

12 Basic Rules of Parliamentary Law

1. **The organization is paramount.** To it belongs the power. Its interest and convenience supersedes those of an individual member. It has the right to make its own rules, which then must be observed by all members.
2. **All members and their rights are equal.** Each member has equal right to attend meetings, propose business, discuss it, make motions, to vote, to make nominations, and to hold office--rights which cannot be suspended or restricted save in the interest of the whole, and then only by a two-thirds vote.
3. **One thing at a time.** There can be but one main proposition before the assembly at one time. Only one member can have the floor at one time.
4. **Full discussion before action.** The presiding officer may not put a debatable motion to vote as long as members wish to debate it. This applies to all main propositions and may be suspended only by a two-thirds vote.
5. **Propositions rather than persons. Personal remarks in debate are always out of order.** The objective is the opinion and decision of the group upon the proposition, hence debate is impersonal. The presiding officer must rule all personal remarks out of order. Debate must be directed to *motions* and not to *motives; principles* and not to *personalities*.
6. **Propositions may yield to privileges.** Matters affecting the convenience or privileges of the assembly or an individual may interrupt consideration of a question.
7. **No discussion for interruptions or suspensions.** Matters of sufficient urgency to interrupt discussion may not themselves be discussed. Motions which have the effect of suspending a rule are not debatable.
8. **No second time in the same form.** To protect the assembly against waste of time, a question once decided may, as a general rule, not be presented again at the same meeting in the same form under similar circumstances unless reconsideration is ordered.
9. **The majority decides-usually.** This rule is basic to the democratic process. The minority has the right to be heard, but once a decision has been reached by a majority of the members present and voting, the minority must then respect and abide by the decision. The majority decides all ordinary questions, but it requires more than a majority to limit a member's parliamentary rights to introduce and discuss questions and vote, or to suspend or modify (without notice) a rule of order previously adopted.
10. **Two-thirds votes for extraordinary questions-** such as motions to amend by-laws, to change or repeal (without notice) a motion previously adopted, to suspend the rules or restrict the rights of members to introduce questions, discuss them, and vote.
11. **Silence gives consent.** The right to vote must be exercised. Silence has the same effect as assent to the will of the prevailing side.
12. **A quorum must be present to do business.** The purpose of a quorum is to prevent an unrepresentative group from taking actions in the name of an organization.

(*Robert's Rules Simplified*. Lewis, Arthur T. and Robert, Henry M. (2006) Mineola, NY: Dover Publications; *Robert's Rules in Plain English*. Zimmerman, Doris. (2005). New York: Collins)