

Rules of Order: Short and Sweet

A time-tested way to control meetings is with rules of order. The United States Congress adopted Robert's Rules of Order in 1876 to help guide its deliberations and they have been widely adopted, at least in concept, by many organizations.

Principles of the rules of order are:

- The majority rules,
- The minority has a right to be heard,
- Everyone is entitled to an opinion, and
- Only one subject is addressed at a time.

The purpose of having rules is to assure orderly conduct of business, protection of the rights of members, solid foundation for resolving questions of procedure, and decorum in debate.

The fundamentals of Robert's Rules of Order are:

- The chairperson presides,
- There is a fixed agenda,
- Members speak only when given the floor by the chairperson,
- Discussion is permitted only after a motion has been made and seconded,
- Decisions are made by majority vote (unless otherwise specified in the documents), and
- Rules of debate are obeyed.

The success of a meeting is proportional to the effectiveness of the chairperson in applying these rules to manage the discussion and achieving the meeting objective. It takes a forceful and sometimes aggressive leader – and the cooperation of the other board members to achieve a well organization, effective and well executed meeting.