

THE “DIRTY DOZEN”

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Note: References are to *Robert’s Rules of Order Newly Revised* (12th ed.). These references use an abbreviated prefix of “RONR” followed by the section and paragraph numbers.

1. Motion to Postpone to next year or improper use of the motion to *Commit* or *Refer*

- a. Any attempt to postpone a motion (i) beyond the current session when an organization meets less than quarterly, or (ii) beyond the next regular business session if the organization meets at least quarterly, is out of order (RONR 14:6).
- b. It is also out of order if postponement would kill the main motion (RONR 14:9).
- c. The motion to *Commit* or *Refer* is out of order if it is obviously absurd or would defeat the purpose of the main motion (RONR 13:9).

2. Calling “Question”

- a. Calls of “Question!” by members from their seats are not motions for the *Previous Question* and are disorderly if another member is speaking or seeking recognition (RONR 16:20).
- b. The *Previous Question* motion requires a 2/3 vote (RONR 16:5[7]). Care should be taken to understand the rules that protect the members’ rights with respect to debate (RONR 16:6).
- c. The *Previous Question* motion is out of order in committees (RONR 16:4).

3. Motion to *Lay on the Table*

- a. In ordinary assemblies, the motion to *Lay on the Table* is out of order if the evident intent is to kill or avoid dealing with a measure (RONR 17:2).
- b. It is not in order to move to lay a pending question on the table if there is evidently no other matter urgently requiring immediate attention (RONR 17:14).
- c. It is proper for, and the chair can ask, the maker of this motion to state the reason first before accepting the motion to *Lay on the Table* (RONR 17:3[5]).

4. Motion to Close Nominations

- a. The motion to close nominations is out of order if a member is **seeking the floor** to make a nomination (RONR 31:2[3]).
- b. The chair can close nominations by asking if there are further nominations and receiving no response. Otherwise, a 2/3 vote is required to close nominations (RONR 31:4).

5. Motion to *Adjourn* (RONR 21:3; 21:6)

- a. The **privileged motion** to *Adjourn* is high ranking and not debatable nor amendable.

- b. The motion to *Adjourn* is **not a privileged motion** if any of the following exists:
 - (1) the motion is qualified in any way (such as adjourn at a future time);
 - (2) a time for adjourning has already been established by a motion or rule; or
 - (3) the effect of the motion, if adopted, would be to dissolve the assembly with no provision for another meeting.
- c. If **any** of the conditions in “b” apply, the motion to *Adjourn* is treated like any other main motion (more particularly called an incidental main motion) and **is debatable**. In that case, it cannot interrupt another pending motion.
- d. If **none** of the conditions in “b” apply, then the motion to *Adjourn* retains its privileged character regardless of whether business is pending, i.e. it is not debatable (RONR 21:2).

6. Reading papers (not requiring action by the assembly) (RONR 33:20)

- a. If any member objects, a member has no right to read from-or to have the secretary read from-any paper or book as part of his speech without permission of the assembly.
- b. Action of the assembly granting the request to read a paper can be reconsidered at any time until the reading is concluded.

7. Improper use of a Point of Order (or to “raise a question of order”) when a Request for Information (formerly Point of Information) or Parliamentary Inquiry is desired

- a. A *Point of Order* is a motion that brings to the attention of the chair a **breach** of the assembly's rules (RONR 23:1). It calls upon the **chair to rule** whether the *Point of Order* is “well taken” or “not well taken” (RONR 23:15). **A Point of Order is not used to make an inquiry.**
- b. A *Request for Information* is a **request** directed to the chair, or through the chair, for information **relevant to the current business**, but **not** related to parliamentary procedure. It is not a debatable motion though it may be accompanied by a brief explanation as necessary (RONR 33:6; 33:2[5]).
- c. A *Parliamentary Inquiry* is an **inquiry** directed to the chair for information on parliamentary procedure or an organization's rules **relevant to the current business**. It is not a debatable motion though it may be accompanied by a brief explanation as necessary (RONR 33:3; 33:2[5]).
- d. The chair must ensure that a *Request for Information* and a *Parliamentary Inquiry* are used as **true questions** and do not become debate. Members may not carry on discussion or address each other directly (See item 9 below). **A Request for Information or Parliamentary Inquiry is not used to make statements or provide information to the assembly.**

8. Chair entering into debate; gaveling through a motion

- a. The chair must not enter into debate on the merits of pending questions (RONR 43:29). This rule is relaxed in small boards and committees (RONR 49:21[7]; 50:25).
- b. To participate in debate, the individual must relinquish the chair until the pending main question has been disposed of (RONR 43:29).

- c. The right of members to debate or introduce secondary motions cannot be cut off by the chair's attempt to put a question to vote so quickly that no member can get the floor (RONR 43:7).

9. Members directing remarks at each other

Members of an assembly cannot address one another directly, but must address all remarks through the chair (RONR 33:9; RONR 43:22).

10. Monopolizing debate with only pros or cons

- a. The chair should alternate assignment of the floor between members in favor and members opposed to a motion as far as possible (RONR 42:9[3]).
- b. In the author's experience, this has been quite difficult to accomplish in small groups.

11. Monopolizing debate by individual members

- a. The general rule is that there is no debate on a matter until it is brought before the assembly in the form of a motion proposing a specific action (RONR 43:4). This rule is relaxed in small boards and committees (RONR 49:21[4]; RONR 50:25).
- b. If there are no other rules, each member can speak no more than 10 minutes per speech and no more than twice on each debatable motion per day (except *Appeal*) (RONR 43:8; 43:12).
- c. A member is not entitled to the floor a second time on the immediately pending question on the same day so long as any member who has not spoken on that question claims the floor (RONR 43:13). The chair can use this rule to help keep the debate "on track" and minimize the monopolization of debate by individual members.
- d. The debate rules may be changed (e.g. from 10 minute speeches to 2 minute speeches) as required by the needs of the organization (RONR 43:15).

12. Remarks and their relationship to the minutes

- a. The minutes should contain a record of what was *done* at the meeting, not what was *said* by the members. The minutes must never reflect the secretary's opinion, favorable or otherwise, on anything done or said (RONR 48:2).
- b. An "assembly's proceedings" are not the same as "minutes", even if published. The minutes are the official record (RONR 48:16).

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