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*Effective listening  
is a professional  
achievement—achieved  
only through hard work.*

Tom Peters

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**Cultivate an attitude that is warm, calm and in control.** Connect with people as a colleague and a fellow human, while maintaining the authority of the position.

**Formality is a friend.** Use titles rather than first names. Do not try to be chummy.

**Ideally, no one should be able to tell whom the chair likes or dislikes.** Strive to treat everyone with fairness, no matter your personal feelings.

**Cultivate the ability to observe yourself with “the third eye,”** to step back and notice when your voice becomes shrill, your temper rises or you are in danger of losing your cool. Know your own weaknesses and take steps to counterbalance them.

**When another person is speaking, listen to her** as if there were no one else in the room. The undivided attention of the presider will assure each person that their concerns are taken seriously and that they are respected. (Council members should do this too.)

**Take the time to memorize the language of the presider** so that you can speak with confidence, and control the ebb and flow of meeting discussion. See “Addressing Disorder” on page 101 for specific examples.

**Do not be afraid to admit ignorance or confusion.** When in doubt, propose a course of action to the group and let the group decide.

**Above all else, remain the servant of the group.** The presider’s job is to help the group make up its mind. As long as you keep to this role, you will be fulfilling your duty.

## Duties

Newly elected mayors are sometimes expected to start running their meetings with little or no training in meeting procedure. Instead, it is assumed that they have “picked it up” as they attended earlier meetings of the group. While experience teaches much, a little study can make a large difference and produce far better meetings.

A mayor, as meeting presider, is given these duties by parliamentary law. Keep the following list, taken from Robert (pp. 449-450), handy. It is important to know what these responsibilities are, and what they are not. Above all, the presider serves the group and assists it to make its own decisions. The mayor is the facilitator, not the dictator.



## Role of Presider (Chair)

It is the presider's job to:

Duty	Description of duty
Open meeting	To open the meeting at the appointed time by taking the chair and calling the meeting to order, having ascertained that a quorum is present.
Announce next activity	To announce in proper sequence the next activity before the assembly in accordance with the prescribed order of business, agenda or program.
Recognize members	To recognize members who are entitled to the floor.
State questions and put to vote	To state and to put to vote all questions that legitimately come before the assembly as motions or that otherwise arise in the course of proceedings, and to announce the result of each vote; or, if a motion that is not in order is made, to rule it out of order.
Refuse to recognize dilatory motions	To protect the assembly from obviously dilatory (time-wasting) motions by refusing to recognize them.
Enforce order and decorum	To enforce the rules relating to debate and those relating to order and decorum within the assembly.
Expedite business	To expedite business in every way compatible with the rights of members.
Decide all questions of order	To decide all questions of order subject to appeal—unless, when in doubt, the presiding officer prefers initially to submit such a question to the assembly for decision.
Respond to inquiries	To respond to inquiries of members relating to parliamentary procedure or factual information bearing on the business of the assembly.
Authenticate documents	To authenticate by his or her signature, when necessary, all acts, orders and proceedings of the assembly.
Close meeting	To declare the meeting adjourned when the assembly so votes or—where applicable—at the time prescribed in the program, or at any time in the event of a sudden emergency affecting the safety of those present.



## Meeting principles Meeting principles/Flow of authority

### ACCORDING TO ROBERT

*All persons present at a meeting have an obligation to obey the legitimate orders of the presiding officer. p. 645*

*If the chair at a meeting acts improperly, a Point of Order may be raised, and from the chair's decision an Appeal may be taken. This procedure enables the majority to ensure enforcement of the rules. p. 650*

### Principles for members

In order to achieve the right conditions, all members need to understand and act according to the basic principles of meetings. We like James Lochrie's formulation, which he has given us permission to use. It is excerpted from his book, *Meeting Procedure*:

- The majority must be allowed to rule.
- The minority have rights that must be respected.
- Members have a right to information to help make decisions.
- Courtesy and respect are required.
- All members have equal rights, privileges and obligations.
- Members have a right to an efficient meeting.

### Principles for the presider

Jurassic Parliament has formulated some important additional principles:

- The presider, the person running the meeting, is both the most important person in the room and the least important person in the room.
- The presider must be strict on procedure—a benevolent dictator.
- The presider is not responsible for the decision the group makes.
- The presider must balance the emotional and procedural aspects of every meeting.

**Flow of authority**

These principles produce this flow of authority at a meeting:

1. The group adopts its rules and guidelines.
2. In attending, members accept the rules of the group.
3. During meetings, the presider applies the rules for the benefit of the group.
4. All persons present at a meeting have an obligation to obey the legitimate orders of the presider.
5. Any member who disagrees with a ruling, decision or order by the presider may appeal the ruling.
6. If another member seconds the appeal, the group will decide by majority vote whether the ruling, decision or order is legitimate.
7. The presider obeys the group's decision.



Figure 4. Flow of Authority

**IN OUR EXPERIENCE**

*A set of council procedures that we were reviewing included the sentence, "All persons present at a meeting must obey the mayor's orders." This is a wild distortion of the principles that actually apply. If this language were in place, a mayor could say "Go pick up my laundry" and a citizen in attendance would be obliged to comply. It's no wonder that elected leaders sometimes get a swelled head when they are given this kind of license! As seen above, the correct parliamentary language is that attendees must obey "the legitimate orders of the presiding officer," which is quite a different proposition. —Ann*



## Decorum in Discussion

Robert's Rules of Order provides a framework for civilized and productive discussion and decision-making. Decorum is essential and required by Robert's Rules and common parliamentary law.

Remarks must be relevant to the topic at hand.

### ACCORDING TO ROBERT

*In debate a member's remarks must be germane to the question before the assembly—that is, his statements must have bearing on whether the immediately pending motion should be adopted. p. 392; see also pp. xxxiv, 43*

The jargon word here is “germane.” Remarks must be germane, or relevant. It is the duty of the presider to decide whether remarks are germane or not. If any two members disagree with the presider's decision, they can appeal the decision.

Members may not speak about the motives of other members.

### ACCORDING TO ROBERT

*When a question is pending, a member can condemn the nature or likely consequences of the proposed measure in strong terms, but he must avoid personalities, and under no circumstances can he attack or question the motives of another member. p. 392; see also p. 43*

This is not about conflict of interest (although every governmental body should establish and follow a conflict of interest policy). This simply means that in ordinary discussion and debate, members are not allowed to attack or speak about the motives of their colleagues (though one may speak about one's own motives, or the motives of nonmembers).

## No arguing.

There is no place for arguing at a council meeting, though vigorous—even heated—debate about controversial issues is entirely appropriate. Avoid argument by focusing on ideas, not personalities. If a council meeting becomes tense, a short recess or “stand at ease” may be in order.

“Stand at ease” often improves a meeting. The presider announces that everyone has two minutes to greet a neighbor, stand up and stretch, or refill a coffee cup. A timer is set for 120 seconds and when it goes off, the presider calls everyone back to the meeting—back “to order.”



## Decorum in Discussion

No inflammatory language (use neutral language instead).

### ACCORDING TO ROBERT

*If a member disagrees with a statement by another in regard to an event that both witnessed, he cannot state in debate that the other's statement 'is false.' But he might say, 'I believe there is strong evidence that the member is mistaken.' The moment the chair hears such words as 'fraud,' 'liar,' or 'lie' used about a member in debate, he must act immediately and decisively to correct the matter and prevent its repetition. p. 392*

There are as many different types of inflammatory language as there are inflamed speakers ready to spout off. An alert presider will be ready to call a halt by tapping the gavel firmly and interrupting the speaker whenever he hears remarks that are unacceptable. Members too must be ready to speak up. As always, if there is any question or objection raised to the presider's ruling, the group will decide what can be tolerated.

### IN OUR EXPERIENCE

*I attended a council meeting once when a member said, "If there had been embezzlement going on, and we hadn't noticed it, we would have failed in our duty to the public." This was inflammatory. A member who fears that a crime such as embezzlement is being committed should take appropriate steps to bring it to the attention of the proper authorities. To raise the specter of crime in this casual and allusive manner, with no actual charges in mind, poisons the atmosphere and worsens relations between the elected officials and staff. No council should tolerate such remarks. — Ann*

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*For when you assemble a number of men to have the advantage of their joint wisdom, you inevitably assemble with those men all their prejudices, their passions, their errors of opinion, their local interests, and their selfish views.*

Benjamin Franklin

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A member may not speak against her own motion.

### ACCORDING TO ROBERT

*In debate, the maker of a motion, while he can vote against it, is not allowed to speak against his own motion. He need not speak at all, but if he does he is obliged to take a favorable position. If he changes his mind while the motion he made is pending, he can, in effect, advise the assembly of this by asking permission to withdraw the motion. p. 393*

People sometimes wonder why this rule exists in Robert's Rules. Perhaps the reason is to avoid wasting time—if a member has changed her mind as a result of arguments made by others, asking permission to withdraw the motion is simpler than continuing on to a full vote and urging that others defeat it.





A member may not explain his vote while voting.

**ACCORDING TO ROBERT**

*A member has no right to "explain his vote" during voting, which would be the same as debate at such a time. p. 408*

This point is self-evident and tends to save time. While we have worked with bodies who allow elected officials to give an explanation of their reasoning after the vote, sticking with Robert's Rules here is the most efficient way to process issues.

A member may not criticize a prior action of the group.

**ACCORDING TO ROBERT**

*In debate, a member cannot reflect adversely on any prior act of the society that is not then pending, unless a motion to reconsider, rescind, or amend it is pending, or unless he intends to conclude his remarks by making or giving notice of one of these motions. p. 393*

This rule is not well known, but is part of the general duty of loyalty that members owe to an organization. It would save a lot of hot air if groups enforced this requirement. If a member is not going to take steps to change a situation, do not discuss it at meetings.

A member must support the group.

**ACCORDING TO ROBERT**

*If there is an article on discipline in the bylaws, it may specify a number of offenses outside meetings for which these penalties can be imposed on a member of the organization. Frequently, such an article provides for their imposition on any member found guilty of conduct described, for example, as "tending to injure the good name of the organization, disturb its well-being, or hamper it in its work." In any society, behavior of this nature is a serious offense properly subject to disciplinary action, whether the bylaws make mention of it or not. pp. 643-644*

A member may not make statements which tend to "injure the good name of the organization, disturb its well-being, or hamper it in its work." If a member is unable to support the group, its work and its decisions, then it is time for the member to leave the group.



Sometimes the political nature of elected groups means that this rule is not enforceable. However, in the current age of individualism, it is helpful for councils and other public bodies to consider this requirement and see whether aspects of it may apply to their situation.

We believe that our public discourse would be well served if council members chose to say, when they have lost on an issue, "We have expressed our views in frank and open debate, and now it is time to move forward. I accept the will of the majority and will support the actions of this council as part of my commitment to the welfare of our community."

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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 W. Clayton

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## Round Robin Method

### Round Robin Method

The simplest way to make city council meetings more efficient is to use the round robin method of discussion. In a round robin, each member of the body is given an opportunity to speak once before anyone may speak a second time, commonly by calling on the members around the table in turn. Sometimes, however, it is harder to employ this method than it seems.

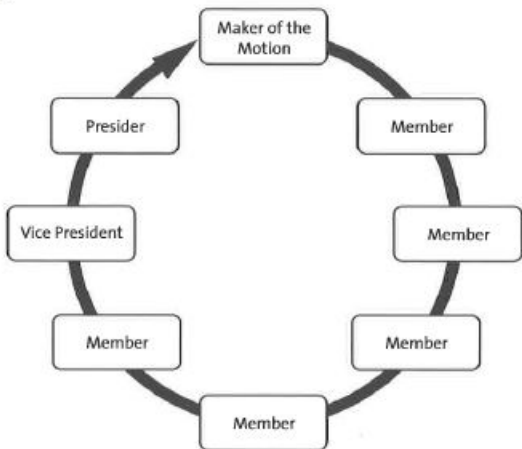


Figure 20. Round Robin

Somebody has to keep track and somebody has to be the enforcer.

Have the number two person, vice president or mayor pro tem, track speakers. This frees the president to intervene when someone speaks out of order. This system will minimize errors often made by a president who tries to do both.

The maker of the motion starts the debate.

Under Robert's Rules, the person who makes the motion has the right to speak first. The round robin would then move to left or right or alphabetically, depending on custom.



## Orderly Public Comment

### Orderly Public Comment

The following guidelines establish structure and clear expectations for outside comment by nonmembers, members of the public and others. Note that different guidelines apply to public hearings, which have the sole purpose of gathering public input, and to quasi-judicial hearings.

#### Time considerations

Establish one or two specific periods for public comment during your meetings, in a way that is consistent with your community's expectations and customs. Set a length of time by which each period will conclude, unless the council votes to extend it. It is also important to set a time limit for each individual to speak.

#### Written guidelines

Provide printed copies of the guidelines and expectations for all who enter the council chamber. Review the guidelines at the beginning of each comment period if necessary, and explain that this is a time for citizens or residents to express their views in order to inform the council.

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*Everything has been said,  
but not everyone has had  
a chance to say it.*

Carl Albert

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#### During public comment

Require all speakers to address their remarks to the presider. **This is not a discussion period.** The presider should thank each speaker, whether positive or negative.

Authorize the presider to provide brief factual information, if judged appropriate, in response to public comments, or to ask the staff to provide such information. The presider must not under any circumstances enter into back-and-forth exchanges with the public.

Council members **refrain from speaking during this portion of the meeting.** When feasible, **have staff ready to note input or questions from the public and to provide responses at a later date.**

#### Behavioral expectations

Model courtesy and respect and require members of the public to do the same. (Use titles and honorifics—sir, ma'am, Miss Smith, Mr. Jones.) Personal attacks, insults or profanity are not allowed. Booing, hissing, cheering, clapping are not allowed.



During public comment, the presider should correct members of the public who fail to observe the guidelines. If the presider does not do this, a council member should raise a point of order. It is important for presider and members to speak in a firm, matter-of-fact manner, but not to sound overly harsh or critical. If members of the public become abusive, disruptive or violent, the presider has the authority to order them from the room.

### Other suggestions

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*Good government obtains when those who are near are made happy and those who are far off are attracted.*

Confucius

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Provide clearly marked paper inviting individuals who are not heard during the public comment period due to time constraints to provide written comment for the council. Do not invite or allow public comment or questions during council discussion of its own agenda items. Be consistent in enforcing all the rules that are established. Recognize that a governmental body must craft its requirements with care in order not to unduly limit free speech by citizens, and obtain legal review of your guidelines.

## Appendix C.

# Essential Rules for Discussion and Debate for Small Boards

All references are to *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised, 11th edition*. The word "implicit" means that in our view, the rule stated is assumed by Robert's Rules, or is a logical derivative of the principles on which Robert's Rules are based.

1. All members have an equal right to speak and make motions. p. 3
2. Nonmembers do not have the right to speak or to make motions. p. 648
3. One subject is discussed at a time. pp. xxxiii-xxxiv
4. One person speaks at a time. implicit
5. No interrupting. pp. 43-44, 383-384
6. Courtesy and respect are required at all times. p. 43 and implicit
7. No one may speak a second time until everyone who wishes to do so has spoken once. pp. 31, 379
8. The presider may participate in debate and make motions. p. 488 (We recommend restraint.)
9. Informal discussion without a motion is allowed. p. 488
10. A second is not needed unless law or regulation requires it. p. 488 (We recommend that a second be required.)
11. Members must seek recognition from the presider. pp. 29, 487
12. Members may speak directly to each other. p. 488 (We recommend that they do not do so, but address all remarks to the chair.)
13. The maker of the motion may speak first. p. 379
14. There is no need to alternate speakers "for" and "against." implicit
15. There is no limit to the number of speeches. p. 488



## Rules for Discussion & Debate

16. There is a limit of 10 minutes per speech. p. 387 (We recommend establishing a shorter limit.)
17. Members may “call the question” or move to limit debate. p. 488
18. Remarks must be relevant to the topic at hand (germane). pp. xxxiv, 43
19. Members may not speak about the motives of other members. pp. 43, 392
20. No arguing, implicit
21. No inflammatory language. p. 392, implicit
22. Courtesy and respect means:
  - No personal attacks.
  - No insults, epithets or profanity.
  - No disrespectful body language.
  - No innuendo.
  - No booing, hissing or clapping.pp. 43, 392, and implicit
23. A member may not speak against her own motion. p. 393
24. A member may not explain his vote while voting. p. 408
25. A member may not comment adversely on (criticize) a prior action of the group unless (a) the action is being considered for amendment or cancellation, or (b) he plans to introduce a motion to change the action at the end of his speech. p. 393
26. A member may not make statements which tend “to injure the good name of the organization, disturb its well-being, or hamper it in its work.” pp. 643-644