

Jurassic Parliament

Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules



Mastering Meetings with Robert's Rules

Ann G. Macfarlane, Professional Registered Parliamentarian
Jurassic Parliament

Association of Alaska School Boards

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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.

Our topics

- I. Introduction
- II. Meeting debate
- III. How to do this?
- IV. System of motions
- V. Authority and role of chair and members
- VI. Keeping order
- VII. Inappropriate remarks
- VIII. Voting and quorum
- IX. The right kind of control
- X. Public comment
- XI. Conclusion

I. Introduction

I. Introduction

- We are in the League of Northwest Dino Cities.
- This is not entirely realistic – it is a fantasy – but there is some overlap with real life!
- We use broad strokes to convey the big picture.
- You are going to be the members of the district board.

Workshop method

- Some of you have “remarks” to make, printed on white paper.
- Please look through them and be prepared to speak up when your number is called.
- Keep your remarks to yourself – don’t share them with your neighbors!
- “Special instructions” are just for you – don’t read them aloud.

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 [name of organization] is called to order.”
- Ask the clerk to take the roll.
- Announce that a quorum is present (or not).

Unanimous consent

- Form of voting – a type of “fast track.”
- Very efficient.
- 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 tips

Without objection...

If there is no objection...

Agenda

- Prepared by leadership, but within control of board (subject to notice requirements, of course).
- Can be adopted at the beginning of the meeting (by unanimous consent or majority vote).
- Once adopted, takes a two-thirds vote to change it later during the meeting.
- Should state outcomes and give approximate times.
- Do not need to include approval of agenda, or other minor procedural motions, in minutes.

Agenda

- See more details in presentation from AASB Annual Conference November 2016, “Agenda? What Agenda?”

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.

We strongly recommend ACTION MINUTES

See our blog and book for more on:

- ✓ Action minutes
- ✓ Summary minutes
- ✓ Detailed minutes
- ✓ Why detailed minutes are a bad idea

II. Meeting debate

Principle of Equality

All members have equal rights,
privileges and obligations.

Key Point

Discussion in board and
committee meetings is
NOT A CONVERSATION.
It is **DEBATE** and has its own rules.

Rules for debate

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

Rules for debate

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

This is CRITICAL!

- Applying this rule will transform your meetings.
- It is a MUST if you wish to maximize your effectiveness.

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

flying dinosaur

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

Exercise: Point of Order Scripts

- Pair up with your neighbor and read through the Point of Order scripts.
- First one of you will be the member and the other the chair.
- When you flip the page, flip roles.

Point of order!

Point of order!

State your point.

The point is well taken.

The point is not well taken.

Do we have to consider this amendment?

NO. One of the duties of the chair is to protect the assembly from dilatory (time-wasting) or frivolous motions.

III. How to do this?

III. How to do this?

- Members seek recognition before speaking.
- Members speak to the chair, not to each other.
- Chair keeps track of who has spoken and who wishes to speak.
- Can empower vice-chair to keep track – great training for them.
- Can use the “round robin” (described in book).

Seeking recognition

- Raise your hand and wait to speak until the chair calls your name, nods at you, or gives some other sign that you have permission to speak (you “have the floor”).
- DO NOT raise your hand and start to speak at the same time.

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.
- Members may not say “you” to each other.

Down the rabbit hole...

- If members speak to one another, often the discussion degenerates into a conversation between two members.
- “Down the rabbit hole” results in the rest of the group being left out.
- The “principle of equality” is violated.

Speak to the chair

- Sometimes members resist this idea as too formal.
- We recommend giving it a try for two-three months, and then assessing how well it works for your group.

If your members still can't stand to do this...

- Chair keeps a watchful eye to make sure no two people “hijack” the meeting.
- Chair can intervene and say,
“We need to hear from everyone. Does anyone else wish to speak on this topic?”

One person speaks at a time

- 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.

How to do this?

- No interrupting!
- No whispering!
- No sidebar conversations!
- No texting!
- No checking cell phones!

What about time limits?

- Robert's general rule is that each member may speak TWICE on each subject per day.
- Each speech may be up to 10 minutes.

What about time limits?

- Robert's Rules has special rules for small boards (up to about 12 people).
- In a small board there is no limit on the number of times a person may speak.
- If you follow the “principle of equality,” this will likely work out fine.

What about time limits?

- However, if length of speaking is an issue, we recommend that boards and committees adopt a shorter time limit – 3 or 5 minutes.
- See our blog entry on “adopting special rules of order.”

An occasional exception...

- Sometimes there is benefit in the conversational style or “informal discussion.”
- This provides a sparky flow of ideas that can be beneficial, for instance at a study session.
- A member can say, “I move that we discuss this in conversational style for 10 minutes.”
- However, DO NOT make the conversational style your ordinary or “default” style of discussion.

Role of the chair

- In large groups, chair may not participate in debate.
- Exception: Chair may relinquish position as presider and sit on the floor with other members. Vice-chair presides until issue is resolved.

Role of the chair

- In a small board, the chair may take part in discussion, make motions, and vote (unless law, regulation or bylaws say otherwise).
- Nevertheless, chair must exercise restraint.
- We recommend that the chair speak and vote last.
- Note that this is a Jurassic Parliament recommendation. It is not taken from Robert's Rules.

The four big mistakes

- Speaking twice in a row
- Not seeking recognition
- Speaking directly to another member
- Interrupting another person

IV. System of Motions

Request for Information/ Point of Information

Flying dinosaur

- This is a request for information that is timely and relevant to the debate.
- Chair should say, “State your question.”

Request for Information/ Point of Information

Flying dinosaur

- After hearing question, chair can respond three ways:
 - Respond yourself
 - Ask someone else to respond
 - Say, “We’ll get back to you later.”
- DO NOT allow members to GIVE information. That is debate.

Language tip

*What information does the member need
in order to decide how to vote?*

Main Motion

Tyrannosaurus rex

- For boards and other public bodies, a main motion is the usual and customary way to start the action of discussion and decision making.
- Staff presents the proposed action, which has been provided in writing, answers any questions, and then a member moves acceptance of the motion to begin the discussion.

How do you introduce a main motion?

Three little words:

I MOVE THAT

Main Motion

- Do not say “I would like to move that...”
- Do not say “I would like to motion that...”
- Do not say “I recommend that...”
- Do not move a motion “for discussion.”
- Do not make a motion “that we should discuss this.”
- Do not make a motion “that we vote on this.”

Second the motion

- You “second” a motion to show that you would like to talk about it.
- You can 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 taken up.”
- Then moves immediately to next item of
business.

Main Motion

Tyrannosaurus rex

- It should be **in writing** if at all possible.
- It should be **clear** and unambiguous.
- It should be phrased in the grammatical **positive**.
- It must comply with the **bylaws** and the **procedural** law of the land.
- It is in order when **no other business is pending**.

Motions should be in writing

- Leadership may prepare draft motions, resolutions, etc. and include in agenda.
- Some groups have a “ten-word rule” – any motion longer than ten words must be written down.
- Can use three-part forms published by the parliamentary associations.
- If necessary, suggest group “stand at ease” to allow member to write down the motion.

Eight steps to process a motion

1. **Member makes motion.**
2. Another member seconds motion.
3. **Chair states motion.**
4. Members debate and/or amend motion.
5. **Chair restates motion.**
6. Members vote on motion.
7. Chair states results of vote, whether motion passes or fails, and what happens next.
8. Chair states next item of business.

Worksheet: Eight steps to process a Main Motion

- Fill in the blanks on the Eight Steps worksheet.

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.

Amendment

Dimetrodon

- 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.

Four 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!).

Process Amendment

- The amendment is processed using the same eight steps that we just saw for a main motion.

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.

Amendment

- Once the fate of the amendment has been decided, debate continues on the main motion.
- Don't forget to vote on the main motion "as amended."

More amendments are possible...

- Once you've dealt with one amendment, you may have others...
- provided that they apply to a *different aspect* of the main motion.
- It takes special actions to go back and change something we've already amended.
- The only limit to the number of this type of amendment is the patience of your group.

“Friendly amendment”

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

Refer to Committee

Ankylosaurus

- Motion sending main motion (and any amendments) off to another group.
- Should specify two things:
 1. Which **committee it's going to**
 2. When **it's coming back**

Refer to Committee

Ankylosaurus

Two different types:

1. Normally a motion is referred for a **recommendation**.
2. It is possible to refer a motion with **power to decide**.

Process Refer to Committee

- Refer to Committee is processed using the same eight steps we saw for the Main Motion and the Amendment.

Call the question

Triceratops

- 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.

Call the question

Triceratops

- Once approved, no more discussion is allowed.
- No need to include this motion in the minutes.
- Do not say “I call the question” in order to take the vote. Just ask, “Is there any further discussion?” or “Are you ready to vote?”

Two-thirds vote

- Robert specifies this when members' rights are limited or extended.
- When we vote to end debate, we are limiting members' rights.
- Should be taken so you can see the result.
- DO NOT take by voice.

Let's go back to the menagerie...

- HOW do you know which motion can be made when, and how to process them?
- There is a SECRET – not to unbounded prosperity, but to continued success at meetings!

What is the SECRET?

Pree – SEE – dence of motions

Precedence of motions

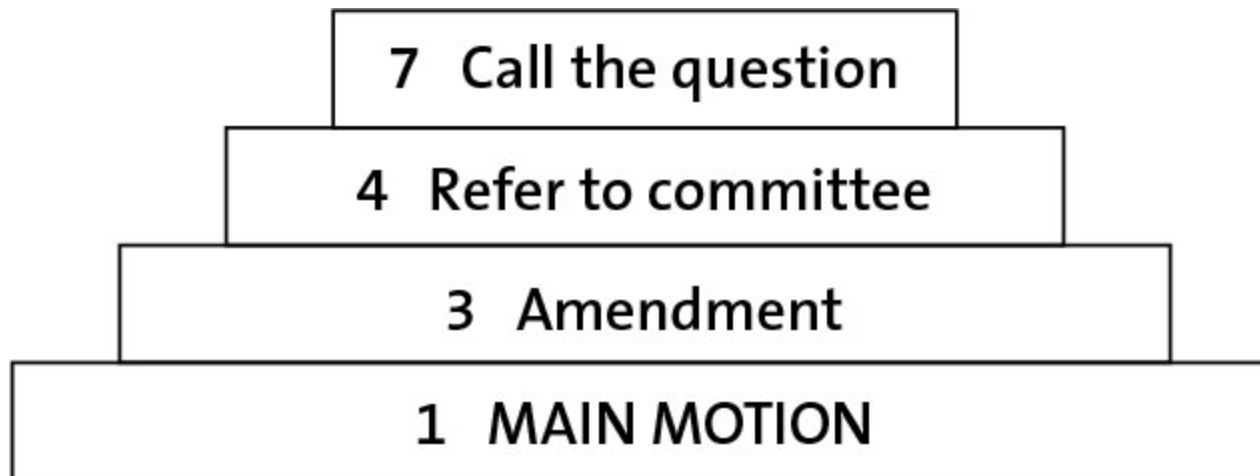
- Each motion has a number or rank.
- Motions are processed in reverse order (“last in first out” or LIFO).
- When a motion is pending (under consideration), motions with a HIGHER rank may be made.
- Motions with a LOWER rank are out of order.

Worksheet:

Precedence of motions

- Fill in the blanks on the Precedence of Motions worksheet.

Precedence of Motions



Exercise:

Pickle Festival Script

- Form a group of six.
- Each person chooses one role.
- Read through the script.

Motions chart

- Note that there are 13 “ranking motions” in all.
- The “flying dinosaurs” do not have a rank.
- The Motions Chart is available for free download on our website.

Can you discuss without a motion?

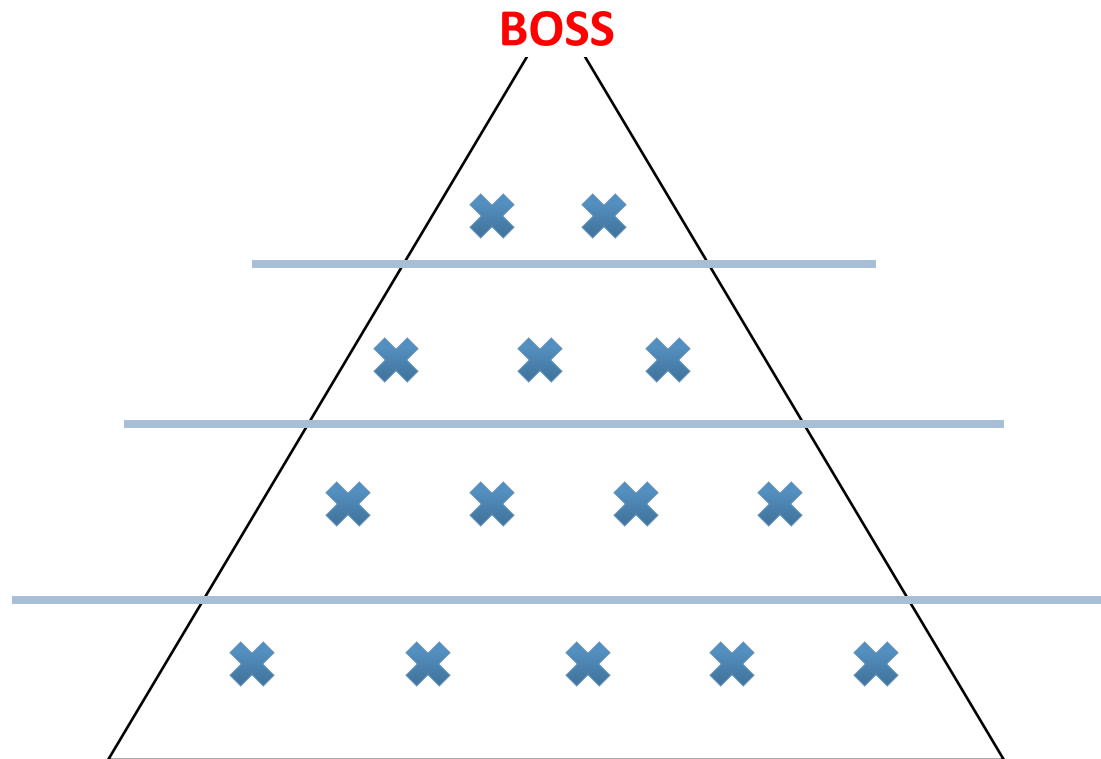
- In large groups, you must have a motion before any discussion begins.
- In small boards, it is fine to discuss topics without a motion, if you wish to.
- Must be careful not to ramble too much.
- If you wish to take advantage of this flexibility, then...

We recommend this process

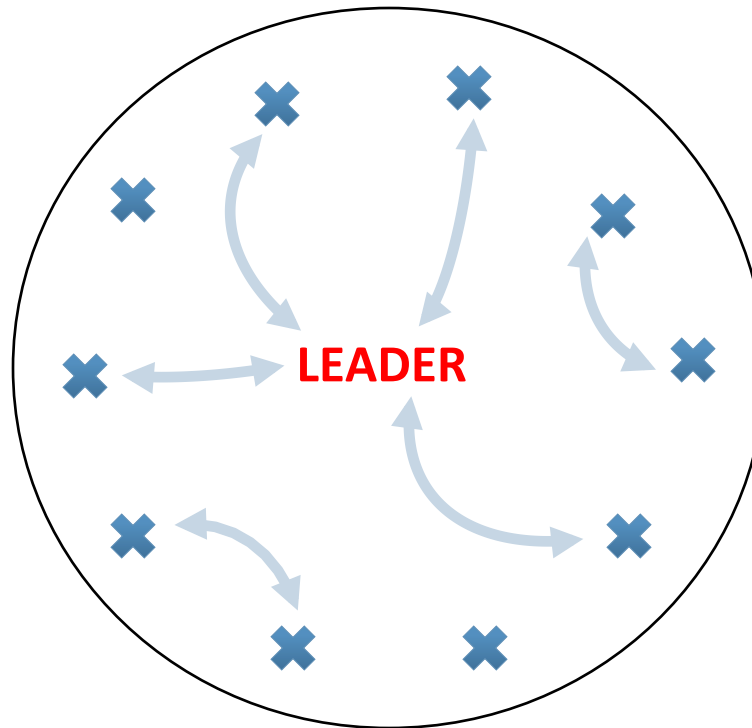
- Discuss the topic at hand
- When ready, propose a formal motion – in writing if at all possible
- Discuss the motion and, if desired, amend it.
- Vote on the motion.

V. Authority and role of chair and members

Accountability Hierarchy



Voluntary Association



Key Point

Each member has an equal right to speak and to try to persuade others to accept her view.

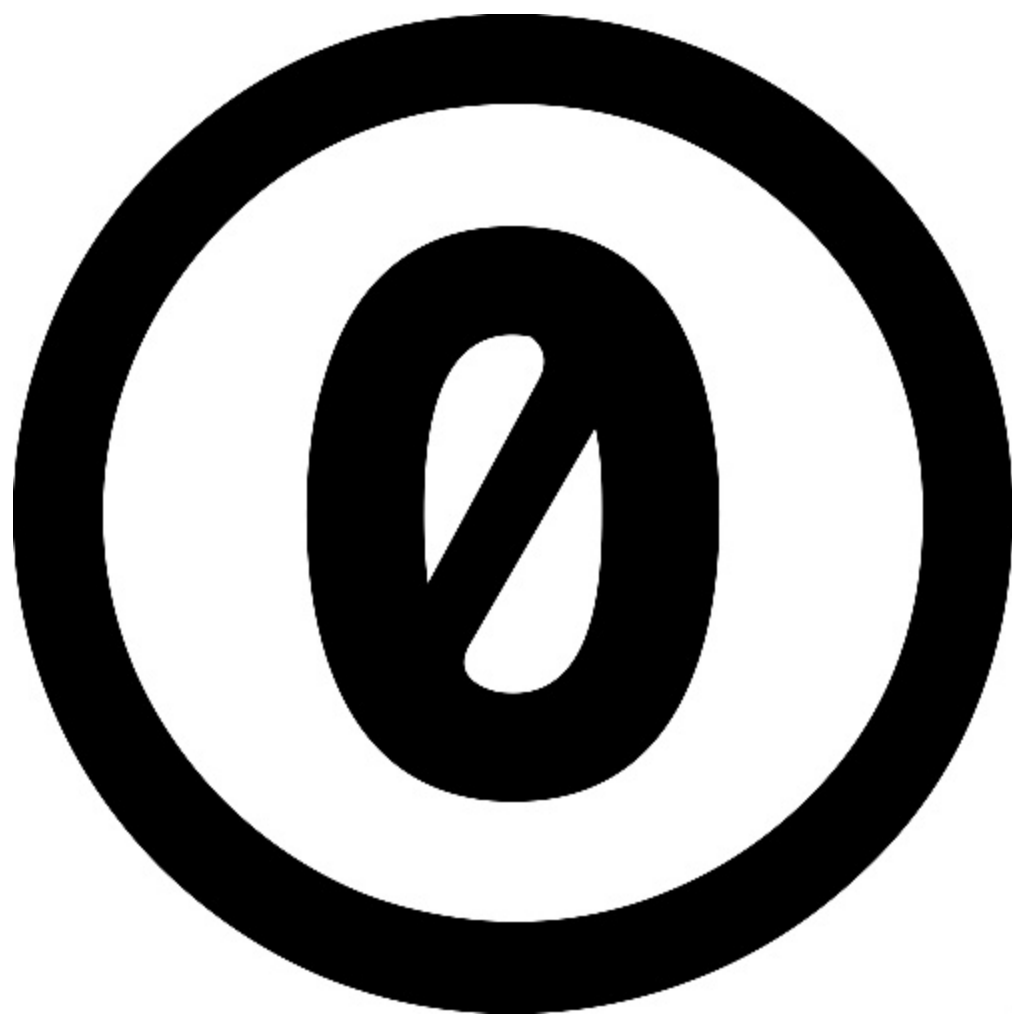
Key Point

During meetings,
the chair controls the process
so the group can make the decisions.

Key Point

During meetings,
the chair is the servant of the group,
and the group is the final authority.

What is each person's individual authority?



ZERO
Nothing
Nada
Zip
0

What is each person's individual authority?

- As a separate individual, you have NO authority.
- This seems almost anti-American, but it is deeply and profoundly American.

What is each person's individual authority?

All members of a governing board share in a joint and collective authority which exists and can be exercised only when the group is in session.

The Standard Code of Parliamentary Procedure

The clash of opinions is vital

- The fact that people have different opinions is a strength. It's a good thing!
- BUT we tend to identify with our own position.
- When we are defeated, we sometimes take it personally.
- This is a mistake.

At the end of the day, the body must unite behind its decision.

- It is a basic democratic principle that the decision of the majority voting at a meeting is the decision of the body as a whole.
- The minority must make it their decision as well.
- It's a terrible system – but see Winston Churchill quote...

Democracy is the worst system of government in all the world, with the exception of those others that have been tried from time to time.

Winston Churchill

Bottom line

- In a democracy, HOW we decide things is more important than WHAT we decide.
- Courtesy and respect, no surprises, no unilateral action, no end-runs...these are essential for the system to work.
- And as for the minority...

Protecting minority

- Robert's Rules emphasizes that the views of the minority must be protected.
- Members must have opportunity for free and full expression, even if their views are highly unpopular.

The willingness to engage in honest debate and lose on issues you care deeply about reaffirms your commitment to common citizenship.

Cornell Clayton, Washington State University

What is the alternative?

*The ballot box is sacred
because the alternative is blood.*

Elias Canetti

VI. Keeping order

VI. Keeping order

- Order is critical to fair and democratic meetings.
- Order is achieved by having rules and following them.
- If a body doesn't follow its own rules, consequences will occur!

Within the board

- The chair has the duty of maintaining order and decorum.
- If the chair fails to do so, any member may speak up.

Point of Order

flying dinosaur

- 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.**
- There are a few exceptions, but they are rare.

Four steps to process 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.*

Point of order!

Point of order!

State your point.

The point is well taken.

The point is not well taken.

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 doesn't have to say “point of order”

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

Chair subject to 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.

Chair may not get all emotional

- Chair has a duty to maintain a calm, steady demeanor, no matter how deeply he feels about the issues and the meeting.

Chair controls process, not content

- Chair has a duty to ensure a fair process.
- Chair may not attempt to direct **CONTENT** of members' speeches.
- Exception: when speech is not germane.

Chair may not interrupt speaker

- Chair may not interrupt speaker just because she knows more about subject than speaker does.
- Exception: when rules are being broken, chair may interrupt.

Chair may not throw member out of the room

- Only the body has the right to order one of its own members to leave the meeting.

Don't say “so moved”

- Often it is said after someone suggests something that is not clearly expressed.
- Much better to write out the motion, so the presider, the clerk and everyone else knows what is being proposed.

Appeal

The most important motion in all of
Robert's Rules –
and the least known!

Chair's rulings can be appealed

- The CHAIR enforces order and decorum.
- The GROUP is the final authority.
- Any TWO MEMBERS can appeal a ruling of the chair.
- EXCEPTION: If the ruling is a matter of fact on which there cannot be two interpretations, the ruling cannot be appealed.

Can Appeals be debated?

- Appeals pertaining to language and decorum cannot be debated.
- When an appeal can be debated, note that the debate process is unique – different from any other discussion process in Robert's Rules.

Appeal

- Chair must take care in explaining vote.
- Question being voted on is, “Shall the decision of the chair be SUSTAINED?”
- Takes a NEGATIVE vote for the appeal to win.
- A majority vote or a tie upholds the chair’s decision.

The heart of democracy

- By using Point of Order and Appeal, the group is the final authority.
- In our view this is the heart of our democracy.

Motion to Table

- Often misused.
- This motion has a high rank, and is not debatable.
- If someone says “I move to table this until the next meeting,” the correct motion is “to postpone until the next meeting.”

Motion to Table

- Motion to Table cannot be used to kill a motion.
- Chair may ask, “For what purpose does the member seek to table the motion?”
- Motion to Table merely sets a motion “on the table.”
- Must be “taken from the table.”
- If not taken from the table by the end of the next regular meeting, it falls to the ground.

VII. Inappropriate remarks

VII. Inappropriate remarks

- It is a fundamental principle of parliamentary procedure that debate must be “germane” (relevant) to the topic at hand.
- Irrelevant remarks are inappropriate.

These remarks are inappropriate

1. Personal remarks
2. Discourteous remarks – insulting language, attacks
3. Inflammatory language
4. Criticizing past actions of the group (unless subject is under discussion, or member is about to propose a change)
5. Remarks that are not germane (relevant) to the discussion

Personal remarks

“The measure, not the member, is the subject of debate.”

Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised, 11th edition, p. 392

Discourteous remarks

- Speaks for itself!
- No insulting language, no vulgarity, no personal attacks.
- This also applies to remarks about the public and other non-members.

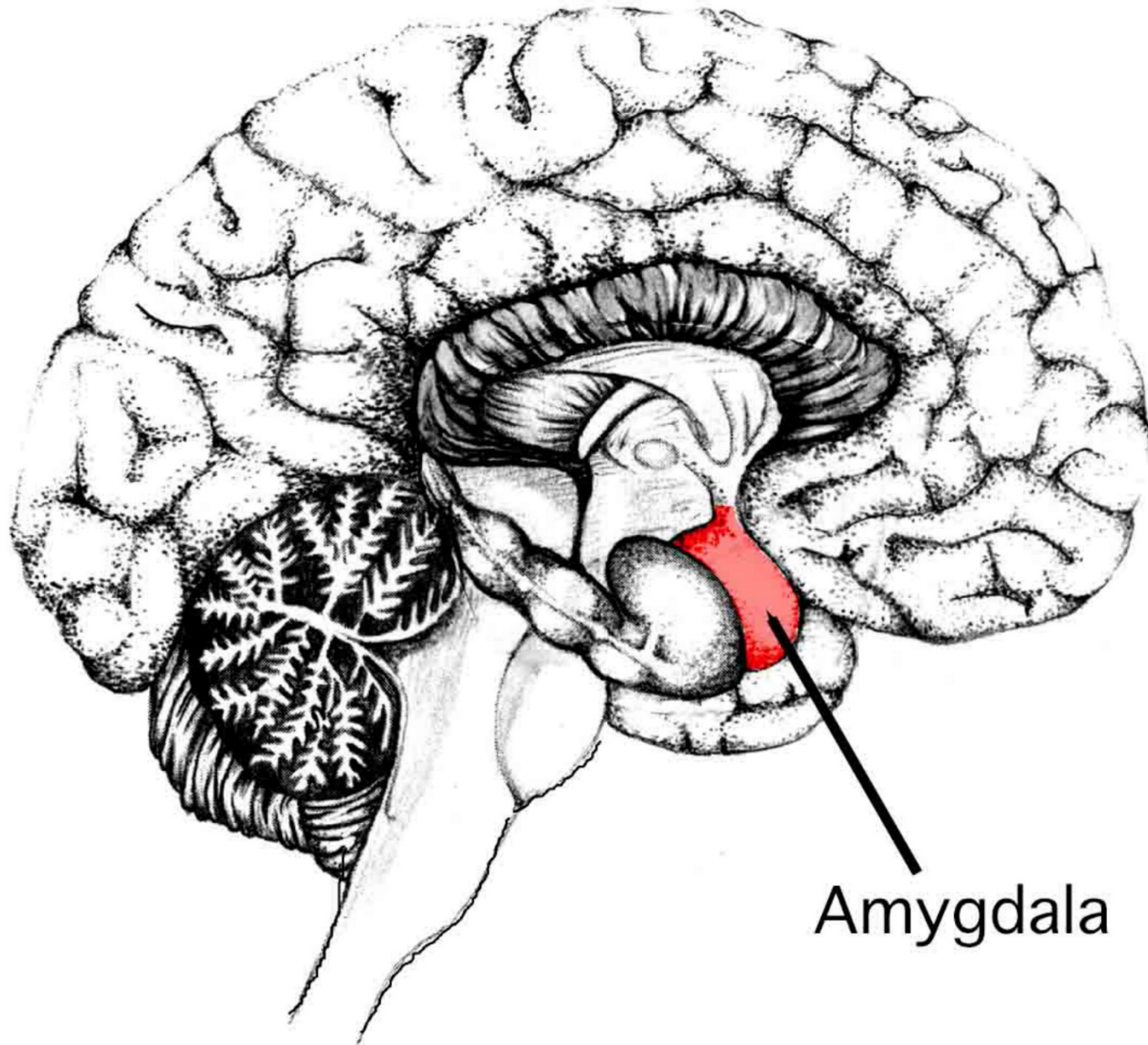
Why the rules on courtesy?

Generally speaking, if a human being never shows anger, then I think something's wrong. He's not right in the brain.

Dalai Lama

Anger and intolerance are the enemies of correct understanding.

Mahatma Gandhi



Amygdala

Send the right message

- No sarcasm
- No frowning
- No eye-rolling
- No sighing
- No checking cell phones

Inflammatory language

That's a lie!

VS.

*I believe that there is strong evidence
that the member is mistaken.*

Criticizing past actions

- Members may not criticize a past action of the group during a meeting, with two exceptions:
 - ✓ If the group as a whole is discussing the action, OR
 - ✓ If the member plans to introduce a motion to amend (change) or rescind (cancel out) the action at the end of their speech.

Remarks that are not germane

- Discussion must be relevant to the topic at hand.
- Be RUTHLESS in insisting on this!
- Chair can call a member to order if remarks are not germane.
- A member can call another member to order.

Who decides?

- If any question arises as to whether a remark is appropriate or not, the chair rules, subject to appeal.
- The chair may also turn immediately to the board to ask the members to decide.
- Ultimately it is the board's call.

Language tip

Members will kindly keep their remarks strictly to the topic under discussion.

Important notes

- We are speaking here about discussion within the board meetings.
- These prohibitions DO NOT APPLY to the public when they are giving public comment.
- We recommend that board members follow these rules OUTSIDE meetings as well.
- This will increase the reputation and stature of the board in the eyes of the public.
- Speak to issues, not to personalities.

Exercise: What's wrong here?

- Identify what is wrong with each remark by writing the correct number in the right-hand column.

VIII. Voting and Quorum

Quorum

- A quorum is the minimum number of voting members who must be present for business to be done.
- If not otherwise specified, it is a majority (more than half) of the voting members who are then in office.
- **DIFFERENT FROM** the number of votes cast.

Taking the vote

- State the question (issue to be voted on).
- Call for the affirmative vote: All those in favor say “aye.”
- Call for the negative vote: All those opposed say “no.” (Do this even if it seems unanimous.)

If the members aren't sure...

- Any member can call out a single word:
- DIVISION!
- The chair must then take the vote by a different method, such as a roll call.

Retaking a vote

- When retaking a vote, the previous vote doesn't count.
- Members are free to vote as they choose.

Changing your vote

- A member has the right to change her vote up until the chair announces the result.
- After that time, unanimous consent is required for a member to be allowed to change her vote.
- Once the board has moved on to the next item of business, a vote cannot be changed.

Majority vote

- Ordinarily, this means “a majority of votes cast.”
- MORE THAN half, or MORE THAN 50%.
- DO NOT SAY “fifty percent plus one.”
- You cannot have a half of a person.

State of Alaska

- Your requirement is “A majority of the School Board’s membership.” This is a different and a higher requirement.

Two-thirds vote

- AT LEAST two-thirds of votes cast.
- A two-thirds vote is normally required when **members' rights are limited or extended.**
- Should be taken so you can see the result.
- DO NOT take by voice.

Abstain

- To abstain is to do nothing. According to Robert, you can't vote "to abstain," and the chair should not call for abstentions.
- However, in public bodies, it is fine to call for abstentions for the record.

State of Alaska

- Your suggested bylaws state that members **MUST** vote unless they have a conflict of interest.
- An abstention is considered to concur with the action taken by the majority of those who vote, whether affirmatively or negatively.

Tied votes

- A tied vote fails.
- In some situations the chair may vote in case of a tie.
- Know the laws and regulations that apply to you!

Exercise:

Animal Control Script

- Form a group of six.
- Each person chooses one role.
- Read through the script.

Exercise:

Practice making motions

- Take a role and read through the suggested motions.
- These are just suggestions – you are free to make any motion you choose, and say anything you choose.
- Chair says, “Would any member care to make a motion?”
- After processing one motion, pass gavel to your right

Eight steps to process a motion

1. **Member makes motion.**
2. Another member seconds motion.
3. **Chair states motion.**
4. Members debate and/or amend motion.
5. **Chair restates motion.**
6. Members vote on motion.
7. Chair states results of vote, whether motion passes or fails, and what happens next.
8. Chair states next item of business.

IX. The right kind of control

Flow of authority at a meeting

The group adopts its rules and guidelines.



In attending, members accept the rules of the group.



During meetings, the presiding officer applies the rules for the benefit of the group.



All persons present at a meeting have an obligation to obey the **legitimate orders** of the presiding officer.



Flow of authority at a meeting

Any member who disagrees with a ruling, decision or order by the presiding officer may **appeal the ruling**.



If another member seconds the appeal, the **group will decide by majority vote** whether the ruling, decision or order is legitimate.



The presiding officer **obeys the group's decision**.

Three things you must have:

1. Knowledge of how this system works
2. A majority on your board in favor of civility and this system.
3. The personal moxie,chutzpah, energy and drive to put it all into practice.

Chair **MUST** control discussion

- Repeat: the chair must control the meeting discussion.
- The chair serves as a BENEVOLENT DICTATOR, enforcing the rules the group has chosen.

We don't like this

- The modern style is completely opposite.
- We're encouraged to speak softly, gently, indirectly.
- We're encouraged to use "I" statements.
- Forget all that when running a meeting.

A balancing act

- Radiate confidence.
- Speak clearly and definitely.
- At the same time, keep emotionally connected to the members.

Brisk, warm neutrality

- It's important to be business-like and focused.
- Keep things moving.
- At the same time, show humanity and humor when appropriate.

Strength vs. warmth

John Neffinger and Matthew Kohut

Compelling People:

*The Hidden Qualities that
Make Us Influential*

"A must read for all leaders who want to maximize their influence on others."
—ART MARKMAN, author of *Smart Thinking* and *Habits of Leadership*

COMPELLING PEOPLE



THE HIDDEN QUALITIES
THAT MAKE US INFLUENTIAL

JOHN NEFFINGER + MATTHEW KOHUT

Chair **MUST** control discussion

- If someone speaks up without being recognized, STOP THEM.
- If someone speaks out of turn, INTERRUPT THEM.
- If someone make insulting remarks, STOP THEM.

HOW to control?



HOW to control?

“Under no circumstances should the chair attempt to drown out a disorderly member—either by his own voice or the gavel—or permit himself to be drawn into a verbal duel.”

Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised, 11th edition, p. 456



HOW to control?

“In dealing with any case of disorder in a meeting, the presiding officer should always maintain a calm, deliberate tone—although he may become increasingly firm if a situation demands it.”

Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised, 11th edition, p. 456



HOW to control?

“The chair should never get excited.”

Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised, 11th edition, p. 456

Language tips

- Phrase things in the positive.

We're not trying to hide anything here vs.

We're committed to being transparent.

- Give up on the word *but*. Always say *and*.
- Say *kindly* not *please*, which sounds like pleading.
- Say *very well* and move on.

More language tips

- Watch your pronouns!
 - Don't say *you*, say *the member* or *members*
 - Don't say *your motion*, say *the motion*
 - Don't say *my staff*, say *our staff*
- Remember negativity bias and chilled tomato effect.
- Use downward intonation at the end of sentences.
- Be aware of how you use your eyebrows.

Cheat Sheet

- The language of Robert's Rules is like learning a foreign language.
- This chart shows you what to say in each circumstance.

Point of order!

Point of order!

State your point.

The point is well taken.

The point is not well taken.

WHY do we need these rules?

- Because the single most important factor in group decision-making is whether the individuals involved are thinking freely, and giving their true INDEPENDENT judgment. But oftentimes we fail to do this.
- You can have “group genius” instead of “group think”
if you hear from EVERYBODY before moving into decision-making mode.

X. Public Comment

Public comment

- A board meeting is NOT a meeting of the public.
- It is a meeting of the board that is held in public.
- The purpose of the “public comment” period is to allow the board members to become informed about the views of the public.
- It should be carefully structured.
- Best to announce rules at beginning of each session.

Public comment

- For the sake of fairness, rules for public comment **MUST** be enforced consistently.
- Ask staff to time speakers so chair can listen intently.
- **ALL MEMBERS** should listen to the speaker as if there were no one else in the room. This is not easy!

Public comment

- Public should address remarks to chair, and chair should thank each speaker.
- Do not get into back-and-forth with the public. If chair or board members start dialoguing with the public, the situation can quickly become confusing.
- Do not allow demonstrations—clapping, booing, etc. These can chill free speech, both for board members and public.
- Invite the public to address factual questions to the staff after the meeting (not during meeting!)

Public comment

- The rules pertaining to discussion BY board MEMBERS do not apply to COMMENT BY THE PUBLIC.
- The board may encourage citizens to speak politely but cannot enforce a requirement to do this.
- Under the First Amendment to the Constitution citizens have the right to express their views, even if negative.
- Be prepared with an action plan in case of difficulties. Consult with your attorney and staff.
- League of California Cities has excellent material on this.

Public comment

- Your sample school board rules say “The School Board may remove disruptive individuals and order the room cleared if necessary.”
- BE CAREFUL about definition of “disruption.”
- BE CAREFUL about removals.
- In cases where a First Amendment challenge is brought against a public body, very often the jurisdiction loses.

Attacks on staff

- Board members should not criticize staff in public.
- Under your sample bylaws, members of the public may not attack staff.

Sample policy

- Now is the time to hear from our public. We welcome your comments which are very important to us. Note that all comments are limited to three minutes.
- As a reminder, please go to the podium to comment. It is helpful for the board if you would give us your name. Please address your remarks to the chair.
- Note that we will not be entering into dialogue at this time. The purpose of this agenda item is for YOU, the public, to inform US, the board, about your views.
- If members of the public have factual questions, staff will be glad to address them after the meeting.

Other channels

- It is essential for you to be in touch with your public, to be responsive, and to appear responsive.
- Unfortunately, the public comment period has limitations.
- We recommend maintaining other channels for dialogue with the public.
- Community forums, personal discussions, “coffee with the board member,” a form on your website, surveys, etc.

What goes in the minutes?

We recommend that the minutes DO NOT INCLUDE details of statements by the public. Alternatives:

- Public comment was given.
- Public comment was given by Resident A and Resident B.
- Public comment was given as follows:
 - Resident C said the board was doing a great job.
 - Resident D expressed concern about the new arena.
 - Resident E asked the board to monitor the stream flow.

XI. Conclusion

New resource

*Citizen's Guide to Effective Conduct of
Public Meetings Using Parliamentary
Procedure and Robert's Rules of Order in
Washington State*

<https://jurassicparliament.com/citizens-guide/>

**CITIZEN'S GUIDE
TO EFFECTIVE CONDUCT OF PUBLIC MEETINGS
USING PARLIAMENTARY PROCEDURE AND
ROBERT'S RULES OF ORDER
IN WASHINGTON STATE**



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This guide has been prepared to assist citizens and residents who want to know the expectations for public meetings under parliamentary procedure and Robert's Rules of Order in Washington State. We use the example of a city council; these questions are also relevant to other local government bodies such as county commissions, school boards, special districts, etc. We are parliamentarians and nothing in this guide constitutes legal advice.

John Berg, PRP
Kevin R. Connelly, PRP, CP
Ann G. Macfarlane, PRP
K. Ann McCartney, PRP, CP-T
Paul McClintock, PRP, CP-T
Weldon L. Merritt, PRP, CPP
Beverly Przybylski, PRP
Mary L. Randolph, PRP, CPP-T
Matthew J. Schafer, PRP

Three ways to adjourn

1. During the meeting, members may move to adjourn – non-debatable motion, takes a majority vote to pass, very high rank.
2. At the end of the meeting, the chair may say, “There being no further business, this meeting is adjourned.”
3. The chair may adjourn the meeting if a riot breaks out.

Review: Key rules for debate

- Seek recognition before speaking.
- Speak to the chair, not to another member.
- **No one may speak a second time until everyone who wishes to do so has spoken once.**
- One subject at a time, remarks must be germane.
- No interrupting (except for special circumstances).
- Courtesy and respect are essential at all times.

Chair MUST:

- Control the discussion.
- Recognize members.
- Interrupt a member who breaks the rules.
- Be fair at all times.
- Remain calm.

Chair **MUST NOT**:

- Participate too much in the debate.
- Try to control the content of the debate.
- Get all emotional.
- Interrupt a speaker because he knows more than speaker about the subject.
- Throw a member out of the room.

Central paradox

- The chair is the most important person in the room, AND the least important person in the room.
- The chair must be strict on process – a “benevolent dictator.”
- The chair is not responsible for the decision that the group makes.
- The chair is the servant of the group, and the group is the final authority.

Disclaimer: Nothing in this presentation constitutes legal or business advice.

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PO Box 77553, Seattle, WA 98177

Tel: 206-542-8422

Email: ann@jurassicparliament.com Web: www.jurassicparliament.com