

Guidelines for Committees and Small Boards

With references from Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised (RONR)

John R. Berg, PRP

In committees¹ and small boards where there are not more than about a dozen members present, some of the formality that is necessary in a large assembly would hinder business. The rules governing such meetings are different from the rules that hold in other assemblies, in the following respects:²

1. Motions need not be seconded.³
2. There is no limit to the number of times a member can speak to a debatable question.⁴
3. Motions to close or limit debate are not allowed in committees⁵, including the motion for Previous Question or "Calling for the Question".⁶
4. Informal discussion of a subject is permitted while no motion is pending.⁷
5. Informal discussion may be initiated by the chairman himself, which, in effect, enables the chairman to submit his own proposals without formally making a motion. The chairman also has the right to make a motion if he wishes.⁸
6. When a proposal is perfectly clear to all present, a vote can be taken without a motion's having been introduced. Unless agreed to by unanimous consent, however, all proposed actions must be approved by vote under the same rules as in larger meetings, except that a vote can be taken initially by a show of hands, which is often a better method in small meetings.⁹
7. If the chairman is a member, he may, without leaving the chair, speak in informal discussions and in debate, and vote on all questions.¹⁰
8. The Chairman is usually the most active participant in the discussions and work of the committee.¹¹
9. The chairman need not rise while putting questions to a vote¹².
10. Members may raise a hand instead of standing when seeking to obtain the floor, and may remain seated while making motions or speaking.¹³
11. The Chairman usually acts as secretary in very small committees.¹⁴
12. The motion to Reconsider has special rules in all committees.¹⁵

¹ "The informalities and modifications of the regular rules of parliamentary procedure listed on pages 487-489 for use in small boards are applicable during the meetings of all standing and special committees, unless the committee is otherwise instructed..." RONR (11th ed.), p. 500, ll. 9-13

² RONR (11th ed.), p. 487, ll.26-31

³ RONR (11th ed.), p. 488, l. 1

⁴ RONR (11th ed.), p. 488, ll. 2-6 ("Appeals, however, are debatable under the regular rules—that is, each member {except the chair} can speak only once in debate on them, while the chair may speak twice.")

⁵ RONR (11th ed.), p. 500, ll. 20-21

⁶ RONR (11th ed.), p. 198, l. 12

⁷ RONR (11th ed.), p. 488, ll. 7-8

⁸ RONR (11th ed.), p. 488, ff.

⁹ RONR (11th ed.), p. 488, ll. 9-15

¹⁰ RONR (11th ed.), p. 488, ll. 18-20

¹¹ RONR (11th ed.), p. 500, ll. 17-18

¹² RONR (11th ed.), p. 488, ll. 16-17

¹³ RONR (11th ed.), p. 487, ll.33-35

¹⁴ RONR (11th ed.), p. 500, ll. 4-5

¹⁵ RONR (11th ed.), p. 329, l. 25 – p. 330, l. 9