

Robert's Rules of Order

Parliamentary Basics

From the National Association of Parliamentarians

Motions

There are several *classes* of motions you may encounter in meetings, listed below. The most commonly used motions belong to the *thirteen ranking motions*.

To review the procedure for handling a motion, see [Parliamentary Basics - Presiding](#).

Classes of Motions

There are several classes of motions you may encounter in meetings:

The **main motion** is the basis of all parliamentary procedure. All business to be considered by an assembly is introduced by a main motion. This type of motion may only be considered if no other business is pending.

Subsidiary motions are those that may be applied to another motion for the purpose of modifying it, delaying action on it, or disposing of it.

Privileged motions are motions that are unrelated to the current motion, but are of such urgency or importance that they are considered immediately. These motions are related to members, the organization, and meeting procedure rather than the item of business being considered.

Incidental motions are motions that are related to, or incidental to, the business being considered, but do not directly modify the pending motion.

Motions that bring a question again before the assembly, or **bring-back** motions, are a special type of main motion that permit the assembly to consider business that was previously disposed of.

Thirteen ranking motions

The main motion, subsidiary motions, and privileged motions all have rank relative to one another. The table below illustrates the motions' rank and basic characteristics.

Thirteen Ranking Motions

Name of Motion	Is it in order when another has the floor?	Does it require a second?	Is it debatable?	Is it amendable?	What vote is required for adoption?	May it be reconsidered?	
Fix the Time to Which to Adjourn*	No	Yes	No	Yes	M	Yes	PRIVILEGED
Adjourn**	No	Yes	No	No	M	No	
Recess*	No	Yes	No	Yes	M	No	
Raise a Question of Privilege	Yes	No	No	No	(1)	No	
Call for the Orders of the Day	Yes	No	No	No	(2)	No	
Lay on the Table	No	Yes	No	No	M	No	SUBSIDIARY
Previous Question	No	Yes	No	No	2/3	Yes	
Limit or Extend Limits of Debate	No	Yes	No	Yes	2/3	(3)	
Postpone to a Certain Time (Definitely)	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	M(4)	Yes	
Commit (Refer to a Committee)	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	M	(5)	
Amend	No	Yes	(6)	Yes	M	Yes	
Postpone Indefinitely	No	Yes	Yes	No	M	(7)	
Main Motion	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	M	Yes	

Based on *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised (RONR)*

* A main motion if made when no business pending

** Check RONR for specific rules

- (1) Chair grants
- (2) No vote: demand
- (3) Yes, the unexecuted part may be reconsidered
- (4) 2/3 vote required if made a special order
- (5) Yes, if the committee has not started work
- (6) Yes, if applied to a debatable motion
- (7) Only an affirmative vote may be reconsidered

Discussion and Debate

Discussion, or *debate* in parliamentary terms, is how an assembly decides whether a proposed course of action should be followed. Disagreement is healthy, and helps the organization make the best decision *if* discussion is approached fairly and consistently:

- Before speaking in debate, members obtain the floor as described in Parliamentary Basics - Presiding.
- The person who makes a motion may speak on it first, if he expresses the desire to do so.
- All remarks are addressed to the chair, not to other members.
- Debate is confined to the merits of the motion currently under consideration.
- Debate can only be closed by order of the assembly (2/3 vote), or by the chair if no one seeks the floor for further debate.

Presiding

Two essential components of effectively presiding over a meeting are preparing and following an agenda, and handling motions fairly and consistently.

Sample Meeting Agenda

(Excerpted from the NAP publication, *The Chair's Guide: Order of Business*)

- Call to Order
- Opening Ceremonies (optional)
- Roll Call (if customary)
- Reading and Approval of Minutes
- Reports of Officers, Boards, and Standing Committees
- Reports of Special Committees (announced only if such committees are prepared or instructed to report)
- Special Orders (announced only if there are special orders)
- Unfinished Business and General Orders
- New Business
- Announcements
- Program (if a program or a speaker is planned for the meeting)
- Adjourn

Procedure for Handling a Main Motion

Obtaining and Assigning the Floor

1. A member rises when no one else has the floor and addresses the chair: "Mr./Madam President," "Mr./Madam Chairman," or by other proper title. (In a large assembly, the member gives his name and identification.)

The member remains standing and awaits recognition by the chair.

2. The chair recognizes the member by announcing his name or title, or, in a small assembly, by nodding to him.

How the Motion is Brought Before the Assembly

1. The member makes the motion: "I move that (or 'to')..." and resumes his seat.

2. Another member, without rising, seconds the motion: "I second the motion," or "I second it" or even just "second."

3. The chair states the motion: "It is moved and seconded that Are you ready for the question?"

Consideration of the Motion

1. Members debate the motion. (See Parliamentary Basics - Discussion).

2. The chair puts the motion to a vote.

The chair asks: "Are you ready for the question?" If no one rises to claim the floor, the chair proceeds to take the vote.

The chair says: "The question is on the adoption of the motion that... As many as are in favor, say 'Aye'. (Pause for response.) Those opposed, say 'No'. (Pause for response.)

3. The chair announces the result of the vote.

"The ayes have it, the motion is adopted, and (indicating the effect of the vote)," or

"The noes have it, and the motion is lost."

BASIC CHARACTERISTICS OF MOTIONS

From: *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Robert's Rules*
The Guerrilla's Guide to Robert's Rules

MOTION	PURPOSE	INTERRUPT SPEAKER?	SECOND NEEDED?	DEBATABLE?	AMENDABLE?	VOTE NEEDED
1. Fix the time to which to adjourn	Sets the time for a continued meeting	No	Yes	No ¹	Yes	Majority
2. Adjourn	Closes the meeting	No	Yes	No	No	Majority
3. Recess	Establishes a brief break	No	Yes	No ²	Yes	Majority
4. Raise a Question of Privilege	Asks urgent question regarding to rights	Yes	No	No	No	Ruled by chair
5. Call for orders of the day	Requires that the meeting follow the agenda	Yes	No	No	No	One member
6. Lay on the table	Puts the motion aside for later consideration	No	Yes	No	No	Majority
7. Previous question	Ends debate and moves directly to the vote	No	Yes	No	No	Two thirds
8. Limit or extend limits of debate	Changes the debate limits	No	Yes	No	Yes	Two thirds
9. Postpone to a certain time	Puts off the motion to a specific time	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority ³
10. Commit or refer	Refers the motion to a committee	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority
11. Amend an amendment (secondary amendment)	Proposes a change to an amendment	No	Yes	Yes ⁴	No	Majority
12. Amend a motion or resolution (primary amendment)	Proposes a change to a main motion	No	Yes	Yes ⁴	Yes	Majority
13. Postpone indefinitely	Kills the motion	No	Yes	Yes	No	Majority
14. Main motion	Brings business before the assembly	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority

¹ Is debatable when another meeting is scheduled for the same or next day, or if the motion is made while no question is pending

² Unless no question is pending

³ Majority, unless it makes question a special order

⁴ If the motion it is being applied to is debatable

Motions above are in the Order of Precedence of Motions.

BASIC CHARACTERISTICS OF MOTIONS

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MOTION	PURPOSE	INTERRUPT SPEAKER?	SECOND NEEDED?	DEBATABLE?	AMENDABLE?	VOTE NEEDED
Point of order	Requests that the rules be followed	Yes	No	No	No	Ruled by chair
Appeal from the decision of the chair	Challenges a ruling of the chair	Yes	Yes	Depends ⁴	No	Majority ⁵
Suspend the rules	Allows the group to violate the rules (not bylaws)	No	Yes	No	No	Two thirds
Objection to consideration	Keeps the motion from being considered	Yes ⁶	No	No	No	Two thirds ⁷
Division of the question	Separates consideration of the motion	No	Yes	No	Yes	Majority
Division of the assembly	Requires a standing vote	Yes	No	No	No	One member
Parliamentary inquiry or point of information	Allows a member to ask a question about business at hand	Yes	No	No	No	Responded to by chair
Withdraw a motion (after stated by chair)	Removes a motion from consideration	Yes	Depends ⁸	No	No	Majority
Take from the table	Resumes considering a motion that was laid on the table	No	Yes	No	No	Majority
Reconsider	Considers a motion again	Yes ⁹	Yes	Depends ¹⁰	No	Majority
Rescind or amend something previously adopted	Repeals a previously adopted motion or amends it after it has been adopted	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Depends ¹¹

- 5 Majority in negative required to reverse chair's decision
- 6 When another member has been assigned the floor, until debate has begun or a subsidiary motion has been stated by the chair
- 7 Two thirds against consideration sustains objection
- 8 Yes, if motion is made by person requesting permission; no, if made by another member
- 9 When another has been assigned the floor, but not after he has begun to speak
- 10 Only if motion to be reconsidered is debatable
- 11 a) a majority with notice; b) two thirds; or c) majority of entire membership