

MISCELLANEOUS RULES
&
TIPS FOR ORDERLY MEETINGS

1. If your organization's bylaws or procedural rules say you have to use *Robert's Rules*, then you do. It's a mandate, not an option.
2. The person with authority to rule on a procedural matter is the presiding officer, not the parliamentarian. The latter is available for consultation, but the former makes the ruling. She shouldn't blame the parliamentarian if she doesn't like the result. Thus, it is incumbent on the presiding officer to have a basic knowledge of the procedural rules. If you've been elected to be in charge, show that you know what to do.
3. The presiding officer must control the discussion.

Be sure that discussion comes at the proper time. Many meetings get out of hand because discussion takes off before a suggestion has been put in the form of a motion and seconded (where required). If no one ever puts her thoughts in the form of a motion, there is nothing to discuss.

Don't let anyone dominate the discussion by talking louder than others, interrupting, speaking without having been recognized, or asking to speak again before everyone else has had a chance.

4. You must have a quorum to transact business, unless your organization's bylaws permit otherwise – very unusual. If someone calls attention to the lack of a quorum, the body cannot act.
5. There's no such thing as "old business." The proper term is "unfinished business." That heading should be on an agenda *only* if there are items of business left unfinished from a previous meeting. Perhaps an item was postponed until further information could be gathered; or maybe it was not fully dealt with before the time allotted for the meeting ran out. The inclusion of this heading on an agenda is not an invitation for members to revisit old issues or pet peeves.
6. Use your committees to save time at the club meeting. It is much quicker for a committee to consider relevant issues and report to the club instead of having everyone try to consider every issue at the meeting.

Encourage your members to respect their committees. If a member has concerns about a matter the committee will consider, encourage her to speak to a member of the committee about it. This will avoid many instances of the concerned member inquiring at the club meeting about whether the committee

considered her particular issue. As the membership hears good recommendations coming from committees, they will frequently approve them without further discussion.

- 7 All motions do not need a second. A motion that comes from a committee or task force is an example. Why? Because the fact that the particular group presents it has to mean that at least a majority of the group want it to come up for discussion and a vote. A second would be redundant.
- 8 If a motion that should have had a second somehow slips through and is approved without having been seconded, it is still valid. Again, the fact that enough people voted for it to pass it is proof that someone would have seconded it.
- 9 Don't use a motion when you don't need one. Examples are (a) a motion to accept a report that was presented for information only, or (b) a motion to accept a financial report before it has been audited.
- 10 Don't try to include too much in a single motion. If during debate, it becomes clear that there are two separate discussions going on, a motion can be made to divide the motion on the floor. Alternatively, if a motion is on the floor and someone moves to amend it, the chairman may request that the person offering the amendment hold it and make it the subject of a separate motion.
- 11 Know which motions are debatable, which require a two-thirds vote rather than a majority, and which have priority over others. Most procedural guides have charts that set this out clearly.
- 12 Approving an amendment does not approve the underlying motion; it merely changes the wording. Members may vote for the amendment and then vote against the motion itself.
- 13 Be sure the right motion is being made. There are at least two motions – or parliamentary maneuvers – that are widely misunderstood and misused.

One is the call: "Question!" What is being attempted is the termination of debate. The proper form is to be recognized by the presiding officer and "move the previous question." Regardless of whether this request is worded properly, however, it is still a motion. Thus, it is not properly made without recognition, and it requires a second and a two-thirds vote for approval. The presiding officer should not respond by complying with the blurted out "question" and cut off debate without observing the formalities. On the other hand, the presiding officer can call for a vote when debate seems to have ended, without waiting for a motion from the floor.

A second widely misunderstood motion is “to table.” Generally, a person who makes such a motion intends to kill the motion already on the floor or at least defer its consideration until a time in the future or indefinitely. Under *Robert’s Rules*, however, neither of those events is the result of a successful motion “to lay on the table,” which is the proper term. Instead, this motion refers to setting something aside temporarily to deal with a more urgent matter. To accomplish the other goals, the proper motion is “to postpone to a certain time” or “to postpone indefinitely.”

14. It’s fine to save time by using unanimous consent as an alternative to the usual motion, second, discussion, vote procedure. A good example is approval of the minutes. The presiding officer can state that if there is no objection, the minutes are approved. Anyone with an objection can speak up. Even then a vote may not be needed if only a minor correction is in order (*e.g.*, a spelling error), or if after a member’s inquiry, it is clear no correction is needed. If minutes and other routine reports are submitted in advance of the meeting, there is more likelihood of quick approval than if everyone has to read them or hear them read for the first time at the meeting..
15. A presiding officer is always allowed to vote if voting is by ballot. If the vote is by voice, show of hands, etc., the presiding officer should maintain an impartial stance and vote only if doing so will affect the result. If she chooses to vote against the motion when it would otherwise pass by one vote, the result is a tie, and the motion fails. If she votes for the motion in the case of a tie, it passes. The presiding officer is not compelled to break a tie. If she chooses not to vote in the case of a tie, the motion fails.
16. Let the degree of formality fit your group. If your club’s board has five members and everyone tends to be civil and orderly, you can probably dispense with a lot of formality, but remember that if you dispense with too much, none of your intended actions may be valid. And having once lost control of a meeting, it’s hard to regain it. In a larger group, you will need to stick to the rules more closely, especially if your group has members who are not familiar with, or want to ignore, the proper procedure. But keep in mind that you don’t want to come across as a dictator. The club should understand that the purpose of the rules is for the meeting to run smoothly, efficiently, and in a way that’s fair to everyone.