

# Great School Board Meetings

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Webinar



**Jurassic Parliament** Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

## Great School Board Meetings

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Jurassic Parliament

Woodland School District  
By videoconference  
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## Our topics

- I. Introduction
- II. Meeting discussion, Point of Order and Appeal
- III. How to do this?
- IV. Motions and Amendments
- V. Authority and role of chair, members, and staff
- VI. Public comment
- VII. The right kind of control
- VIII. Conclusion

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## I. Introduction

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## Why are we here?

To equip you to run  
great school board meetings  
to serve your community

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## After taking this training you will be able to:

1. Describe how the authority of the group is more important than any single individual, even the chair.
2. Follow best practices for discussion.
3. Respond to disorder and difficult people.
4. Make Motions and Amendments.
5. Run effective public comment sessions.

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## Disclaimer

The material contained in this presentation is based upon the principles and practices of parliamentary procedure. I am not an attorney and nothing in this presentation constitutes legal advice.

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## We are better than chimps

- Most adult human beings are peaceful and compliant.
- When group expectations are clear, they will follow them.
- Many of our local governments do just fine.

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## Solution

Adopt common guidelines  
as a group  
and make a personal and  
whole-hearted commitment  
to following them.

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## Personal? Whole-hearted?

Emotion is the artesian spring  
of our being.

It is far more important  
than procedure.

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*I think, therefore I am.*

Rene Descartes, French philosopher

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*I feel, therefore I am.*

Dacher Keltner, American psychologist

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Your personal commitment  
is essential  
to achieving the goal  
of better meetings.

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## II. Meeting discussion, Point of Order, and Appeal

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## Fernville School Board Meeting

MOTTO

*We do our best for all our students, staff, and stakeholders, whether we like them or not!*

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## Call meeting to order

- Sit in the chair reserved for the person running the meeting.
- Rap the gavel lightly one time and announce, "This meeting of the Mudford County Commission is called to order."
- Lead the Pledge of Allegiance.
- Ask the clerk to take the roll.
- Announce that a quorum is present (or not).

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## Quorum

- The "quorum" is the minimum number of voting members who must be present for business to be done.
- Usually it is a majority (more than half) of the members in office—the members who are actually serving on the commission.
- "Quorum" is different from "votes cast."
- If you lose your quorum, you can't do business.

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## Agenda

- Prepared by leadership, but within control of commission (subject to notice requirements, of course).
- Robert's Rules says that if you follow the standard "Order of Business," you don't need to vote to adopt an agenda.
- However, many bodies do vote. Takes a majority vote to adopt, and a 2/3 vote to change later in the meeting.
- Do not need to include approval of agenda, or other minor procedural motions, in minutes.

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## Regular agenda/consent agenda

**Question:** *What's the difference between the regular agenda and the consent agenda?*

- The regular agenda lays out the items to be taken up at a particular meeting.
- It follows your "Order of Business."
- The agenda may include, as a single item, "Adoption of the consent agenda."

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## Consent agenda

- A “consent agenda” lists items that are expected not to be controversial.
- If any member requests that an item be removed from the consent agenda, it is done on request.
- The item is placed at its proper place in the regular agenda.

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## Consent agenda

- The consent agenda CANNOT BE DISCUSSED OR DEBATED.
- It is adopted with a single vote.
- The minutes must list all the items that were approved.

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## Approval of minutes

*Chair, these minutes have my remarks completely wrong. They say that I said that the staff had done a GREAT job arranging community relations day, but what I actually said was that the staff had done a LOUSY job. I demand that this be corrected!*

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## Purpose of minutes

According to Robert’s Rules, the purpose of minutes is:

**to record the actions taken by the body.**

Minutes record what is DONE, not what is SAID.

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## Meeting minutes

- We recommend “action” or “summary” minutes, not detailed minutes.
- Should record what is done, not what is said.
- For certain topics such as conflict of interest, main points made should be included.
- Do not include “he said, she said.” This is a waste of time and effort and makes minutes less useful.


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## Detailed minutes are a bad idea because...

- It violates the fundamental purpose of minutes.
- It can create liability for the organization or individuals in case of a lawsuit.
- It tends to personalize and politicize the discussion.
- It can intimidate participants, preventing them from speaking freely.
- It absorbs too much staff time and takes the group’s time.
- It makes it harder to find the actions taken.

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## SCRIPT

### Weed control at headquarters

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## Watch for:

- Rules for discussion
- Point of Order
- Appeal
- Inappropriate behavior by chair

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- In real life, members must be recognized by the chair before speaking.
- In this script, the numbers take the place of recognition.

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## ROLES

Chair - Ann  
Banker  
Botanist  
Dancer  
Football coach  
Photographer

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## Principle of Equality

All members have equal rights, privileges and obligations.

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## Key Point

Discussion in board meetings is  
**NOT A CONVERSATION.**  
It is **DEBATE** and has its own rules.

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## Rules for debate

- **No one may speak a second time until everyone who wishes to do so has spoken once.**

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## Why don't we follow this rule?

- Boards tend to discuss their affairs in conversational mode.
- In conversations, dominant people tend to dominate.
- Agreeable people tend to let them.
- Must have a structure to make sure that everyone has an equal chance to speak.
- This is both fair and efficient.

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## Point of Order

*flying dinosaur*

- When ANOTHER MEMBER breaks one of the rules, a member may make a POINT OF ORDER.
- Chair rules on the point.

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Point of Order  
*flying dinosaur*

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## Point of Order

- A motion claiming that a procedural mistake has been made.
- According to Robert, can be made only by a member.
- We recommend authorizing key staff to do so also.
- Public may not raise a Point of Order.
- **May interrupt a speaker if necessary.**
- **Must be timely – made at the time of the offense.**

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## Four steps to process Point of Order

1. Member: *Point of Order!*
2. Chair: *State your point.*
3. Member: *That remark breaks our rule against interrupting.*
4. Chair: *The point is well taken. Members will refrain from interrupting each other.*

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## Language tip

- Use the “third person” to keep things neutral and lessen conflict.
- Note that the chair states the general rule.
- The chair is speaking on behalf of the rules of procedure.
- Do NOT say, “You are out of order” or “You made a mistake.”

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## Chair doesn't have to say “Point of Order”

- The chair has the duty of maintaining order and decorum, so doesn't need to say “Point of Order.”
- Just needs to take appropriate action.

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## When in doubt, ask the group!

- Chair can always ask the group to decide if a point of order is correct (“well-taken”) or not.

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## Chair subject to same rules

- If the chair breaks one of the rules, a member may raise a Point of Order.
- The chair rules on own behavior, which seems odd, but is the way the system works.

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## Why make a Point of Order?

- Make a Point of Order if a rule has been broken.
- DO NOT make a Point of Order because you think someone has made a factual mistake, or you disagree with what they said.
- Speak about that when it is your turn to discuss.
- Making a Point of Order does not count as a “turn” in discussion.

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## No further discussion

- Once the chair has ruled on a Point of Order, the only allowable form of discussion is to appeal the ruling.

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## Appeal

The most important motion in all of Robert's Rules – and the least known!

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## Chair's rulings can be appealed

- The CHAIR enforces order and decorum.
- The GROUP is the final authority.
- Any TWO MEMBERS can appeal a ruling of the chair (one member appeals and one seconds the appeal).
- EXCEPTION: If the ruling is a matter on which there cannot be two reasonable interpretations, the ruling cannot be appealed.

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## Process Appeal

1. Member A: *Appeal!*
2. Member B: *Second!*
3. Chair: *The chair's ruling has been appealed. The members will decide. All those who believe the ruling should be sustained, please say "Aye."*
4. Members in favor: *"Aye!"*

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## Process Appeal

5. Chair: *All those who believe the ruling should NOT be sustained, please say "No."*
6. Members opposed: *"No!"*
7. Chair: *The ayes have it and the ruling is sustained, OR The noes have it and the ruling is not sustained.*

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## Explaining the Appeal

- Chair must take care in explaining vote to members.
- Basic principle: The chair's ruling stands until it is overturned.
- The question being voted on is, "Shall the decision of the chair be SUSTAINED?"

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## Confusing!

- It takes a NEGATIVE vote for the Appeal to win.
- A majority vote in favor of sustaining the chair's ruling, or a tie, means that the chair's ruling stands.
- The chair may vote on the Appeal.

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## Further points

- Point of Order is made by one member, but an Appeal needs a second.
- Point of Order and Appeal are processed immediately. No other business can take place until they are dealt with.
- Points of Order and Appeals do not count against a member's turn to speak in debate.

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## Debatable?

- Point of Order cannot be debated.
- Appeals pertaining to language, decorum, and the order of business cannot be debated.
- When an appeal can be debated, the process is different from anything else in Robert's Rules.

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Point of Order and Appeal are the heart of democracy



In our view, the motions Point of Order and Appeal are the heart of our democracy. They provide the mechanism to stop a dictatorial chair who is acting like a "boss." They are essential for every local

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## III. How to do this?

- Seek recognition before speaking.
- No one may speak a second time until everyone who wishes to do so has spoken once.
- No interrupting (in general)
- No sidebar conversations.
- Set time limits.
- Courtesy and respect are required.

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## Seeking recognition

- Members must seek recognition from the presider before speaking.

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## Seeking recognition

- Raise your hand and wait to speak until the presider (chair) calls your name, nods at you, or gives some other sign that you have permission to speak (you "have the floor")
- Online, you can use the "raise hand" function or raise your physical hand.
- For Zoom on the telephone, press \*9 (star nine).

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## Duty to remain silent

- When you have not been recognized, you have a duty to remain silent.
- The exception is a Point of Order when essential.

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## Rights and Responsibilities of the Member



Weldon L. Merritt, FRP, CFP, has graciously authorized Jurassic Parliament to publish this listing of the rights and responsibilities of ordinary members of an organization.

Please note that neither the list of member rights nor the list of member responsibilities is intended to be exhaustive. In addition, neither the rights nor the responsibilities are necessarily absolute in every instance. For example, the right to debate may be cut off or limited by motions for the Previous Question or to Limit Debate. And, while a member should not vote on a matter of direct personal interest, under Robert's

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## Fundamental guideline

- No one may speak a second time until everyone who wishes to do so has spoken once.

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## NO CROSS TALK!

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## HOW to do this?

- Chair can keep track of who has spoken and who wishes to speak, using a chart.
- Chair can empower vice-chair to do this – good training for them.

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**SPEAKING CHART**

Name	1	2	3	4	5	6	etc.
Garcia							
Jackson							
Juma							
Lee							
Patel							
Smith							
Young							

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## A great method – the “round robin”

- The chair goes around the table, asking each person in turn for their opinion. People may pass and speak at the end.
- Important to have a pencil in hand, to jot down points or questions for when your turn arrives.
- Chair must wait their turn also!
- This rule applies to questions and answers also, and to discussions with staff.
- Don't let any two people “hijack” the meeting.

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## Interrupting

- When a member has the floor, they have the right to speak until they have completed their comments.
- Members may not interrupt each other.
- Chair may interrupt members when necessary to bring them to order.
- Members may interrupt to make a Point of Order when essential.

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## No sidebars or texting

- No “sidebar conversations”
- No whispering!
- No texting to each other or people outside during meetings.
- No posting on social media during meetings.

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## Frustrating

- Structuring discussion in these ways can be frustrating.
- Board members sometimes say, “I wish we could just hash it out and have a free-form discussion.”
- The Open Meetings Act, and the press of time, mean that usually, this won't serve your board well.
- However...

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## An occasional exception...

- Sometimes there is benefit in the conversational style or “informal discussion.”
- This provides a sparky flow of ideas that can be beneficial.
- It can be useful at study sessions (Committee of the Whole), or in committee meetings.
- Do not make the conversational style your ordinary or “default” style of discussion.

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## Set time limits

- Jurassic Parliament recommends that board set estimated times for agenda items.
- We recommend time limits on individual board member speeches – 3 or 5 minutes.
- Time limits cannot be debated.
- They can be suspended or changed by a two-thirds vote without debate.

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## Time limits create productive meetings



The mayor of Alexandria, Virginia began council meetings by responding to each person giving public comment, sometimes delaying the start of regular business three hours or more. Was this reasonable? No. We need time limits to establish structure and create productive meetings. Robert's Rules says that members have the right to an efficient meeting. It takes effort to do this, and for the chair to maintain the limits, but the effort will pay off big time.

**SET AN OVERALL TIME LIMIT FOR THE MEETING**  
If you are a private nonprofit board, a good target for a regular board meeting is two hours. After

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## Fundamental guideline

### Courtesy and respect towards everyone are required.

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## These remarks are inappropriate

1. Personal remarks about other members (except for conflict of interest)
2. Discourteous remarks – insulting language, attacks
3. Inflammatory language
4. Criticizing past actions of the group (unless subject is under discussion, or member is about to propose to amend or rescind the action at the end of their speech)
5. Remarks that are not germane (relevant) to the discussion

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## Inappropriate Remarks on Local Government Councils



If you serve as an elected official on a local government council or board, you should know the types of remarks that are inappropriate during discussion at a meeting. Robert's Rules of Order and the common parliamentary law it is based on require that:

- Members of a council or board must be courteous to one another.

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## Personal remarks

*The measure, not the member, is the subject of debate.*

Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised, 12<sup>th</sup> edition, 43:21

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## The focus of our meeting is...

- Words on paper.
- Focus on the motions and not on the people who make the motions.
- We recommend that board members take this approach outside the meeting also.
- Focus on actions taken and do not criticize colleagues outside the meeting.

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## Who decides?

- If any question arises whether a remark is appropriate or not, or a comment is germane, the chair rules, subject to appeal.
- The chair may also turn immediately to the group to ask the members to decide.
- Ultimately it is the **GROUP'S CALL**.

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## How to be objective about subjective comments



What can you do when your colleagues on a board or council say things that you find offensive? What if they are making subjective statements that hurt your feelings? We are living in tough times for civility. People feel free to say things during meetings that can be offensive and challenging.

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## SAMPLE DISCUSSION GUIDELINES FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

*Permission is granted to modify these guidelines as your organization prefers. Note that these guidelines refer to discussion within the body, not to comment by the public.*


1. The chair of the meeting runs the meeting in the service of the body. The chair serves as the facilitator for the meeting and has the primary responsibility for maintaining order. The chair may take part in discussion, but may not answer each individual speaker back, nor lecture or criticize the members. When discussing substantive questions, the chair will usually speak and vote, if entitled to do so, after others have spoken.

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## IV. Motions and Amendments

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Main Motion  
*Tyrannosaurus rex*

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## Main Motion

### *Tyrannosaurus rex*

- For school boards and other public bodies, a main motion is the usual and customary way to start the action of discussion and decision making.

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## Main Motion

We recommend this sequence:

- Staff presents proposal in writing and answers any questions.
- Motion is moved and seconded.
- Members discuss motion and may amend it.
- Members vote on motion.

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## Main Motion

### *Tyrannosaurus rex*

- It should be **in writing** if at all possible.
- It should be **clear** and unambiguous. Don't say, "I move what he just said!" or "So moved!"
- It should be phrased in the grammatical **positive**.
- It must comply with the **bylaws** and the **procedural** law of the land.
- You may only have **one main motion** at a time.

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## One thing at a time

- One subject is discussed at a time.
- Robert's Rules is very linear!
- Chair, and members, must insist on this.

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## How do you introduce a Main Motion?

Three little words:

*I move that...*

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## Member must be clear

- The member has the responsibility of formulating the motion.
- Don't mix up your ideas about the subject with the motion itself. Save those for debate.

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*Our teachers are really under a lot of stress right now, they're worried about an asteroid striking the earth and wiping us all out, and I think that giving them pharmaceutical help would be great, Valium would make a big difference, they deserve our assistance.*

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## State the exact motion clearly

*I move that all teachers will be issued  
a monthly supply of Valium  
WITHOUT CHARGE.*

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## You can request a moment to write it down

- May I have a few minutes to write this motion down?
- Chair may also request that motion be written.
- Can use 3-part motion forms.

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## Second

*Director Smith seconds the motion!*

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## Second the motion

- You “second a motion” to show that you would like to talk about it.
- No need to be recognized. Just call out “second.”
- It is OK to second a motion you disagree with, if you want to explain why it’s a bad idea.

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## If no second...

- If there is no second, the chair says:  
*There being no second, the motion will not be considered.*
- Then moves immediately to next item of business.

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## EXERCISE

### Eight Steps Worksheet

- Fill in the blanks on the Eight Steps worksheet.

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## Eight steps to process a motion

1. Member makes motion.
2. Another member seconds motion.
3. Chair states motion.
4. Members debate and/or amend motion.
5. Chair restates motion and calls for vote.
6. Members vote on motion.
7. Chair states results of vote, whether motion passes or fails, and what happens next as a result of the vote.
8. Chair states next item of business.

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## Social worker

- *I'm in favor of this proposal. I think it will help our employees to achieve work-life balance.*

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## Ferryboat captain

- *Work-life balance is a myth! My mother was a teacher for 30 years, and she didn't need any drugs to get the job done. I'm opposed to this wacky idea.*

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## Moving to vote

- When it seems that discussion is finished, chair asks, "Is there any further discussion?" or "Are you ready to vote?" and then, if no one speaks up, takes the vote.

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## Voting

- Chair repeats the motion.
- Chair says, "All those in favor say 'aye,' all those opposed say 'no.'"
- Chair announces results of vote, whether motion passes or fails, and what will happen next as a result of the vote.
- Chair announces next item of business.

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## Voting

*The "ayes" have it, the motion passes, and all employees will be issued a monthly supply of Valium without charge, OR*

*The "noes" have it, the motion fails, and we will not implement this proposal.*

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# Eight Steps To Process A Motion

**Member A:** *I move that we hold a cruise on Dino Bay.*

**Member B:** *I second the motion!*

**Chair:** It has been moved and seconded that we hold a cruise on Dino Bay. We will now debate the motion. [debate]

**Chair:** Are you ready to vote?

The motion is that we hold a cruise on Dino Bay. All those in favor say “aye.” All those opposed say “no.” The “ayes” have it, the motion passes, and we will hold a cruise on Dino Bay. The Social Committee will make the plans for this event. Our next item of business is...

## Eight steps to process a motion

1. Member makes a \_\_\_\_\_.
2. Another \_\_\_\_\_ seconds motion.
3. Chair states \_\_\_\_\_.
4. Members \_\_\_\_\_ and/or amend motion.
5. Chair restates \_\_\_\_\_ and calls for the vote.
6. Members \_\_\_\_\_ on motion.
7. Chair states results of vote, whether motion \_\_\_\_\_, and what happens as result of vote.
8. Chair states next item of \_\_\_\_\_.

In taking the vote, the presider must call for the \_\_\_\_\_ or the vote is not legitimate.

The presider has a duty to make things clear so that members understand what they are doing.

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## Other points on voting

- On a voice vote, the chair must call for the negative vote, even if it seems obvious that the motion is unanimous.
- A tied vote fails.
- Under Robert's Rules, if you abstain from a vote, it means you took no action.
- If you think you have a conflict of interest, check with the attorney in advance. During the meeting, you "recuse yourself" by leaving the room and taking no part in the discussion or vote.

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## Amendment

### *Dimetrodon*

- You amend a motion to improve it.
- The amendment applies to the main motion.
- The amendment must be germane (relevant).
- Anyone may move to amend, even the person who made the motion.

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Amendment  
*Dimetrodon*

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## Psychiatrist

*I move that we amend the motion by adding the words "after receiving a psychiatric evaluation."*

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## If adopted, motion will read:

All teachers will be issued a monthly supply of Valium WITHOUT CHARGE, **after receiving a psychiatric evaluation.**

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## Four ways to amend

1. Add or insert words.
2. Strike out words.
3. Strike out words and insert words in their place.
4. Substitute (tricky!).

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## Process Amendment

- The amendment is processed using the same eight steps that we just saw for a main motion.

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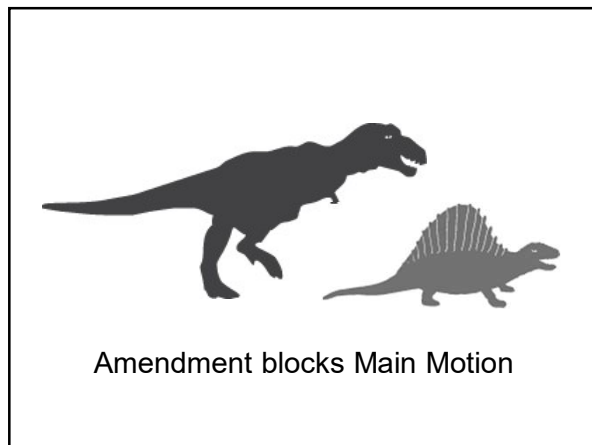
## The challenge is...

- We vote on amendments before we vote on the main motion, in order to make the main motion as good as possible - to **perfect** the motion.

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## Fate of the Amendment

- Once the fate of the amendment has been decided, debate continues on the main motion.
- Don't forget to vote on the main motion "as amended."

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## More amendments are possible...

- Once you've dealt with one amendment, you may have others...
- provided that they apply to a *different aspect* of the main motion.
- It takes special actions ("reconsideration") to go back and change something we've already amended.

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## The process continues

- After all amendments have been processed, the body still must vote on the **AMENDED MAIN MOTION**.

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## “Friendly amendment”

- People often process “friendly amendment” the wrong way.
- DO NOT turn to maker and seconder to ask if they accept the amendment – this give them improper power.
- Handle this the same as any other amendment.
- Ask, “Is there a second?” etc.
- Once a motion has been stated by the chair, the maker and seconder have same rights as any other member.

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Call the Question  
*Triceratops*

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## Call the Question *Triceratops*

- People often process this motion wrong.
- You cannot simply cut off debate by saying “question.”
- You must be recognized to make this motion.
- It requires a **second**.
- It cannot be **debated or amended**.
- It takes a **two-thirds** vote to pass.

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## EXERCISE Motions practice

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## EXERCISE Using the surplus

Fernville has a \$10 million surplus this year.  
What will the city do with it?

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## Performing Arts Center

Moved and seconded: That the city build a performing arts center at a cost not to exceed \$10 million.

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## V. Authority and role of chair, members, and staff

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## Note on role of chair

- Robert has different rules for small boards (up to about 12 people).
- In a small board, chair may make motions, discuss, and vote, unless law, regulations or bylaws say otherwise.
- We recommend chair exercise restraint by speaking and voting last, and by refraining from making motions (this is a Jurassic Parliament suggestion).

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## When does chair discuss and vote?

Confusion about the role of the chair at meetings can be widespread. Here are some parameters.

**CHAIR OF LARGE MEETING DOES NOT DISCUSS AND VOTE**  
 When a large assembly (group) is meeting, the chair serves as a facilitator. The chair does not take part in debate (discussion) and does not vote, unless the vote is by ballot. This is a basic and important rule for large groups.

*If for some reason the chair feels impelled to speak in discussion the chair*



*This chair seen at the Fishermen Village Inn in Beilbigham, Westinton, was a one*

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## Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised, 12<sup>th</sup> edition

### Abbreviated RONR

### "Rules of Order Newly Revised"

We recommend spiral-bound edition from National Association of Parliamentarians

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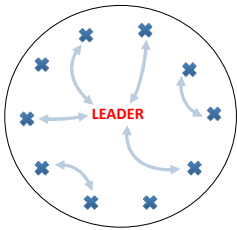
## Accountability Hierarchy



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## Voluntary Association



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### Key Point

Each member has an equal right to speak and to try to persuade others to accept their view.

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### Key Point

During meetings, the chair controls the process so the group can make the decisions.

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### Key Point

During meetings, the chair is the servant of the group, and the group is the final authority.

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### What is each person's individual authority?

*All members of a governing board share in a joint and collective authority which exists and can be exercised only when the group is in session.*

The Standard Code of Parliamentary Procedure

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### What is your individual power?

- When people get elected to a school board, often they are surprised at how little power they have.
- An individual member may not have a staff member fired, direct staff, oversee employee work product, or interfere in administration.
- Know the limits of your role! You are a policy maker, not a mover-and-shaker.

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POLICY is the prerogative of the board. Superintendent supports board, but does not decide.

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ADMINISTRATION is the prerogative of the superintendent.  
Board may not interfere.

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### Board members may not do the work of the district

- Elected directors care deeply about their schools.
- People often approach them with problems or suggestions.
- They may inform the superintendent, but they may not try to influence the outcome, unless and until it reaches them as a board issue.
- Why? They must not cross the line between legislation and administration.
- This is a legal requirement!

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### Give clarity to staff!

- If you would like the superintendent to do something, the direction must come from the board, not from an individual.
- Take the time to state specifically what is desired.
- As a member, you can make a motion. *"I move that we request the superintendent to study this matter and report back at the next meeting."*
- If there is no consensus, take a vote on the matter, and record it in the minutes.

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### It's OK to disagree

- The fact that people have different opinions is a strength. It's a good thing!
- BUT we tend to identify with our own position.
- When we are defeated, we sometimes take it personally.
- This is a mistake.

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### At the end of the day, the body must unite behind its decision.

- It is a basic democratic principle that the decision of the majority, voting at a properly called meeting, is the decision of the body as a whole.
- The minority must make it their decision as well.
- It's a terrible system—but see Winston Churchill quote...

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*Democracy is the worst system of government in all the world, with the exception of those others that have been tried from time to time.*

Winston Churchill

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## Bottom line

- In a democracy, HOW we decide things is more important than WHAT we decide.
- Courtesy and respect, no surprises, no unilateral action, no end-runs...these are essential for the system to work.

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## Majority rule is the key

- The decision of the majority, voting in a properly called meeting, is the decision of the body as a whole.
- However arbitrary it may seem, this is our system.
- The minority must make it their own.

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## Members have a duty

- When serving on a public body, members have a duty to uphold the decision of that body, even if they disagree with it.

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## Disagreement

- Members may express their disagreement in public, but may not attempt to UNDERMINE the decision.
- They are free to try to persuade their colleagues, during the meeting, to change the decision (within limits).

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## We all want to be right

- It's human nature to be unhappy when you oppose the decision.
- Our current culture places a strong premium on individuality.
- I invite you to commit yourself to a bigger principle than your own views.

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## WHY?

The essential principle of majority rule.

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Lost the vote? Don't sabotage the council's action



We've had inquiries recently about elected officials who lost a vote, and then actively worked against the outcome. This amounts to trying to sabotage the council. It is wrong, wrong, wrong.

**THE MAJORITY RULES**  
General Henry Martyn Robert, the original author of *Robert's Rules of Order*, expresses it this way:

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*The willingness to engage in honest debate and lose on issues you care deeply about reaffirms your commitment to common citizenship.*

Cornell Clayton, Washington State University

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**What is the alternative?**

*The ballot box is sacred because the alternative is blood.*

Elias Canetti

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**VI. Public comment**

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**Another disclaimer**

Robert's Rules of Order contains very little guidance on public comment. In general, this information comes from Jurassic Parliament's experience over 15 years of working with local governments.

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**WHY public comment?**

- A school board meeting is NOT A MEETING OF THE PUBLIC.
- It is a MEETING OF THE BOARD that is held in public.
- The purpose of the "public comment" period is to allow the board members to become informed about the views of the public.
- It should be carefully structured.

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## Be consistent

- Best to announce rules at beginning of each session, and provide written handout.
- For the sake of fairness, rules for public comment **MUST** be enforced consistently.
- Public must address remarks to chair, not to individual board members or the audience.

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## Follow time limits

- Ask staff to time speakers so chair is not distracted.
- Some bodies have a visible timer so speakers know when their limit is approaching.
- Speakers may not donate their time to someone else.

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## Do not dialogue

- This is not a dialogue.
- Do not get into back-and-forth with the public. If chair starts dialoguing with the public, the situation can quickly become confusing.
- If you respond to some speakers but not to others, it can be interpreted as showing bias.

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## Differing expectations

- The public may have different expectations.
- They may come to the meeting looking for answers to specific questions.
- They may want to argue.
- They may want their remarks "on the record."
- They may want to raise a "Point of Order," which they cannot do.
- Education is critical!

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## Audience relations

- Only the chair may speak to the audience as a whole.
- Individual board members may not speak to the public or recognize people in the audience.
- Discourage demonstrations—clapping, booing, whistling, stamping of feet, etc. These can chill free speech, both for board members and public.

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## Time, place and manner

- The courts have found that local governments may limit the time, place and manner of public comment.
- All such restrictions must be viewpoint-neutral.
- We recommend setting a time period for public comment (for example, 30 minutes).
- We recommend setting a 3-minute limit for individual speakers.

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## If a speaker runs over...

- If a speaker runs over the limit, interrupt and request that they conclude their remarks, or simply inform them, “Your time is up.”

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## Comment vs. disruption

- Attendees do not have the right to DISRUPT the meeting.
- However, the courts have found that mere words do not usually constitute disruption.
- In general, citizens can say whatever they like during public comment.

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## Exception for school districts

- School districts may establish rules that administrative complaints about teachers etc. must be made through channels, not in public comment.
- They may prohibit discussion about individual students.
- This is not legal advice! Consult your attorney.

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## How to act on dais?

- Chair and members convey interest and concern by their body language.
- They should listen to each person speaking as if there were no one else in the room (this is hard!).
- Keep a warm and pleasant expression, or a neutral face if speaker is not complimentary.

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## How to respond?

- Best approach is to thank each speaker, even if negative, and move on.
- Chair may provide brief factual information, if appropriate, which must not degenerate into lecturing or criticism.
- Don't put staff on the spot. Invite people to address questions to staff separately.

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## Attacks on staff

- Board members should not criticize staff in public and must be courteous to them.
- If public attacks staff, do not get defensive.
- Do not get in a hostile exchange.
- Be prepared if appropriate to defend the staff in a calm, positive manner.
- Why? If no response is made, it can seem as if the body agrees with the criticisms.

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## No public comment in minutes

- Jurassic Parliament recommends that details of public comment should NOT be included in the minutes.
- See our blog entry, *"Don't include detailed public comment in meeting minutes."*

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## Why?

- Including public comments in the minutes wastes staff time and council's time.
- It creates the possibility of liability for the organization.
- The comments can become a battlefield for citizens to express their views.

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## Options?

1. Public comment was taken.
2. Public comment was given by residents Smith, Jones, and Robinson.
3. Public comment was given as follows:
  - Resident Smith spoke in favor of the transportation improvement plan.
  - Resident Jones criticized the recent budget.
  - Resident Robinson asked about goats on the green.

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## Conclude with thanks

- At the end of the public comment period, the chair should thank the public for attending.
- Explain again that while this is not a time for dialogue, all comments and questions are taken seriously by the body.
- Sincerity and warmth on the part of the chair will make a big difference to the experience the public has at your meeting.

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## Other channels

- It is essential for you to be in touch with your public, to be responsive, and to appear responsive.
- Given the limitations of the public comment period, we recommend maintaining other channels for dialogue with the public.
- Community forums, personal discussions, "coffee with the board" (always less than a quorum), a form on your website, surveys, etc.

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## Guidelines for Public Comment in Local Government



The public comment period is an essential part of local government meetings. These are our guidelines for public comment periods in local government. They refer to ordinary business and work or study meetings of councils, boards and committees. Public hearings and quasi-judicial hearings are governed by different rules.

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## VII. The right kind of control

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### Three things you must have:

1. Knowledge of how this system works
2. A majority on your board in favor of civility and this system.
3. The personal moxie, chutzpah, energy and drive to put it all into practice.

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### Chair must control who speaks when

- The chair serves as a BENEVOLENT DICTATOR, enforcing the rules the group has chosen.
- Individual members must SEEK RECOGNITION before speaking.

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### Chair controls who speaks when

- If someone speaks up without being recognized, STOP THEM.
- If someone speaks out of turn, INTERRUPT THEM.
- If someone makes insulting remarks, CUT THEM OFF.

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### Duty to obey the chair

- Members have a duty to obey the chair's directions.
- If they disagree, they can't argue back.
- What can they do?

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### Duty...

- Duty isn't a word we use much nowadays.
- I prefer to think of it as a commitment to the principles of democracy.
- As a nation, we have chosen to be governed by the rule of law, not by brute force.
- You are upholding that choice when you follow these principles on your board.

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## Keep things moving! Be brisk! Speak crisply!

- *Well, I guess the agenda is adopted...*
- *I'll kind of get a thumbs up from the board next week...*

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## Firm but not harsh

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## CHEAT SHEET

### LANGUAGE TIPS FOR MEETING MANAGEMENT

SITUATION	CHAIR CAN SAY
Call to order	<i>This meeting of the [name of organization] is called to order.</i>
Unanimous consent	<i>Without objection... if there is no objection...</i>
To begin discussion	<i>It has been moved and seconded that... is there any discussion?</i>
If there is no second	<i>Since there is no second, the motion will not be considered.</i>
To end discussion	<i>Is there any further discussion? or Are you ready to vote?</i>
Process Point of Order	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Member says, "Point of Order"</li> <li>2. Chair says, "State your point."</li> <li>3. Member explains issue.</li> <li>4. Chair says, "The point is well taken," or "The point is not well taken."</li> </ol>
When someone says "Point of Order" but can't explain what they mean	<i>What rule has been broken?</i>
Process Point of Information	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Member says, "Point of Information."</li> <li>2. Chair replies, "State your question."</li> </ol>

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## When in doubt, ask the group!

- Chair can always ask the group to decide a question.

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- Chair: *The chair is uncertain about the word "malarkey." The chair will ask the board to decide this matter. All those who believe that the word "malarkey" is insulting, please say "aye."*
- Board members in favor: *Aye.*

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- Chair: *All those who believe the word "malarkey" is not insulting, please say "no."*
- Board members opposed: *No.*
- Chair: *The ayes have it and the word "malarkey" may not be used, OR the noes have it and the word "malarkey" is acceptable.*

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## HOW to control?

*The chair should never get excited.*

*Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised, 12<sup>th</sup> edition, 47:19*

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## WHY do we need rules?

*Win/lose is the only game most of us understand. We have a constant unspoken need for domination and actually find no enjoyment in win/win situations.*

Richard Rohr

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## Vision phase one

- Each member expresses their personal views on topics before the board with vigor, energy, commitment, and respect.

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## Vision phase two

- Once the vote is taken, personal opinions and political views are LESS IMPORTANT than the majority vote of the board.
- Members accept the decision and move on without rancor or bitterness.

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## VIII. Conclusion

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## After taking this training you will be able to:

1. Describe how the authority of the group is more important than any single individual, even the chair.
2. Follow best practices for discussion.
3. Respond to disorder and difficult people.
4. Make Motions and Amendments.
5. Run effective public comment sessions.

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## Keep in touch!

- You are invited to subscribe to our monthly newsletter.
- **Subscribe to the blog on our website** for insight, tips and inspiration, including our new advice column, "Dear Dinosaur."
- Email any time.

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**MASTERING COUNCIL MEETINGS**  
 A GUIDEBOOK FOR ELECTED OFFICIALS AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS  
 Ann G. Macfarlane, PRP, CAE and Andrew L. Estep, CAE  
 Jurassic Parliament

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## Four fundamental guidelines

1. The chair is the servant of the group, and the group is the final authority.
2. All members have equal rights, privileges and obligations. To ensure this, no one may speak a second time until everyone who wishes to do so has spoken once.
3. Courtesy and respect are required.
4. One thing at a time.

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## Follow four fundamental guidelines for successful meetings

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Robert's Rules of Order includes **four fundamental guidelines** that will create successful meetings. They are easy to say but take some effort to apply, since prevailing culture is often very different. Run your meetings according to these guidelines so your meetings—and your organization—will flourish.

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## These remarks are inappropriate

1. Personal remarks about other members (except for conflict of interest)
2. Discourteous remarks – insulting language, attacks
3. Inflammatory language
4. Criticizing past actions of the group (unless subject is under discussion, or member is about to propose to amend or rescind the action at the end of their speech)
5. Remarks that are not germane (relevant) to the discussion

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## Point of Order and Appeal are the heart of democracy

In our view, the motions Point of Order and Appeal are the heart of our democracy. They provide the mechanism to stop a dictatorial chair who is acting like a "boss." They are essential for every local

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## Making a motion

- At the right time, seek recognition from the chair.
- State your motion.  
*Chair, I move that we issue each board member a \$500 bonus in recognition of their service during this pandemic.*
- After the motion is seconded by another member and stated by the chair, explain why you think it's a good idea.

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## Seconding a motion

- After another member makes a motion, just call out "second!"
- You do not need to be recognized.

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## Eight steps to process a motion

1. **Member makes motion.**
2. Another member seconds motion.
3. **Chair states motion.**
4. Members debate and/or amend motion.
5. **Chair restates motion and calls for vote.**
6. Members vote on motion.
7. Chair states results of vote, whether motion passes or fails, and what happens next as a result of the vote.
8. Chair states next item of business.

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## Amending a motion

- During discussion on the motion, seek recognition.
- Once recognized, state your proposed amendment.  
*Chair, I move to amend the motion by striking out the number \$500 and inserting the number \$5000.*
- Once another member seconds the amendment, explain why it's a good idea.

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## Remember...

- The amendment is voted on first.
- Once the amendment is resolved, discussion may continue on the main motion.
- Further amendments may be made.
- Finally, the vote will be taken on the **MAIN MOTION AS AMENDED.**

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## Best practices for public comment

1. Set time limits for public comment and for individual speeches.
2. Have the public address the chair, and have the chair respond.
3. Don't engage in dialogue with the public, but have arrangements to answer their questions afterwards.
4. Speakers may not donate their time.
5. On the dais, make the effort to be, and to appear to be, listening intently to all speakers.

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## Essential Guidelines for School District Boards



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Follow these essential guidelines of parliamentary procedure to take the pain out of your meetings, hold productive discussions, and serve your school community better.

► **BASICS**  
A quorum must be present for business to be done. Usually a quorum means a majority (more than half) of the voting members in office.

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## Essential Parliamentary Procedure Guidelines for Junior & High Schools



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## Next steps

1. Hold a board discussion on these ideas.
2. Develop your own board discussion guidelines.

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## SAMPLE DISCUSSION GUIDELINES FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

*Permission is granted to modify these guidelines as your organization prefers. Note that these guidelines refer to discussion within the body, not to comment by the public.*

1. The chair of the meeting runs the meeting in the service of the body. The chair serves as the facilitator for the meeting and has the primary responsibility for maintaining order. The chair may take part in discussion, but may not answer each individual speaker back, nor lecture or criticize the members. When discussing substantive questions, the chair will usually speak and vote, if entitled to do so, after others have spoken.

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## Next steps

3. Commit to using this information as a tool for better meetings, not a weapon.
4. Plan an "education minute" at the start of each meeting to remind, and set the tone.
5. Be kind to each other during meetings.

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*Kindness is within our power.  
Liking is not.*

Samuel Johnson, British author

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*Serving on a local government board  
is like being in a marriage  
arranged by the citizens.*

Tami Tanoue, Colorado Intergovernmental  
Risk Sharing Agency

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**Why are we here?**

To equip you to run  
great school board meetings  
to serve your community

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Disclaimer: Nothing in this presentation constitutes business or legal advice.

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