
Running Effective Meetings – Rules of Decorum

WCA Educational Seminar
January 13, 2020

Sources of Procedural Rules

- State Statutes
 - Local Rules
 - Robert's Rules of Order
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Object of Rules of Order

- To facilitate the smooth functioning of the assembly
 - Provides order
 - Provides a firm basis for resolving questions of procedure
 - Provides organizational stability
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Object of Rules of Order

- It is unwise for an assembly or society to function w/o formally adopted rules of order
- For many organizations that manual is Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised 11th Edition



History

- Parliamentary law originally was the name given to the rules & customs for carrying on business in the English Parliament
 - The kind of gathering in which parliamentary law is applicable is known as a deliberative assembly
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Henry Martyn Robert (1837–1923)

- Engineering officer in regular army
 - Became Brigadier General
 - Active in educational work; church & civic org
 - w/o warning asked to preside over meeting
 - Embarrassment was supreme
 - Never again w/o knowing parliamentary law
 - Severe winter tied up Milwaukee engineering project (Lake Michigan), wrote manuscript
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Principles Underlying Parliamentary Law

Rules based on regard for the rights:

- of the majority
 - of the minority, especially a strong minority
 - of individual members
 - of absentees, and
 - of all these together
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The Process

- Call to Order – Presiding officer
 - Quorum
 - statute, bylaws or local rules should specify
 - In the absence of such a provision – a majority
 - where membership is loosely determined than those who attend
 - WCA Board – majority of members
 - WCA Steering Committee – 25% of members
 - WCA Standing Committee – majority of members
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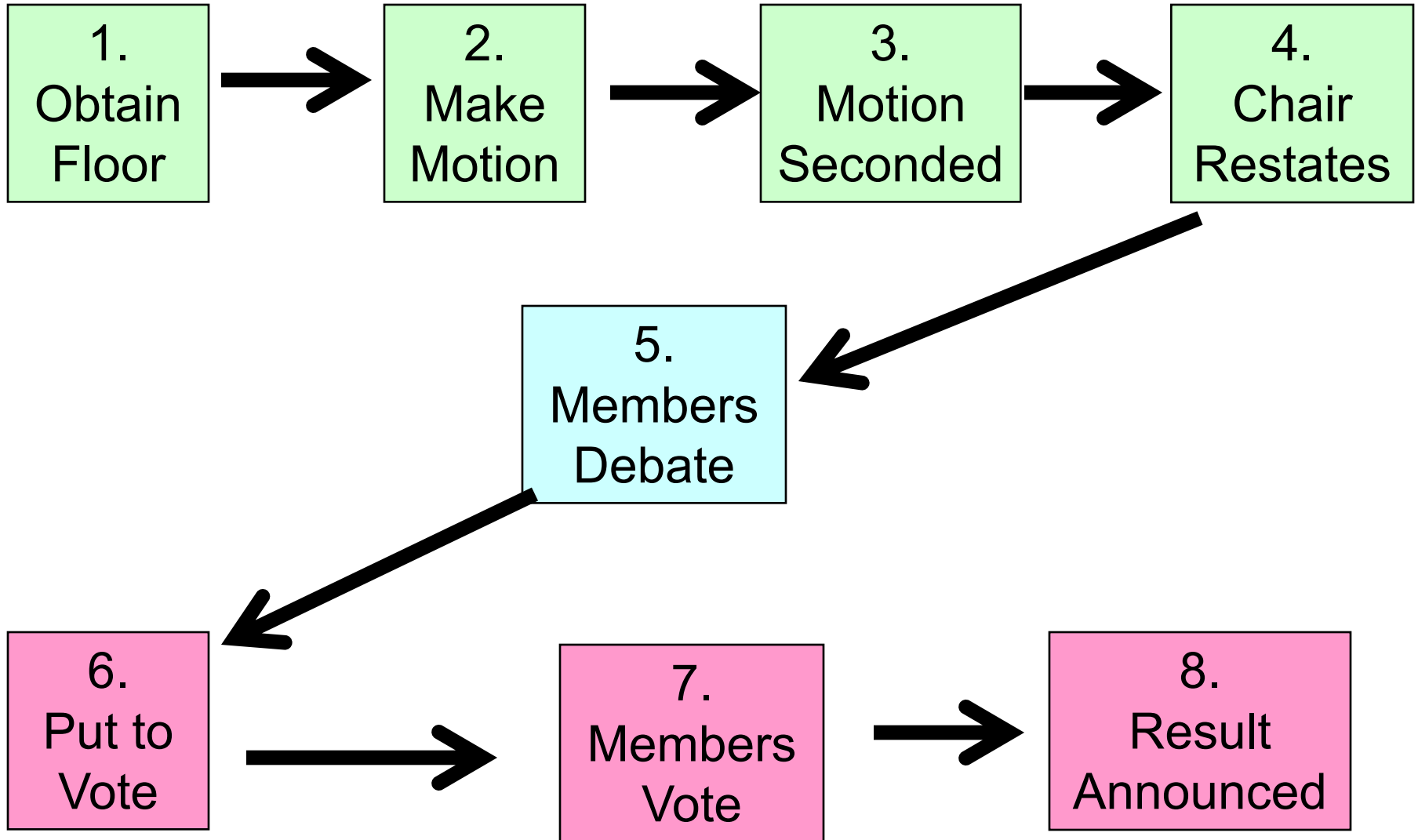
The Process

- Member obtains the floor – must be recognized - raise your hand, stand, push a button
 - Member makes a motion – proposal to take a specific action
 - Another member seconds the motion
 - Chair restates the motion placing it before the body
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The Process

- Members debate
 - Amendments are in order – only 2 at a time
 - Put the motion to a vote – if debate is finished the chair asks “are you ready for the question?”
 - Members vote
 - Chair announces the vote
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Motion, Debate and Action



Bringing Business Before Assembly

- Business is brought by a motion by a member
 - A motion is a formal proposal to take action
 - Basic form of a motion, the only one that brings business before the assembly, is the main motion
 - Many other parliamentary motions but none of those bring business before the assembly
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Making a Motion

- Member must obtain the floor when no other question is pending and when business of the kind represented by the motion is in order
 - Member must obtain the floor before making a motion or speaking in debate
 - Motion is not before the body until stated by the chair
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Making a Motion

- Motion can be prefaced by a few words of explanation
 - Chair may assist member in framing the motion
 - Maker of the motion may not withdraw motion once stated by the chair, it is the property of the body
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Speaking to the Motion

- Discussion of any question is permitted only with a reference to a pending question
 - Until a matter is brought before the assembly in the form of a motion it cannot be debated
 - General rule against discussion w/o a motion is one of parliamentary procedure's most powerful tools for keeping business on track
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Speaking to the Motion

- Presiding officer must never interrupt because he/she knows more about the matter than the speaker
 - Maker of the motion may vote against it but he/she is not allowed to speak against his/her own motion
 - Must avoid personalities and under no circumstances question the motives of another member
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Precedence in Speaking

- Member who makes motion is entitled to be recognized
 - No one is entitled to the floor a second time if member who has not spoken desires the floor
 - No member can speak more than twice
 - No more than 10 minutes in total
 - Member can not yield unused time
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Refrain from Disturbing the Assembly

During debate no member should be permitted to disturb the assembly by whispering, walking across the floor, or in any other way – key words are “disturbing the assembly”

Reading from Reports

- Member has no right to read from or have the clerk/secretary read from any paper or book as part of his/her speech w/o permission of the assembly
 - Members are permitted to read short, pertinent, printed extracts in debate as long as they do not abuse the privilege
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Assigning the Floor

- Member who rose and addressed the chair first, after the floor was yielded, is entitled to be recognized
 - Exceptions to make, those who have not spoken and opposing opinions (should alternate if possible)
 - A member can not establish prior claim to the floor by rising before it has been yielded
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Rules of Decorum

Avoid Use of Member's Names

- Presiding officer should not be referred to by name
 - Presiding officer speaks of himself/herself in the third person
 - Avoid mentioning another's name when the person can be described in another way
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When to Speak

- Member never speaks while seated
 - Member does not speak w/o first having risen, addressed the chair & obtained the floor
 - Member has not obtained the floor until recognized by the chair
 - Stand, raise hand, get chair's attention, press a button
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Address the Chair

- Address all remarks through the chair – not the body, gallery or TV cameras
 - Members can not address one another directly
 - Direct questions to other supervisors through the chair
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Duties of the Chair

- All persons at a meeting have an obligation to obey the presiding officer
 - Members using parliamentary forms for obstructive purposes should not be recognized or ruled out of order
 - Enforce the rules relating to debate, order and decorum
 - Remind members to confine remarks to the merits of the question
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Duties of the Chair

- Announces issues and keeps members on track
 - Restates motion to place before the body & for clarity
 - Recognizes members
 - Asks for votes on each side and announces outcome
 - Responds to requests and rules on points of order
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Debate on the Question

- Members remarks must be germane to the question before the assembly
 - Speakers must address their remarks to the chair, maintain a courteous tone, avoid injecting a personal tone into the debate
 - Member has a right to speak twice on the same question
 - Can speak no longer than 10 minutes in total
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Chair Speaking in Debate

- Presiding officer should relinquish the chair if entering the discussion
 - Officer should not return until the pending question is disposed of
 - Exception with small boards and committees
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Committee–Public Comment

- The public should be encouraged to speak at the committee level as opposed to the board
 - Set time limits – 2,3,5 minutes
 - Public should not be allowed to discuss or debate
 - Members should not respond to questions
 - Determine if public comment is limited to items on the agenda
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Committee–Seating

- Board members should be allowed to address the committee but not participate in debate
 - Only members of the committee and staff should be seated at the table
 - Other seating should be provided for members of the board, public or guests
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Committee–Closed Session

- Members of the board are allowed to attend a closed meeting of the committee
 - County may adopt a rule limiting members of the parent body from attending a closed session of a committee (s.19.89 Wis. Stats.)
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Committee-Debate

- General rule is to have motion first then discussion
 - In committee it is acceptable to have discussion first then a motion
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Budget Resolution

Preferred

- Motion – approve the budget
- Motion to amend – reduce park fees 2%
- Motion to amend – increase salary line 2%

Alternative

- Motion – reduce park fees 2%
 - Motion – increase salary line 2%
 - Motion – approve budget as amended
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Committee-Debate

- Members may raise a hand instead of standing when seeking the floor
 - Members may remain seated during debate and discussion
 - Informal discussion is permitted before a motion is pending
 - Members may speak as often and as long as they like
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Committee-Chair

- The chair may, without stepping down, discuss, debate and vote on all questions
 - The chair need not rise when putting a motion to a vote
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Committee of the Whole

- Enables full assembly to give detailed consideration to a matter under conditions of freedom similar to a committee
 - Speak as often as you can get the floor
 - Votes are not final, only recommendations
 - Can not adjourn as a committee
 - Use for general discussion
 - More common in smaller bodies-city councils
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Motions & Misconceptions

Nominations

- Nominations are not necessary
 - Each member is free to vote for anyone eligible
 - Need not be recognized by the chair
 - May nominate your self
 - No second required
 - Sometimes done to show support
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Nominations

- Motion to close
 - No motion necessary
 - Not in order until reasonable time has been given
 - Is out of order if someone is seeking the floor
 - Requires 2/3 vote
 - No requirement to ask 3 times
 - Chair can declare nominations are closed
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Elections

- Impropriety of limiting voting to the 2 leading candidates
 - Leading candidates may represent 2 different factions – division may be deepened
 - May unite members w/compromise candidate
 - Improper to remove nominee w/lowest votes
 - Repeat balloting until you have a winner
 - Nominee w/lowest number of votes could be a “dark horse” who all can agree on
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Motion to Lay on the Table

- Temporarily sets aside the matter w/intent to take up later in the meeting
 - Commonly misused in place of Postpone Indefinitely or Postpone to a Time Certain
 - Adopting halts consideration w/o debate
 - Such action violates the rights of the minority and individual members
 - Is out of order if no other urgent matter
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Motion to Postpone

- Motion by which pending action can be delayed
 - Must be to a time specific
 - Definite day, meeting, hour or until after a certain event
 - Motion is debatable
 - Motion to just postpone is out of order
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Motion to Postpone Indefinitely

- Motion used when the body declines to take a position
 - Motion is debatable
 - Adoption kills the motion
 - Avoids a direct vote on the question
 - Useful in disposing of a badly chosen main motion that cannot be either adopted or rejected w/o undesirable consequences
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Move the Previous Question

- Motion used to bring the assembly to an immediate vote - non-debatable
 - Requires 2/3 vote
 - Often mistaken for a “Call for the Question”
 - No one person can close debate
 - Not proper to shut off debate against the will of even one member who wishes to speak and has not exhausted his/her right to debate
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Motion to Adopt Entire Report

- Seldom wise except when it is to be issued or published in the name of the organization
 - An affirmative vote has the effect of the assembly endorsing every word of the report
 - Expressions *adopt*, *accept* & *agree to* are all equivalent
 - A common error is to move that a report “be received” or “accepted” - implies that the assembly has endorsed the complete report
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Friendly Amendment

- Often used to describe an amendment offered by someone who is in sympathy with the purpose of the main motion
 - Regardless of whether or not the maker of the main motion “accepts” the amendment it must be opened to debate and voted on (unless adopted by unanimous consent)
 - Is handled under the same rules as amendments generally
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Voting – Division of the Assembly

- A vote retaken by rising at the demand of a member is called a “Division of the Assembly”
 - A member can demand a division from the moment the negative votes have been cast until the result of the vote has been announced
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Voting – Right of Abstention

- It is the duty of every member who has an opinion on a question to express it by his/her vote
 - A member can abstain
 - A member cannot be compelled to vote
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Explain Your Vote

- A member has no right to explain his/her vote during voting
 - It would be the same as debate at such a time
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Change One's Vote

- A member has a right to change his/her vote up to the time the result is announced
 - A member can change his/her vote after the result is announced only by unanimous consent without debate
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Point of Order

- Member states when he/she feels rules of the assembly are being violated
 - Takes precedence over pending question
 - In order when another has the floor
 - Does not require a second
 - Is not debatable
 - Ruled upon by the chair
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Appeal the Ruling of the Chair

- Any two members have the right to appeal from the ruling of the presiding officer – one makes the Appeal the other seconds
 - The question is taken from the chair and vested in the assembly
 - No member is allowed to speak more than once except the presiding officer who is not limited and need not leave the chair
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We have to stop meeting this way



- Ukrainian Parliament-April 26, 2010
Source: nytimes.com “Ukraine Passes Deal Under Hail of Eggs”

Resources

- The UW–Extension Local Government Center
 - 608–262–9961

 - von Briesen & Roper, S.C.
 - 414–287–1570

 - Wisconsin Counties Association
 - 866–404–2700
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Questions? Comments?

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