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***An Introduction to Rules of Order  
For Council Members of the  
American Library Association***

***Based on:***

***Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised (RONR, 2011 edition)***

## PARLIAMENTARY PROCEDURE (RULES OF ORDER)

Parliamentary Procedure is the combination of rules and customs that govern the conduct of business meetings. The information provided here is consistent with the current (11<sup>th</sup>) edition of Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised RONR).

Hierarchy of governing documents (RONR Section 2):

1. Laws of the Land (applicable statutes)
2. Constitution and Bylaws
3. Rule book (e.g.: RONR) and Special Rules of Order

Purposes of the rules:

- To create the necessary structure and appropriate level of formality for a meeting
- To facilitate progress
- To include individual members in discussion and shared decision-making on a "level playing field".
- To protect the rights of the majority, minority, individuals, absentees, and the organization

Voting outcomes:

- Most decisions require a majority vote (more than 50% of the votes cast) to adopt .
- Under RONR (page 400) abstentions do not count.
- A tie vote means that a motion is defeated (no majority was obtained).

## UNANIMOUS (GENERAL) CONSENT (RONR page 54)

Unanimous/General Consent is an informal method of taking a vote, used for routine and non-controversial decisions. For example:

- *"The minutes have been circulated. Are there any corrections to the minutes? (PAUSE)? If not, the minutes are approved as circulated".*
- *"Is there any objection to changing the agenda to consider item 7 now? (Pause)? There being no objection, we will proceed now with item 7, and then return to item 3". **OR:** "There is an objection and we will take a show of hands. Those in favor of changing the agenda raise your hands. Thank you. Those opposed raise your hands, etc."*
- *"Is there any objection to amending the motion by adding the words 'including all taxes'? (Pause). There is no objection and the motion has been amended to read: \_\_\_\_\_".*

**NOTE:** Unanimous Consent is not appropriate when voting on main motions, since they do not qualify as "routine and non-controversial decisions". Members must be given the full opportunity to express their sentiment by a formal show of hands.

**10. HANDLING MAIN MOTIONS (RONR sections 4 and 10)**

A main motion is a proposal to take action or express a view. The steps of handling it are:

Step	Language	Pertinent points
1. A member makes a motion	<i>"I move that ____" or "I move that that the following resolution be adopted: Resolved, That ____"</i>	1. Make sure the motion is concise, complete and unambiguous. 2. It is good practice to require motions to be submitted in writing.
2. Another member seconds the motion.	<i>"I second the motion" or "Second"</i>	Seconding does not mean endorsement of the motion, but only agreement that it should be discussed.
3. The Chair states the motion.	<i>"It is moved and seconded that we _____. Is there any discussion?"</i>	1. The Chair may rule a motion out of order (giving the reasons) or establish clarity before stating the motion. Until the chair admits a motion, it is not open for debate. 2. Ownership becomes <b>collective</b> (from now on withdrawing or amending the motion requires the group's permission).
4. Debate and amendment		
5. The Chair puts the motion to a vote.	<i>"There being no further debate, we will proceed to the vote. The motion is that _____. Those in favor of the motion raise one hand. Thank you. Those opposed raise one hand. Thank you."</i>	1. Ensure clarity by repeating the motion before taking the vote. 2. There is no need to call for abstentions, since they are not counted (unless the statute or the Bylaws provide otherwise). 3. If the result is clear, it is not necessary to count the votes.
6. The Chair announces the outcome.	<i>"The motion is adopted" or "The motion is defeated"</i>	

**FREQUENTLY USED SECONDARY MOTIONS**

The motion	The use	Pertinent points
Point of Order (RONR Sec. 23)	Point to a violation of a rule, policy, or bylaw.	The chair makes a ruling: The point is well taken or not well taken. Or the chair can ask the members to decide.
Appeal (Sec. 24)	Two members who disagree with the chair's ruling can appeal it.	The chair explains the ruling, allows debate, and takes a vote: " <i>Shall the chair's ruling be sustained?</i> " A majority in the negative reverses a chair's ruling.
Postpone Indefinitely (S. 11)	A motion to decline to take a position on a pending main motion.	This motion effectively "kills" the pending motion for the session (but the main motion can be renewed at a subsequent meeting). Requires a majority vote to adopt.
Amend (S.12)	A motion to change the wording of another motion before voting on it.	Non-contentious amendments can be adopted by unanimous consent. Otherwise a majority vote is required.
Commit/Refer (Section 13)	A motion to send the pending motion to a committee or staff	Should include instructions to the committee, e.g.: questions to be addressed and when the committee will report. Majority vote required.
Postpone to a certain time (S. 14)	A motion to postpone the pending motion to a certain time.	Should specify the time to which the motion is to be postponed. Requires a majority vote to adopt.
Limit or Extend Debate (Sec. 15)	A motion to limit or extend debate on a motion, e.g.: " <i>I move to extend debate by 5 minutes</i> ". Or: " <i>I move to end debate at 10:30</i> ". This motion is not debatable.	Can be agreed upon by unanimous consent. If not, a 2/3 vote is required.
Close Debate (or "Previous Question") (Section 16)	A motion to close debate and vote immediately: " <i>I move we close debate</i> ".	When the motion is made, the Chair can check if there is general consent to closing debate. If not, she or he takes a vote on whether debate will be closed (2/3 vote).
Table (Section 17)	A motion to set aside a pending main motion to accommodate something else of immediate urgency.	Strictly speaking, in many groups the motion to table is used incorrectly. The correct motions are usually to postpone to a certain time, refer or withdraw. A majority vote is required to adopt.
Suspend the rules (Section 25)	A motion to allow the assembly to waive a rule of order for a specific purpose. This motion cannot be used to suspend rules protecting fundamental rights (e.g.: minority and absentee rights).	This motion can be very helpful when the rules of order are proving too restrictive and wasteful and a more flexible approach is needed. For example: " <i>I move to suspend the rules and allow more than one primary amendment at a time</i> ". (2/3 vote required)
Withdraw (Section 33)	Before debate begins, a motion may be withdrawn by the mover. After debate begins, only the assembly can withdraw it.	Can be agreed upon on by unanimous consent. If there are objections, a majority vote is required to adopt.
Consider informally (Section 52)	A motion to allow informal consideration of a topic without a motion on the floor.	This motion helps when the premature introduction of a motion would be constraining and counter-productive. A majority vote is required to adopt.