

Reference Guide to Robert's Rules of Order

San Francisco Elections Commission

Robin M. Stone, President

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Introduction

Per Article XII of the [Elections Commission bylaws](#), *“At the President’s discretion, unless the Charter or other law requires otherwise, meetings shall be governed by the most recent edition of Roberts Rules of Order Newly Revised.”*

Robert’s Rules of Order are a broad set of guidelines dating back to San Francisco 1876, most recently updated in September 2020. Widely known as parliamentary procedure, Robert’s Rules were developed to ensure that meetings are fair, efficient, democratic, and orderly. In small bodies, Robert’s Rules can have some flexibility, but observing its basic functions and procedures can help maintain meeting productivity and member decorum.

This document provides a brief overview of three core functions of Robert’s Rules that are applicable to the San Francisco Elections Commission:

- I. Meeting Agendas
- II. Meeting Structure & Operations
- III. Meeting Minutes

As the body strives to properly observe these Robert’s Rules fundamentals, Commissioners, Deputy City Attorneys, and relevant meeting participants should rely on this document as a basic reference guide.

This document is in no way exhaustive and may be expanded upon, updated, and redistributed.

I. Meeting Agendas

Commission meeting structure is dictated by its agenda, which includes the list of items to be discussed in chronological order. The agenda protects the meeting from last minute additions.

Meeting agendas according to Robert's Rules include and are generally organized by the following order of business:

- 1) Call to Order
- 2) Roll Call
- 3) Approval of Minutes
- 4) Reports of Directors, Officers, Members, Standing Committees
 - a. Meeting members share their notes, recommendations, motions, tasks, what has been done since the last meeting (& what remains outstanding).
 - b. Members should provide any actions related to their reports, where appropriate.
- 5) Standard Business
 - a. Usually the bulk of the meeting
 - b. Designated time to cover unfinished business from previous meetings, regular action items.
- 6) New Business
- 7) Adjournment

II. Meeting Structure & Operations

General Structure

In Robert's Rules of Order, the designated Chairperson (in the Elections Commission's case, the President) presides over and facilitates each meeting of the body according to its agenda. The Chair's responsibilities include fairly recognizing members (assigning the floor), effectuating the agenda's order of business, managing motions and motion debate, keeping discussions on-track, modeling and insisting on courtesy and respect for members, among others.

With few exceptions, meeting participants must always first obtain the floor before offering comment.

Motions

A motion is a proposal that the members take action on or discuss an issue. Motions form many of the action items of meetings. For any discussion to move forward, motions must be raised, seconded, and voted on. In a vote, the majority rule (and sometimes two-thirds vote) dictates whether a motion has passed.

Motion Types

1. Main Motion: Introduces a new item or action.
 - a) Cannot be made when any other motion is on the floor.
 - b) Main mover waits to justify their motion until Chair opens debate, not in the motion's introduction.
2. Subsidiary Motion: Change or affect how to handle a main motion (vote on this before main motion).
3. Privileged Motion: Urgent or important matter unrelated to pending business, often associated with physical meeting comfort (e.g., room distractions, temperature control).
4. Incidental Motion: Questions of procedure concerning other motions (must consider before the other motion).
5. Motion to Table: Kills a motion. The motion can at any given time be "taken from the table" for the body's consideration.
6. Motion to Postpone: Delays a vote (can reopen debate on the main motion).

Motion Procedure and Conduct

Under Robert's Rules, motions and movers adhere to the following protocol:

1. Obtain the Floor: A member rises or raises a hand to signal the Chair. Chairperson recognizes the member by name.
 - a) A member seeking to obtain the floor must wait until the last speaker has finished.
2. Present Motion: Address Chairperson (e.g., "Mister Chairperson, Madame President," etc.) and present motion in the affirmative (i.e., "I move that/to..").
3. Second: Another member seconds the motion.
 - a) A member does **not** need to obtain the floor to second a motion.

- b) The Chairperson may also call for a second.
 - c) If no second, the motion is lost.
 - d) Note: A “second” does not indicate a member’s agreement with the motion; rather, a desire for the motion’s content to be discussed by the full body.
4. Restate motion: The Chairperson restates the motion and opens the floor to debate.
 5. Expand on Motion: Mover justifies motion. The mover is always allowed to speak first.
 6. Debate: Members debate the motion, always seeking recognition to obtain the floor. Alternatively, the body can move straight to a vote.
 - a) Comments and debate are always directed to the Chairperson, not the other members or meeting participants unless authorized by the Chair.
 - b) Each member has the opportunity to comment on a motion before any member can comment for a second time.
 - c) Mover may speak again only after other speakers are finished, unless called upon by the chairperson.
 - d) Members can cede their comment or time to another member.
 - e) Debate is always confined to the merits of the motion.
 1. Focus on issues, not personalities.
 2. Practice decorum, respect, and politeness.
 7. Vote: Once debate has closed (no other member claims the floor), the Chairperson puts the question to the membership (asks the body if it is ready to vote on the question), restates the motion, and directs the secretary to conduct the vote via roll call.
 8. Announce the Vote: The Chairperson announces the result of the vote and any relevant instructions for next steps.

§	PURPOSE:	YOU SAY:	INTERRUPT?	2ND?	DEBATE?	AMEND?	VOTE?
§21	Close meeting	I move to adjourn	No	Yes	No	No	Majority
§20	Take break	I move to recess for ...	No	Yes	No	Yes	Majority
§19	Register complaint	I rise to a question of privilege	Yes	No	No	No	None
§18	Make follow agenda	I call for the orders of the day	Yes	No	No	No	None
§17	Lay aside temporarily	I move to lay the question on the table	No	Yes	No	No	Majority
§16	Close debate	I move the previous question	No	Yes	No	No	2/3
§15	Limit or extend debate	I move that debate be limited to ...	No	Yes	No	Yes	2/3
§14	Postpone to a certain time	I move to postpone the motion to ...	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority
§13	Refer to committee	I move to refer the motion to ...	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority
§12	Modify wording of motion	I move to amend the motion by ...	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority
§11	Kill main motion	I move that the motion be postponed indefinitely	No	Yes	Yes	No	Majority
§10	Bring business before assembly (a main motion)	I move that [or "to"] ...	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority

Requesting Points of Something

Members may have relevant procedural questions that arise out of meeting business. The following points may be used without obtaining the floor:

1. Point of Order: A member seeks to draw attention to a breach of rules, established practices and procedures, or improper decorum.
2. Point of Information / Inquiry: A member needs clarification or additional information.
3. Point of Privilege: A member may use point of personal privilege to address the physical comfort of the meeting setting, such as temperature, distractions, noise. Members may also use to address the accuracy of published reports or a member's conduct.

Rules For Procedural Requests

All procedural requests take precedence over any motion and may be made at any time. Additionally, procedural requests:

1. Are always considered in order when another has the floor *if they require immediate attention*.
2. Do not require a second.
3. Are not debatable, amendable, or voted on.
4. Must be directed to the Chair.

To:	You say:	Interrupt Speaker	Second Needed	Debatable	Amendable	Vote Needed
Object to procedure or personal affront	"Point of order"	Yes	No	No	No	Chair decides
Request information	"Point of information"	Yes	No	No	No	None
Ask for vote by actual count to verify voice vote	"I call for a division of the house"	Must be done before new motion	No	No	No	None unless someone objects
Object to considering some undiplomatic or improper matter	"I object to consideration of this question"	Yes	No	No	No	2/3
Take up matter previously tabled	"I move we take from the table..."	Yes	Yes	No	No	Majority
Reconsider something already disposed of	"I move we now (or later) reconsider our action relative to..."	Yes	Yes	Only if original motion was debatable	No	Majority
Consider something out of its scheduled order	"I move we suspend the rules and consider..."	No	Yes	No	No	2/3
Vote on a ruling by the Chair	"I appeal the Chair's decision"	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Majority

III. Meeting Minutes

Minutes are the official record of meeting proceedings. Meeting minutes are required for every Commission convening.

Contents of Minutes

Robert's Rules (Section 48:1-16) state that "the minutes should contain mainly a record of what was *done* at the meeting, not what was *said* by the members." Minutes are not transcripts of meetings; rather, the document contains a record of actions taken by the body, organized by the meeting's order of business (agenda).

All motions should be captured in the minutes, including the mover's name, facts as to whether the motion may have been debated or amended, any amendments to motions, and the final vote tally and results.

Additional rules and practices relating to content of meeting minutes include:

1. All points of order and appeals must be included in the minutes.
2. The hour of adjournment should be listed at the end of the document.
3. Names and subject of a guest speaker should be included, but no effort should be made to summarize their remarks.
4. Minutes should be signed by the secretary.
5. The format of content under each agenda item should be written in paragraphs, organized by sub-topics.

Amending & Approving Meeting Minutes

A formal motion to approve the minutes is not necessary, however proposed corrections to minutes should be unanimous (Roberts Rules 41:6-11). If no member has objected or proposed comments or amendments, the chair can solicit general consent in lieu of a formal vote.

When meeting minutes are approved, the word *Approved* next to the secretary's initials and date should be listed on the top of the final document.