

Sonoma State University Academic Senate

Robert's Rules of Order Made Simple

[Rules for Common Motions at our Senate - download](#)

Points

The following three points are always in order:

- **Point of Order:** .When a member thinks that the rules of the assembly are being violated, s/he can make a Point of Order (or "raise a question of order," as it is sometimes expressed), thereby calling upon the chair for a ruling and an enforcement of the regular rules.
- **Point of Information:** a *request for information* on a specific question, either about process or about the content of a motion. A point of information does not give the speaker the privilege to provide information. If you have information for the body, raise your hand to be put on the speakers list.
- **Point of Personal Question of Privilege:** a comment addressing a personal need - a direct response to a comment defaming one's character, a plea to open the windows, etc.a device that permits a request or main motion relating to the rights and privileges of the assembly or any of its members to be brought up for possible immediate consideration because of its urgency, while business is pending and the request or motion would otherwise be out of order.*The most common example is a motion to enter into Executive Session. Our Senate rarely does this. Questions of Personal Privilege are almost never ruled in order to interrupt business.*

Motions

- * All main motions must be seconded, and are adopted by a majority vote unless otherwise noted.
- * All main motions may be debated unless otherwise noted.

Motions are of four five types: **privileged, subsidiary, incidental, main** and **motions that bring a question again before the assembly**.

- **Privileged** motions have precedence over nearly all other motions. They fall within a list of precedence.
- **Subsidiary motions yield precedence to the privileged motions and take precedence over main motions. They fall within a list of precedence.**Subsidiary motions assist the assembly in treating or disposing of a main motion (and sometimes other motions).
- **Incidental** motions do not properly fall within the list of precedence, since they usually arise out of the business of the assembly. They may be proposed at any time, and must be decided as they arise. They fall within no list of precedence among themselves.
- **Original main motions** and **incidental main motions** differ principally in the nature of their subject matter. Original main motions bring business before the group, and incidental main motions is a main motion that is incidental to or relates to the business of the assembly, or its past or future action. bring a question again before the group. Those motions are of the lowest rank and take precedence over no others. They fall within no list of precedence among themselves.
- **Motions that bring a question again before the assembly**– Fall within no list of precedence among themselves. Like main motions, all of the motions that bring a question again before the assembly are usually made (and three of them can only be made) while no business is pending.

The following Motions are in order of precedence: motions may be made only if no motion of equal or higher precedence is on the floor (i.e., don't do a number 9 (refer to committee) when the body is considering a number 7 (motion to extend or limit debate)).

1. **Fix The Time to Which to Adjourn** – Sets the time for an adjourned meeting which is a continuation of the current meeting held at another time before the next regular meeting.
2. **Motion to Adjourn** - not debatable; goes to immediate majority vote.
3. **Motion to Recess** - not debatable. May be for a specific time.
4. **Call for Orders of the Day** – A demand to return to the regular order of business.
5. **Lay on the Table** – Misused 99.999999% of the time. This motion is only used to set aside the pending motion to take up something more urgent, with the full expectation of returning to the motion. It is NOT intended to kill a motion and cannot be used for that purpose due to its high rank.
6. **Move for the Previous Question; Motion to End Debate and Vote; Call the Question** - A motion to close debate immediately and vote now on the pending motion. Applies only to the motion on the floor. Not debatable; requires 2/3 vote.
7. **Motion to Limit or Extend Debate** - can be general, or for a specific time or number of speakers. Not debatable.
8. **Postpone to a Certain Time** – Postpones the current motion to the next session or to an adjourned meeting.
9. **Motion to Refer to Committee** - applies only to the main motion. Refers question to a specific group with a specific time and charge.
10. **Motion to Amend** - must be voted for by a majority to be considered and to be passed.
11. **Postpone Indefinitely** – Kills the motion without directly voting it down
12. **Main Motion** - what it is you're debating and amending.

Motions can also be classified according to purpose or special situation:

To modify a motion:

Amend (Subsidiary)

To suppress debate or hasten action:

Call for orders of the day (Privileged)

Previous question (Subsidiary)

Limit debate (Subsidiary)

Suspend rules (Incidental)

Take from the table (Main)(Motions that bring a question again before the assembly)

Make special order of business (Main)(not a classified motion in and of itself. It is often tacked on to a motion to postpone, or during the adoption of an agenda)

To delay action:

Postpone to a definite time (Subsidiary) – The motion that almost always should be used instead of lay on the table.

To lay on the table (Subsidiary)– Almost Never in Order.

Refer to committee (Subsidiary)

To prevent action:

Postpone indefinitely (Subsidiary)

Object to consideration (Incidental)

Withdraw a motion (Incidental)

To consider more carefully:

Extend debate (Subsidiary)

Divide question (Incidental)

Committee of the whole (Incidental)

To change a decision: (Motions that Bring a Question again before the assembly)

Reconsider (Main)

Rescind or Amend Something Previously Adopted (Main)

To maintain rules and order:

Question of privilege (Privileged)

Point of order (Privileged)

Appeal from decision of chair (Incidental)

Parliamentary inquiry (Incidental)

Request for information (Incidental)

To close a meeting:

To fix time of next meeting (Privileged)

Adjourn (Privileged)

Recess (Privileged)

Glossary

Amend

An amendment is a motion to change, to add words to, or to omit words from, a pending original motion. The change is usually to clarify or improve the wording of the original motion and must, of course, be germane to that motion.

An amendment cannot interrupt another speaker, must be seconded, is debatable if the motion to be amended is debatable, may itself be amended by an amendment to the amendment, can be reconsidered, and requires a majority vote, even if the motion to be amended requires a two-thirds vote to be adopted.

The chair should allow full discussion of the amendment (being careful to restrict debate to the amendment, not the original motion) and should then have a vote taken on the amendment only, making sure the members know they are voting on the amendment, but not on the original motion. The assembly can *order the previous question* on this motion the same as any debatable motion.

If the amendment is defeated, another amendment may be proposed, or discussion will proceed on the original motion.

If the amendment carries, the meeting does not necessarily vote immediately on the "motion as amended." Because the discussion of the principle of the original motion was not permitted during debate on the amendment, there may be members who want to speak now on the issue raised in the original motion.

Other amendments may also be proposed, provided that they do not alter or nullify the amendments already passed. Finally, the meeting will vote on the "motion as amended" or, if all amendments are defeated, on the original motion.

An amendment to an amendment is a motion to change, to add words to, or omit words from, the first amendment. The rules for an amendment (above) apply here, except that the amendment to an amendment is not itself amendable and that it takes precedence over the first amendment.

Debate proceeds and a vote is taken on the amendment to the amendment, then on the first amendment, and finally on the original motion ("as amended," if the amendment has been carried).

Only one amendment to an amendment is permissible.

Sometimes a main motion is worded poorly, and several amendments may be presented to improve the wording. In such cases it is sometimes better to have a substitute motion rather than to try to solve the wording problem with amendments.

An individual (or a group of two or three) can be asked to prepare a substitute wording for the original motion. If there is unanimous agreement, the meeting can agree to the withdrawal of the original motion (together with any amendments passed or pending) and the substitution of the new motion for debate.

Point of Order

This motion permits a member to draw the chair's attention to what he/she believes to be an error

in procedure or a lack of decorum in debate. The member will rise and say: "I rise to a point of order," or simply "Point of order." The chair should recognize the member, who will then state the point of order. The effect is to require the chair to make an immediate ruling on the question involved. The chair will usually give his/her reasons for making the ruling. If the ruling is thought to be wrong, the chair can be challenged.

A point of order can interrupt another speaker, does not require a second, is not debatable, is not amendable, and cannot be reconsidered.

Requests and Inquiries

a. Parliamentary Inquiry. A request for the chair's opinion (not a ruling) on a matter of parliamentary procedure as it relates to the business at hand. This opinion is not subject to appeal.

b. Point of Information. A question about facts affecting the business at hand-directed to the chair. The chair then directs all questions "through the chair" to the member. A member should only address the chair.

c. Request for Permission to Withdraw or Modify a Motion. Although Robert's Rules of Order specify that until a motion has been accepted by the chair it is the property of the mover, who can withdraw it or modify it as s/he chooses, a common practice is that once the agenda has been adopted, the items on it become the property of the meeting. A person may not, therefore, withdraw a motion unilaterally; he or she may do so only with the consent of the meeting, which has adopted an agenda indicating that the motion is to be debated.

Similarly, a person cannot, without the consent of the meeting, change the wording of any motion that has been given ahead of time to those attending the meeting—for example, distributed in printed form in advance, printed on the agenda, a motion of which notice has been given at a previous meeting, etc. If a person does want to change the wording, they must move to substitute or amend before the body can consider the changed motion.

The usual way in which consent of a meeting to withdraw a motion is obtained is for the mover to ask the consent of the meeting to withdraw (or change the wording). If no one objects, the chairperson announces that there being no objections, that the motion is withdrawn or that the modified wording is the motion to be debated.

If anyone objects, the chair can put a motion permitting the member to withdraw (or modify) or any two members may move and second that permission be granted. A majority vote decides the question of modifying a motion—similar to amending the motion. A two-thirds majority is needed for permission to withdraw a motion, as this has the effect of amending the agenda.

Motions Related to Methods of Voting

A member can move that a vote be taken by roll call, by ballot or that the standing vote be counted if a division of the meeting appears to be inconclusive and the chair neglects to order a count. Such motions may not interrupt another speaker, must be seconded, are not debatable, are amendable, can be reconsidered, and require majority votes. By-laws may specify a secret ballot for such votes as the election of officers which is not suspendable under any circumstances.

Quorum of Members

Before a meeting can conduct business it requires a quorum--the minimum number of members

who must be present at the meeting before business can be legally transacted. The requirement of a quorum is a protection against unrepresentative action in the name of the association by an unduly small number of people.

Postpone Indefinitely

Despite its name, this motion is not one to postpone, but one to suppress or kill a pending main motion.

If an embarrassing main motion is brought before a meeting, a member can propose to dispose of the question (without bringing it to a direct vote) by moving to postpone indefinitely. Such a motion can be made at any time nothing other when than the main motion is pending except when a speaker has the floor. If passed, the motion kills the matter under consideration. It requires a second, may be debated (including debate on the main motion), cannot be amended, can be reconsidered only if the motion is passed, and requires a majority vote.

Refer

When it is obvious that a meeting does not have enough information to make a wise decision, or when it seems advisable to have a small group work out details that would take too much time in a large meeting, a member may move: "That the question be referred to the _____ committee" (or "to a committee"--not named).

A motion to refer cannot interrupt another speaker, must be seconded, is debatable only as to the propriety or advisability of referral, can be amended, can be reconsidered if the group to which the question has been referred *has not begun work on the matter*, and requires a majority vote.

If a motion to refer is passed, the committee to which the matter is referred should report on the question at a subsequent meeting. Sometimes the motion to refer will state the time at which a report will be required.

Table (Lay on the Table)

Sometimes a meeting wants to lay a main motion aside temporarily without setting a time for resuming its consideration but with the provision that the motion can be taken up again whenever the majority so decides. This is accomplished by a motion to table or to lay on the table. Tabling should only be used to take up something very urgent and then return to the tabled motion.

Adjourn

A member can propose to close the meeting entirely and immediately by moving to adjourn. This motion can be made and the meeting can adjourn even while business is pending, providing that the time for the next meeting is established by a rule of the association or has been set by the meeting. In such a case, unfinished business is carried over to the next meeting.

A motion to adjourn may not interrupt another speaker, must be seconded, is not debatable, is not amendable, cannot be reconsidered, and requires a majority vote.

Recess

A member can propose a short intermission in a meeting, even while business is pending, by moving to recess for a specified length of time.

A motion to take a recess may not interrupt another speaker, must be seconded, is not debatable, can be amended (for example, to change the length of the recess), cannot be reconsidered, and requires a majority vote.

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[Return to Senate Home Page](#)