

Audiobook Companion PDF

ROBERT'S RULES

QuickStart Guide

**The Simplified Beginner's
Guide to Robert's Rules**

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1 2 1

Building Your Bylaws

fig. 1

1. Characters

- Not even the bylaws can supersede the rules established by a charter.
- This is by necessity; if bylaws could outrank charter provisions, then any subsidiary organization could operate completely autonomous from its parent organization. It would be anarchy.

2. Bylaws

- The advantage of having bylaws high on the food chain is that the group will generally be more familiar with its bylaws than with its rules of order.
- This is because, in most cases, the group itself authors the bylaws, whereas the rules of order are generally taken from a third party source, like Robert's Rules.

3. Special Rules of Order

- If special rules of order didn't outrank general rules of order, then there'd be no point in creating them.

4. Rules of Order

- These could be Robert's Rules or whichever parliamentary authority that is in use.
- Ironically, Robert's Rules places last, ironic because they are actually defining the hierarchy of authority

fig. 1 : The hierarchy of authority. Source: Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised (11th ed.)

Voting by Proxy

Without specific expression in the bylaws, members may never vote by proxy, or by telephone or email. This reflects the fact that in order to make an informed decision, voters must have all of the available facts, and the same facts presented to the rest of the attending organization. When absent, there is no way that their opinions can be held in the same regard as those in attendance.

Virtual Meetings

If you're using Robert's Rules and want to allow meetings to take place via teleconference or video conference, then this provision must be specified in your bylaws.

Suspending Your Bylaws

The reason that Robert's Rules do not permit bylaws to be suspended, even by unanimous vote, is because in theory, this protects the rights of the absentees. In other words, if a member must miss a meeting, she should have the assurance that the meeting will be conducted according to the bylaws in place.

Temporarily Change Election Procedure

In Robert's Rules, you will likely run up against a scenario in which a vote by ballot is technically required, but, in reality, not necessary. Use your bylaws to specify when a vote by ballot is and is not required.

Non-Member Influence

Robert's Rules are pretty adamant about an organization's power beginning and ending with its members. If you wish for your organization to be occasionally influenced by non-members, giving non-members voting rights in certain scenarios or even allowing non-members to be elected as officers, then these provisions must be specified in your bylaws.

Executive Boards

You need to rely on your bylaws when setting forth the rules and procedures that govern the election and duties of any executive boards in your organization.

Making the Most of Your Meetings

fig. 3

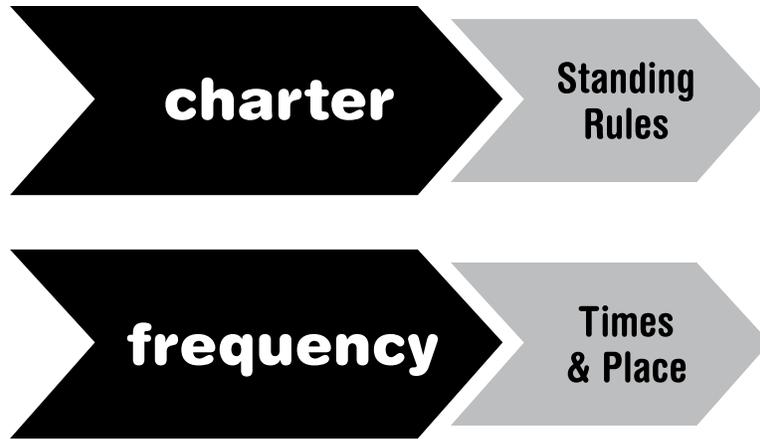


fig. 4

- Motion to Adjourn**
You can call it a day and try again next time. This approach will work when you occasionally can't reach your quorum requirements, but it won't solve chronic issues of absenteeism.
- Fix the Time at Which to Adjourn**
This allows you to set up an adjournment meeting and buys you some time to get the members you need to satisfy your quorum requirement. This time could be before the next regular meeting if the business should be addressed sooner rather than later.
- Motion to Recess**
Sometimes your meeting may start with a quorum, but when it comes time to vote on an important issue, you suddenly don't have a quorum anymore. A motion to recess can be used to go track down the missing members and drag them back to the meeting so you can vote.
- Motion to Form a Quorum Chasing Committee**
You can raise a motion to form a committee responsible for departing the meeting and tracking down enough missing members to attain quorum. This can be done via telephone calls, door-to-door, kidnapping and extortion, etc. While your organization's bylaws (or your state laws for that matter) may not allow kidnapping and extortion, it can sometimes seem as though those methods are the only way to get a reliable turnout.

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The Art of the Motion

fig. 5

Examples of Main Motions

A Motion to Make a Financial Allocation

The organization should purchase an asset, hire a contractor, invest in a stock, donate to a charity, put aside money for a committee within the organization, or otherwise spend funds.

A Motion to Issue an Option of Judgement on Behalf of the Group

This motion can censure the organization's vice president for making a racially insensitive comment, or enable the organization to formally endorse a particular candidate running for public office, for example.

A Motion to Create a Rule

Adds a new bylaw to the organization, or creates a rule that's within the organization's sphere of authority, such as a PTA group voting to extend the hours of operation for the school library.

A Motion to Adopt Reported Recommendations

Adopts a recommendation, such as one made by an education research committee to not support common core curriculum on grounds specified by the report.

Examples of Subsidiary Motions

Motion to Return to Previous Question

This subsidiary motion comes up again and again in most meetings in which Robert's Rules, or any rules of order, are used. The motion to return to previous question, if passed, brings the main motion to an immediate vote.

Motion to Amend

Whereby someone moves to alter the main motion on the table. This can be for any number of reasons, though it should be noted that motions to amend are frequently themselves unable to be the subject of motions to amend as the resulting situation can become quite complex. Motions to amend are often used to add or insert words in a paragraph, strike words from a paragraph, or completely substitute one section or proposal for another. Motions to amend should require a second and should only be debatable if the motion that the motion to amend sees to alter is debatable.

Motion to Postpone Indefinitely

The motion usually arises when the main motion is controversial or threatens to compromise the unity of the group. Technically, a motion to postpone indefinitely means that group agrees to not decide on the pending main motion at the current time.

Motion to Postpone to a Certain (Definitely)

Unlike a motion to postpone indefinitely, this subsidiary motion isn't intended to leave the main motion for dead. It's usually born of practical necessity, such as not having enough time in the scheduled meeting to process the main motion. When a motion to postpone to a certain time is made and passed, the issue is guaranteed to come up again at the time specified.

Motion to Limit or Extend the Limit of the Debate

Main motions are often debated—in accordance with the organization's rules of order—before going to a vote. According to Robert's Rules, each member may take the floor to debate a motion twice. The motion to limit or extend the limit of the debate is, exactly as it sounds, a way to force a vote after a certain amount of time has passed, or a way to allow the debate to proceed beyond the usual dictates set forth by the rules of order.

Motion to Lay on the Table

This motion is one of the more commonly misunderstood motions described in Robert's Rules. Most people think of "tabling a bill" as a parliamentary tactic to end discussion on a bill. While this may be true in government legislatures, in Robert's Rules of Order the motion to lay on the table is used to bring the group's attention immediately to a matter or motion much more pressing than the one currently being discussed. A motion to lay on the table does put aside the current main motion, but, under Robert's Rules, it should not be used to get rid of an unpopular main motion, but instead to draw necessary attention to a specified, more pressing matter.

Motion to Adjourn

While this motion is often used as a privileged motion, it also can be a main motion if used to cut a regular meeting short or to dissolve an assembly. *(Who doesn't love this motion? It's time to go home!)*

Motion to Fix the Time at Which to Adjourn

This motion is used when there is business on the floor and you don't want to just go home and wait for the next regular meeting to take care of it. A motion to fix the time at which to adjourn means that the meeting will adjourn, but there will be adjournment meetings set up to take care of pending business before the next regular meeting of the group commences. This motion can be very useful if you've got a main motion that's still being debated and it looks like the group will not be able to address it due to the time constraints of the current meeting. Your motion to fix the time at which to adjourn essentially sets up a guaranteed special meeting during which this main motion may be properly handled.

Motion to Call for the Orders of the Day

Robert's Rules outlines this very useful and important motion for groups that have a bad habit of getting off track. If there has been an agreement to stick to a meeting agenda, or if a particular main motion was suspended definitely to a certain time and, at that time, it's still not being discussed, then a member makes this motion to get back on track. If the orders of the day are not being followed, this motion can be made, even when someone else is speaking.

Motion to Raise a Question of Privilege

This usually deals with an issue of comfort. If it's too hot, cold, or noisy for the members to focus their attention on the meeting, then someone may make a motion to raise a question of privilege in order to improve the comfort-level of the group, i.e., turn on the air conditioning, close the window, or bring in some sandwiches.

Motion to Appeal

This motion is used when a member thinks the presiding officer has made an erroneous ruling. According to Robert's Rules, if you don't exercise your right to appeal when you believe the presiding officer is in error, then you've implicitly given up your right to criticize the ruling.

Motion to Suspend the Rules

You've got to know the rules before you break them, but you still, on occasion, have to break them. The motion to suspend the rules allows for business to proceed, even when a bylaw or a rule of order stands in the way. To pass, the motion requires a two-thirds majority vote, and this vote is usually held in conjunction with the original action that prompted the motion. For example, if a member wants to suspend the rules so as to allow her dog to sit in on a meeting session in violation of a 'no pets allowed' bylaw, then the motion to suspend the rules and the motion to allow the dog to sit in on the meeting session functions as the same motion.

Object to the Consideration Motion

This motion preempts any discussion from transpiring on a newly moved-for-main motion. In order to use the object to the consideration motion, you must proclaim your objection in the style of a trial attorney; as soon as the question is raised, you stand and say: "I object to the consideration of this question." In the case of this motion, 'the question' refers to the main motion that's being brought up by another member. Once your motion is made, the chair asks for all to stand who want to hear the motion to be discussed. Afterwards, if a two-thirds majority (opposing the discussion) is still possible, the chair invites all to stand who support the motion to object to the consideration of the question.

All of that being said, a member who interrupts another member's designated speaking time by calling a question is being disorderly.

Division of the Question

This incidental motion is used when the main motion being presented has too many component parts and would perhaps be better serviced piecemeal. For example, if someone makes a motion to allocate \$1,000 to purchase a new refrigerator for the group's clubhouse and to make waffles the group's official breakfast food, there may be a case for moving to divide the question and allow each of the two tenets of the previous motion to be heard independently.

Division of the Assembly

This motion is used after a vote is taken—usually a verbal yay or nay vote—and a member doubts whether the group recognized by the presiding officer as the majority is in fact the true majority. It's been known to happen in meetings that one faction is simply louder than another, and, as a result, the presiding officer mistakes the noisiest faction for the majority. A motion for a division of the assembly forces a verifiable revote, such as a ballot-based or stand-up vote.

Division Motions

Incidental motions encompass all motions that govern the way in which voting and vote counting transpires. If a member wishes that a certain vote be conducted in a certain way—by ballot, roll call, etc.—then he may make a motion related to the method of voting. If he wishes to require that a vote be taken at a certain venue, then he may make a motion related to the polls.

figure 8 continued on following page...

Consider Seriatim (or by paragraph)

This motion is used when a deliberative assembly is faced with adopting the dictates of a committee recommendation, a body of bylaws, or any other comprehensive, multi-part written text. Rather than force the assembly to come up with a wholesale yay or nay, the consider seriatim motion allows the dictates to be broken down by paragraph so that each section can be adopted, rejected, or amended.

Nomination Motions

When it's time to elect new officers or board members, nomination motions are used to define the where, how, and when of the nomination process. Usually, this originates with someone making a *motion to open nominations* for a certain position and concludes with someone making a *motion to close nominations*. Motions may also be made to specify how the nominees for a certain position are to be selected. For example, a member may make a motion that the current secretary produce a short-list of three nominees to be considered for succession into the secretary position. Or, a member may make a motion that a committee be established to determine nominees.

Request to be Excused From a Duty

An accompanying *motion to be excused from duty* may be used in conjunction with a resignation of an officer, board member, or committee member or chairman. These motions often follow after the group passes a new main motion that expands the duties of the position at hand.

Point of Order

The point of order motion is used to establish accurate parliamentary procedure. Anyone may call a point of order for consideration by the presiding officer. From that point, the presiding officer checks the bylaws or rules of order if need be, then he or she makes a ruling. If the presiding officer rules against your point of order and you believe him or her to be mistaken, then you may always appeal.

Motion for a Parliamentary Inquiry

This incidental motion is available to help members clarify certain details of the organization's rules of order or special rules of order. A parliamentary inquiry is different from a point of order because what is sought after is information not a formal ruling. What the presiding officer issues is thus merely an opinion.

Requests for Information

In order to make a well-informed vote, you have to be informed, right? Requests for information are used to fill in the relevant blanks about a pending order of business. This particular incidental motion is perhaps the most misunderstood among all those cataloged in Robert's Rules. Since Robert's Rules call information requests, "points of information" rather than "requests for information," many people have gravitated to the misinterpretation of the motion, raising their hands and saying, "point of information" before relaying some fact. The true intent of the "point of information" as it appears in Robert's Rules is to request, not provide information.

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Ways to Create Great Committees

fig. 9

Once the committee clearly completes the task for which it was formed.

When the assembly that formed the committee formally disbands it. This may happen due to the committee's persistent ineffectiveness or due to changing circumstances rendering the committee's purpose no longer pertinent.

When the deliberative assembly that formed the committee disbands committee also ceases to exist.

fig. 9 : Suggested reasons to dissolve special committees.

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A Parliamentary Procedure Sample

fig. 10



legal conflict	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Motions that are in conflict with federal, state, or local laws cannot stand.- This also applies to the organization's charter and bylaws.
previous rejection	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Motions that present something previously rejected during the same session cannot stand.
same question	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Motions that substantially present the same question are in effect subverting the structure of the meeting and of the organization.
beyond scope	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Motions that are beyond the scope of the organization's bylaws cannot stand.- These may be passed regardless, and the bylaws may be amended to fit.

I glossary I

Adjourned Meeting-

A meeting that picks up where a previous meeting left off in terms of processing a certain order of business.

Annual Meeting-

A deliberative assembly or other meeting that occurs once a year and is often used to conduct specific types of business, such as the nomination and election of new officers, board members, and the hearing of annual reporting on the organization's welfare.

Board-

A deliberative assembly created for the purpose of management that either reports to a larger deliberative assembly or is autonomous by way of a law or charter.

Bylaws-

The agreed upon rules an organization uses to govern itself. These rules cannot be changed without a two-thirds vote. In organizations using Robert's Rules of Order, the "bylaws" also encompass any rules set forth by the group in a formal constitution.

Call or "Call of the Meeting"-

A formal term referring to the issuance of notice for an upcoming meeting. If the call is being given for a special meeting, then the business at-hand must be specified.

Chairman-

Refers to the person who presides over a group or committee. reports its income using a Form 1120 U.S. Corporation Income Tax Return.

Charter-

Refers to the system of rules established by a parent organization that a subsidiary organization must follow. Also used to refer to formal articles of incorporation as issued by a state authority.

Debate-

Regulated discourse on a proposed motion.

Deliberative Assembly-

A group that discusses, debates, and decides on action to be undertaken on behalf of the group at-large.

Executive Session-

A meeting or group of meetings that's not open to attendees outside the group's membership.

General Order-

A business item that was postponed in a prior meeting and needs to be heard in the current meeting. This could be an item that was being discussed but was never voted on at the point that the previous meeting adjourned.

Incidental Motions-

Motions that refer to the use and interpretation of the rules of order in a deliberative assembly, such as motions to appeal, motions to suspend the rules, or motions to divide the question.

Main Motion-

The baseline movement of a deliberative assembly: A fundamental call to action on a particular business item.

Mass Meeting-

Refers to an organization of individuals who share a common goal but have yet to agree upon any formal organizational structure for their collective pursuit. Examples would be a town hall assembly, open to all citizens who are concerned about the poor quality of water in the city.

Motion-

A course of action proposed in a meeting.

Order of Business-

A phrase of somewhat loose interpretation meant to convey the increments of business pursued in a parliamentary-style forum or organization. Examples of an order of business include the discussion and voting on a motion, the administering of an election, or the pursuit of a particular business agenda.

Parliamentarian-

A consultant to or permanent officer of an organization whose formal role is to advise the group on matters of parliamentary procedure.

Parliamentary Law-

A general set of common-sense rules that govern the conduct of deliberative assemblies.

Privileged Motion-

A type of secondary motion that doesn't relate directly to the substance of the main motion currently on the floor, but instead focused on the logistics of running the meeting.

Quorums-

A requisite minimum number of members who must be present in order for an organization's meeting to be considered legally valid.

Ratify-

When the group approves after the fact, following an action taken by a group member without proper authorization.

Regular Meeting-

A meeting of a group, designated by the group's bylaws or a standing rule, that occurs on a regular basis—daily, weekly, bi-weekly, etc.

Resignation-

Refers to stepping down from one's official duties as an organization's officer, board member, executive director or committee chairman. Usually requires adequate notice given and fulfillment of all regular obligations until the group formally accepts the resignation. Resignations can be sought after in the form of a proposed motion.

Resolution for Permanent Association-

A written document that demonstrates an assembly's intent to become a solidified organization. Prior to having such a resolution, the assembly is not bound by bylaws or parliamentary procedure.

Secondary Motion-

A motion that supports the group's processing of a main motion, including subsidiary motions, privileged motions, and incidental motions.

Seconding-

A verbal affirmation in support of a new motion. Some motions require seconds in order to be heard and considered by the assembly, and others do not.

Session-

One or a series of meetings intended to pursue a specific order of business.

Special Meeting-

A meeting summoned outside of the regular meeting schedule, usually to address a specific concern facing the group. Special committees are sometimes referred to as "select" or "ad hoc" committees.

Special Rule of Order-

Special rules of order are exceptions and exemptions that are written into an organization's bylaws to determine when and how the organization differs from its procedural guide of choice—such as Robert's Rules. Special rules of order, when officially adopted as part of the bylaws, are just as valid for that organization as any other bylaws or parts of the organization's charter.

Special Committee-

A committee that's established for a fixed, temporary term to assess, investigate and report on a particular issue.

Special Order-

An item of business that, due to a motion, or because it's written into the bylaws, is scheduled to be heard at a specific meeting. Special orders usually take precedence over all other business at a regular meeting.

Special Rules of Order-

An explicitly noted deviation from the general written rules of order used to govern the procedural standards of an assembly.

Standing Committees-

A committee, usually established in the bylaws, charged with a specific, continual function within an organization.

Standing Rules-

Rules not specified in the bylaws, constitution, charter, or rules of order, that govern an organization's process. Standing rules are voted in by a majority and may be suspended at a later time, but only during the normal course of a meeting during which their application arises.

Subsidiary Motion-

A motion put forth to alter or help expedite the processing of a main motion, such as a motion to amend or a motion to send to committee.

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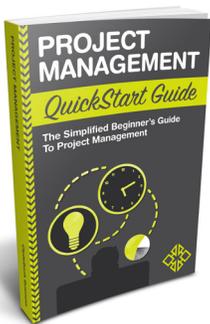


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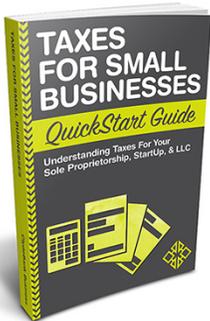
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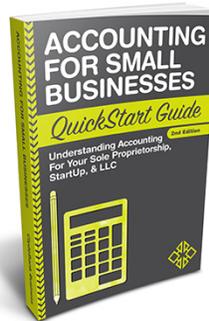
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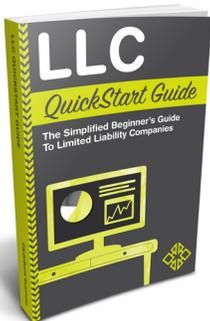
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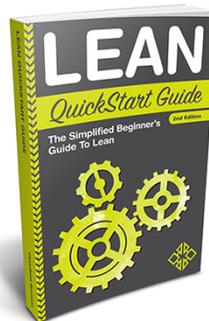
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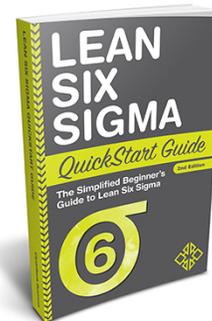
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