

Running Effective Meetings

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Disclaimer

- The material contained in this presentation is based upon the principles and practices of parliamentary procedure.
- I am not an attorney and nothing in this presentation constitutes legal advice.

Call meeting to order

- Sit in the chair reserved for the person running the meeting.
- Rap the gavel lightly one time and announce, “This meeting of the ABC School Board is called to order.”
- Ask the clerk to take the roll.
- Announce that a quorum is present (or not).

Quorum

- The “quorum” is the minimum number of voting members who must be present for business to be done.
- Usually it is a majority (more than half) of the members in office—the members who are actually serving on the board.
- If you lose your quorum, you can’t do business.

“Walking Quorum”

- Local government bodies must not create a “walking quorum” or a “serial meeting.”
- When members of the body talk or email with each other outside of meetings, such that a quorum is discussing the body’s business, the Open Meeting Act has been violated.
- You can talk to other people, as long as you aren’t discussing work of the board.



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Agenda



- Prepared by who?
- You don't need to vote to adopt an agenda, but many bodies do vote.
- Takes a majority vote to adopt, and a 2/3 vote to change later in the meeting.
- Do not need to include approval of agenda, or other minor procedural motions, in minutes.

Regular vs Consent Agenda

- Question? What's the difference between the regular agenda and the consent agenda?
- The regular agenda lays out the items to be taken up at a particular meeting.
- It follows your "Order of Business."
- The agenda may include, as a single item, "Adoption of the consent agenda."

Consent Agenda

- A “consent agenda” lists items that are expected not to be controversial.
- If any member requests that an item be removed from the consent agenda, it is done on request.
- The item is placed on the regular agenda, EITHER immediately after the consent agenda, or at its proper place in the regular agenda.
- Items on consent agenda **CANNOT BE DISCUSSED.**



Unanimous Consent

- Form of voting – a type of “fast track.”
- Very efficient for minor procedural matters.
- Presider suggests something, and if you agree, REMAIN SILENT. **Silence means consent.**
- If you disagree, say “OBJECTION.”
- Presider then knows that everyone does not agree, and abandons the fast track to use the regular method.



Language Tip

- Without objection...
- If there is no objection...



Minutes

Purpose of minutes

- According to Robert's Rules, the purpose of minutes is:
 - **to record the actions taken by the body.**
- Minutes record what is DONE, not what is SAID.



Detailed minutes are a BAD idea

- It violates the fundamental purpose of minutes.
- It tends to personalize and politicize the discussion.
- It can intimidate participants, preventing them from speaking freely.
- It absorbs too much staff time and takes the group's time.
- It makes it harder to find the actions taken.

Meeting, Debate, & Point of Order

Rules of debate

- No one may speak a second time until everyone who wishes to do so has spoken once.



**POINT
OF
ORDER**



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Why don't we follow this rule?

- Boards tend to discuss their affairs in conversational mode.
- In conversations, dominant people tend to dominate.
- Agreeable people tend to let them.
- Must have a structure to make sure that everyone has an equal chance to speak.
- This is both fair and efficient.

Point of Order

- When ANOTHER MEMBER breaks one of the rules, a member may make a ***POINT OF ORDER.***
- Chair rules on the point.



Point of Order

- A motion claiming that a procedural mistake has been made.
- According to Robert, can be made only by a member.
- Public may not raise a Point of Order.
- May interrupt a speaker if necessary.
- Must be timely –made at the time of the offense.



4 Steps to process a POINT OF ORDER

1. Member: *“Point of Order”*
2. Chair: *“State your point.”*
3. Member: *“That remark breaks our rule against Interrupting.”*
4. Chair: *“The point is well taken. Members will refrain from interrupting each other.”*

Language Tip



- Use the “third person” to keep things neutral and lessen conflict.
- Note that the chair states the general rule.
- The chair is speaking on behalf of the rules of procedure.
- Do NOT say, “You are out of order” or “You made a mistake.”



Chair **isn't** the only one to say “Point of Order”

- The chair has the duty of maintaining order and decorum, so doesn't need to say “Point of Order.”
- Chair just needs to take appropriate action.
- Chair can always ask the group to decide if a point of order is well-taken (correct) or not.

Chair is subject to the same rules

- If the chair breaks one of the rules, a member may raise a Point of Order.
- The chair rules on own behavior, which seems odd, but is the way the system works.



Don't Weaponize Point of Order

- You may interrupt to make a Point of Order.
- ~ Sometimes you have to.
- Usually it is NOT NECESSARY TO INTERRUPT, and you should hold back.
 - Usually it is best NOT TO CALL A POINT OF ORDER FOR GERMANENESS.

Few Other Points

- Point of Order is processed immediately. No other business can take place until it's been dealt with.
- Points of Order do not count against a member's turn to speak in debate.
- Point of Order cannot be debated.

How to do this?

- Seek recognition before speaking.
- No one may speak a second time until everyone who wishes to do so has spoken once.
- No sidebar conversations or whispering.
- NO INTERRUPTING!
- Speak to the chair (optional)
- Debate must be either FOR or AGAINST (optional).



Seeking Recognition

- Raise your hand and wait to speak until the presider (chair) calls your name, nods at you, or gives some other sign that you have permission to speak (you “have the floor”)
- Online, you can use the “raise hand” function or raise your physical hand.
- Try to stick to the time limit given to the public for comments.



Duty to Remain Silent

- When you have not been recognized, you have a duty to remain silent.
- The exception is a Point of Order when essential.

How to Do This?

- Chair can keep track of who has spoken and who wishes to speak, using a chart.
- Chair can empower vice-chair to do this – good training for them.
- Use the “round robin.”



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NO Interrupting

- When a member has the floor, they have the right to speak until they have completed their comments.
- Interrupting is ABSOLUTELY FORBIDDEN.
- Members may not interrupt each other, and chair may not interrupt members.
- Exception—Point of Order when essential.



Speak to the Chair

- Speak to the chair, NOT to another member.
- It is a kind of “SONAR.” Everything pings back and forth between the chair and the members.
- This depersonalizes issues and improves clarity of discussion.
- Otherwise, discussion often goes “down the rabbit hole”.



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Put Away Your Cell Phone

- Strongly recommends that groups adopt a policy of using electronic devices during the meeting.
- Why? “Phone snubbing” is rude to others and weakens the body’s cohesion and ability to work well together.
- When members are distracted, they are not attending to the work of the body, which wastes everyone else’s time.
- Absolutely no texting between members during meeting, and no tweeting or posting on social media during meetings.
- You can do this! Other jurisdictions have adopted policies.



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Send the Right Message

- No Sarcasm
- NO frowning
- NO eye-rolling
- No heavy sighing



More thoughts

- Don't try to convince your colleagues that you are right.
- Don't answer them back or question what they said.
- Don't argue with them.
- Just state your own position as clearly and effectively as you can.

Breakout Groups

- Please discuss these rules for discussion and discuss what could be helpful for your board.
- We will take a short break after the breakout groups.
- Resume in 15 minutes.



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Main Motion

For school boards, a main motion is the usual and customary way to start the action of discussion and decision making.

- Staff presents proposal in writing and answers any questions.
- Motion is moved and seconded.
- Members discuss motion and may amend it.
- Members vote on motion.

Main Motion

- It should be in writing if at all possible.
- It should be clear and unambiguous. Don't say, "I move what he just said!" or "So moved!"
- It should be phrased in the grammatical positive.
- It must comply with the bylaws and the procedural law of the land.
- You may only have one main motion at a time.

One Thing at a Time



- One subject is discussed at a time.
- Robert's Rules is very linear!
- Chair, and members, must insist on this.

How do YOU introduce a Main Motion?



I move that....

I 'second the motion'

- You “second a motion” to show that you would like to talk about it.
- No need to be recognized. Just call out “second.”
- It is OK to second a motion you disagree with, if you want to explain why it’s a bad idea.



If NO 'second'

- If there is no second, the chair says:
"There being no second the motion will not be considered."
- Then chair moves immediately to next item of business.



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You can't Speak against your own motion!

- Under Robert's Rules, the maker of the motion cannot speak against it.
- If the discussion has changed their mind, they should request permission to withdraw the motion.
- The maker **CAN VOTE** against their own motion.

Move to Vote

- When it seems that discussion is finished, chair asks, “Is there any further discussion?” or “Are you ready to vote?” and then, if no one speaks up, takes the vote.
- Chair repeats the motion.
- Chair says, “All those in favor say ‘aye,’ all those opposed say ‘no.’”
- Chair announces results of vote, whether motion passes or fails, and what will happen next as a result of the vote.
- Chair announces next item of business.

Amendment

- You amend a motion to improve it.
- The amendment applies to the main motion.
- The amendment must be germane (relevant).
- Anyone may move to amend, even the person who made the motion.



4 ways to amend

1. Add or insert words.
2. Strike out words.
3. Strike out words and insert words in their place.
4. Substitute (tricky!).



The Challenge is

- We vote on amendments before we vote on the main motion, in order to make the main motion as good as possible - to **perfect** the motion.

~~Friendly Amendment~~

- People often process “friendly amendment” the wrong way.
- DO NOT turn to maker and seconder to ask if they accept the amendment – this give them improper power.
- Once a motion has been stated by the chair, the maker and seconder have same rights as any other member.
- Handle this the same as any other amendment.
- Ask, “Is there a second?” etc.

Call the Question

- Motion requesting that we stop debate and vote.
- This motion requires a second.
- HOWEVER it cannot be debated.
- It cannot be amended, And, it takes a two thirds vote to pass.
- Once approved, no more discussion is allowed.



Process to Call the Question

- 1. Member A: I call the question°
- 2. Member B: Second°
- 3. Chair: The question has been called so we will vote immediately on whether to end the debate and vote on this motion (read motion). All those in favor of stopping debate now, please raise your right hand.
- 4. [Members in favor raise right hand]



continued

- 5. Chair: Thank you hands down. All those opposed" please raise your right hand.
- 6. [Members opposed raise right hand]
- 7. Chair: Thank you hands down. There are two-thirds In favor of ending debate so we will vote immediately"

OR

- There are not two thirds in favor of ending debate so discussion will continue.

Role of the Chair

- Robert has different rules for small boards (up to about 12 people).
- In a small board, chair may make motions, discuss, and vote, unless law, regulations or bylaws say otherwise.
- We recommend chair exercise restraint by speaking and voting last, and by refraining from making motions.

Key Points

- Each member has an equal right to speak and to try to persuade others to accept their view.
- During meetings, the chair controls the process so the group can make the decisions.
- During meetings, the chair is the servant of the group, and the group is the final authority.
- It's okay for members to disagree.



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Board Members may **NOT** do the work of the district.

- Elected members care deeply about their schools.
- People often approach them with problems or suggestions.
- They may inform the Superintendent, but they may not try to influence the outcome, unless and until it reaches them as a board issue.
- Why? They must not cross the line between governance and administration.
- This is a legal requirement!

Majority Rule

- The decision of the majority, voting in a properly called meeting, is the decision of the body as a whole.
- However arbitrary it may seem, this is our system.
- When serving on a public body, members have a duty to uphold the decision of that body, even if they disagree with it.

Remarks that are not germane

- Discussion must be relevant to the topic at hand.
- Be vigilant (but reasonable) about this!
- Chair can call a member to order if remarks are not germane.
- A member can call another member to order.

Let's Practice

- Let's read a script for a meeting!

Thanks for Listening

- Questions and Comments?
- Thanks to Ann MacFarlane and Jurassic Parliament for her guidance in this work.