What are Robert's Rules of Order/Parliamentary Procedure and Why Are They Important?

Robert’s Rules are a set of rules and procedures used to run meetings that have lasted over two centuries. Robert’s Rules place everyone on equal footing by allowing all to have their opinions heard and to make decisions in a fair manner and ensures that everyone uses the same vocabulary. The rules can be adapted to fit the needs of any meeting. Today, many clubs, organizations, town meetings, and other groups use these rules.

Who Can Participate in Town Meeting?

Only legal voters can participate in Town Meeting. The only people eligible to vote at Town Meeting were male property owners over the age of 21. Women, slaves, and indentured servants were not allowed to vote. The only way non-voters are allowed to speak is for the voters to pass a motion to allow the individual to “address the assembly.” This motion must pass by a 2/3 majority.
A Summary of Robert's Rules/Parliamentary Procedure

1) The method used by members to express themselves is in the form of making motions. A motion is a proposal that the entire membership take action or a stand on an issue.

2) Under no circumstances should "undue (excessive) strictness" be allowed to intimidate members or limit the participation of everyone.

3) The assembly rules - they have the final say on everything! Silence means consent (or agreement)! If you do not speak up, it will be assumed that you agree with what was said.

4) Obtain the floor (the right to speak) by being the first to stand when the person speaking is done and state, “Mr. Moderator.” Raising your hand means nothing, and standing while another has the floor is out of order and will result in you losing the right to vote! You must be recognized by the moderator before speaking!

5) No member can speak twice to the same issue until everyone else wishing to speak has spoken to it once!

6) All remarks must be directed to the moderator. Remarks must be courteous (polite and kind) in language and never refer to others by name or to motives!
Sample Procedure Using Robert’s Rules

Article 1: Should the Swine Run Free
1) The moderator bangs the gavel and asks everyone to quiet down so the meeting can begin. Then he/she “calls the meeting to order.” He/She introduces the selectmen, Robert Fuller, Nathaniel Fisher, and Ebenezer Fuller and then begins the meeting.

2) The moderator reads the article: “Shall the Town allow the swine to run at large this year?”

3) A voter stands and waits to be recognized (called on) by the moderator. The moderator recognizes the voter and the voter stands up and makes a motion to adopt the article. “I move the article.”

4) The moderator asks if there is a “second to the motion” (another voter who wants to discuss and vote on the article): “Do we have a second to the motion?”

5) A second voter stands and “seconds” the motion: “I second the motion.” If there is no second, the article is “passed over” (not discussed or voted on).

6) After the “second” the moderator asks for any discussion on the motion: “Would anyone like to begin discussion on the motion?”

7) Voters stand one at a time and wait to be recognized by the moderator. The next speaker may not stand until the previous speaker has finished. When a person is recognized, he/she speaks directly to the moderator. Voters may make statements in support of or against the proposal. This discussion is called debating the motion. A voter can move to close the debate at any point but this motion needs a 3/4 majority to pass.

8) The Moderator must make sure that everyone who wants to speak has a turn before anyone is allowed to speak a second time.
9) After the discussion has been completed, someone can make a motion to vote on the article. “I move to vote.”

10) The moderator asks if there is a “second to the motion” (another voter who wants to vote on the article): “Do we have a second to the motion?”

11) A second voter “seconds” the motion: “I second the motion.”

12) “The motion carries.” There are three ways for the town meeting to vote on an article.

   1) **Voice Vote:** “All in favor indicate by saying Yea.” “All against signify by saying Nay.”

   2) **Hand Count:** If the moderator cannot tell the outcome of the voice vote, he or she can ask for a hand count. “All in favor of the motion please raise your hand.”

   3) **Divide the Assembly:** If seven voters move to “divide the assembly” the motion is voted by “paper ballot.” “I move to divide the assembly.”
      * The moderator asks, “Are there six more voters who second this motion?”
      * If so, paper is passed out to all voters and they indicate their vote by writing “yes” or “no.”
      * The votes are usually counted by the clerk and board of civil authority (local officials who help run the election) and are then reported to the moderator.

12) After the vote is announced say either “The motion passed in the affirmative” or “The motion passed in the negative.” The moderator then moves to the next article on the agenda by reading it to the assembly. “Should we elect a Committee of Correspondence?”

** If a voter interrupts this reading by moving to reconsider the prior vote, the moderator must stop his reading and ask
if there is a second to the motion to reconsider. The meeting may only reconsider a vote once before going on to the next item.

Article 2: Committee of Correspondence Discussion

1) The Moderator reads the article: “Should we elect a Committee of Correspondence?”

2) A voter stands and waits to be recognized (called on) by the moderator. The moderator recognizes the voter and the voter stands up and makes a motion to adopt the article. “I move the article.”

3) The moderator asks if there is a “second to the motion” (another voter who wants to discuss and vote on the article): “Do we have a second to the motion?”

4) A second voter stands and “seconds” the motion: “I second the motion.” If there is no second, the article is “passed over” (not discussed or voted on).

5) After the “second” the moderator asks for any discussion on the motion: “Would anyone like to begin discussion on the motion?”

6) Voters stand one at a time and wait to be recognized by the moderator. The next speaker may not stand until the previous speaker has finished. When a person is recognized, he/she speaks directly to the moderator. Voters may make statements in support of or against the proposal. This discussion is called debating the motion.

7) The Moderator must make sure that everyone who wants to speak has a turn before anyone is allowed to speak a second time.

8) After the discussion has been completed, someone can make a motion to vote on the article. “I move to close the debate and vote.”
9) The moderator asks if there is a “second to the motion” (another voter who wants to vote on the article): “Do we have a second to the motion?”

10) A second voter “seconds” the motion: “I second the motion.”

11) There are three ways for the town meeting to vote on an article.

   1) **Voice Vote:** “All in favor indicate by saying Yea.” “All against signify by saying Nay.”

   2) **Hand Count:** If the moderator cannot tell the outcome of the voice vote, he or she can ask for a hand count. “All in favor of the motion please raise your hand.”

   3) **Divide the Assembly:** If seven voters move to “divide the assembly” the motion is voted by “paper ballot.” “I move to divide the assembly.”

      * The moderator asks, “Are there six more voters who second this motion?”

      * If so, paper is passed out to all voters and they indicate their vote by writing “yes” or “no.”

      * The votes are usually counted by the clerk and board of civil authority (local officials who help run the election) and are then reported to the moderator.

** Majority rules in the case of voting. **

12) The vote is announced by saying either, “The motion passed in the affirmative” or “The motion passed in the negative.”

13) Then someone has to motion to adjourn (end) the meeting. A voter raises his or her hand to be recognized (called on). The moderator recognizes the voter and the voter stands up and makes a motion to adjourn the meeting. “I move to adjourn.”
14) A second voter “seconds” the motion: “I second the motion.”

15) After the “second” the moderator asks for any discussion on the motion: “Would anyone like to begin discussion on the motion?”

16) Hearing none we come to the vote on adjournment. “All in favor indicate by saying Yea.” “All against signify by saying Nay.”

17) If the vote rules in favor of adjournment, say “The motion passes in the affirmative.”
Your Choices and Responsibilities as a Voter

1) Someone must “move the article” to begin the meeting.

2) Someone must then “second the motion” agreeing to discuss and vote on the article/topic.

3) When you would like to speak, you must wait to stand up AFTER the previous speaker has finished and wait to be recognized by the moderator. Once you are recognized, speak directly to the moderator and do so in a kind, respectful manner.

** If you stand or begin to speak while someone else is speaking, you may lose your right to vote! **

4) When you feel there is enough debate/discussion, you can “motion to close the debate and vote.”

5) If you agree, you can “second the motion.”

6) There are three ways for the town meeting to vote on an article.

   1) Voice Vote: “All in favor indicate by saying Yea.” “All against signify by saying Nay.”

   2) Hand Count: If the moderator cannot tell the outcome of the voice vote, he or she can ask for a hand count. “All in favor of the motion please raise your hand.”

   3) Divide the Assembly: If seven voters move to “divide the assembly” the motion is voted by “paper ballot.” “I move to divide the assembly.”
      * The moderator asks, “Are there six more voters who second this motion?”
      * If so, paper is passed out to all voters and they indicate their vote by writing “yes” or “no.”

7) If you do not agree with the first vote on an article or feel there was not enough debate, you can “move to reconsider the prior vote.”

8) Someone must “second to the motion to reconsider.” The meeting may only reconsider a vote once before going on to the next item.

9) In votes, majority rules.