

Simplified Robert's Rules of Order for use at AA Business Meetings

Robert's Rules of Order are used around the world to allow organizations to make decisions in a timely and mutually accepted manner. They are designed to allow groups with widely opposed factions to come to agreement. They are not the only kind of informal parliamentary procedure, but they are relatively simple and familiar in essence to many people.

This document presents a simplified version for use in the business meetings of Alcoholics Anonymous or other 12-step programs. This is not General Service Conference-approved A.A. literature, but it does reflect common practice.

Main ideas:

- We gather in a spirit of cooperation to discover our group conscience. We need never fear the conscience of the group.
- For each discussion, everyone should have the chance to speak once before anyone may speak a second time.
- Everyone has the right to know what is going on at all times.
- Only urgent matters may interrupt a speaker.
- The members discuss only one thing at a time.

The Chairperson

The Chair performs an invaluable service by running the business meeting according to the rules of order. The Chair **cannot** vote, introduce motions, or participate in discussion. In general, no one should speak without first being recognized by the Chair, and if people start speaking out of turn, the chair will call for order.

The Secretary

The Secretary takes notes so that they can prepare the official written record of the meeting, called the "minutes." Clear, accurate minutes are very important – they will be used to keep track of the group's conscience, as well as unfinished business from previous business meetings.

The Secretary need not record everything that is said; the minutes are *not* a transcript. But they should include:

- Officer's reports, if any were made during the meeting.
- The exact wording of any **motions** introduced, and their fate (passed, defeated, referred to committee, or tabled).
- If motions were referred to committee, make sure the group specifies the duties of the committee and when their report should be delivered to the full business meeting.

If at any time the Secretary is unclear about something, he/she should ask for clarification immediately. The Secretary can vote, introduce motions, and participate in discussion.

A standard AA business meeting format

Most AA business meetings are run according to the following format:

1. **Minutes** of the previous business meeting should be read by the Secretary. After they are read, if there are no objections to the content, a motion to accept the minutes should be passed.
2. **Officers' Reports.** If necessary, trusted servants (at minimum the Treasurer) report to the group.
3. **Old Business.**
 - a. If there are any reports due from committees, they should be delivered during this phase of the meeting.
 - b. If there are any motions pending from a previous business meeting, they should be taken off the table for consideration at this time.
4. **New Business.** If any member wishes to bring up a new topic for the consideration of the group, it should be done during this phase.

Motions

A **main motion** is the topic under discussion (e.g., “I move that we add a coffee break to this meeting”). After recognition by the chair, any member can introduce a main motion when no other motion is on the table. A main motion requires a second to be considered. A main motion must be disposed of (passed, defeated, tabled, referred to committee, or postponed indefinitely) before a new main motion may be considered.

A **subsidiary motion** affects the main motion under discussion (e.g., “I move that we amend the motion to specify that the break should be 5 minutes long”). After recognition by the chair, any member can introduce a subsidiary motion when another motion is on the table. Once a subsidiary motion has been seconded, it must be disposed of before returning to the main motion. Subsidiary motions can theoretically have their own subsidiary motions, each of which must be resolved in turn. The various kinds of subsidiary motions have different precedence and require different votes to pass (see next page).

Technically, once a motion has been introduced and seconded, it “belongs” to the group, not the person who introduced it. Instead of the mover “withdrawing” it, the group should **amend** it, or move to **postpone the motion indefinitely** (a way of killing the motion without voting it down).

To bring a new idea before the group:

After recognition by the chair, present your **motion** by starting “I move that we ____”. A second is required for the motion to go to the floor for discussion, or consideration. If a motion passes, it goes into effect immediately or at a specified time. Defeated motions cannot be reintroduced for 6 months.

To change or add to the wording of a motion under discussion:

After recognition by the chair, move to **amend** the motion by proposing a specific amendment. Most amendments are friendly, arising naturally out of the group’s discussion of the motion, and can be accepted by the original mover. But if the original mover objects, a majority vote will still amend the original motion. An amendment can completely reword or replace a motion without voting it down.

If you have heard enough discussion, either:

1. Move to **close the discussion**. This ends discussion and brings the assembly to a vote on the pending question only. Requires a 2/3 vote.
2. Move to **limit discussion** to a set period of time or to a set number of speakers. Requires a 2/3 vote.

To recommend more study and/or investigation be given to a motion:

Move to **refer to a committee**. Refers a question to be investigated by a specified group, with a specified purpose, and a specified time to report back to the entire group. Requires a majority vote.

To postpone a motion until some later time:

Move to **table the motion** until a specific time. The motion may be taken from the table after 1 item of business has been conducted. If the motion is not taken from the table by the end of the next meeting, it is dead. A majority is required to table a motion.

To end the meeting:

Move to **close business meeting**. All pending motions will be tabled until next biz meeting. This motion takes immediate precedence and is not discussed. It requires a majority vote to pass.

You are unsure that the Chair has announced the results of a vote correctly.

Without being recognized, call for a “**division of the house**.” At this point a standing vote will be taken.

If you are confused about a procedure being used and want clarification:

Without recognition, call for a “**point of information**.” The Chair will ask you to state your question and will attempt to clarify the situation.

If you think the rules of order have been violated:

Without recognition, call for a “**point of order**.” The Chair will ask you to state your question and will attempt to clarify the situation.

To kill a just-introduced motion:

Without recognition from the Chair simply state “**I object to consideration**.” This must be done before any discussion. This motion requires no second, is not debatable and requires a 2/3 vote.

If you have changed your mind about something that was voted on earlier in the meeting for which you were on the winning side.

Move to **reconsider**. If the majority agrees, the motion comes back on the floor as though the vote had not occurred.

You want to change an action voted on at an earlier meeting.

Move to **rescind**. A 2/3 vote is required.

A note about main motions: in adversarial assemblies, nothing is discussed without a motion. But in AA, cooperation is assumed, and it is often counterproductive to introduce a main motion before there has been some discussion of its subject matter. After some discussion, the intent of the group is usually clearer, and the chair can be of service by attempting to coalesce what he or she has heard into a coherent motion, and ask if anyone will introduce the motion.

You may influence **WHAT** the members discuss:

- if you would like to discuss something - **motion**
- if you would like to change a motion under discussion - **amend**

You may influence **HOW** and **WHEN** a motion is discussed:

- if you want to limit discussion on something - **limit discussion**
- if you think people are ready to vote – **end discussion**
- if you want a committee to evaluate the topic and report back – **refer to committee**
- if you want to discuss the topic at another time – **table until later in meeting or next meeting**

You may **INTERRUPT** a speaker for these reasons only:

- to get information about business - **point of information**
- to get information about rules - **parliamentary inquiry**
- if you see a breach of the rules - **point of order**

Precedence of Motions

Lower-numbered motions have precedence over higher numbers.

1. **Close meeting** - not debatable; goes to immediate majority vote.
2. **Call for orders of the day** – A demand to return to the regular order of business.
3. **Table until later in meeting** – This motion is only used to set aside the pending motion to take up something more urgent, with the full expectation of returning to the motion.
4. **End discussion and vote** - A motion to close debate immediately and vote now on the pending motion. Applies only to the motion on the floor. Not debatable; requires 2/3 vote.
5. **Limit discussion** - can be general, or for a specific time or number of speakers. Not debatable; requires 2/3 vote.
6. **Table until next meeting** – Postpones the current motion to the next session or to an adjourned meeting.
7. **Refer to committee** - applies only to the main motion.
8. **Amend** – if not accepted by mover, must be voted for by a majority to be considered and passed.
9. **Kill Motion on the floor** – Kills the motion without directly voting it down.
10. **Main Motion** - what it is you're debating and amending.

MOTION	REQUIRES SECOND	OPEN FOR DISCUSSION	CAN BE AMENDED	REQUIRED TO PASS	reconsider/ rescind
Main Motion	second	discuss	amend	majority	rec/resc
Amend Motion	second	discuss		majority	rec/resc
Kill a Motion	second			2/3 maj	rec/resc
Send to Committee	second	discuss	amend	majority	rec/resc
Table until later in meeting	second			majority	
Table until next meeting	second	discuss	amend	majority	rec/resc
Close Discussion	second			2/3 maj	rec/resc
Limit Discussion	second		amend?	2/3 maj	rec/resc
End Meeting	second			majority	

Adapted from: http://www.sonoma.edu/Senate/Roberts_Simple.html