familiar with the rules, you can jump in with motions to call the question, raise a point of order or raise a point of information.

There are a handful of motions that you can make during the discussion of a motion or its amendments that are not considered out of order.

For example: If the room is too warm you can "Raise a Question of Privilege" and ask that the window be opened or thermostat turned down.

If you anticipate that the debate will be lengthy, you can "Move to limit the time available for debate to" -- oh, say -- "5 minutes". The motion must be seconded and then achieve a 2/3 majority to pass.

Or, if the topic being discussed is out of line with the agenda of the day, you can, "Call for Orders of the Day" -- in other words, stick to the agenda -- which must also be seconded, it is not debated, and 1/3 of the members must vote yes to pass.

As you become more familiar with the Rules, you can help the Business Chair if members are straying by calling for a "Point of Order" and then explaining why the current situation is not within the rules.