

# **Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised (RONR) Basics**

(04/29/18 – Roy Minet)

**Definition/Purpose** – RONR is a set of rules and procedures that have been developed and carefully optimized over many years to facilitate orderly meetings which accomplish a specified amount of official business (the agenda) within a specified amount of time. RONR provides for fair debate of issues (within the allotted time) and assures that decisions made truly represent the will of the body.

**The Chair Rules** – The Chair runs the meeting. The Chair may consult a parliamentarian regarding RONR, but all rulings must be made by the Chair. The Chair has considerable latitude to allow “more relaxed discussion” based upon circumstances, but official business must follow RONR. The Chair has no vote except to break a tie. A ruling of the Chair can be overridden by majority vote (“I appeal the ruling of the Chair.” – requires a second and is debatable.)

**Most Important Basic Rule** – No one speaks unless and until they are recognized by the Chair and given the floor. The speaker then rises and addresses the Chair (and *only* the Chair). The Chair may then either act upon what the speaker has said **OR** rule the speaker “out of order.”

## **Overall Flow of a Meeting**

- Call to order
- Propose/discuss/modify/adopt an agenda (may specify time limits)
- Process agenda items in order
- Motion to Recess until HH:MM time (lunch, breaks, etc.) (as many necessary)
- Resume processing agenda items
- Motion to adjourn (ends the meeting, if/when passed)

**The Motion** – Any official business or action must take the form of a “motion.” After being recognized, the speaker says, “I move that our organization schedule a meet-and-greet for...” The Chair will either rule the motion out of order or ask for a second. The motion is dead if it is ruled out of order or fails to receive a second. If seconded (and *not* before), the motion may be debated (if it is a debatable type of motion). The Chair first recognizes the person who made the motion to speak in its favor. A speaker opposing the motion is recognized second. Alternate pro and con speakers are recognized until either: 1) no more members wish to speak; 2) the time allocated is used; or 3) a recognized speaker says, “I move the previous question” or “I call the previous question.” “Calling the question” requires a second, is not debatable and requires a 2/3 vote to cut off debate and force an immediate vote. Most motions require a majority vote, but some require a super-majority. Only one (main) motion can be under consideration at a time.

**Amending a Main Motion** – During debate of a main motion, a recognized speaker may propose to amend it (“I move to amend the main motion by...”). The exact same procedure

described above for a main motion is then followed for the amendment. After the amendment has either passed or failed, the procedure for the main motion is resumed where it left off. Only one amendment can be considered at a time. During debate of an amendment, a secondary amendment (an amendment of the primary amendment) can be moved and considered in exactly the same way the primary amendment is handled. Only one secondary amendment may be considered at a time. A secondary amendment may not be amended. Secondary amendments tend to confuse people and seldom are really necessary, so it may be wise to avoid them.

**Voting on Motions** – Immediately prior to each vote, the Chair must clearly state what is being voted upon (main motion, amendment, etc.) and repeat the wording. At the discretion of the Chair, voting may be by voice vote (ayes and nays), raising of hands, standing or secret ballot. The Chair rules on the vote. If a member feels the ruling is in error, s/he may say, “I call for a division of the house.” This automatically requires that an exact count be done. The Chair votes only to break a tie.

**Voting for People** – The Chair opens the floor for nominations. Candidate(s) are nominated (a nomination does *not* require a second). Someone moves to close nominations (a second *is* required). If the motion to close carries, the Chair conducts a vote. For “key” elections, this will normally be by secret ballot. NOTA (none-of-the-above) is always a candidate in any election (does not need to be nominated). To win, a candidate must receive a majority of votes. When no candidate receives a majority, the candidate receiving the smallest percentage is eliminated and the body re-votes. If NOTA ever receives a majority of the votes, nominations must be re-opened and all previously nominated candidates are ineligible.

**Suspending the Rules** – Occasionally, the body may decide to deviate in some way from the normal course of events. In order to do so, a recognized speaker may move to “suspend the rules.” Such a motion requires a second, is not debatable and needs a 2/3 vote to pass. Here are some common examples: “I move to suspend the rules to add 3 minutes to the debate time for the current main motion”; “I move to suspend the rules to consider item 24 of the agenda next”; “I move to suspend the rules to add Fraziwhamowitz as an additional agenda item to be inserted after item 5, and to allocate 7 minutes for its consideration.”

**“Without Objection...”** – If there very clearly is no objection to some action, it serves only as a waste of valuable time to slog through a bunch of procedural steps. It is important for the Chair to take advantage of such opportunities to keep the meeting moving. There are many such possibilities. One example is that a motion has been moved and seconded and no one wishes to speak against it. The Chair says, “Without objection, the Chair will rule that the motion passes. [*Pause about three seconds.*] Hearing none, the motion is passed.” The Secretary notes in the minutes that “The motion passed without objection.” However, even one objection means that procedural steps may not be skipped after all!

**The Three Points** – There are three special “points” that are (almost) always in order. The Chair decides upon the disposition of such points, or else rules that they are out of order.

- **“Point of privilege”** which a member may raise regarding issues such as the inability to clearly hear what is being said, etc.
- **“Point of order”** which may be raised if a member believes that correct procedure has not been followed.
- **“Point of information”** which may be raised when a member believes (or believes that the body) needs more information about the subject being considered which bears upon making the best decision.

**Order of Precedence, Etc.** – Motions and points have an order of precedence and other characteristics (whether a second is required, whether debatable, etc.). This information is summarized on the handy chart on the back of this page. The chart might well be used by an amateur parliamentarian. However, most meetings can be run quite smoothly and successfully with just the information provided above this item plus a little common sense!