

NOTE ON THE ROLE OF THE PARLIAMENTARIAN UNDER ROBERT'S RULES OF ORDER NEWLY REVISED (RONR)

Under Robert's Rules (§ 47) the parliamentarian plays a strictly advisory role in the conduct of meetings. Points of parliamentary inquiry can only be addressed to the chair. The chair may consult with the parliamentarian, whose advice is not binding on the chair. At the chair's discretion, the parliamentarian may be asked to explain a procedure or rule to the body. The body may not request a ruling from the parliamentarian. If a member of the body disagrees with a decision made by the chair, that member can appeal the decision of the chair. When this occurs, the chair asks the body to vote on whether their ruling will stand. The key thing to remember is that the chair always makes the ruling and is checked by the body through the appeal process.

COMMON RONR ISSUES

Main Motions: A main motion brings a substantive action or question before the body (see the chart below for other types of motions). A prospective motioner must be given the floor by the chair before making a motion. Once the main motion is made, the motioner stops talking. Main motions are debatable, and the presumption is that the motioner will be the first speaker in favor of the motion. However, the motioner must be recognized by the chair a second time in order to deliver the first speech in favor of the motion. Speakers are allowed to preface their motion with a few words of explanation (not a speech). Speakers are also allowed to provide a summary of the motion they wish to make and to ask the chair (not other members of the body) for assistance in wording the motion. Once the motion has been made and seconded, it is stated by the chair. Complex motions should be submitted in writing. The chair may, at their discretion have the motion read by the recording secretary, or refer to the motion "as printed." Members may submit such complex motions in advance of the meeting. However, the motion is not considered made until the motioner is granted the floor, makes the motion, receives a second, and the chair states the motion.

Amendments: Amendments are subsidiary motions designed to change a main motion. RONR does not distinguish between friendly and unfriendly amendments. Once a motion is formally stated by the chair, it becomes the property of the body. Hence the person who makes a motion cannot change it in response to a friendly amendment. The motion can be amended through the normal RONR process. However, the chair may allow a brief period of commentary to refine the motion between when a member makes a motion and when the chair formally states the motion for consideration by the body and the motion is seconded. During this brief window, the motion may be informally revised, subject to approval from the member making the motion. As is the case with a main motion, the speaker may ask the chair for assistance in wording the amendment as part of the consultation process. An amendment that passes becomes part of the main motion.

Seconding Motions: Most motions technically require a member to second the motion, indicating that they think the motion has merit to be considered. However, for non-controversial

motions, the chair may simply declare that a motion has been seconded, in effect assuming that at least one member of the body would second the motion if given the opportunity. If a member doubts that someone would second the motion, they may object (i.e. raise a point of order), at which time the chair would request a second. The identity of the seconder should be omitted from the minutes.

Without Objection: There are two common circumstances where the chair may invoke the idea of something being done “without objection” (i.e. “by unanimous consent”). One is if the chair believes a motion currently on the floor is not controversial. In that case, the chair generally asks if there is any objection to the adoption of the motion. If there is no objection, the motion is considered adopted. If there is an objection, the motion proceeds like any other motion. The second use case occurs when the chair wants to initiate something without a motion. For example, the chair will ask the body if there is any objection to doing something (such as considering the minutes or the agenda approved).

Speaking order: There is no speaking order or speaker’s list under Roberts rules. Someone who wishes to gain the floor must raise their hand or rise. If they are not called on, they must put their hand down. The process resets after each speaker. Chairs may try to remember who wants to speak, but RONR operates under the assumption that the end of each speech represents a reset of sorts. In this fashion, if the person before you said what you wanted to say, you might decide not to raise your hand to be recognized. Recognizing these patterns in speeches often makes meetings more efficient, while allowing all views to be expressed. Under Robert’s Rules, the chair is expected to alternate pro and con speeches during debate, to the extent that this is possible. As a result, when a speech in support of a motion has concluded during debate, the chair may ask for people seeking the floor to speak in opposition to the motion.

Limits on speaking time: The standard speaking limit is 10 minutes, and a member may only speak twice on any debatable motion. Either limit may be changed by a 2/3 vote. Members are only permitted to deliver a second speech after every other member who wishes to has been allowed to speak for the first time. Yielding time to another speaker is not possible. The person who makes a debatable motion is the presumed first speaker in favor of that motion. The chair has discretion to allow members additional time or opportunities to speak in the absence of objections. A member who disagrees with the decision may object and appeal to the body if the chair does not uphold the objection. Debate is prohibited for some kinds of motions.

Debate: Debate must remain respectful of all members, and comments are to be directed only to the chair. Debaters should generally not refer to other members by name when avoidable, as debate should refer to the general issues. Meeting minutes may be considered public documents, and proceedings should reflect well on the university.

“Killing a motion”: The most appropriate way to seek to stop a motion from moving forward without an up-or-down vote is to motion to suspend indefinitely, as this clearly indicates the motioner’s intent. The motion to lay on the table is commonly used for this purpose, but for technical reasons related to the Faculty Manual, laying a motion on the table may allow it to be brought back up as old business, even years later.

Calling the Question: Robert’s allows closure of debate by a 2/3 vote. The norm is for speeches to continue until everyone who wishes to speak has spoken. The most efficient way to close

debate is to stop speaking. Once everyone stops speaking, the chair may move the body into voting procedure without a motion.

Quorum and Voting: RONR requires a quorum of more than 50% of the body eligible to vote for any meaningful action to be taken. The limited actions that can be taken in the absence of quorum include recessing while more members are sought and determining a new meeting time when quorum may again be sought. Any member who thinks that quorum is lacking has the right to call for quorum, which requires that the number of members actively involved in the meeting be determined.

The standard for votes for main motions, unless otherwise specified in the Faculty Manual, is more than 50% of those casting ballots. This number may be less than 50% of those eligible to vote, and there is no requirement that the total number of votes cast achieve quorum because members are allowed to refrain from voting (even to refrain from voting to abstain). However, a vote total below quorum may lead to a member calling for quorum.

Use of Chat in Online or Hybrid Meetings: RONR has draft rules for hybrid and online meetings that use computer conferencing software such as Teams or Zoom. These rules only allow the chat to be used to make a complex motion, and only then once a speaker has the floor. Using chat in any other way is a violation of RONR. It is the functional equivalent of interrupting the speaker and is subject to the same rulings by the chair. If an online participant wishes to interrupt the speaker in a situation where that is permitted (such as to raise a point of order) that is done by unmuting one's microphone and making the point of order. The same is the case for seconds and voice votes. RONR is silent on the issue of using raised hands for counting votes, so the presumption is that this is allowed.

Technical Issues with an Individual Computer: RONR allows the chair to mute the mic of anyone who is having a computer issue that disrupts the meeting (such as feedback or echo). An individual computer problem does not invalidate any action taken during a meeting. For example, if your internet connection causes you to lose your connection to a meeting during a vote, your inability to vote does not invalidate the vote of the body.

Some Common Motions and Surrounding Rules

M=Main Motion: A motion that brings a substantive action or question before the body.

S=Subsidiary Motion: A motion that deals with or alters the main motion.

P=Privileged Motion: A motion that takes precedence over all other motions. Something that needs immediate attention.

I=Incidental Motion: A motion that deals with questions of procedure related to a main or subsidiary motion.

Main, subsidiary, and privileged motions are in order or precedence. Incidental motions have no order of precedence.

COMMON ACTIONS	CLASS	YOU SAY...	INTERRUPT?	Second?	DEBATABLE?	Amendable?	VOTE REQUIRED
Adjourn	P	"I move to adjourn."	No	Yes	No	No, unless to a specified time or place	Majority
Raise a question of privilege (common for noise or room complaints)	P	"Point of privilege!"	Yes	No	No	No	Chair Decides
Call for the orders of the day (Demand to take up the proper business in order.)	P	"I move for the orders of the day."	Yes	No	No	No	Must be enforced on demand of one member.
Lay on the table (Interrupts the current business to introduce urgent business immediately.) Often results in killing the motion.	S	"I move that the motion be laid on the table."	No	Yes	No	No	Majority
Close Debate	S	"I move the previous question"	No	Yes	No	No	2/3
Debate, Limit or extend	S	"I move to limit discussion to _____ minutes per speaker."	No	Yes	No	Yes	2/3
Commit or refer	S	"I move to refer this matter to committee X"	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority
Amend a motion	S	"I move to amend the motion by (striking/inserting/striking & inserting) _____."	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority
Postpone definitely This does not kill the motion	S	"I move we postpone"	No	Yes	Yes	No	Majority

		this matter until____."					
Postpone indefinitely A postponed motion "dies."	S	"I move to postpone the question indefinitely." "	No	Yes	Yes	No	Majority
Make a motion	M	"I move to..."	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority
Suspend the Rules (Can be used only to suspend some rules of order) Quorum, rules in the Faculty Manual, and rules in the Bylaws that are not rules of order may not be suspended.	I	"I move to suspend the rules and _____."	No	Yes	No	No	2/3
Raise a point of order (use when the rules are not being followed)	I	"I rise to a point of order." Then wait for the chair to have you state your point.	Yes	No	No	No	Chair Decides
Raise of point of parliamentary inquiry (question the rules of order be they the FM, Bylaws, or RONR). The chair and not the parliamentarian responds.	I	"I rise to a point of parliamentary inquiry." Then wait for the chair to ask you to state your point.	Yes (by custom, only if the question is urgent).	No	No	No	Chair addresses the point
Rise to a point of information (use if you have a question about the current motion)	I	"I rise to a point of information." Then wait for the chair to ask for your point.	Yes	No	No	No	Chair addresses the point of information
Appeal the Decision of the Chair	I	"I appeal the decision of the chair." You may be asked to state the specific decision	Yes	Yes	Yes (unless it relates to the order of business, the rules of speaking, or involves a motion that itself is not debatable)	No	Majority