

Parliamentary Procedure Made Simple

By Jim Slaughter

Unsure about what parliamentary procedure to use at meetings? You're not alone.

Generally, you should use more formal procedures when the subject matter is highly important or controversial and in large gatherings—such as annual membership meetings. At the latter, informal discussion is impractical due to the number of members present, the necessity to limit debate to keep the meeting on time, and the need for formal votes to help avoid legal challenges.

But formality can actually hinder business in a board meeting of fewer than about a dozen people. As a result, most parliamentary books, including *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised (10th Edition)*, recommend relaxed procedures for smaller boards. Members can speak or make motions while seated, motions don't need to be seconded, and there is no limit to the number of times a member can speak to an

issue. The chair is typically a full participant and can speak to issues, make motions, and vote.

If your smaller board still prefers more formality, two organizations may be of help: the National Association of Parliamentarians (www.parliamentarians.org) and the American Institute of Parliamentarians (www.aipparl.org). Both train and certify parliamentarians, can refer you to professional parliamentarians, sponsor parliamentary procedure seminars, and provide parliamentary books and resources.

If you simply need a cheat sheet on some of the more popular motions, use the chart below. This motions guide tells you how to state the motion, whether it needs a second, whether it is debatable or amendable, and the required vote. For more information on any motion, consult the section number (given on the left side of each row) in *Robert's Rules of Order*.

To learn how these motions work together or for related charts and articles, a parliamentary calendar of events, and some brainteasers, visit www.jimslaughter.com.

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Parliamentary Motions Guide

Based on *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised (10th Edition)*

The motions below are listed in order of precedence. Any motion can be introduced if it is higher on the chart than the pending motion.

Close meeting	I move to adjourn.	No	Yes	No	No	Majority
Take break	I move to recess for ...	No	Yes	No	Yes	Majority
Register complaint	I rise to a question of privilege.	Yes	No	No	No	None
Make follow agenda	I call for the orders of the day.	Yes	No	No	No	None
Lay aside temporarily	I move to lay the question on the table.	No	Yes	No	No	Majority
Close debate	I move the previous question.	No	Yes	No	No	2/3
Limit or extend debate	I move that debate be limited to ...	No	Yes	No	Yes	2/3
Postpone to a certain time	I move to postpone the motion to ...	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority
Refer to committee	I move to refer the motion to ...	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority
Modify wording of motion	I move to amend the motion by ...	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority
Kill main motion	I move that the motion be postponed indefinitely.	No	Yes	Yes	No	Majority
Bring business before assembly (a main motion)	I move that [or I move to] ...	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority

Formality can actually hinder business in a board meeting of fewer than about a dozen people.

Incidental Motions—no order of precedence. Arise incidentally and decided immediately.

Enforce rules	Point of order	Yes	No	No	No	None
Submit matter to assembly	I appeal from the decision of the chair.	Yes	Yes	Varies	No	Majority
Suspend rules	I move to suspend the rules that ...	No	Yes	No	No	2/3
Avoid main motion altogether	I object to the consideration of the question.	Yes	No	No	No	2/3
Divide motion	I move to divide the question.	No	Yes	No	Yes	Majority
Demand rising vote	I call for a division.	Yes	No	No	No	None
Parliamentary law question	Parliamentary inquiry	Yes	No	No	No	None
Request for information	Point of information	Yes	No	No	No	None

Motions That Bring a Question Again Before the Assembly—no order of precedence. Introduce only when nothing else is pending.

Take matter from table	I move to take from the table ...	No	Yes	No	No	Majority
Cancel previous action	I move to rescind ...	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	2/3 maj. w/ notice
Reconsider motion	I move to reconsider the vote ...	No	Yes	Varies	No	Majority

Source: Jim Slaughter, www.jimslaughter.com

Introduction to Robert's Rules of Order

What Is Parliamentary Procedure?

It is a set of rules for conduct at meetings, that allows everyone to be heard and to make decisions without confusion.

Why is Parliamentary Procedure Important?

Because it's a time tested method of conducting business at meetings and public gatherings. It can be adapted to fit the needs of any organization. Today, Robert's Rules of Order newly revised is the basic handbook of operation for most clubs, organizations and other groups. So it's important that everyone know these basic rules!

Organizations using parliamentary procedure usually follow a fixed order of business. Below is a typical example:

1. Call to order.
2. Roll call of members present.
3. Reading of minutes of last meeting.
4. Officers reports.
5. Committee reports.
6. Special orders --- Important business previously designated for consideration at this meeting.
7. Unfinished business.
8. New business.
9. Announcements.
10. Adjournment.

The method used by members to express themselves is in the form of moving motions. A motion is a proposal that the entire membership take action or a stand on an issue. Individual members can:

1. Call to order.
2. Second motions.
3. Debate motions.
4. Vote on motions.

There are four Basic Types of Motions:

1. **Main Motions:** The purpose of a main motion is to introduce items to the membership for their consideration. They cannot be made when any other motion is on the floor, and yield to privileged, subsidiary, and incidental motions.
2. **Subsidiary Motions:** Their purpose is to change or affect how a main motion is handled, and is voted on before a main motion.
3. **Privileged Motions:** Their purpose is to bring up items that are urgent about special or important matters unrelated to pending business.
4. **Incidental Motions:** Their purpose is to provide a means of questioning procedure concerning other motions and must be considered before the other motion.

How are Motions Presented?

1. Obtaining the floor
 - a. Wait until the last speaker has finished.
 - b. Rise and address the Chairman by saying, "Mr. Chairman, or Mr. President."

- c. Wait until the Chairman recognizes you.
2. **Make Your Motion**
 - a. Speak in a clear and concise manner.
 - b. Always state a motion affirmatively. Say, "I move that we ..." rather than, "I move that we do not ...".
 - c. Avoid personalities and stay on your subject.
3. **Wait for Someone to Second Your Motion**
4. **Another member will second your motion or the Chairman will call for a second.**
5. **If there is no second to your motion it is lost.**
6. **The Chairman States Your Motion**
 - a. The Chairman will say, "it has been moved and seconded that we ..." Thus placing your motion before the membership for consideration and action.
 - b. The membership then either debates your motion, or may move directly to a vote.
 - c. Once your motion is presented to the membership by the chairman it becomes "assembly property", and cannot be changed by you without the consent of the members.
7. **Expanding on Your Motion**
 - a. The time for you to speak in favor of your motion is at this point in time, rather than at the time you present it.
 - b. The mover is always allowed to speak first.
 - c. All comments and debate must be directed to the chairman.
 - d. Keep to the time limit for speaking that has been established.
 - e. The mover may speak again only after other speakers are finished, unless called upon by the Chairman.
8. **Putting the Question to the Membership**
 - a. The Chairman asks, "Are you ready to vote on the question?"
 - b. If there is no more discussion, a vote is taken.
 - c. On a motion to move the previous question may be adapted.

Voting on a Motion:

The method of vote on any motion depends on the situation and the by-laws of policy of your organization. There are five methods used to vote by most organizations, they are:

1. **By Voice** -- The Chairman asks those in favor to say, "aye", those opposed to say "no". Any member may move for a exact count.
2. **By Roll Call** -- Each member answers "yes" or "no" as his name is called. This method is used when a record of each person's vote is required.
3. **By General Consent** -- When a motion is not likely to be opposed, the Chairman says, "if there is no objection ..." The membership shows agreement by their silence, however if one member says, "I object," the item must be put to a vote.
4. **By Division** -- This is a slight verification of a voice vote. It does not require a count unless the chairman so desires. Members raise their hands or stand.
5. **By Ballot** -- Members write their vote on a slip of paper, this method is used when secrecy is desired.

There are two other motions that are commonly used that relate to voting.

1. **Motion to Table** -- This motion is often used in the attempt to "kill" a motion. The option is always present, however, to "take from the table", for reconsideration by the membership.
2. **Motion to Postpone Indefinitely** -- This is often used as a means of parliamentary strategy and allows opponents of motion to test their strength without an actual vote being taken. Also, debate is once again open on the main motion.

Parliamentary Procedure is the best way to get things done at your meetings. But, it will only work if you use it properly.

1. Allow motions that are in order.
2. Have members obtain the floor properly.
3. Speak clearly and concisely.
4. Obey the rules of debate.
5. Most importantly, *BE COURTEOUS*.

1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 ROBERT'S RULES: WHAT IS IT?

Robert's Rules of Order, Revised--abbreviated here as Robert's Rules--is a system of parliamentary procedures first published in 1876 by Henry Robert, an American army general. His book borrowed heavily from earlier manuals, but it gradually became the standard in the United States. This set of rules forms the basis for the *Rules of the House of Representatives of Congress*, and contemporary editions of Robert's Rules are tailored toward the practices of that body.[1]

Robert's Rules were adopted by the Philomathean Society to promote orderly discourse and debate, to defend the parliamentary rights of the minority, to act on the will of the majority, and to streamline the workings of the business of the Society.[2]

1.2 WHAT IS THIS?

This document is Robert's Rules in ten pages or less. In recent times there have been several two-page summaries floating about, and I hope to expand on and supplement these by providing a more detailed outline of the book. The audience I have in mind is the cabinet member whose position invites the role of the watchdog,[3] and the young member or guest of the Society to whom parliamentary procedure is still rather new.

1.3 DISCLAIMER

All information in this document should be viewed as one interpretation, not necessarily as a faithful rendering of the original. This is particularly true of footnotes, which tend to record observations and traditions not at all based on Robert's Rules. A far better approach to learning *Robert's Rules of Order, Revised* would be to read the source itself, which is short and accessible, especially the first seven articles (§§4 through 45 or so).

As always, the final interpreter of Robert's Rules is the acting Moderator, and he or she is bound only by *The Constitution and By-Laws of the Philomathean Society* and *Robert's Rules of Order, Revised*, in that order of precedence. I am just trying to provide a brief overview for the layperson. In organizing this presentation, I have not attempted to stick to the structure of Robert's book.

1.4 SOURCES

- Bolt, Jr., Eugene A., Emmanuel C. Morales, Robert Hutter, and Robert Deschak. *Apocrypha of Etiquette*. Philadelphia: Tea Publishers, 1991.
- *The Constitution and By-Laws of the Philomathean Society*. Last amended spring 1993.
- Robert, Henry M. *Robert's Rules of Order, Revised*. 1915 edition. New York: Morrow Quill Paperbacks, 1979. This is the primary resource for this document.
- -----, *The Scott, Foresman Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised*. 1990 edition, revised by Sarah Corbin Robert. Glenview, Illinois: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1990.

2: BASIC TERMINOLOGY

2.1 BUSINESS, MOTIONS, DEBATE

Business is conducted in the Philomathean Society by means of motions introduced by individuals[4] present at a general or special meeting. Business may only be conducted when a quorum--a significant minority of the membership stipulated by the *Constitution*--is present.[5]

An individual is typically permitted to speak by raising his or her hand and waiting for the acting Moderator to recognize the potential speaker by calling upon him or her.[6] When an individual has been recognized, he or she is said to have the floor; that is, he or she has the right to offer any motion or debate that is in order at that time. A speaker may yield the floor permanently when he or she is finished speaking, or temporarily for an inquiry or for a secondary motion.[7]

A motion that brings new business before the assembly is called a principal or original main motion, and it is submitted to consideration--debate and a vote--when it has been seconded by a show of support from some member other than the individual who proposed it. Once a main motion has been stated by the chair and has entered into debate, it is often referred to as the question. Only one main motion may be considered at a time. The assembly may bring back for further consideration a motion that has already been voted on; this is known as the reconsideration of a motion.[8]

2.2 COMMON SECONDARY MOTIONS

Motions which control the flow of debate, modify the question under consideration, or are otherwise auxiliary to the main motion are distinguished in Robert's Rules by the terms procedural or secondary motion. Some, but not all, of these are undebatable. Robert's Rules divides secondary motions into subsidiary motions, those that directly impact the question on the floor; privileged motions, which maintain order in the assembly; and incidental motions, which apply directly to the parliamentary procedure of the voting body.[9]

Certain powerful secondary motions are referred to as points, which are enumerated later in this summary. More than one secondary motion may be under consideration at the same time, as long as precedence--rules that permit or disallow the introduction of motions--is observed.[10]

A motion may be temporarily set aside; this is called a laying the motion on the table. A tabled motion can be revived by taking the motion from the table. A motion to commit or refer will direct the deliberation of a motion to a select committee, thus ending debate on it in the assembly as a whole. In the Philomathean Society, the By-Laws require the automatic introduction and adoption of certain motions designed to structure the conduct of the business meeting; these are known as the orders of the day, and they can only be rearranged by a two-thirds vote.[11]

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3: MOTIONS

Associated with this document is a chart that lists all motions, in alphabetical order, and a summary of special conditions that apply to each. This section will define the most important of these motions, and it refers the reader to the appropriate section of *Robert's Rules of Order, Revised*. Also associated with this document is Robert's summary of precedence. In general, motions in this section are listed in increasing rank.

3.1 BASIC MAIN MOTIONS

These motions apply only when no other business is pending before the Society and are used to introduce business into a meeting.

3.1.1 The original main motion.

This is a motion that brings new business before the Society; such a motion can be made only while no other motion is pending. A main motion is out of order when another speaker has the floor. It must be seconded; it is debatable and amendable, and it may be brought back for further consideration after it has been voted upon (subject to limitations imposed by §36 of Robert's Rules). A main motion requires a majority vote except in special cases described by Robert's Rules, such as modifying a By-Law or suspending a rule.^[12]

See §§4, 11, 33, and 40 of Robert's Rules for information on the wording of a motion, descriptions of main motions that are not in order, procedures for amendment, other uses of main motions, and a description of the proper handling of a main motion.

3.1.2 Take from the table.

A question that has been previously tabled may be brought up again for consideration by way of this motion. If it succeeds, debate immediately resumes on the motion that had been tabled. A motion to take from the table is in order only when its sponsor has the floor; it must be seconded, and is neither debatable nor amendable. It requires a majority vote to bring the tabled matter before the Society again. See Robert's Rules §35 for more information.^[13]

3.1.3 Rescind.

This motion provides the Society with the power to change an action ordered by a previous vote or by decision of the chair. A motion to rescind is in order only when its sponsor has the floor; it must be seconded, and is debatable and amendable, provided the amendment applies to the wording of the motion that rescinds, *not* to the action being rescinded. It requires a two-thirds vote. See §37 for more information.^[14]

A motion to amend something previously adopted is equivalent to a motion to rescind. See the entry titled "Amend a main motion," below.

3.2 SUBSIDIARY AND PRIVILEGED SECONDARY MOTIONS

These are motions which control the flow of debate and the subject matter being debated. They

take precedence over any main motion currently on the floor. They are listed here in *increasing* rank; that is, each of these motions may be introduced only when any of the motions listed before it is pending.[15]

3.2.1 Postpone indefinitely.

This secondary motion banishes the question under consideration for the duration of the meeting. It is used to quickly remove a badly chosen, poorly worded, or unconscionable main motion. Postponing indefinitely is out of order when another secondary motion is under consideration, or when another speaker has the floor. It must be seconded; it is debatable but not amendable. It requires a majority vote. See §34 of Robert's Rules for a detailed description of its effect and special uses.[16]

3.2.2 Amend a main motion.

One of the most common secondary motions is to modify the wording of the pending question on the floor. The proposed amendment must be germane--no new subject may be introduced--and the changes to the wording of the current question are limited by Robert's Rules to certain instances of insertions, deletions, and substitutions. It is at the Moderator's discretion to evaluate whether a proposed amendment is germane and valid. Robert's Rules §33 provides an extended explanation of the proper form of an amendment.[17]

Amendments may be applied to main motions and to primary amendments, and to certain other secondary motions specified in Robert's Rules. The speaker must have the floor to propose an amendment, and the motion to amend must be seconded and is debatable.[18] Debate is confined to the substance of the amendment, and may not stray into the substance of the question being amended except where it applies to the content of the amendment. An amendment to a pending motion requires a majority vote, even in cases where the question being amended requires a two-thirds vote.[19]

An amendment to something previously adopted--such as a change to the By-Laws--is a main motion and is treated in the same manner as a motion to rescind. In particular, it requires a two-thirds vote, unless otherwise specified by the resolution or document being modified. The By-Laws require a two-thirds majority, while the Constitution requires a three-quarters majority, plus a one-meeting interval from its original presentation and a one-week posting period.[20]

3.2.3 Commit or refer.

This dispatches a pending question (possibly with amendments) to a select[21] committee that is charged with investigating the merits of the proposal and reporting back to the Society. If an amendment is pending on a question, a motion to commit refers both the amendment and the motion to a committee for consideration, and the committee reports on both when it is finished with its deliberation. The speaker must have the floor to commit; it must be seconded and is debatable. It may be amended to specify the composition of the committee to which the question is referred. It requires a majority vote to pass. See §32 of Robert's Rules.[22]

3.2.4 Calling the question.

This motion closes debate immediately on the current main or secondary motion and brings it to a vote. If it passes, it supersedes any previous motion to limit or extend debate. It may be qualified

by its sponsor to apply to all pending questions. See §29 for further clarifications.[23]

The speaker must have the floor to initiate a calling of the question; it must be seconded and is neither debatable nor amendable. A two-thirds vote is required to call the question.[24]

3.2.5 Lay on the table.

This motion enables the majority to temporarily set aside the consideration of the pending question (possibly with amendments), in such a way that there is no specified time for bringing up the matter again. Consideration of the tabled matter may be resumed at the will of the majority, whenever a motion to take from the table is in order. When a question has amendments pending, the motion as well as its amendments are tabled by this motion. The speaker must have the floor to request the pending matter be tabled; it must be seconded and is neither debatable nor amendable. A majority vote is required. See §28.[25]

3.2.6 Point of personal privilege.

A member may at any time raise a point of personal privilege to make a motion related to the rights and privileges of the Society or any one of its members or guests. It was designed to provide the means to make a main motion even when another main or secondary motion is pending. §19 of Robert's Rules describes this motion.[26]

A point of personal privilege is a very powerful motion, and it is not to be abused. Its most common use is to inform the Society of a problematic situation and to request aid from the membership. In its most formal use, a non-procedural motion is put forward, debated, voted upon, and--if it passes--is acted upon.

This motion is in order when the Moderator has not recognized the speaker, and it is in order even when another speaker has the floor, if the urgency of the situation warrants. It is ruled upon by the chair, who decides only whether or not the point of personal privilege is to be admitted before the Society. (A subsequent motion contained in the point of personal privilege is treated as a main motion; that is, it must be seconded, debated, and passed by a majority vote to take effect.)[27]

3.3 INCIDENTAL SECONDARY MOTIONS

These secondary motions deal with the parliamentary procedure of the Society's meetings. They may, in general, be applied at any time, subject to limitation imposed by the motions themselves. There is no strict hierarchy among them, and each of them applies even when a privileged or subsidiary secondary motion is pending.[28]

3.3.1 Point of order, and Appeal.

This motion applies when an individual believes that the parliamentary rules of the Society—including *Robert's Rules of Order, Revised* as well as the *Constitution and By-Laws of the Philomathean Society*--are being violated. This motion is in order when its sponsor does not have the floor, even when it interrupts another individual with the floor. It is normally ruled upon by the acting Moderator, unless he or she is in doubt and requests a vote. The chair's ruling may be appealed. §21 explains this motion in greater detail.[29]

A member of the Society may challenge a Moderator's ruling on a procedural point by immediately

calling for an appeal of his or her decision. If any new main motion is initiated following a questioned ruling, the ruling is no longer subject to appeal. A motion to appeal is in order when its sponsor does not have the floor; it must be seconded and is debatable,[30] but not amendable. Debate is limited to one contribution per speaker, except for the Moderator, who has no such limit. The Moderator need not leave his or her chair, but must stand when offering debate. In Robert's Rules, a simple majority vote carries the appeal of the decision of the chair; however, the Philomathean Society By-Laws state that a two-thirds vote is required.[31]

3.3.2 Suspend the rules.

This motion is used to temporarily suspend one of the Society's regular rules for the purpose of accomplishing some task that could not otherwise be performed under the guidelines imposed by parliamentary law. It cannot be used to suspend by-laws or a constitution unless the clause being suspended provides for its own suspension.[32]

A motion to suspend the rules can be made whenever no other business is pending, or whenever the proposed suspension of the rules applies directly to a pending question. Its sponsor must have the floor, and it must be seconded; it is neither debatable nor amendable. Typically a suspension of the rules requires a two-thirds vote.[33] §22 explains the applications and limitations of this motion.[34]

3.3.3 Objection to the consideration of a motion.

When a main motion is so offensive that it would be strongly undesirable for the motion to even come up for debate, a member may object to its consideration. It is in order even when the objector does not have the floor, as long as debate on the motion to which it applies has not yet begun. Objection to consideration does not require a second, and it is not debatable or amendable. A two-thirds vote against consideration is required to sustain the objection. See §23 for further explanation.[35]

3.3.4 Requests: Point of inquiry or information, or Withdraw.

A member or guest of the Society may at any time ask the Moderator for information on a matter of parliamentary procedure or on some factual matter currently before the Society. Questions of procedure are satisfied through a point of inquiry; questions of fact are made through a point of information. These questions may be raised even when the speaker does not have the floor. The answers are provided or solicited at the discretion of the chair. See §27 for more information.[36]

Under Robert's Rules §27 there is a provision whereby the sponsor of a motion may at any time move for its withdrawal from further consideration, effectively killing it. But this motion only takes effect by unanimous consent, since once a question enters into debate it becomes the property of the Society as a whole.[37]

3.3.5 Reconsider.

Any time during a meeting that a member on the prevailing side of a vote feels that his or her vote was cast incorrectly or without the benefit of all available information, he or she may move to reconsider a vote, assuming the motion being reconsidered allows it. The effect of a successful reconsideration is to open up debate again on the motion, and to call for a subsequent vote in light of the new information introduced in the debate. For a lengthier description, see §36 of Robert's

Rules. [38]

This motion can be raised at any time during the same meeting, provided that Robert's Rules allows the questioned vote to be reconsidered, and the person moving to reconsider was on the prevailing side of the vote. The motion to reconsider must be seconded. Robert's Rules states that its mover need not have the floor, and that it is debatable whenever the motion being reconsidered was debatable. However, by general consent, this motion is not debated in the Philomathean Society, and its mover must have the floor. It is not amendable. Successful reconsideration requires a majority vote, and this motion merely invalidates the previous vote and brings the matter up for further consideration by the Society. [39]

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4: ROBERT'S RULES TID-BITS

Page references are provided from *Robert's Rules of Order, Revised* (1915 edition), the standard for this document.

- Motions to limit or close debate usually require at least a two-thirds majority, and like all but a handful of secondary motions, an individual must be recognized by the chair before he or she may propose the motion. These motions are summarized in §§29 and 30.
- The Moderator is not under an obligation to entertain a motion, even if it is in order. §40 of Robert's Rules states that absurd, obstructive, offensive, or trivial motions may be ruled invalid by the chair, regardless of whether or not they have been seconded by the membership. This applies to all motions, including secondary motions whose obvious intent is to defeat the purpose of the main motion with a motion not designated by Robert's Rules to do so. [40]
- Do not object to the consideration of an unsuitable main motion unless it is clearly offensive to the Society or to a particular member or guest (in which case the acting Moderator should not have allowed it in the first place). Instead, move to postpone it indefinitely. The latter requires only a majority vote (while the former requires two-thirds), and the latter is debatable, providing you with the opportunity to quickly and forcefully argue against any further consideration of the main motion. (Objecting to consideration is not debatable, even though it is not always clear why an individual objects.)
- Robert's Rules call an amendment to an amendment a secondary amendment, or an amendment in the second degree. §33, pp. 135 and 147 forbid amendments in the third degree: that is, there can be no amendment to an amendment to an amendment, or anything worse.
- The most effective way to commit a question is to amend one's own motion to commit to specify that the question be referred to a standing committee. In this way, the motion is more likely to receive immediate consideration within an established setting.
- The Society's once-per-semester membership committee meeting, the Committee of the Whole, is a special case of a motion to commit, and receives extended treatment in §55. It should be noted that Robert's Rules are applied differently in the Committee of the Whole than they are in a general meeting. In particular, business is conducted less formally, with more opportunity for members to offer debate. In the past, the Philomathean Society has deviated from Robert's Rules §55 in the following ways: during Committee of the Whole, the Membership Committee is in executive session--that is, nonmembers are asked to leave the chamber, and no part of its proceedings may be discussed outside of the committee; debate may be limited, extended, or closed by a two-thirds vote; and the committee is permitted to recess or caucus by majority vote or general consent.
- Robert's Rules refer to Philospeak's "calling the question" as the previous question; this is another phrase for moving to close debate immediately and calling a vote on the current motion.
- A "friendly amendment" is a special kind of amendment, not explicitly referenced in Robert's Rules, whereby a motion is amended by general consent if the main motion's sponsor agrees to the proposed amendment. This is covered by one of the standing rules in the By-Laws, as well as in §27, pp. 100-101.

- Philospeak's "point of personal privilege" is a question of privilege in Robert's Rules. §19, p. 68 invites, but does not require, a question of privilege to include a motion. Using a point of personal privilege to raise a procedural motion that does not have the right to interrupt the floor—e.g., to move to table or to move to close debate—is dilatory and should not be entertained by the chair, per §40.
- There may be some confusion over the motion with the highest precedence, that of fixing the time to which to adjourn. The object of the motion to set a time—and sometimes the place—for the start of the *next* meeting to continue business. It is for this reason that it is given the highest precedence, so that it can be executed while a motion to adjourn is pending. See §16, p. 59 of Robert's Rules.
- A point of order applies only to a current violation of parliamentary procedure; it may not be applied to a past decision or action. Past violations must be appealed, rescinded, or censured. See §§21, 37 and 72. Reconsiderations only apply to reconsiderable votes taken within the same meeting; see §36.
- An objection to consideration of a motion is in order even after the motion has been seconded, as long as debate on it has not commenced. See §23, p. 87.
- A point of information has come to be used as a way to quickly volunteer information (without being recognized by the Moderator) regarding a question of fact before the Society, which is not what Robert's Rules §27 intended it for—it should be used only to ask a question.
- The acting Moderator should take care when offering debate to limit his or her comments to those of a factual nature and should avoid betraying his or her own opinions on the matter at hand. If the chair through its debate can be shown to be partial toward one side or the other on a particular issue, Robert's Rules state that the chair must step down for the remainder of the debate.
- Per Robert's Rules §4, p. 32, the following motions are in order even when another individual has the floor: call for the orders of the day, division of the question, point of inquiry or information, point of order, point of personal privilege, motion to withdraw, objection to consideration, motion to appeal. All other motions (except some obscure ones) are in order only when their sponsor has obtained the floor by being recognized by the acting Moderator.[41]
- Per Robert's Rules §45, p. 187, the following motions are not debatable: motion to adjourn or recess, call for the orders of the day, lay on the table, objection to consideration, point of order, call the question, point of personal privilege, motion to withdraw, suspend the rules, take from the table, extend or limit debate, reconsideration. All other motions (except for rare motions and special cases of common ones) are debatable by the Society.[42]
- Per Robert's Rules §33, pp. 146-147, the following motions are not amendable: motion to adjourn, call for the orders of the day, lay on the table, objection to consideration, call the question, motion to withdraw, suspend the rules, take from the table, appeal, postpone indefinitely, and all points of order, privilege, inquiry, and information. All other debatable motions (except for some uncommon exceptions) are amendable by the Society.

5 TABLES

5.1 TABLE OF RULES RELATING TO MOTIONS

This table is taken from Robert's Rules of Order, Revised (1915 edition), pp. 6-10. The following abbreviations are used:

- **RR§:** Section of Robert's Rules of Order, Revised that describes this motion.
- **Motion Name:** Name of the motion, including modifying circumstances and special notes. The section of this summary document that describes the motion is listed in parentheses.
- **Need Floor:** Is this motion out of order when another has the floor? "No" means that this motion is allowed even when its mover has not obtained the floor.
- **Must Second:** Does this motion require a second? "No" means no second is needed.
- **Is Debatable:** Is this motion debatable? "No" means debate is not permitted.
- **May Amend:** Can this motion be amended? "No" means no amendments are allowed. If it can be amended, there may still be restrictions on valid modifications.
- **Vote Needed:** The vote that is required (majority, two-thirds, or other) to pass this motion.

This table lists exceptions to the general rule that these questions are all answered in the affirmative. If the entry is blank, the answer to the question at the top of the column is "yes." If there is a number in the column, refer to the corresponding note below.

RR§	MOTION NAME (SUMMARY)	FLOOR	SECOND	DEBATE	AMEND	VOTE
§17	Adjourn, when privileged [1]			No	No	majority
§54	Adopt, accept or agree to a report					majority
§33	Amend a pending main motion (3.2.2) [3]			[4]		majority
§33	Amend an amendment (3.2.2)			[4]	No	majority
§68	Amend constitutions, by-laws, order (3.2.2)					[5]
§67	Amend standing rules					2 thirds
§21	Appeal, relating to indecorum (3.3.1) [7]	No		No	No	2 thirds
§21	Appeal, all other cases (3.3.1)	No			No	2 thirds
§29	Call question, previous question (3.2.4) [14]			No	[21]	2 thirds
§32	Commit or refer, or recommit (3.2.3)					majority
§30	Debate, to close, limit, or extend [9]			No		2 thirds
§25	Division of the assembly	No	No	No	No	majority
§24	Division of the question	[10]	[10]	No		majority
§16	Fix the time to which to adjourn [1]			[11]		majority
§57	Informal consideration, or comm. of the whole				No	majority
§27	Information, point of, or inquiry (3.3.4)	No	No	No	No	[19]
§27	Inquiry, point of (3.3.4)	No	No	No	No	[19]
§28	Lay on the table (3.2.5)			No	No	majority

§11	Main motion or question (3.1.1)					majority
§26	Nominations, to open [20]		No		No	majority
§26	Nominations, to close			No		2 thirds
§23	Objection to consideration (3.3.3) [12]	No	No	No	No	2 thirds
§21	Order, question of, or point of (3.3.1)	No	No	No	No	[19]
§20	Order, to make a special					2 thirds
§20	Orders of the day, to call for	No	No	No	No	majority
§27	Parliamentary inquiry, point of (3.3.4)	No	No	No	No	[19]
§31	Postpone definitely, or to a certain time					majority
§34	Postpone indefinitely (3.2.1)				No	majority
§29	Previous question (3.2.4) [14]			No	[21]	2 thirds
§19	Privilege, point of personal (3.2.6)	No	No	No	No	[19]
§27	Reading papers			No	No	majority
§18	Recess, when privileged [1]			[11]		majority
§36	Reconsider (3.3.5) [22]			No	No	majority
§37	Rescind or repeal (3.1.3)					2 thirds
§22	Suspend the rules (3.3.2)			No	No	[23]
§28	Table, to, or "Lay on the table" (3.2.5)			No	No	majority
§35	Take from the table (3.1.2)			No	No	majority
§22	Take up a question out of its proper order			No	No	2 thirds
§25	Voting, motions, other than division			No		majority
§27	Withdraw a motion (3.3.4)		No	No	No	[24]
RR§	MOTION NAME (SUMMARY)	FLOOR	SECOND	DEBATE	AMEND	VOTE

Notes to the Table

Notes 1 through 14 are summarized from Robert's Rules.

The following deviations from the original were made: Notes 6 and 16 were dropped from the table because they are habitually not observed by the Philomathean Society. Note 12 was moved to the appropriate column. Notes 2, 8, 13, 15 and 17 are not reprinted because they appear in columns of the original table that were not included above. Note 18 was dropped as superfluous. Notes 19 and up were added for the purposes of this summary and do not appear in the original document.

"Reconsider" row: In the Philomathean Society, the floor is required to move to reconsider, and a motion to reconsider is not debatable.

1. The three highest ranking privileged motions are not always privileged, but the exceptions are rare. See the second footnote on p. 5 of Robert's Rules of Order, Revised (1915 edition).
2. An amendment to a pending motion is very narrowly defined in Robert's Rules; see §33.
3. This motion is undebatable when the motion to be amended is not debatable.
4. Before adoption, constitutions, by-laws, and rules of order are main motions and may be amended by majority vote. After adoption, they require a two-thirds vote for amendment, or

- whatever the document to be amended stipulates.
5. An appeal is undebatable only when made while an undebatable question is pending, or when concerning the indecorum or transgressions of the rules of speaking on the part of the chair, or when relating to the priority of business.
 6. These motions may be moved only when the immediately pending question is debatable.
 7. Under most circumstances, a motion to divide the question may only be moved by an individual has the floor, and must be seconded. If the pending question relates to different subjects which are independent of each other, a single member may move to divide the question, without having the floor, and needing no second.
 8. Undebatable if made when another question is before the assembly.
 9. The objection can be made only when the question is first introduced, before debate.
 10. The previous question--a.k.a. calling the question--may be moved when the pending question is debatable or amendable. The questions upon which it is moved should be specified; otherwise, it refers only to the immediately pending question.
 11. The acting Moderator rules on the admissibility of these motions, once made.
 12. The Philomathean Society includes the opening of nominations in its orders of the day, and as such, this motion is not needed.
 13. This motion may be modified to qualify the pending questions to be called, if there is more than one.
 14. In the Philomathean Society, the floor is required to move to reconsider, and a motion to reconsider is not debatable, contrary to Robert's Rules.
 15. This motion requires a two-thirds majority, except when the rule being suspended protects a minority of one-third or less, in which case the vote against suspension must be less than the minority it protects.
 16. A motion to withdraw a pending question is made by the sponsor of the pending question, and is carried out only by unanimous consent.

5.2 TABLE OF PRECEDENCE

This table is taken from Robert's Rules of Order, Revised (1915 edition), p. 5. The motions are listed in descending rank; when any one of them is pending those before it in the list are in order, and those after it are out of order.

Undebatable

Fix the time to which to adjourn*
 Move to adjourn
 Take a recess*
 Raise a point of personal privilege
 Call for the orders of the day
 Lay on the table
 Call the question (2/3)
 Limit or extend limits of debate (2/3)*

Debatable

Postpone to a certain time*
 Commit or refer*
 Amend a main motion*
 Postpone indefinitely
 A main motion*

* Can be amended; the others cannot be amended.

2/3 Requires a two-thirds vote for their adoption; the others require a simple majority.

5.3 GUIDELINES FOR THE CONDUCT OF DEBATE

What follows is a suggested set of moderatorial procedures for handling a motion, summarized from Robert's Rules §4 through 11, and 44 through 48, with special additions tailored for the Philomathean Society. The "you" that appears in the text below—explicitly or implied—refers to the Moderator who chairs the consideration of this motion.

I. Obtain the motion

- A.** Yield the floor to Member X.
- B.** Member X states his or her motion.
- C.** Member Y seconds the motion.
- D.** You state the motion. "The motion under consideration is. . ." or "The motion before the Society is to. . ." This allows the Scriba to write down the motion, and it allows the membership to hear it clearly.

II. Open up debate

- A.** Yield the floor to Member X for opening debate. "Mr./Ms. X, do you have any debate?"
- B.** Ask the Society for questions. "Does anyone have a question for Mr./Ms. X?" or "Questions for Mr./Ms. X?"
- C.** Exhaust all questions for Member X. Yield to questions only, not to debate or secondary motions. Afterwards, ask Mr./Ms. X to take his or her seat. (Matt Miller, this is for you.)
- D.** Invite debate. "Does anyone have debate to offer?" or "Debate?"
 - i.** Ask individuals to rise before speaking.
 - ii.** Do not yield the floor to the same person again if someone else who has not yet spoken seeks the floor.
 - iii.** Do not yield the floor to an individual who speaks out of turn, without being recognized by the Moderator (except for points of order, inquiry, privilege, objections to consideration, or appeals). Use your gavel!
 - iv.** Do not allow cross-talk between individuals who do not have the floor; suppress angry back-and-forth cross-talk by giving each side the opportunity to offer debate in turn.
 - v.** If someone has obtained the floor properly, be sure to allow him or her to finish when interrupted by a secondary motion or by improper debate. Put off contentious debate or points of information until after the person who has the floor has finished speaking.

III. Secondary motions during consideration

A. Object to consideration:

- i.** This is in order only at the beginning of the consideration of main motions, when no debate has been offered.
- ii.** If it is in order, it requires no second, and permits no debate or amendment.
- iii.** State the objection and the vote required. "There is an objection to the consideration of the motion to (do such-and-such). Objection requires a two-thirds vote."

- iv. Call for those in favor of objecting--or more simply, call for those opposed to consideration of the question--and vice versa: State the tally.
- v. If two-thirds oppose consideration, the motion is killed.

B. Amend (formal, non-friendly amendment), commit, table, or postpone (indefinitely or to a certain time):

- i. Wait for the secondary motion to be seconded.
- ii. Make sure it's in order, and then state the motion. This is very important! It keeps the Society current with what's going on. Allow the Scriba time to note it.
- iii. For motions to amend, to commit, or to postpone (but not for tabling), invite debate, beginning with the person who made the motion. Call for further debate, restating the motion if necessary. Make sure debate is germane to the secondary motion under consideration.
- iv. If another secondary motion is made during the consideration of this one, check precedence and the table of rules to make sure it's in order. (Recall that not all secondary motions may be amended.) If the new secondary motion is in order, recurse.
- v. When debate has been exhausted or closed, ask the Scriba to read the secondary motion. All secondary motions in this subsection require a majority vote.
- vi. Call for those in favor, those opposed. Announce the tally and pause to allow the Scriba to note it.
- vii. If the motion carries, act on it:
 - A successful motion to amend changes the wording of the pending question.
 - A successful motion to commit removes the pending question (with any pending amendments) from consideration before the Society at large, and redirects the question to a committee, which should be specified by the motion to commit or appointed by the Moderator.
 - A successful motion to table places the pending question (with any pending amendments) before the Scriba, removing it from consideration before the Society at large for the present time.
 - A successful motion to postpone indefinitely kills the motion for the rest of the meeting.
 - A successful motion to postpone to a certain time removes the question from consideration at the present time and sets a specific time at which consideration on the motion will resume.

C. Friendly amendment:

- i. Make sure the amendment is in order.
- ii. Restate it immediately to the person who moved the main motion. This gives the Scriba time to note it and the main motion's sponsor a chance to consider it. Then ask if it is accepted.
- iii. Depending on the response, restate it to the Scriba: "Mr./Ms. Scriba, the friendly amendment to (do such- and-such) was (was not) accepted." This allows the Scriba, who was too busy writing down the friendly amendment to hear the outcome, to note whether or not it was accepted.

D. Call the question, or extend or limit debate:

- i. Make sure the secondary motion is in order. Do not entertain motions to call the question from individuals who have not been recognized by you, or from points of personal privilege.
- ii. Wait for it to be seconded.
- iii. Announce the secondary motion. "The motion is to call the question on the motion to (do such-and- such)," or "The motion is to limit (to extend) debate on the question to (do such-and-such) to (such-and-such time)." This keeps the membership, always easily confused, abreast of what's going on, and it gives members a chance to raise privileged point, or to amend.
- iv. These secondary motions are not debatable. If a friendly amendment is offered for the motion to limit or extend debate, follow the procedures above. If a formal amendment is offered, follow the procedures above; note that amendments to these motions are not debatable.
- v. Having already announced the secondary motion, it is not necessary to re-announce it, unless amendments or other points have intervened. However, you should announce the majority required: "This motion requires a two-thirds majority."
- vi. Call for those in favor, those opposed. Announce the tally.
- vii. If two-thirds vote in favor:
 - If the motion to call the question passes, debate on the pending question is closed; proceed to a vote.
 - If the motion to limit or extend debate passes, appoint someone other than yourself or the Scriba to keep time; debate on the pending question resumes. After the limit has expired, invite a motion to extend debate. If none is moved, debate is closed, and you proceed to a vote.

E. Points of information, inquiry, order, and personal privilege; appeal:

- i. Determine if the privileged motion is admissible. Of these motions, only the appeal requires a second.
- ii. If it is admissible, the person who had the floor is interrupted.
- iii. The following action is to be taken:
 - For points of inquiry or information, answer the question, redirect it to the member who had the floor, or invite the membership to answer that question only. "Can anyone respond to Mr./Ms. Z's question regarding (such-and- such)?" Do not permit debate or extraneous information to enter into the response. Try to limit, or at least to moderate, requests for further clarifications, to prevent the issue from being muddled.
 - For a point of order, rule on it immediately, possibly seeking the counsel of others. If you are completely unsure, it is in order to put the member's point before the Society. The latter recourse is undebatable; restate the point, and ask for those in favor of the interpretation as expressed in the point of order, and for those opposed. A simple majority carries.
 - For a point of personal privilege, if appropriate, direct the Society to act on it immediately. If a formal nonprocedural main motion is offered, proceed with the consideration of that motion; if it passes, carry it out straightaway.
 - For an appeal, rise and state the reason that you ruled as you did, and

invite debate. It is not necessary to leave your chair during consideration. Allow no person to speak more than once, except yourself; no amendments are permitted. When debate is exhausted, state the appeal and put it to a vote. A two-thirds majority is required to reverse your decision. If the appeal is successful, act accordingly, now and in future situations where the circumstances are similar.

iv. When the secondary motion is dispensed with, return the floor to the speaker who had it prior to the making of the motion.

F. Other secondary motions:

i. **Withdraw:** This motion may be made by the sponsor of the original main motion, even if it was since amended. It requires no second, and cannot be debated, but needs unanimous consent from the membership. "Is there any objection to Mr./Ms. X's motion to withdraw his/her main motion?" If there is no objection, the motion is killed.

ii. **Suspend the rules:** Make sure that the motion is in order. (It is in order when another question is under consideration only when the rule being suspended applies to the motion; also, no rule of the Constitution may be suspended.) Wait for it to be seconded. It cannot be debated or amended. Restate the motion, and the fact that it requires a two-thirds majority to pass. Put it to a vote. If it carries, act accordingly.

iii. **Division of the question:** Make sure that the motion is in order, and is seconded. (See §24 for a discussion of exceptions.) It is undebatable but can be amended—without debate—to qualify the way in which the question is to be divided. Restate the motion to the Society, and the fact that it requires a simple majority. Put it to a vote; if it passes, the constituent questions are divided and voted upon separately.

iv. **Reconsideration:** The motion must be in order. (That is, it must be applied to a vote that is reconsiderable, one that was taken during the consideration of the pending main motion, and it must be moved by an individual who voted with the prevailing side.) Wait for it to be seconded; it is undebatable and cannot be amended. Restate the motion to reconsider and the fact that it requires a simple majority; put it to a vote. If it passes, consideration is reopened on the secondary motion to which it is applied.

IV. Call for a vote

A. When debate is exhausted or closed by a secondary motion, state so. "Seeing no further debate, the question is called," or "Debate is now closed."

B. Direct the Scriba to read the motion on the floor.

C. Determine the majority required, and if it is a special one, state it. "This motion to (do such-and-such) requires a two-thirds vote."

D. Call for those in favor, those opposed.

E. Announce the tally, and give the Scriba the opportunity to note it.