

Robert's Rules of Order

A Primer for Parliamentary Procedures
Academic Senate of Napa Valley College

I. Overview

The Academic Senate of Napa Valley College uses Robert's Rule of Order to conduct meetings of the full senate body and in standing and ad hoc committees. This standard for conducting meetings of deliberative bodies establishes rules for motions, voting, precedence of motions, and general rules of order. While following the full text of the Rules of Order at every meeting of every committee is neither necessary nor practical, closer adherence to a few basic principles outlined in this text will create more professional meetings where the rights of all faculty to participate in the business of the senate, regardless of rank, standing, or holding a minority view, will be better-served.

Specifically, the Senate and Senate Committees will focus on adopting and implementing the following procedures and process for meetings conducted in Spring 2011. This paper outlines general rules of conduct that apply to all meetings, orders of business, agendas, and precedence of motions, providing a brief introduction to the rules of orders for all members of the senate. The degree to which these processes are followed should be commensurate with the size and complexity of the committee. Full meetings of the senate, curriculum, and other large committees should adhere to these rules closely, whereas committee meetings comprised of five members of the senate can conduct business more informally providing that every member of the committee has equal say, that basic rules of motions are observed, and that agendas are written and adopted according to best-practice models.

II. General Rules of Conduct

Successfully conducting senate meetings, whether full business meetings or the meetings of small committees, requires that all participants are working within the same parameters, with a common language, and with commonly understood rules of order governing the conduct of all members.

The following general rules of conduct apply to all members of senate bodies at all business meetings, all committee meetings, and all meetings of sub and ad hoc committees.

- *All motions, comments, and debate are directed to the Chair.*
- *Remarks must be courteous in language and deportment – avoid all personalities, never allude to others by name or to motives. Discussions must be limited to the merits or lack thereof of the topic.*
- *Motions precede debate. Debate cannot begin until a member has made a motion (according to the motions chart in part IV) on the item under consideration for action.*
- *The Chair must restate the motion clearly so that everyone knows exactly what is being proposed and opened for debate.*
- *No member can speak twice to the same issue until everyone else wishing to speak has spoken to it once.*
- *If no one responds or once everyone has had their say, the chair then must restate the motion and “Call for the Question.”*
- *Any member of the body may make motions related to the item up for action as*

described in the following sections and tables.

III. The Order of Business

The following sections outline the standard order of business for meetings of Senate bodies.

A. Agenda

All meetings are conducted and governed by an agenda. One of the first actions at any meeting is to approve, amend, and motion to adopt the agenda. Robert's Rules of Orders conflicts a bit with the Brown Act on this point, but an appropriate blend of the two should result in a printed agenda that outlines:

- Items for Information
- Items for Discussion
- Items for Action

Every item on the agenda should be properly listed in one of these categories with a brief description, the name of the person presenting the item, the precise amount of time allocated for the item, and a recommendation for action, when appropriate. Before the meeting can begin, the agenda must be "adopted", which results from:

- A member of the body making a motion to approve the agenda;
- That motion receiving a second;
- A simple majority voting to approve the agenda.

The Senate body may revise the agenda prior to adoption through motions to amend. However, this should be used judiciously and not as a way to avoid action or discussion on any topic. Because of the requirements of the Brown Act, if a member of the body proposes the addition of action items to an agenda, such amendments may only be included if:

1. The need for such action only became apparent after the posting of the original agenda;

And

2. The motion to add the item is approved by 2/3 of the total voting body or by unanimous vote of the quorum present if it is less than 2/3 of the total voting body.

Once approved, this agenda becomes the "Orders of the Day." Each type of agenda item is handled and dispensed with according to category or through a series of ranked motions that are described later in this document.

B. Information Items

These are agenda items intended to provide the body with brief updates or reports of activities or actions from outside. This includes reports from the President, elected officers, committee chairs, administrators, or can be reports on actions taken by other bodies, committees, or on discussions or decisions in executive session. If the Senate wishes to debate or discuss an item presented as information, they must request that it be placed on an agenda at future meeting as an action or discussion item according to the rules layed out in the Senate bylaws.

Information items should be brief and only contain information that is pertinent to the business of the Senate or committee. This is not story time. Senate and committee members may ask for clarifications for these items by addressing the chair, but follow-ups should be brief and not an invitation to discussion or debate.

C. Discussion Items

Discussion items are a chance for the body to discuss and debate any matter related to the business of the senate, often leading to action at a future meeting or providing the President or Chair with direction for discussions with the Administration, State Academic Senate, or other bodies. However, discussion items are not intended to be a free-for-all debate and should adhere to process as follows:

1. The person listed next to that agenda item should be allowed a brief introduction to the topic under discussion, including how and why it pertains to the business of the Senate and whether this is being introduced as a potential action item at a future meeting.
2. Once the introduction is made, the Chair may then open up the floor for comments and debate following the standard rules of order for discussion:
 - o Each member of the board may address the topic once.
 - o No member can speak twice to a subject until all members of the board have had their say and only then with the consent of the Chair.
 - o No member of the public may be involved in the discussion unless the Chair has specifically recognized them or they are presenting the item, and only then to provide answers or clarifications on follow up questions. Neither the Brown Act nor Robert's Rules of Order require that boards allow public comment on discussion items.
3. Time limits for discussion are absolute unless a member of the board makes a motion to extend discussion. That motion requires a second and then requires a 2/3 majority of the committee to vote in favor. The motion to extend time may not be debated or discussed and must specify the amount of the extension or the time at which the extension expires. Once motioned and seconded, the chair must proceed immediately to a vote on extending the time for an agenda item without ANY discussion. Every item on the agenda should clearly state how much time is being provided for that item and time may not be carried over or reserved from other discussions or actions.

D. Action Items

Action items are those items on the agenda that require a vote from the committee and should be handled as follows:

1. *Introduction of the Item to be deliberated.* The introduction should be delivered by the Chair or by the person who is listed next to that item on the agenda, if not the Chair. The introduction should be very brief and to the point, allowing the body to understand what is being proposed and to formulate an appropriate motion. The agenda should contain a description of the action being proposed, but a short oral introduction is also

appropriate. It is also appropriate to word the introduction, whether written or oral, to state that it is being recommended for approval. "It is recommended that that Senate approve the bylaws revisions as follows" This introduction also helps the body to formulate a motion that can then be debated, amended, etc. The brevity of this introduction is another reason it is so important to have meeting materials out to the committee in advance of the meeting, not at the meeting. Members should come to a meeting prepared to take action on an action item. The discussion and debate around an action item, while providing clarity or direction for individual members' votes, is not an educational session about the history, background, or formulation of the item. Members must come to session informed.

2. *Public Comment on the action item.* The Brown Act requires that the public be allowed to address a deliberative body of a public agency (including Senate business meetings, committee meetings, sub-committees in some cases, but not the Senate Executive) prior to action on any item on the agenda. General public comments should come at the beginning of the meeting
3. *Motion from the committee.* Motions precede debates. If there is no motion from the floor to approve, postpone, or otherwise address or dispense with the action item, then the action dies and no debate or votes are necessary. Types and order of motions are outlined in a later section.
4. *Discussion.* Discussion may begin once a motion has received a second. Rules of order require members wishing to discuss the action to "take the floor" by standing up. While our senate may not need to go this level of formality, it is appropriate that the Chair require members to raise their hands to take the floor. The Chair should determine a consistent amount of time for each person wishing to address the body based on the number of people wishing to comment and the total amount of time allotted for that item. Generally, no more than two minutes should be allowed per person. Discussion should follow what is outlined above under Discussion Items and under the general rules of order in section II. Specifically:
 - *Each member of the board may address the topic once.*
 - *All comments are directed to the chair.*
 - *Remarks must be courteous in language and deportment – avoid all personalities, never allude to others by name or to motives. Discussions must be limited to the merits or lack thereof of the topic.*
 - *No member can speak twice to a subject until all members of the board have had their say.*
 - *No member of the public may be involved in the discussion unless they have been specifically recognized by the Chair or invited by the CC as the presenter of an agenda item.*
 - *Time limits for discussion are absolute unless a member of the board makes a motion to extend discussion. That motion requires a second and requires a 2/3 majority of the committee. The motion may not be debated. Once motioned and seconded, the chair must proceed immediately to a vote without ANY discussion.*
5. *Amendments and other subsidiary motions.* If during discussion the body decides that the original motion is not how they want to proceed, the person making the original motion may "Withdraw Motion from Consideration", or, more likely, the committee can

move to amend the original motion. The attached charts explain this process and all other motions in detail, including when they should be used.

6. *Vote.* Once discussion is concluded or time is up, the Chair restates the motion on the floor and calls for the “Question”. Voting proceeds and the action fails or succeeds based on the voting and majority requirements for any particular motion.

IV. Motions

Motions are how the body dispenses with any item up for action on an agenda. The following table provides an overview of the most common motions, their rank or order of precedence, and under what circumstances they should be used.

One important note: if at any point in a meeting a member thinks things are going awry or that procedure is not being properly followed, they may say “Point of Order.” A point of order is an interrupt and must be immediately addressed by the chair. It stops all discussion, all action, everything until the Chair determines whether or not order is being followed.

A. Main Motions

These motions are listed in order of precedence. A motion can be introduced only if it is higher on the chart than the pending motion. Motions introduced out of precedence must be ruled as “Out of Order” by the chair.

Motion	Purpose	Interrupt	2 nd	Debate	Amend	Vote
Move to Adjourn	<i>End the meeting</i>	No	Yes	No	No	Majority
Move to Recess for (specific time)	<i>Take a break</i>	No	Yes	No	Yes	Majority
Point of Privilege	<i>Register complaint or discomfort. Always in order</i>	Yes	No	No	No	None
Move the Orders of the Day	<i>Make the body follow the agenda. Used when the body is off topic and requires immediate resumption of the orders of the day (agenda.)</i>	Yes	No	No	No	None
Move to lay the question on the table	<i>Postpone agenda item until a specific time during the same meeting.</i>	No	Yes	No	No	Majority
Move the previous question	Close debate and move immediately to a vote. Stops all debate and requires immediate action.	No	Yes	No	No	2/3

Move to extend or limit debate	Extends the time for debate or cuts off time for debate. Motion must specify amount of extension or time at which debate will end.	No	Yes	No	No	2/3
Motion	Purpose	Interrupt	2nd	Debate	Amend	Vote
Move to postpone the motion	Postpones action until a specified time	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority
Move to refer motion to a committee	Postpones action by returning or referring a matter to a specific committee.	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority
Move to amend the motion	Modify wording of the motion. Motion must include specific amendments to the wording. It is not sufficient to suggest general changes. May not change the intent of the motion.	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority
Move to postpone motion indefinitely	Kills the main motion.	No	Yes	Yes	No	Majority
Move that [or to]....	Main motion to bring an item for debate and vote.	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority

B. Incidental Motions

These motions have no order of precedence. They arise incidentally and are decided immediately.

Motion	Purpose	Interrupt	2 nd	Debate	Amend	Vote
Point of Order	<i>Enforce rules of order and conduct. Must be addressed immediately by the chair, who either accepts it as a "Point Well Taken" or rejects it. If accepted, the chair must rectify the situation resulting in the point of order.</i> <i>Always in order</i>	Yes	No	No	No	No

Move to appeal from the decision of the Chair	<i>Used to challenge the ruling of the chair and submit a ruling to full body vote. Can only be used to challenge the judgment of the chair (on points of order, privilege, etc.), not points of fact.</i>	Yes	Yes	No	No	Majority
Move to suspend the rules	<i>Suspend the rules. Allows a violation of the assembly's own rules (except bylaws); the object of the suspension must be specified</i>	No	Yes	No	No	2/3
Motion	Purpose	Interrupt	2nd	Debate	Amend	Vote
Object to consideration of the motion	<i>Avoid any discussion or action on the main motion</i>	Yes	No	No	No	2/3
Move to divide the question	<i>Divides the motions into smaller constituent parts</i>	No	Yes	No	Yes	Majority
Move for a rising vote.	<i>Requires voting to take place by members standing to indicate "ayes" and "noes".</i>	Yes	No	No	No	None
Point of Parliamentary Inquire	<i>Stops business to resolve question about appropriate process</i>	Yes	No	No	No	None
Point of Information	<i>Used to request information on a specific question, either about process or about the content of a motion. A point of information does not give the speaker the privilege to provide information. Always in order.</i>	Yes	No	No	No	None

C. Motions That Bring a Question Again Before the Body

These motions have no order of precedence. Introduce only when nothing else is pending.

Motion	Purpose	Interrupt	2nd	Debate	Amend	Vote
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Move to take from the table	<i>Allows item tables during that session to brought forward for motions and debate.</i>	No	Yes	No	No	Majority
Move to Rescind	<i>Cancel previous action</i>	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	2/3
Move to reconsider	<i>Reconsider a motion to propose change to a previous decision.</i>	Yes	No	No	No	None