

Synopsis of *Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised* (2021)

The following information is offered as an aid for those seeking assistance in following parliamentary procedure. All page references are to the 11th edition of *Robert's Rules of Order, 12th Edition, Newly Revised, (2020)* published by Hachette Book Group. In accordance with provision S7.32 in the Constitution of the Northwest Washington Synod, "Robert's Rules of Order, latest edition, shall govern parliamentary procedure of the Synod Assembly, unless otherwise ordered by the assembly." Thus, the "Standing Rules" of the assembly may modify the parliamentary procedures discussed below. Topics are discussed in alphabetical order. Charts summarizing the motions, and the requirements for each, appear on the final pages of this document.

Agenda, Amendment of, §41, p. 333ff

Once the agenda is adopted, an item of business can be taken out of its prescribed order a) by adopting, by a two-thirds vote, a motion to suspend the rules, or b) by unanimous consent (p. 373).

Amendments, §10 & §12, p. 119ff

A motion may be amended before it is voted upon by inserting words, striking out words, striking out and inserting words, adding words at the end of a sentence, and substitution. A motion to amend must be germane to the motion to be amended. (See "Germane" below.) A motion to amend requires a second; is debatable, if the motion to be amended is debatable; can be amended (once); requires a majority vote even if the motion amended requires a two-thirds vote for adoption; and can be reconsidered (pp. 113-116, 131-133).

Appeal, §24, p. 242ff

If a member believes that the chair has ruled incorrectly, she or he may appeal by stating "I appeal from the decision of the chair." The appeal can be made without recognition of the member by the chair. However, an appeal may not be made if the chair has expressed only an opinion (p. 259). An appeal must be made at the time of the ruling; if any debate or business has intervened, an appeal is not in order. An appeal must be seconded; is debatable, unless it addresses a matter of decorum or the matter appealed is not debatable; is not amendable. A majority vote or tie sustains the decision of the chair. An appeal may be reconsidered (pp. 256-258).

Courtesy, §3, p.18ff

Members always should act with decorum. Members should address only the chair; they should refer to other speakers by title or some other designation, and should avoid mentioning names, if possible. A speaker's motives should not be called into question. During debate, presentations, and remarks from the stage, members should avoid conduct that would disturb the assembly (pp. 22-25, 42-44, 391-394).

Division of a Question, §27, p. 255ff

A motion that focuses on a single question, but consists of several parts, each of which can stand as a distinct proposal even if separated from the other parts, may be considered and voted upon as separate parts following adoption of a motion to "divide the question." The motion to divide must state clearly the manner in which the question is to be divided; must be seconded; is

amendable but not debatable; requires a majority vote; and cannot be reconsidered (pp. 271-272).

Germane §12 & §43

A “germane” matter is something closely related to, or having a bearing on, a motion before the assembly. A motion to amend must be germane to the motion to be amended; i.e., no new subject can be introduced under the pretext of a motion to amend (p. 131). In debate, a member’s remarks must be germane to the question before the assembly; i.e., the statements must have a bearing on whether the pending motion should be adopted (p. 392).

Incidental Motions, §6, p. 62ff

Incidental motions usually relate to questions of procedure and, unlike subsidiary motions, do not have a rank. They include:

- Point of Order
- Appeal
- Suspend the Rules
- Objection to the Consideration of the Question
- Division of a Question
- Consideration by Paragraph or Seriatim
- Division of the Assembly
- Motions Relating to Methods of Voting and Polls
- Motions Relating to Nominations
- Parliamentary Inquiry
- Point of Information
- Request for Permission to Withdraw or Modify a Motion
- Request to Read Papers
- Request for Any Other Privilege

Lay on the Table, §17, p. 198ff

The subsidiary motion to “lay on the table,” if adopted, enables the assembly to put aside temporarily a pending question so that a more urgent matter can be considered. This motion requires a second; cannot be debated; cannot be amended; requires a majority vote; and only a negative vote can be reconsidered (pp. 209-212). A motion laid on the table can be brought back to the assembly by a motion to “take from the table.” (See “Take from the Table” below.) A motion to lay on the table should not be made if the intent is to “kill” the pending motion (pp. 215-216). (See “Postpone Indefinitely” below.)

Limit or Extend Limits of Debate, §15, p. 179ff

The purpose of this subsidiary motion is 1) to shorten or to lengthen the time limit placed upon each speaker, 2) to limit the number of speeches, 3) to close debate at a specified time, or 4) to close debate after a specified period of time. This motion requires a second; can be amended; cannot be debated; requires a two-thirds vote; and can be reconsidered (pp. 192-193).

Main Motion, § 10, p. 92ff

A “main motion” introduces business before the assembly. As such, a main motion can be made only when no other motion is pending. All subsidiary motions can be applied to it. A main motion is out of order when another person has the floor; must be seconded, except when the

main motion is made on behalf of a committee; is debatable; is amendable; generally requires a majority vote; and can be reconsidered. When adopted, a main motion becomes the officially recorded statement of an action taken by the assembly. A resolution is a type of main motion, usually containing “whereas” clauses and “resolved” clauses (pp. 105-108). The Standing Rules describe the process for submitting main motions and resolutions.

Objection to the Consideration of a Matter, §26, p. 252ff

This incidental motion is used to test the assembly’s desire even to consider an original main motion. It must be made immediately after the question is stated by the chair and before there has been any debate or subsidiary motion (other than a motion to “lay on the table”). It is intended to prevent discussion of controversial or personal questions. A member may rise and, without waiting for recognition, say, “I object to the consideration of the question (or motion).” A second is not required, and the motion may not be debated or amended. A two-thirds vote is required to sustain an objection to consideration. A negative vote can be reconsidered, but not an affirmative vote. (pp. 268-269).

Obtaining the Floor, §3, p. 26ff

As a general rule, prior to speaking in the assembly, whether to make a motion or to engage in debate, a member must obtain the floor, i.e., be recognized by the chair as having the right to speak at that time.

Microphones are placed at convenient locations so that members may address the chair when no one else “has the floor.” Once recognized by the chair, the member is entitled to speak, subject to the limitations in the Standing Rules.

Persons recognized by the chair are asked to identify themselves by giving their name and the name of their congregation.

In a few limited instances when urgency requires, it is not necessary to seek recognition of the chair before speaking. These include:

- To appeal a decision by the chair – the appeal must be made before any debate or other business has intervened (pp. 255-260);
- To suggest an amount, name, place, date, or numbers to “fill blanks” when invited by the chair (pp. 162-167);
- To call for “division,” if the result of a vote is doubtful (pp. 280-282);
- To call for a count, if the result of the “division” is in doubt (pp. 280-282);
- To extend the time for consideration of a pending question or until scheduled recess or adjournment, when the orders of the day are announced or called for (pp. 222-224);
- To call for the orders of the day (pp. 219-224);
- To raise a point of order, or a question of order (pp. 247-255);
- To make a parliamentary inquiry (pp. 293-294);
- To raise a question of privilege, unless a person is speaking or unless such interruption is unavoidable (pp. 224-230);
- To request permission to read a paper or a section of a book (pp. 292-293, 298-299);
- To move reconsideration of a motion previously acted upon (pp. 315-335);
- To request permission to withdraw a motion, or to modify a motion, that has been stated by the chair (pp. 295-298); and
- To object to consideration of the question (pp. 267-270).

Orders of the Day, §18, p. 207ff

A privileged motion calling for the “orders of the day” is made for the purpose of requiring the assembly to conform to its adopted agenda. The chair will rule on the motion. Upon a “call for the orders of the day” by a single member, the assembly must return to the approved agenda, unless by a two-thirds vote the assembly a) refuses to proceed to the orders of the day, b) extends the time for considering the pending matter, or c) adopts a motion to suspend the rules.

Point of Order, §23, p. 233ff

If a member believes that the rules of the assembly are being violated, he or she may rise to a “point of order” or “raise a question of order.” This calls upon the chair for a ruling and enforcement of the assembly’s rules. A “point of order” does not require a second; is not debatable or amendable; is normally ruled upon by the chair; and cannot be reconsidered. It must be raised at the time the alleged breach of rules occurs, unless the breach is ongoing (p. 250).

Postpone Indefinitely, §11, p. 116ff

A subsidiary motion to “postpone indefinitely” is used for one of three purposes: 1) to dispose of an ill-considered motion without voting on it directly; 2) to get a “reading” on the strength of those supporting and those opposing a main motion; or 3) to extend the limits of debate on a matter. The effect of the motion, if adopted, is to “kill” the main motion. The motion to postpone indefinitely requires a second; is debatable; cannot be amended; requires a majority vote; and only an affirmative vote can be reconsidered (pp. 126-127).

Postpone to a Certain Time, §14, p. 169ff

A member has the right to make a motion to postpone action on another motion 1) so that it can be discussed more fully at a more convenient time, or 2) because arguments advanced during debate have indicated the need to decide at a later time. The time to which the motion is to be postponed should be stated definitely in this motion. The motion requires a second; is debatable, but only with respect to the proposed postponement; and can be amended as to the time of consideration of the main motion. A majority vote is required unless the effect of the postponement is to create a special order, in which case a two-thirds vote is required; however, an amendment to the motion to postpone to a certain time requires only a majority vote. The motion to postpone to a certain time can be reconsidered (pp. 180-182).

Previous Question, §16, p. 187ff

To “move the previous question” is to ask the assembly to end debate and to vote immediately on the pending question. The maker of the motion must proceed to a microphone and be properly recognized by the chair. By assembly rule, the motion cannot be made by someone who has first participated in the debate. This subsidiary motion requires a second; is not debatable; cannot be amended; requires a two-thirds vote; and can be reconsidered before any vote is taken under it. If adopted, the assembly proceeds, without further debate, to vote on the pending question. If the previous question is moved and adopted on “all pending questions,” the assembly proceeds without further debate, to vote successively on each pending question (pp. 198-199).

Privileged Motions, §6, p. 60ff

Unlike subsidiary and incidental motions, privileged motions do not relate to the pending business but have to do with special matters of immediate and overriding importance, which

should warrant interruption of the consideration of anything else. Like subsidiary motions, there is an order of precedence, as follows (from highest to lowest):

- Fix the Time to Which to Adjourn
- Adjourn
- Recess
- Question of Privilege
- Call for Orders of the Day

Quasi Committee of the Whole, §52, p. 510ff

The assembly can vote to “go into the quasi committee of the whole” to discuss a matter that can best be discussed informally under conditions of freedom approximating those of a committee (p. 168). The motion to go into the quasi committee of the whole is a form of the subsidiary motion to refer, and the motion may specify the format and applicable procedures. No binding decisions may be taken by a quasi-committee of the whole; however, it may make recommendations to the assembly. Absent specification in the motion to refer, the rules of debate approved by the assembly apply in the quasi committee of the whole. The chair of the quasi committee of the whole is the presiding officer (p. 538). During the period when the assembly is meeting as a quasi-committee of the whole, even though the committee consists solely of members having vote and voice, it is technically not the assembly (pp. 538-540).

Reconsideration, §37, p. 289ff

Should it be deemed desirable to return to a motion already voted on, whether adopted or rejected, a motion is made to reconsider the vote on that subject, if such a motion is otherwise in order. Such a motion may be offered only by one who voted on the prevailing side of the issue, and may be made only on the day the previous vote on the subject was taken or on the next succeeding day of assembly business. If adopted, the question before the assembly is exactly the same question, and it is in the same form, as at the time the original vote was taken. The motion to reconsider requires a second; is debatable, if the motion to be reconsidered is debatable; cannot be amended; requires a majority vote; and cannot be reconsidered (pp. 315-335).

Refer (or Commit), §13, p. 157ff

This subsidiary motion is used to refer a matter for study and/or further investigation to the Synod Council, a synod committee designated by the Synod Council, or another group. The motion may contain instructions regarding the process for study and investigation. If motions to amend have been made, they are referred with the main motion to the designated group. The motion to refer requires a second; is debatable; can be amended; requires a majority vote; and cannot be reconsidered, if the committee has begun to function (p. 171).

Rescind or Amend Something Previously Adopted, §35, p. 305ff

These two motions may be applied to an earlier action of an assembly. If adopted, the motion to rescind has the effect of nullifying the entire earlier action; the motion to amend something previously adopted is used if only a part of the earlier action is to be changed. The motion requires a second; is debatable; and can be amended. Under proposed assembly rules, a two-thirds vote is necessary to adopt. However, constitution and bylaw amendments, once approved, cannot be rescinded or amended. Only a negative vote can be reconsidered (pp. 305-310).

Standing Rules for an Assembly, Adoption of, §59, p. 574ff

The Standing Rules govern the conduct of an assembly. They cannot conflict with the constitution or bylaws, but they can modify rules contained in the parliamentary authority, and they can address other matters as well. The Standing Rules, while applicable only to the immediate assembly, have been developed over the years so that there is little change from one assembly to another. While the rules are presented under an enacting motion, they are in fact a group of separate main motions. Voting members may request separate consideration of particular rules for purposes of debate, amendment, deletion, or addition. These requests for separate consideration will be held in abeyance without being voted upon until after the remainder of the rules (those for which no requests for separate consideration were made) have been adopted by a two-thirds vote. Then each of the requests will be considered, with a two-thirds vote required if a parliamentary rule from *Robert's Rules of Order* is being changed, or a simple majority vote if no parliamentary rule is involved (p. 619).

Subsidiary Motions, §6, p. 56ff

Subsidiary motions assist the assembly in treating or disposing of a main motion (and sometimes other motions). In order of rank (from highest to lowest), their precedence is as follows:

- Lay on the Table
- Previous Question
- Limit or Extend Limits of Debate
- Postpone to a Certain Time
- Refer or Commit
- Amend
- Postpone Indefinitely

Substitute, §12, p. 119ff

A motion to strike out an entire paragraph, section, article, or a complete main motion and to insert a different paragraph, section, article, or main motion is a motion to substitute. A motion to substitute is a type of motion to amend. The motion to substitute requires a second; is debatable, if the motion is debatable; requires a majority vote; and is amendable. Generally, amendments can be made first to the original and then to the substitute motion. Unlike other motions to amend, debate may address both the original text and the substitute concurrently (p. 154). When both have been perfected, the vote is taken on whether to substitute the proposed substitute (with any amendments to it that have been adopted) for the original paragraph, section, article, or main motion with any amendments that previously had been adopted. A majority vote is required. If the motion to substitute has been adopted, the substitute becomes the pending paragraph, section, article, or main motion, and then the substituted material cannot be amended except by adding something that does not alter the content of the substituted material. When material has been substituted for other material, the assembly must still vote on whether the substituted material is to be adopted.

Suspend the Rules, §25, p. 246ff

If, by reason of the assembly's rules, it is not possible according to *Robert's Rules of Order* to take a procedural action (such as bringing forward an action scheduled for later consideration), a

member may move to suspend the rules, stating the specific purpose to be achieved, but not the specific rule. Any such suspension of rules, however, may not conflict with the constitution or bylaws of this synod, or with the fundamental principles of parliamentary law. A motion to suspend the rules requires a second; cannot be debated; and cannot be amended. It cannot be reconsidered (pp. 260-266).

Take from the Table, §34, p. 283ff

The purpose of a motion to “take from the table” is to enable renewed consideration of a motion that had previously been laid on the table. Such motion is in order any time after the business that interfered with consideration at an earlier time has been completed, provided no other business is before the assembly. A matter that has been tabled dies at the close of the assembly, if no motion is adopted to take it from the table. A motion to take it from the table requires a second; cannot be debated; and cannot be amended. A majority vote is required to adopt. It cannot be reconsidered (pp. 300-304).

Voting, §45, p. 385ff, Chapter 45

The Standing Rules of the assembly describe voting protocols.

Most motions can be adopted by a majority of the members present and voting, provided a quorum is present.

Under *Robert’s Rules of Order*, the following motions require a two-thirds vote of members present and voting for adoption:

- Amend or rescind something previously adopted, if notice has not been given;
- Close nominations;
- Discharge an order for the day before it is pending;
- Extend time for consideration of pending question, or time until scheduled adjournment or recess;
- Limit or extend limits of debate;
- Make a special order;
- Previous question;
- Refuse to proceed to the orders of the day;
- Suspend the rules;
- Take up a question out of its proper order, or take up an order of the day before the time for which it has been set (Table 46).

Language for Introducing Motions

For clarity and consistency, voting members should use the standard language of parliamentary procedure when introducing motions on the floor of the assembly. The chart below offers standard phrases used when introducing motions for various purposes.

If you wish to . . .	You say . . .
Close the meeting	I move to adjourn.
Take a break	I move to recess for [<i>specify time duration</i>] OR until [<i>time certain</i>].
Register a complaint	I rise to a question of privilege.
Require the assembly to return to its agenda	I call for the orders of the day.
Lay a matter aside temporarily	I move to lay the question on the table.
Close debate	I move the previous question.
Limit or extend debate	I move that debate be limited to . . .
Postpone to a certain time	I move to postpone the motion to [<i>time certain</i>].
Refer the motion to a committee	I move to refer the motion to [<i>committee name</i>].
Modify wording of the motion	I move to amend the motion by . . .
Kill the main motion	I move that the motion be postponed indefinitely.
Bring business before the assembly	I move that . . . OR I move to . . .
Enforce the rules	Point of order.
Submit a matter to the assembly after a ruling from the chair	I appeal the decision of the chair.
Suspend the rules	I move to suspend the rules.
Avoid a main motion altogether	I object to the consideration of . . .
Divide a motion	I move to divide the question.
Demand a rising vote	I move for a rising vote.
Ask a parliamentary law question	Parliamentary inquiry.
Request for information	Point of information.
Take a matter from the table	I move to take from the table . . .
Reconsider a motion	I move to reconsider . . .
Cancel a previous action	I move to rescind . . .