

Board Minute - Understanding Robert's Rules of Order for School Board Members

Part 1 of 2

Robert's Rules of Order is the most widely used format for running school board meetings. These rules help meetings run in a fair, respectful, and organized way. However, they do not replace state laws or school board policies. While not legally binding on their own, they give structure to discussions and decision-making.

A *motion* is how a board member brings an idea or proposal to the group for discussion and decision. You've probably heard phrases like "I move that..." or "I second that motion." After a motion is made and seconded, discussion usually follows. Once everyone has had a chance to share, the group votes.

But motions can do much more than simply start discussions. Board members can also *amend*, *refer*, *postpone*, or *table* motions depending on what is needed.

Sometimes, a motion needs a small change before the board is ready to act on it. To suggest this, a member can say, "I move to amend the motion by..." The amendment must then be voted on before returning to the main motion. Amendments should adjust or clarify the wording—not completely change the intent of the motion.

If the amendment fails, discussion returns to the original motion. Remember, most motions must be seconded before they can move forward.

Another option is to *refer* a motion to a committee for more study or feedback. For example, a member might say, "I move that this motion be referred to the Finance Committee." The committee does not make the final decision—it studies the issue and reports back. The full board always has final approval unless decision-making authority is clearly delegated in the motion.

Sometimes, board members feel that more time is needed before making a final decision—perhaps to gather more information or hear public feedback. In these cases, the board can choose to *postpone* or *table* a motion.

A motion to postpone sets a specific time for reconsideration, such as the next meeting. A motion to table, on the other hand, does not. If a motion is tabled and not brought up again soon—usually by the next meeting—it effectively dies.

It's important to use tabling carefully. It should not be used to avoid uncomfortable decisions or delay progress. When a motion is tabled, people expect it to return for discussion later. Using it too often can create frustration or mistrust.

Robert's Rules may seem complex at first, but they are simply a way to keep meetings fair, organized, and efficient. Knowing how to make, amend, or delay motions helps board members participate confidently and respectfully. These basic tools support healthy decision-making and prepare us for more advanced parts of the process—like managing debate, revisiting past decisions, and asking the right questions, which we'll explore in Part Two.

This document is not intended as legal advice or a replacement for expert opinions on Robert's Rules of Order. It is only intended as an informational piece providing a broad overview. Individual states often have information put out by their corresponding school board associations