

INFORMATION ON DEMOCRATIC RULES OF ORDER

Version 10, 2019: Written by Francis and Francis

Easy-to-use rules for meetings of any size

Are you searching for simple meeting rules – easy for all members to understand and follow? Instead of spending time arguing the rules, you can focus on the decisions to be made together. *Democratic Rules of Order* is the parliamentary standard that fully protects every member's right to equal participation in orderly meetings. It does this with concise, common sense rules without jargon or unnecessary protocol. Based on the natural laws of democracy, the rules are equally effective in small groups using consensus or for large organizations with a formal Chair.

Some advantages are:

- Easy for all members to understand
- Can be read in an hour
- Only 27 pages of rules, plus 37 pages of examples
- Appropriate for any group size
- Equally useful for formal or informal Chairs
- No jargon or complicated classifications to learn
- Based on the natural laws of democracy:

“• **the right of each individual member** to participate equally and fully in orderly meetings that are free from intimidation, filibustering, and other disturbances and in which all members follow the same easily-understood rules, and the right to be equally and fully informed of all events, whether the member is present or not; And,

• **the right of the majority of members** to make the decisions.” (Page 8)

When all members understand the rules, you remove a barrier to participation and thus have a more true democracy.

Democratic Rules of Order demonstrates that efficient, democratic decision-making is a simple and natural process. Meetings that are governed by straightforward rules enable the Chair and the participants to focus on issues without being preoccupied with the rules. Within the simple meeting structure prescribed by *Democratic Rules of Order*, members reach agreements more quickly and easily and ultimately, make better decisions. See the short [summary of the rules](#).

This book can be adopted as the official rules of order for almost any organization. It is a reliable, universal standard. Through ten editions, it has been thoroughly revised to be sure that each point is crystal clear and that not a single necessary rule is missing. The rules of all editions are so similar, however, that earlier editions can be used along with the latest edition.

Comparison with Robert's Rules of Order

Democratic Rules of Order

Robert's Rules of Order

27 pages of rules plus 37 pages of answers to questions, examples, etc.

Up to 700 pages of rules and protocol (depending on which edition)

All motions have similar properties so there are no complicated classifications to learn

There are many kinds of motions: main, subsidiary, incidental, privileged, and they all have special properties which must be learned or found in tables.

- Some are debatable, some aren't.
- Some can be amended, some can't.
- Some require a majority to pass, some more.
- Some need seconding, some don't, etc.

Uses plain language so no need to learn a specialized vocabulary.

Contains some special phrases which must be learned e.g.: "the previous question", "orders of the day", "lay on the table", "question of privilege", "suppress debate", etc.

Allows informal decision-making but automatically requires more formality when necessary.

Rather formal when it's rules are consistently followed.

Members with a greater knowledge of the rules have no special advantage.

Members with a greater knowledge of the rules can use it for personal advantage.

Originally written in 1994 as rules of order for meetings of any size.

Originally written in **1876** based on rules of order for the United States Congress.

Contains rules for every likely situation.

Contains rules for every likely situation.

Likely to be read and understood by the Chair and many members.

Likely to be partially read and understood by the Chair and a few members.

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Short Summary of the Rules

- **Fairness:** Equal rights of members and good order are the underlying principles.
- **The final authority** is the majority of voting members, provided a quorum is present, subject always to any applicable higher law (a law of the land, a constitution, a bylaw, or an existing standing rule).
- **In formal meetings**, the chair guides impartially without taking part in discussion. In informal meetings, the chair participates as an equal member.
- **A motion should be worded** affirmatively and must not conflict with any higher law. All motions require a seconder.
- **The mover's privilege** allows the mover to reword or withdraw the motion provided there is a seconder and not more than one member objects.
- **Amendments can delete, substitute, or add words to a motion** on the floor but must not negate it or change its topic. An amendment can not be amended.
- **Postpone, refer:** A motion can be postponed to an indefinite or a specific future occasion or referred to a committee for further study.

- **Voting:** Common voting methods include voting by ballot, standing, show of hands, show of voting cards and voice. For a motion to pass, a quorum must be present and more than half the votes cast must be affirmative.
 - **Informal Discussion:** A motion to informally discuss some topic, if passed, allows members to consider an idea without the formality of a motion.
 - **Rescind, reconsider:** A previous decision can be rescinded or reconsidered by the members at any appropriate time.
 - **Ratify:** a previous decision: A decision exceeding the authority of a member, committee or meeting can be ratified at a later meeting.
 - **Good order:** Members should discuss only one motion at a time. A member must not take more than a fair share of floor time nor interrupt another member except as allowed with a point of order.
 - **Point of Order:** A member who believes that a law or the meeting's good order is being breached may rise immediately and say "point of order." The chair should allow the member to explain and, if necessary, should call for a vote for a decision.
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Tips for Meetings

- Discuss the idea together, informally, before forming a motion.
- After a motion is stated, let the mover, aided by the members, modify it before voting. But if more than one member objects, changes require formal amendments.
- Never allow an amendment to the amendment. The motion can be defeated and stated again if necessary.
- The chair must never allow a member to interrupt a speaker or personally criticize or ridicule another member.

Flowchart Process on How a Motion is Handled

<https://www.democraticrules.com/pdf/flowchart.pdf>

Frequently asked questions

Table of Contents

[Is Democratic Rules of Order very different from other parliamentary authorities?](#)

[Since Democratic Rules of Order is so much shorter than most older rules, how can it be as reliable for large organizations to adopt for governing their meetings which might include some strongly divided opinions?](#)

[Does it contain anything unique?](#)

[Why was this book written?](#)

[Why is it called Democratic?](#)

Is Democratic Rules of Order very different from other parliamentary authorities?

Yes and No. They codify much common practice and on the surface meetings would sound the same with motions, seconding, voting, etc. but the rules are less dominant, deliberations are smoother, and equal rights exist in practice as well as in theory.

Since Democratic Rules of Order is so much shorter than most older rules, how can it be as reliable for large organizations to adopt for governing their meetings which might include some strongly divided opinions?

Progress is natural in today's world and streamlining rules of order so that they are less obtrusive and are easier to understand does not reduce their reliability for large or small meetings. Democratic Rules of Order is not missing any regulation necessary for the best run meetings. Its rules have been adopted and tested by organizations of various kinds and sizes all over North America, and have been accepted by many as the ideal and most reliable parliamentary standard.

Does it contain anything unique?

There are three major differences from other rules of order:

- **1.** Its rule allowing informal discussion of an idea before forming a motion is sometimes a great time saver;
- **2.** The mover's privilege allowing the mover and members to reword a motion during discussion can make perfecting the wording of the motion easier. This rule can not be abused as a change requires a formal amendment if more than one member objects;
- **3.** An amendment cannot be amended. Instead the motion can be quickly defeated without more discussion and a new motion proposed embodying the useful ideas from the discussion.

Why was this book written?

In hundreds of meetings, the authors frequently saw the need for simpler rules of order and searched diligently to find one, but without success. Nearly all were incomplete or were modifications of the same complex procedures. Finally, in December 1994, they decided to write a set of rules based only on democratic principles, common practice and common sense. The basic text was written in a week but it took years of refining and advice from executives, parliamentarians and others to perfect the rules.

Why is it called Democratic?

Because it preserves in meetings the fundamental principles of democracy: justice, equal individual rights, right of the majority to decide and the simplicity of good order.

Note:

If you have any questions regarding the Democratic Rules of Order, please write me in advance of the Board meeting and I will try to prepare answers for the Board meeting.

Thanks.