

# **BASICS OF ROBERT'S RULES**

## **A PARLIAMENTARY PROCEDURE WORKSHOP**

Presentation by: Quan Remmer

For: Hillsborough County Council PTA Training



“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

- Often seen as a hindrance to meetings
- More effective for larger meetings
  - May not be as effective in small committees
- If used properly it helps
  - Make meetings fair by allowing everyone's voice to be heard
  - Make meetings efficient by setting structure and time to the meetings



# MY RIGHTS VS. OUR RIGHT

- 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 member or officers)
  - Must balance with rights of the organization to conduct business, thus the purpose of the rules



# HOW YOUR MEETINGS ARE NOW

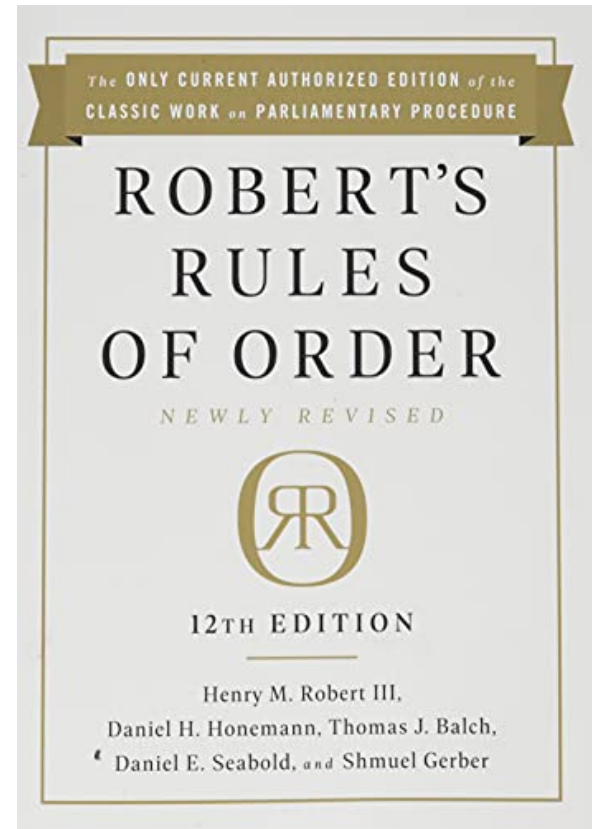


# HOW THEY SHOULD BE



# IT'S NOT THAT HARD

- No one is meant to read ALL of RONR
- There are key things to understand in everyday meetings
- Practice is the best way of learning it



*Ignorance of the rules and customs of deliberative assemblies is a heavy handicap to anyone who expects to influence the policy of a society.*

**Henry M. Robert**  
Robert's Rules of Order preface, 1876

# SILENCE IS CONSENT

Not understanding parliamentary language

=

being voiceless

*Robert's 'Rules of Order' are the rules of a fight; they are intended to prevent unfair advantage and to give the minority a fighting chance.*

# THE CHAIR

- The person that runs meetings, calls the votes, and ensures adherence to an agenda
  - Usually the head of the organization (President)
- Can be delegated to another member for the duration of a meeting (if President absent)
  - Refer to bylaws for who takes over in absence of usual chairperson
- 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

- You need AT LEAST this many people to conduct business
  - Ensures a sufficient number of members are involved in decision making
  - Executive Committee Meetings
    - The majority of the executive committee shall constitute a quorum.
  - General Membership Meetings
    - Minimum of 10 members shall constitute a quorum unless Article VIII states otherwise.
- This is why you do roll call
- Once established, it is maintained for the duration of the meeting, even if people leave (thus the concept of filibustering)



# THE MEETING

- Call to order
- Minutes of the Previous Meeting
  - Should be approved by the Association (official record)
- Reports of the Officers
  - Report of the Treasurer
- Committee Reports
- Unfinished Business
- New Business
- Announcements
- Adjournment



# THE MOTION

- 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”



# THE CHART

- Can utilize a chart to assist with better understanding the quirks of different types of motions



Requires  $\frac{1}{2}$  (simple majority) to pass



Requires  $\frac{2}{3}$  vote to pass



Requires a second for consideration



Debatable item



Not a debatable item



Amendable



Chair determines if in order










# PRESENTING AN IDEA



- The main motion
  - What you want to be done
  - An actionable item that requires the group to make a decision on how to handle it
  - A motion that affects the main motion is a secondary motion.

## Key:

-  Requires ½ (simple majority) to pass
-  Requires 2/3 vote to pass
-  Requires a second for consideration
-  Debatable item
-  Not a debatable item
-  Amendable
-  Chair determines if in order



# THE SECOND

- 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

- 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: Ways & Means committee, Advocacy committee, committee reports, etc
  - “The committee recommends adoptions and WE do so move...”



# DISCUSSION

- 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 chapter (see further motions)





# DISCUSSION ETIQUETTE

- 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 misconstrued 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 (see chart)
  - Most often these are procedural motions



# DISCUSSION ETIQUETTE

- 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)
- No member can speak more than twice to each debatable motion. The second time takes place after everyone wishing to debate the motion has had an opportunity to speak once.
- No member can speak more than ten minutes or as decided by members. Many PTAs limit debate to three (3) minutes per speaker by general consent (if anyone objects to general consent it will take a 2/3 vote to limit debate) at the beginning of the meeting
- Discussion should be directed towards the chair and not at other members
  - Reduces assumption of “direct attacks”



# AYE OR NAY

- 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








Simply put, an abstention refers to the decision by a board member not to vote. The board member isn't voting for the issue nor against it.

- How an abstention vote is counted depends on how the requirements are qualified
  - Robert's Rules defines a majority as those who are present and voting. Therefore, since abstainers aren't voting, they aren't counted as part of the majority.
  - A majority may be based on the number of individuals present or the number of total members. If a majority is based on the number of total members, abstentions count as no-votes because the basis for the majority is a fixed number.



# TYPES OF VOTES

## Key:

-  Requires ½ (simple majority) to pass
-  Requires 2/3 vote to pass
-  Requires a second for consideration
-  Debatable item
-  Not a debatable item
-  Amendable
-  Chair determines if in order

## ▪ 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 (see chart)
  - This forces a hand count
- Not ideal when proxies are utilized



## ▪ 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 pledging, etc
- Time consuming, limits utility



## Key:

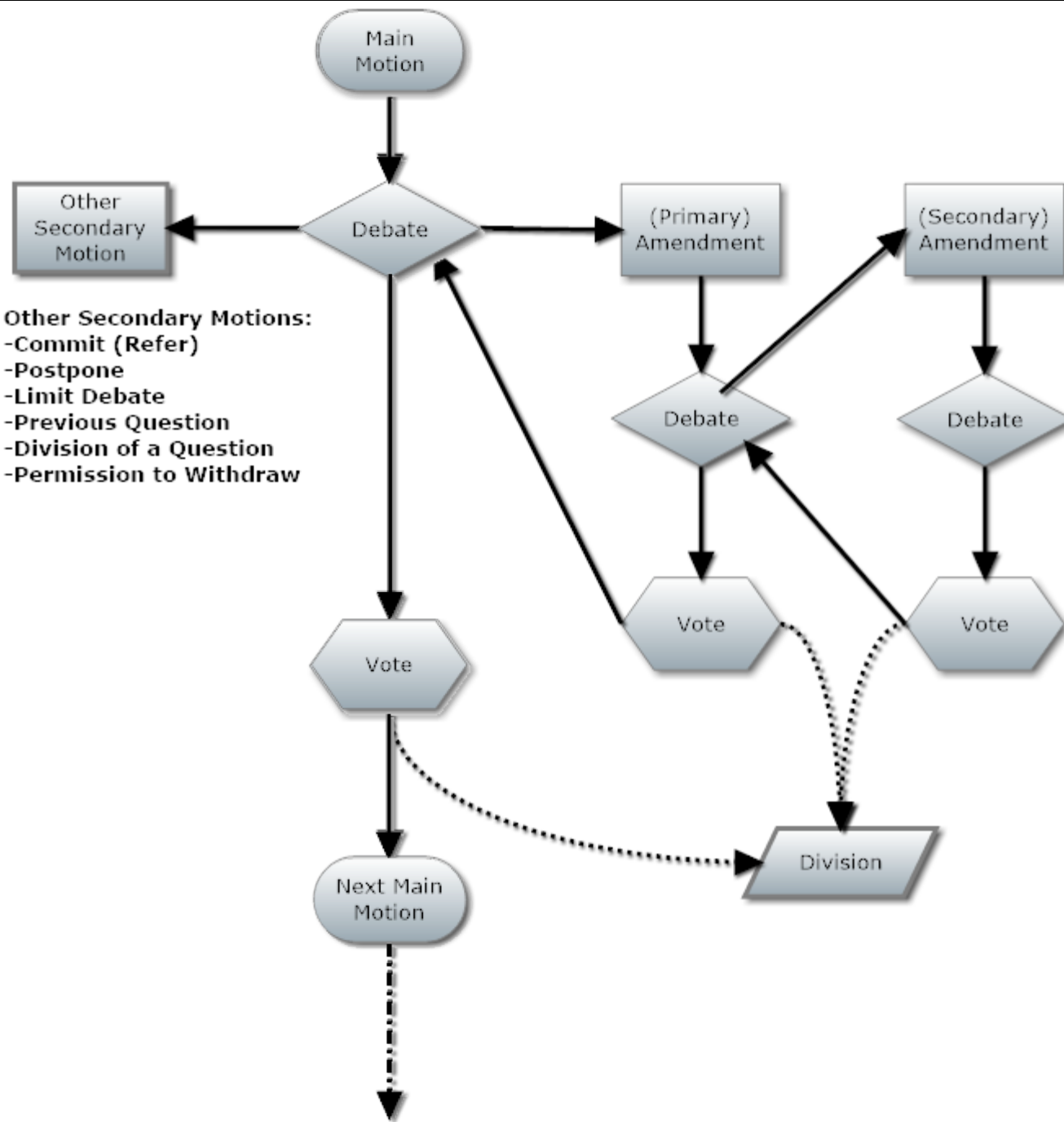
-  Requires 1/2 (simple majority) to pass
-  Requires 2/3 vote to pass
-  Requires a second for consideration
-  Debatable item
-  Not a debatable item
-  Amendable
-  Chair determines if in order

# MAKING CHANGES



- 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”
- 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





# COMMIT/REFER



- Motion to commit (or refer to committee)
  - Often used when it's 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 chapter meeting”





# POSTPONEMENT



- 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 business meeting"



# DIVISION OF A QUESTION



- 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 Association host a fundraising event on October 24<sup>th</sup>, 2022 as a fundraiser for the teachers and staff”
  - Motion to divide the question into
    - First motion: I move the Association host a fundraising event on October 24<sup>th</sup>, 2022
    - Second motion: I move the fundraising event benefit the teachers and staff
- Once approved, the motions must then be handled as two separate main motions to be handled in sequence



# LIMITING DEBATE



- 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 house 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



- 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

## Key:

-  Requires ½ (simple majority) to pass
-  Requires 2/3 vote to pass
-  Requires a second for consideration
-  Debatable item
-  Not a debatable item
-  Amendable
-  Chair determines if in order



# QUESTION OF PRIVILEGE



- Consider them complaints
  - Often are questions to ask for changes to be made, because something is 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?”
    - “Point of Privilege, there are children looking into the room, can we take care of that?”
    - “Point of privilege, there is a water leak, can we change rooms?”



# ADJOURN



- 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



- 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 RROR
    - 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 they will sustain the chair's ruling and votes to sustain or overrule the chair



# POINT OF INFORMATION



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





# PERMISSION TO WITHDRAW



- 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 desire to retract is present
  - 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



- Can be moved at any point
  - Not out of order, but the action is not taken until any 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 cookie dough fundraiser. I voted in favor of the motion”
- If a motion to reconsider is approved, the Association addresses the previous question as a main motion



# OTHER KEY POINTS

- Amending By-Laws
  - Considered amending something previously adopted
  - Parameters often outlined in the document itself
    - 2/3 vote for By-Laws



# SUMMARY

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

