



Motion Mechanics

You Have To Start Somewhere

Let's face it. NO ONE is born knowing Roberts Rules of Order but this thick book filled with tiny print governs the procedure of business for nearly every club people join including the General Federation of Women's Clubs, the California Federation of Women's Clubs, your District and your Woman's Club. Reading it is far less exciting than going to the movies and you are already too busy as it is. WHY STUDY, you probably ask. Chances are no one at your club ever bothered to read it and they have been around a long time so why should YOU bother?

When leaders and members know the rules, leaders act fairly with ease. Rules are an agreement that establish boundaries for everyone. They are the contract by which members agree to act in the operation of the group. Leaders and members must BOTH KNOW Roberts Rules of Order in order to work together to make the club efficient and help create a greater community impact. No two humans are going to agree on everything and rules work to limit conflict and resolve it effectively. Roberts Rules of Order was created expressly for the purpose of protecting the rights of the minority while letting the will of the majority govern.

Roberts Rules of Order are important to every club and organization to keep meetings running smoothly at a good pace ensuring that all members understand the business of the club and participate in its decisions. Organizations filled with committed involved members who care can't help but succeed.

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Special points of interest

- When do we vote?
- When can I speak up?
- How do I get my club to act?
- What can I do if I think something is a bad idea or I want a better one?



Do you have a vocal minority?

Hopefully you joined your club to meet people in the community and do good works. Since Federation benefits all communities, hopefully everyone in the community will want to be a part of our mission, a successful club is likely to have members that reflect the viewpoints of its community. Let's face it. There are some people in the community you agree with and others you don't. Your club is going to have people with whom you can profoundly disagree but when the rules are followed it is easy to get along. If club members rarely disagree, chances are they are apathetic and disengaged which is a major danger sign. The only way you are going to get a room full of people that think the same things all the time is if you stay home and fill the room with mirrors. Healthy, respectful discussion which occurs when Roberts Rules of Order is followed enables members to examine a diversity of views before reaching what most members agree is the best decision. When there is a minority it means people are engaged and care. EVERYONE benefits!

“The purpose of Roberts Rules of Order is to protect the rights of the minority while letting the will of the majority govern.”

Not All Meetings Are Alike

Everyone understands that people are less formal in intimate settings than in larger groups meaning that smaller groups are less likely to adhere to Roberts Rules of Order as closely and yet can still conduct business well.

Members of small clubs still need to know Roberts Rules of Order however since hopefully they are preparing themselves for growth and participation at Federation meetings such as District, State and National meetings. Prepare your members to participate in Federation with confidence!

Bare Bones Basics of Business

Motions are the way all business gets handled at clubs. But do you know the basic mechanics of how to make a motion? Check yourself!

1. Does the presiding officer (e.g., president) have conduct of the floor? If the presiding officer is not at the podium, you need to wait to make your motion. ONLY the presiding officer can handle the motion. DO NOT interrupt someone giving a report or anyone who has the floor to make a motion.
2. Have you been recognized by the presiding officer and given the floor? If you want to speak, wait until no one else is speaking then stand or raise your hand and wait until you are recognized and given the floor by the presiding officer. You may have to wait your turn.
3. When you are recognized by the chair, if appropriate, state your full name then say “I move that...” DO NOT SAY “I want to make a motion”. You either move or you don't. State what you want clearly and directly. It helps to write it out and is helpful if you provide a written copy of your motion BEFORE YOU MAKE IT to the Recording Secretary, President and Parliamentarian. This eliminates confusion and mistakes.

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Bare Bones Basics of Business (continued)

4. WAIT FOR SOMEONE TO SECOND YOUR MOTION. Motions made by committees do not need to be seconded.
5. WAIT FOR THE PRESIDING OFFICER TO REPEAT THE MOTION AND CALL FOR DISCUSSION. After the presiding officer has repeated the motion and called for discussion, the person who made the motion gets to speak first. Say what you have to say and sit down. Try to say it all at once since you are only allowed to speak again once everyone else who wants to speak has finished their turn. You then ONLY get one last chance to speak on the motion then you CANNOT speak again. Unless your meeting rules shorten the time, you can only speak a grand total of 10 minutes combined between the two turns you get (NOT 2 10- minute turns and not even 3 1-minute turns). You get a MAXIMUM of 2 turns and you ONLY are allowed the second turn after everyone else who wants to say something has had their chance to be heard and you can only speak for a grand total combined of 10 minutes maximum.
6. Once discussion has finished, the presiding officer should say "Are you ready for the question?" then repeats the final motion one last time and says "All in favor say aye" then "All opposed say no" (NEVER "All opposed say nay"; we are not horses). Then the Presiding officer announces the results and action that will be taken as a result ("The ayes have it and the motion is adopted. We will donate \$100 to CFWC". Or "The no s have it and the motion is lost. We will not donate \$100 to CFWC."

DID YOU KNOW? A common misunderstanding is the idea that once someone says "I move..." and the motion is pending, the motion must be voted on before anyone else can say "I move..." Often people will erupt with the exclamation that "you can't make a motion when there is already a motion on the floor". THE TRUTH is that there can be a near limitless number of motions on the floor while a motion is pending, but it all depends on THE TYPE OF MOTION. This is the idea of MOTION RANKS which is a topic for another time

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW: There can only be ONE original main motion that introduces a new item of business pending at any given time. Any motion which tries to introduce a new item of business (main motion) while another original main motion is pending is out of order and must wait to be made until the pending motion has been resolved.

PEOPLE ARE NEVER OUT OF ORDER! Only motions and business are out of order. If a member tries to make a motion at an improper time, the chair tells her that her MOTION or BUSINESS is out of order.

Who can conduct a vote?

Organizations like most clubs are legally considered what lawyers call a "fictitious being" or essentially a make-believe person. The organization is responsible for its actions much like a person is. However, the way an organization can legally act is determined by the rules under which it is governed. This means (in order of importance) Federal laws, State laws, county laws, city laws, organizational bylaws, standing rules, policy, procedure, customs, and Robert Rules of Order determine how the organization can act and members choose those acts by voting.

At meetings, it is the presiding officer (usually the president) who is the ONLY person authorized to conduct votes at that meeting. Just because someone is standing at the podium does not mean she has the authority to conduct a vote unless the presiding officer has stepped down from that authority for some reason and relinquished the gavel to her, making her temporarily the new presiding officer until the gavel is returned.

THIS MEANS it is ONLY your turn to speak when the presiding officer is at the podium and recognized you and given you the floor to speak.

Is this the full scoop?

NO!!!! The information in this bulletin is a tiny drop in the bucket. This bulletin is addressing only the most stripped down elements of basic core principles and is akin to putting a drop of water in an otherwise empty bucket of Roberts Rules of Order. This is intended to help you put a toe on your journey on the path of parliamentary study and is NOT a substitute for study. This bulletin is not providing the full story, only the outline of these basic concepts.

Very little in this bulletin is an absolute truth that is definitive. This is a BASIC OUTLINE of fundamental concepts and further study will show the reader exceptions and caveats.

The study group is intended as a gathering place for women sharing their collective self-propelled educational efforts. Handouts are not substitutes for study and it is as wise to replace study with only handouts as it is to get brain surgery from someone who never bothered with medical school. If education came without effort, there would be no need for schools. This group and this handout are only intended to help show you the door to knowledge; only you can walk yourself through it.

Unanimous Consent Motions

While the previous bare bones basic motion example has been stripped down to its most fundamental procedure, there may be times that you wonder “do we always need these hoops?” The answer to that is a qualified “not really”.

The unanimous consent motion is a way for the presiding officer to handle routine business items for which it is expected all members are in agreement. An example of this is the approval of the minutes.

To handle a unanimous consent motion, the presiding officer says “if there is no objection...” then states the expected outcome and pauses to give an opportunity for members to object. The presiding officer then says “hearing none...” then the result.

Using the most common example of approval of minutes, the presiding officer would say “if there is no objection, the minutes will stand approved” (pause) “hearing none, the minutes are approved” No voting is necessary.

What about Financial Reports?

Financial reports are NEVER approved by the membership since members are trusting the officers and have no knowledge as to their accuracy or truthfulness. After a financial report has been given the presiding officer thanks the reporting officer for her report and announces that “the report will be filed for audit.” At the end of the fiscal year, financial records should be audited and examined for accuracy and abuse. The auditor should then make a report to the membership of her findings. No one votes on whether reports are “approved”, reports are simply given.

What if I don't like the motion?

Because we are a dynamic group of intelligent women coming from every walk of life, members are guaranteed to hear motions at some point that they don't like. Those who don't know how to participate will probably simply vote “no” if they care about their club but when compared to what happens when members are familiar with the rules it is the same as the difference between using a cave man's stone axe versus a 21st century laser scalpel to perform delicate surgery.

Discussion of the motion is for the purpose of perfecting the motion as the majority of members see as serving the club's best interests. This can range from blocking it, amending it for improvement, or passing it.

Managing Misfortunate Motions

Keeping in mind that all members are supposed to be acting by putting the club's interest first in their decisions, if a member finds the motion profoundly offensive to the mission of the organization, she can "move to prevent consideration" once the offensive (main) motion has been made. This needs to be seconded and a vote is then taken on the motion to prevent consideration which takes a 2/3 majority to pass. If the motion to prevent consideration wins by a 2/3 majority, that ends the offensive motion. If the motion is lost, then consideration of the main motion continues.

If the motion is not profoundly offensive and the member simply thinks it would be a mistake to bring the main motion to a vote, the member can "move to postpone the motion to an indefinite time". This needs to be seconded and passed with a majority vote. If the motion to postpone succeeds, that ends the main motion; if it loses then consideration of the main motion continues.

If a member simply wants to delay consideration of a main motion until later (for example, more information can be obtained or more people can vote), she can "move to postpone to a definite time" naming the time at which she thinks would be prudent. This takes a second and a majority vote and delays consideration of the pending main motion; if it loses, then consideration of the main motion continues.

If a member thinks too much is wrong with the motion in its present form or that the debate is getting unwieldy, she can "move to refer the motion to committee." This needs a second and a majority vote and if it passes, the future of the motion is transferred to an appropriate committee. If there is no existing appropriate committee, the presiding officer can name members to serve on the committee with the first person named serving as the committee's chairman. The committee would meet to perfect the motion and report back to the full assembly making their recommendations and any motions at the end of their report.

Motions can be altered by amendment after they are introduced or undone after they have passed, but these are topics for the future.

Most Misused and Misunderstood Motion Myths

The most frequently misused and misunderstood motion myth is the idea that once a motion or business is tabled, it does not have to be considered at a meeting. While moving to table a motion or business matter at a meeting delays its consideration for the moment, the motion or matter must be considered before the meeting can adjourn.

Most people making a motion to table business generally mean one of the motions in the preceding section above and misuse the term "table" since they are unaware of its meaning.



The De Anza District Parliamentary Study Group is intended to be an informal gathering where members of the California Federation of Women's Clubs can come together to study Roberts Rules of Order and learn from one another how its tools can best be used to empower all levels of Federation through the efficient, effective+, and engaged conduct of business.

The Study Group Difference

Study groups are geared to education /learning from the bottom up where all members prepare the lessons in advance and teach one another at the session. Classes are geared to learning from the top down where students gather to learn from a teacher and can come to class unprepared and study afterward which would not be possible in a study group since each member is essentially promising to do her best to contribute to the teaching of fellow members. There are no grades given out in a study group and each member only receives the benefit of the effort they make in their own education.

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Procedure is a Tool, Not a Weapon

Roberts Rules of Order was created as a tool designed to enhance the ability of large numbers of people who are intelligent, active and engaged work together in harmony even though they disagree consider diverse ideas so that the group can make decisions that are respectful and satisfactory to the greatest number possible. These rules were created to enhance. Members using parliamentary tactics for dilatory purposes in a manner not in keeping with their creation should not be given the floor by the presiding officer once the dilatory intent has become apparent.

All members need to know the rules so that everyone can get along and make the most members satisfied as they continue to grow and change over time by attracting new members with new and different ideas. Had our predecessors in Federation been unfamiliar with Roberts Rules of Order we would be locked in to old and out dated ways of thinking that would not have appealed to the members of the next generation. Knowledge of these rules allows the growth and continued survival of an organization.

Evolution's adage of adaptability for survival is true for every organization. Organizations whose leaders and members are unfamiliar with the means of how to adapt tend to become relics of the past. Knowledge of Roberts Rules of Order is important whether you just joined your club and want to participate or if you are at the top of the organizational hierarchy addressing the organization's business.

When Roberts Rules of Order is followed, all members know that all decisions are made by the will of the majority even if they disagree. Rules are the social contract that allow individuals to come together into a community/organization and work together productively. When members can have the reasons pointed out to them in a book why a decision they disagree with was made and reassure themselves it is part of the social contract they made, they feel better about the decision, leader and organization. Everyone wins!