

# call to order

## Basic Information on Motions

—J. Michael Blaska, Parliamentarian & Chief of Staff,  
Wisconsin Counties Association



**K**eeping track of all the characteristics of all the motions can be a daunting task. Knowing when a motion is in order, whether it requires a second, is debatable, requires a simple majority vote are all questions that come up.

Finding the answers in *Robert's Rules of Order* can be time consuming, especially at the time motions are being made and votes taken. A summary, entitled *Basic Information on Motions* can be found on the adjacent page. It is a quick reference tool that can provide the answers in short order.

Thirteen ranking motions are listed in reverse order starting with thirteen (13) – *Fix the Time to Which to Adjourn* – descending to one (1) – *Main Motion*.

The chart explains which motions are in order depending on which motion is before the assembly. Whichever motion is before the assembly, the motions that appear numerically above that motion are allowed, or *in order*. The motions that appear numerically below the motion before the assembly are not in order. When no other business is pending the *Main Motion* is in order. Once a member moves the *Main Motion*, it is seconded, and the chair places it before the body by restating the motion and asking discussion. At that time, all other motions are in order.

For example, Supervisor Blaska moves, when no other business is pending, to adopt resolution 001; Supervisor O'Connell seconds the motion. The

chair then states, "We have a motion by Supervisor Blaska to adopt resolution 001; it was seconded by Supervisor O'Connell. The motion before us is adoption. Discussion is now in order." Adoption of resolution 001 is now the *Main Motion*, or number one (1) in the chart to the right. The *Main Motion* is the only motion that brings business before the assembly. All motions numerically above the *Main Motion* – two (2) through thirteen (13) are now in order. Note that the *Main Motion* is no longer in order because you can only have one *Main Motion* on the floor at a time.

Once the *Main Motion* is on the floor, a member could move to *Adjourn* (12). If a member moves to *Postpone to a Certain Time* (5), all motions that appear above five (5) are in order; those numerically below are not in order. A motion to *Amend* (3) resolution 001 would be out of order since it appears lower in rank than the motion to *Postpone to a Certain Time* (5). However, a motion to *Amend* the motion to *Postpone to a Certain Time* is in order.

On the bottom half of the adjacent page is a chart of non-ranking motions. These motions have their own set of circumstances and may be related to a motion or point in time.

The chart also provides guidance on whether a second is required, it is debatable, it can be amended, and a vote is required.

Remember, whatever motion is on the floor with the ranking motions, one through thirteen, the motions above are in order the ones below are not.



# BASIC INFORMATION ON MOTIONS



## RANKING MOTIONS

*These motions are listed in order of rank. When any one of these motions is pending, those above are in order and those below are not in order.*

	Require second?	Can debate?	Can be amended?	Vote required.
<b>Privileged Motions:</b>				
13. Fix the Time to Which to Adjourn	yes	no	yes	majority
12. Adjourn	yes	no	no	majority
11. Recess	yes	no	yes	majority
10. Raise a Question of Privilege	no	no	no	chair
9. Call for the Orders of the Day	no	no	no	chair
<b>Subsidiary Motions:</b>				
8. Lay on the Table	yes	no	no	majority
7. Previous Question	yes	no	no	2/3
6. Limit or Extend Limits of Debate	yes	no	yes	2/3
5. Postpone to a Certain Time	yes	yes	yes	majority
4. Commit or Refer	yes	yes	yes	majority
3. Amend	yes	yes	yes	majority
2. Postpone Indefinitely	yes	yes	no	majority
1. Main Motion	yes	yes	yes	majority

## NON-RANKING MOTIONS

	Require second?	Can debate?	Can be amended?	Vote required.
<b>Incidental Motions:</b>				
Appeal	yes	yes*	no	majority
Close Nominations	yes	no	yes	2/3
Consider by Par. or Seriatim	yes	no	yes	majority
Division of the Assembly	no	no	no	no
Division of a Question	yes	no	yes	majority
Objection to Consideration of Question	no	no	no	2/3
Point of Order	no	no	no	chair
Reopen Nominations	yes	no	yes	majority
Suspend the Rules	yes	no	no	2/3
Requests & Parliamentary Inquiries	no	no	no	chair

### Motions bringing a question before assembly again:

Reconsider	yes	yes	no	majority
Rescind	yes	yes	yes	majority
Amend Something Previously Adopted	yes	yes	yes	majority
Take from the Table	yes	no	no	majority

\* May be discussed but each member may only speak once.

Source: Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised 11th Edition