

# ROBERT'S RULES OF ORDER

## SUMMARY OF MOTIONS

- I. **MAIN MOTIONS** — The word motion refers to a formal proposal by a member, in a meeting, that the assembly take certain action. Before a subject can be considered, it must be placed before the assembly in the form of a motion.
  - A. Original main motions — An original main motion is a main motion that introduces a substantive question as a new subject. This is the motion most often used, and is the basic device by which a matter is presented to the assembly for possible action. A main motion can be made only when no other motion is pending, and it ranks lowest in the order of precedence of motions. It may be more suitable for an original main motion to be made orally, or to be submitted in writing, depending on its length, complexity, or importance.
  - B. Incidental main motions — An incidental main motion is a main motion that is incidental to or relates to the business of the assembly, or its past or future action. Such a motion is distinguished by the following characteristics:
    1. It proposes an action specifically defined under parliamentary law and described by a particular parliamentary term. There are thus a definite number of incidental main motions somewhat as in the case of the secondary motions (subsidiary, privileged, and incidental) and the motions that bring a question again before the assembly.
    2. It does not mark the beginning of a particular involvement of the assembly in a substantive matter, as an original main motion does. (Like all main motions, however, it can be made only when nothing is pending, and it brings business before the assembly.) Action that can be proposed by the incidental main motions may relate:
      - a) to further steps in dealing with a substantive matter in which the assembly's involvement has begun earlier; or
      - b) to procedure, without direct reference to a particular substantive item of business.

An incidental main motion involving a subject already entered into might be a motion to adopt recommendations which a committee has prepared upon instructions (not relating to a referred motion), or a motion to ratify action taken at a meeting when no quorum was present. An incidental main motion is usually made orally. Most of the incidental main motions closely correspond to secondary (subsidiary, privileged, or incidental) motions described by the same or similar names.

- II. **SECONDARY MOTIONS** — The concept of secondary motions serves as a starting point for the division of motions into the classes shown. It also throws light on the order of precedence of motions. Secondary motions may be seen as related to the following fundamental principle of parliamentary law: *Only one question can be considered at a time; once a motion is before the assembly, it must be adopted or rejected by a vote, or the assembly must take action disposing of the question in some other way, before any other business (except certain matters called "privileged questions") can be introduced.* By

this principle, a main motion can be made only when no other motion is pending. When the secondary motion has been made and has been admitted by the chair as *in order* (that is, as being legitimately able to come before the assembly at the time according to the rules affecting its use), it must be acted upon or disposed of before direct consideration of the main question can be continued. When a secondary motion is placed before the assembly, it becomes the *immediately pending question*; the main motion remains pending while the secondary motion is also pending.

A. **SUBSIDIARY MOTIONS** — Subsidiary motions assist the assembly in treating or disposing of a main motion (and sometimes other motions.)

1. Postpone Indefinitely — If an embarrassing main motion has been brought before the assembly, a member can propose to get rid of this question without bringing it to a direct vote, by moving to Postpone Indefinitely.
2. Amend — If a main motion might be more suitable or acceptable in an altered form, a proposal to change its wording (either to clarify or, within limits, to modify the meaning) before the main motion is voted on can be introduced by moving to Amend.
3. Refer — But it may be that much time would be required to amend the main motion properly, or that additional information is needed, so that it would be better to turn the motion or resolution over to a committee for study or redrafting before the assembly considers it further. Such action can be proposed by moving to Commit the main question—or Refer it to a committee.
4. Postpone — If the assembly might prefer to consider the main motion later in the same meeting or at another meeting, this can be proposed by moving to Postpone to a Certain Time — also called the motion to Postpone Definitely, or simply to Postpone.
5. Extend Limits of Debate — If it is desired to continue consideration of a motion but debate is consuming too much time, a member can move to place a limit on the debate. On the other hand, if special circumstances make it advisable to permit more or longer speeches than under the usual rules, a motion to do so can be made. Or, it may sometimes be desirable to combine the elements of limitation and extension, as in limiting the length of speeches but allowing more speeches per member. All such modifications of the normal limits of debate on a pending motion are proposed by means of the motion to Limit or Extend Limits of Debate.
6. Previous Question — If it is desired to close debate and amendment of a pending motion so that it will come to an immediate vote, this can be proposed by moving the Previous Question.
7. Lay on the Table — If there is reason for the assembly to lay the main motion aside temporarily without setting a time for resuming its consideration, but with the provision that it can be taken up again whenever a majority so decides, this can be proposed by the motion to Lay on the Table.

B. **PRIVILEGED MOTIONS** — Unlike subsidiary motions, privileged motions do not relate to the pending business, but have to do with special matters of immediate and overriding importance which, without debate, should be allowed to interrupt the

consideration of anything else. The privileged motions are listed below in ascending order of rank. Each of the succeeding motions takes precedence over any or all of the motions listed before it.

1. Call for the Orders of the Day — If the adopted program or order of business is not being followed, or if consideration of a question has been set for the present time and is now in order but the matter is not being taken up, a single member, by making a Call for the Orders of the Day, can require such a schedule to be enforced — unless the assembly decides by a two-thirds vote to set the orders of the day aside.
2. Raise a Question of Privilege — a pressing situation is affecting a right or privilege of the assembly or of an individual member (for example, noise, inadequate ventilation, introduction of a confidential subject in the presence of guests, etc.), a member can Raise a Question of Privilege, which permits him or her to interrupt pending business to state an urgent request or motion. If the matter is not simple enough to be taken care of informally, the chair then makes a ruling as to whether it is admitted as a question of privilege and whether it requires consideration before the pending business is resumed.
3. Recess — A short intermission in a meeting, even while business is pending, can be proposed by moving to Recess for a specified length of time.
4. Adjourn — A member can propose to close the meeting entirely by moving to Adjourn. This motion can be made and the assembly can adjourn even while business is pending, provided that the time for the next meeting is established by a rule of the society or has been set by the assembly.
5. Fix the Time to Which to Adjourn — Under certain conditions while business is pending, the assembly—before adjourning or postponing the pending business—may wish to fix a date and hour, and sometimes the place, for another meeting, or (in an established society) for another meeting before the next regular meeting. In cases of this kind, the motion to Fix the Time to Which to Adjourn can be made—even while a matter is pending—unless another meeting is already scheduled for later within the same session.

C. **INCIDENTAL MOTIONS** — Incidental motions relate, in different ways, to the pending business or to business otherwise at hand.

1. Point of Order — Although the presiding officer has the responsibility of enforcing the rules, any member who believes he or she has noticed a case where the chair is failing to do so can call attention to it by making a Point of Order at the time the breach occurs. The effect is to require the chair to make a ruling on the question involved.
2. Appeal — Although the duty of ruling on all questions of parliamentary procedure affecting the assembly's proceedings rests with the chair, any two members, by moving and seconding an Appeal immediately after the chair has made such a ruling, can require him or her to submit the matter to a vote of the assembly.
3. Suspend the Rules — When it is desired that the assembly take up a question or do something that would be in violation of a rule that applies, it can be proposed in

some cases to Suspend the Rules to permit accomplishment of the desired purpose.

4. Objection to the Consideration of a Question — If an original main motion\* has been made and a member believes that it would do harm for the motion even to be discussed in the meeting, he or she can raise an Objection to the Consideration of a Question, provided he or she does so before debate has begun or any subsidiary motion has been stated by the chair; the assembly then votes on whether the main motion shall be considered (and if there is a two-thirds vote against consideration, the motion is dropped).
5. Division of a Question — If a pending main motion (or an amendment to it) contains two or more parts capable of standing as separate questions, the assembly can vote to treat each part individually in succession. Such a course is proposed by the motion for Division of a Question.
6. Consideration by Paragraph or Seriatim — the main motion is in the form of a resolution or document containing several paragraphs or sections which (although not separate questions) could be most efficiently handled by opening each paragraph or section to amendment one at a time (before the whole is finally voted on), such a procedure can be proposed by the motion for Consideration by Paragraph or Seriatim.
7. Division of the Assembly — If a member doubts the accuracy of the chair's announcement of the result of a voice vote (or even a vote by show of hands)—or doubts that a representative number of persons voted—he can demand a Division of the Assembly; a single member thus has the power to require a standing vote—but not to order a count, which only the chair or the assembly can do (see next item).
8. Motions Relating to Methods of Voting and the Polls — A member can move that a vote be taken (a) by ballot, (b) by roll call, or (c) by a counted standing vote, especially if a division of the assembly has appeared inconclusive and the chair neglects to order a count. This grouping also includes a motion (d) that the polls be closed or reopened in a ballot vote. All these motions are grouped under the heading of Motions Relating to Methods of Voting and the Polls.
9. Motions Relating to Nominations — If the bylaws or rules of the organization do not prescribe how nominations are to be made, and if the assembly has taken no action to do so prior to an election, any member can move while the election is pending (a) to specify one of various methods by which the candidates shall be nominated; or, if the need arises, (b) to close nominations, or (c) to reopen them; these are the Motions Relating to Nominations.
10. Request to be Excused from a Duty — A member may Request to Be Excused from a Duty if he or she wishes to be relieved from an obligation imposed upon him or her by the bylaws or by virtue of some position or office he or she holds.
11. Requests and Inquires — There are several other types of Requests and Inquiries which a member can make in connection with business that someone desires to introduce, or that is pending or has just been pending. These include:

- a) Parliamentary Inquiry — a request for the chair's opinion on a matter of parliamentary procedure as it relates to the business at hand— not involving a ruling.
- b) Point of Information — an inquiry as to facts affecting the business at hand— directed to the chair or, through the chair, to a member.
- c) Request for Permission (or Leave) to Withdraw or Modify a Motion after it has been stated by the chair.
- d) Request to Read Papers.
- e) Request for Any Other Privilege. The first two types of inquiry are responded to by the chair, or by a member at the direction of the chair; the other requests can be granted only by the assembly.

**D. MOTIONS THAT BRING A QUESTION AGAIN BEFORE THE ASSEMBLY** — Motions That Bring a Question Again Before the Assembly, either by their adoption or by their introduction, enable the assembly for good reason to reopen a completed question during the same session, or to take up one that has been temporarily disposed of, or to change something previously adopted and still in force.

1. Take from the Table — If it is desired to resume consideration of a main motion which lies on the table, it can be proposed by means of the motion to Take from the Table that the motion or series become pending again.
2. Rescind; Amend Something Previously Adopted — If it is desired to nullify something that has been adopted, such action can be proposed by means of the motion to Rescind (or Repeal, or Annul); and by another form of the same parliamentary motion—that is, the motion to Amend Something Previously Adopted — it can be proposed to modify only a part of the wording or text previously adopted, or to substitute a different version.
3. Discharge a Committee — question has been referred, or a task has been assigned, to a committee that has not yet made its final report and it is desired to take the matter out of the committee's hands, either so that the assembly itself can consider or act upon it or so that it can be dropped, such action can be proposed by means of the motion to Discharge a Committee.
4. Reconsider — If, in the same session that a motion has been voted on, but no later than the same day or the next day on which a business meeting is held, new information or a changed situation makes it appear that a different result might reflect the true will of the assembly, a member who voted with the prevailing side can, by moving to Reconsider the vote, propose that the question shall come before the assembly again as if it had not previously been considered.

**ORDER OF PRECEDENCE OF MOTIONS AND  
OTHER CONDITIONS AFFECTING ADMISSIBILITY**

- ▶ **PRIVILEGED, UNDEBATABLE: Fix the Time to Which to Adjourn** (when privileged as explained in 22:4)
- ▶ **PRIVILEGED, UNDEBATABLE: Adjourn** (when privileged as explained in 21:1–4)
- ▶ **PRIVILEGED, UNDEBATABLE: Recess** (when moved while a question is pending)
- ▶ **PRIVILEGED, UNDEBATABLE: Raise a Question of Privilege**
- ▶ **PRIVILEGED, UNDEBATABLE: Call for the Orders of the Day IS OUT OF ORDER WHEN:** a motion to Suspend the Rules relating to priority of business is pending
- ▶ **SUBSIDIARY, UNDEBATABLE: Lay on the Table IS OUT OF ORDER WHEN:** a Point of Order, undebatable Appeal, or one of the five Requests and Inquiries—not adhering to main question—is pending
- ▶ **SUBSIDIARY, UNDEBATABLE: Previous Question** (immediately to close debate and making of subsidiary motions except Lay on the Table) **IS OUT OF ORDER WHEN:** a motion which cannot be debated or amended is immediately pending
- ▶ **SUBSIDIARY, UNDEBATABLE: Limit or Extend Limits of Debate IS OUT OF ORDER WHEN:** any undebatable question is immediately pending; also when motion(s) under an order for the Previous Question remain to be voted on
- ▶ **SUBSIDIARY, DEBATABLE: Postpone to a Certain Time** (or Postpone Definitely) **IS OUT OF ORDER WHEN:** any undebatable question except Division of a Question or Consider by Paragraph or Seriatim is immediately pending; also when motion(s) under an order for the Previous Question remain to be voted on
- ▶ **SUBSIDIARY, DEBATABLE: Commit** (or Refer) **IS OUT OF ORDER WHEN:** a motion to Reconsider is pending, or any undebatable question except Division of a Question or Consider by Paragraph or Seriatim is immediately pending; also when motion(s) under an order for the Previous Question remain to be voted on
- ▶ **SUBSIDIARY, DEBATABLE: Amend IS OUT OF ORDER WHEN:** the application would be to the main question, and any motion except Postpone Indefinitely is pending; also, in any application, when motion(s) under an order for the Previous Question remain to be voted on
- ▶ **SUBSIDIARY, DEBATABLE: Postpone Indefinitely IS OUT OF ORDER WHEN:** any motion except the main question is pending; also when the Previous Question has been ordered
- ▶ **DEBATABLE: MAIN MOTION IS OUT OF ORDER WHEN:** any motion is pending

I. CHART FOR DETERMINING WHEN EACH SUBSIDIARY OR PRIVILEGED MOTION IS IN ORDER (cont.)

Order of Precedence of Motions		Other Conditions Affecting Admissibility	
		MOTION DIRECTLY TO LEFT ON FACING PAGE IS OUT OF ORDER WHEN:	
P R I V I L E G E D	Fix the Time to Which to Adjourn (when privileged as explained in 22:4)		
	Adjourn (when privileged as explained in 21:1-4)		
	Recess (when moved while a question is pending)		
	Raise a Question of Privilege		
	Call for the Orders of the Day		
S U B S I D I A R Y	Lay on the Table		
	Previous Question (immediately to close debate and making of subsidiary motions except <i>Lay on the Table</i> )		
	Limit or Extend Limits of Debate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>any undebatable question is immediately pending; also when motion(s) under an order for the <i>Previous Question</i> remain to be voted on</li> </ul>	
	Postpone to a Certain Time (or Postpone Definitely)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>any undebatable question except <i>Division of a Question</i> or <i>Consider by Paragraph</i> or <i>Seriatim</i> is immediately pending; also when motion(s) under an order for the <i>Previous Question</i> remain to be voted on</li> </ul>	
	Commit (or Refer)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a motion to <i>Reconsider</i> is pending, or any undebatable question except <i>Division of a Question</i> or <i>Consider by Paragraph</i> or <i>Seriatim</i> is immediately pending; also when motion(s) under an order for the <i>Previous Question</i> remain to be voted on</li> </ul>	
	Amend	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the application would be to the main question, and any motion except <i>Postpone Indefinitely</i> is pending; also, in any application, when motion(s) under an order for the <i>Previous Question</i> remain to be voted on</li> </ul>	
	Postpone Indefinitely	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>any motion except the main question is pending; also when the <i>Previous Question</i> has been ordered</li> </ul>	
	MAIN MOTION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>any motion is pending</li> </ul>	
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a motion to <i>Suspend the Rules</i> relating to priority of business is pending</li> <li>a <i>Point of Order</i>, undebatable <i>Appeal</i>, or one of the five <i>Requests and Inquiries</i>—not adhering to main question—is pending</li> <li>a motion which cannot be debated or amended is immediately pending</li> </ul>
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>any undebatable question is immediately pending; also when motion(s) under an order for the <i>Previous Question</i> remain to be voted on</li> <li>any undebatable question except <i>Division of a Question</i> or <i>Consider by Paragraph</i> or <i>Seriatim</i> is immediately pending; also when motion(s) under an order for the <i>Previous Question</i> remain to be voted on</li> <li>a motion to <i>Reconsider</i> is pending, or any undebatable question except <i>Division of a Question</i> or <i>Consider by Paragraph</i> or <i>Seriatim</i> is immediately pending; also when motion(s) under an order for the <i>Previous Question</i> remain to be voted on</li> <li>the application would be to the main question, and any motion except <i>Postpone Indefinitely</i> is pending; also, in any application, when motion(s) under an order for the <i>Previous Question</i> remain to be voted on</li> <li>any motion except the main question is pending; also when the <i>Previous Question</i> has been ordered</li> <li>any motion is pending</li> </ul>

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