

Robert's Rules of Order at a Glance

All Student Union members go to meetings, but when you get there, you might find it hard to say what you think. This is because meetings are usually run by 'rules of order'. The information you will find in this handout will help you take part in your student union meeting and understand rules of order. Of course, you don't have to run your meetings with these rules, but it helps to have a Chair to guide the meeting and a clear structure to follow. The larger the meeting gets, the more formal your meeting structure will need to be in order to ensure that everyone has a chance to be heard. Your Constitution may specify a particular format to follow.

Meetings don't need to be dry and dull. Rules of order are in place for the following reasons:

- To help the business of the meeting flow smoothly and efficiently
- To make sure that every member gets the opportunity to speak
- To ensure that decisions are made democratically

Why Speak Up?

First of all, you need to speak up because all Student Unions belong to their members, and you, as a member, have the right to control them. Control by members is one of the main differences between Departmental Student Unions of the Student Society, and University committee structures. If members don't speak up, they will leave the control in the hands of a select few.

Secondly, your ideas and opinions are as valuable as those of anyone else. Some people are more used to meetings, and feel more comfortable with the way they run. But that does not mean that you can't learn to get your ideas across. Try these tips. The more often you speak up, the easier it gets.

How to Get Members to Talk About Your Idea

You need to put the issue on the agenda. You can add your item at the meeting if it is short or urgent, but if it is more complex and requires thorough discussion, get in touch with your Chair or President, and ask her/him to put the discussion item on the agenda for the next scheduled meeting.

When the Chair asks the members to approve the agenda, say: *"I would like to add something to the agenda."* You can also suggest where your Item might fit on the agenda.

How to Find Out if Members Agree With Your Idea: Making a Motion

You should make a motion. A motion is simply a proposal to the members at the meeting. To make a motion, write out what you want to say. The clearer the motion, the better. Then raise your hand until the Chair acknowledges you. When the Chair calls on you, say: "I move *that...*" and say what you want.

Another person who supports the motion will second it before the members can discuss it. If you didn't make the motion, but want the members to talk about it, say: "*I second the motion.*"

The Student Society requires that all decisions to spend money are put forward in a motion, voted on, and recorded in the meeting minutes. For example: "I move that (name) be reimbursed up to (\$ amount) for (expense description) from (core, trust account, bank account, etc.)."

How to Give Your Opinion

If you made the motion, the Chair will let you start the discussion. The Chair will be keeping a list of the members signaling that they wish to speak to the motion, and will call on them in turn. If you didn't make the motion, but have an opinion, raise your hand at any time during the discussion on the floor until the Chair acknowledges you.

When the Chair calls on you, say what you think as clearly and as briefly as possible. Remember, you must speak to the motion. It helps to start with "*I want to speak in favour of the motion because...*" or "*I want to speak against the motion because...*"

How To Change the Motion

If you want to make some changes to the motion before you are prepared to support it, then you should amend the motion. Raise your hand, and when it is your turn to speak, say: "*I move to amend the motion to read...*" and give the wording you want. If someone seconds this motion to amend, then it will be discussed and voted on.

Note: An amendment can add, take away or change parts of the original motion. The amendment, however, cannot go completely against the main motion. If you don't like the motion at all, vote against it. If the motion is defeated, then you can make a new motion.

If you think that the movers and seconders of the main motion will agree to your amendment, then say: "*I hope this will be considered a friendly amendment.*" The Chair will then ask the members who moved and seconded the main motion if they agree to the change. If they do, then the amendment is incorporated into or becomes the main motion. If they don't, then the meeting stops talking about

the main motion and discusses and votes on the change. If the amendment passes, it becomes part of the main motion, which is then voted upon. If the amendment does not pass, the members go back to discussing the main motion in its original form.

How to Take Back the Motion

If you made a motion, and then during the discussion realize that 1) it was not the right time to make a decision on the issue, or 2) it would be better to talk about another motion, say: *"I wish to withdraw the main motion."*

How to Stop the Discussion

If you think there has been full discussion, or that the discussion is going in circles, then raise your hand and, when the Chair calls on you, say: *"I call the question"*. If someone seconds your motion, then the Chair will ask members to vote on whether to end the discussion. If 2/3 of the members vote for your motion, then the meeting must vote immediately on the motion or amendment being discussed.

To Put Off Discussion to a Future Meeting:

Raise your hand and say: *"I move to postpone the question to the next meeting."*

To Turn Over the Decision to Another Group for Recommendations:

If you want a working group or sub-committee of the Student Union to study the issue and report recommendations back to the membership, say: *"I move to refer the question to a committee."*

To Set Discussion Aside Indefinitely

If members clearly don't want to deal with this issue in the near future, say: *"I vote to table the motion."*

When You Can Speak Out of Turn

The only three times you can jump ahead of your turn on the speaker's list are the following:

- If you think the Chair is not following the proper meeting procedure, then call out *"Point of Order"* and explain what you think is wrong.
- If you need clarification on a point already raised, then call out *"Point of Information"* and then ask your question as briefly as possible. You must go back on the speaker's list if you wish to follow up on that information with an opinion.
- If you can't hear the Chair or, for example, members will faint if someone doesn't open a window, call out *"Point of Privilege"* and then say what you want to be done.

Voting

When the Chair calls for the vote, you can:

- vote yes, when the Chair says *"All in favour"*
- vote no, when the Chair says *"All against"*
- raise your hand when the Chair says *"Abstentions"* if you don't want to vote.

Sometimes members don't vote because they don't understand the motion. It is better to ask for explanations during the discussion so that you can vote. Don't be afraid to ask a "dumb" question: if you are confused, then other members probably are too.

At Departmental Student Union or Grad Caucus Meetings

Recording Meeting Minutes

The Secretary should record attendance, the agenda, and all motions, amendments and outcomes of votes. Only the main points raised in discussion should be noted so that members who could not attend the meeting have a good idea of the points of view raised.

Forum and Departmental Committee representatives should give the Secretary written versions of the reports they made to the membership that should then be appended to the minutes.

Minutes should be posted in the Common Room and to the Student Union e-mail list before the next scheduled general meeting. Don't forget to forward minutes to organizer@sfss.ca, thanks!

Need Help Getting a Student Union or Caucus Meeting to Run Smoothly?

Call the Student Union Resource Office (291-3131), or email organiser@sfss.ca, and ask the Organizer staff to come to a meeting to offer some pointers, or to meet with your executive to go over meeting procedures.

About Consensus Decision Making...

Some Departmental Student Unions or Graduate Caucuses use consensus decision making instead of Robert's Rules. An explanation of which type of consensus the group is using should be on file with the Organizer for sake of clarity. If groups wish to use consensus, the Organizer can help gather resources.

Questions about Forum

You can also ask the Member Services Officer any questions you might have about Forum or Forum representatives: mso@sfss.ca.