

# Top 10 Errors in Parliamentary Procedure (Robert's Rules of Order)

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# Disclaimer

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# #10 – “Going around the chair”

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Questions and comments should be addressed through the chair

Members should not be talking to each other directly

- Avoid names and the second person (you, your, etc.)

Examples: “Madame President, do we have enough money for this?” or “Mr. Chair, I disagree with the member’s argument because...”

# #9 – Using Unanimous Consent

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Seek unanimous consent for:

- Amendments that are minor or likely to have no opposition
- Allowing a speaker additional time
- Short recess or adjourn with no more business

Improper usage of unanimous consent:

- Assuming (chair must ask if there is an objection first)
- Election of officers (check bylaws first)
- Motions requiring a two-thirds vote

# #8 – Informal discussions

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Under Robert's Rules, a motion must be on the floor before any discussion can take place

Members must follow rules for recognition and limits to length and number of speeches

(Note a question can be considered informally – such a motion exists)

# #7 – Speaking out of turn

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One member speaks at a time, after being recognized by the chair

Members cannot interrupt unless they make an interrupting motion

- Question of privilege (e.g. can't hear)
- Point of order
- Appeal
- Division of the assembly

# #6 – Voting on amendments and the underlying motion together

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The underlying motion must be debated and voted on separately, regardless of what happens with the amendment

Example: amend the main motion to “host a picnic in October” by striking “October” and inserting “November”

# #5 – Ignoring germaneness

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Amendments and debate must be germane to the pending motion

No unrelated amendments/discussion allowed

Example 1 – amend the main motion to “host a picnic” by adding “in January”

Example 2 – amend the main motion to “host a picnic” by adding “and pay Jason \$500 for his presentation”



## #4 – Not following the agenda

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The agenda is the roadmap for the meeting, and it must be followed under parliamentary procedure

One member can “call for the orders of the day”

Deviating from the agenda requires a two-thirds vote to “suspend the rules” or amend an adopted agenda

# #3 – “Tabling”

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Under Robert’s Rules, “tabling” is not a motion

- Lay on the table
- Take from the table

Lay on the table is often used incorrectly

- In order only to temporarily set aside the motion and take up a more urgent matter
- NOT used to kill a motion
- NOT the same as “postponing”
- Remember to take from the table

# #2 – “Question!”: improper handling of Previous question motion

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What does it mean to “move the previous question” or “call the question”?

The previous question is NOT an interrupting motion and CANNOT be ordered by a single member!

Does it require a second?

- Yes

Does it require a vote?

- Yes

## #2 – Improper handling of Previous question motion

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What vote is required to order the previous question?

- Two-thirds, since it limits a member's right to debate

If the previous question is ordered, you still have to vote on the underlying motion

By the way, the previous question is NOT an interrupting motion, CANNOT be ordered by a single member, and requires a two-thirds vote!

# #1 – Not knowing your rights

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Basic rights of members:

- attend meetings
- make motions
- debate
- vote

If a motion affects your basic rights, it usually requires a two-thirds vote

# #1 – Not knowing your rights

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You have the right to know what's going on

- “Request for information... “: “...what are we debating?” or “...what are we voting on?”
- Raise a question of privilege if you can't hear/see

You can ask about proper procedure

- “Parliamentary inquiry, can I make an amendment by... ?”

# #1 – Not knowing your rights

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You have the right to fair meetings:

- Dictatorships are not allowed under Robert's Rules
- Point of order – point out a breach in the rules
- Appeal - if there is a disagreement with the chair's ruling, the assembly decides the matter
- “Division!” – used to question the results of the voice vote
  - Or you can even move to count the vote

# Questions?

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# Thanks!

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