

## Academic Senate's Parliamentary Procedures

As stated in our "[Procedures](#)" section, "Meetings of the Academic Senate strive to follow Robert's Rules of Order."

- Our meetings homepage includes links to an overview of [Robert's Rules](#) as well as a "[Cheat Sheet](#)" that spells the most common motions and how they work.

In my experience, a significant number of people are not directly familiar with Robert's Rules of Order and kinda/sorta learn by observing what happens during meetings. This worksheet focuses on:

1. explaining the basic goal of parliamentary procedures, and
2. addressing some common confusions.

Understanding the basics of the rules makes them helpful rather than a pretentious superstition.

### *The goal of any parliamentary procedure*

- Robert's Rules is designed to promote robust debates, while navigating time constraints for discussions.
- The procedure is also designed to ensure that a single person or a simple majority of individuals within a body do not dominate proceedings.
- Another basic goal is to ensure that everyone focuses on the same topic at the same time.
- Finally, the procedure is meant to make somewhat predictable when agenda items appear with a meeting, so that interested people can drop in for specific items without having to stay for the entire meeting.

### *Motions – Why? And isn't the whole "seconding" stuff dumb?*

- The basic purpose of a motion is to *focus attention* on a single question and make explicit what proposed action is being debated.
- The reason a "second" is required is to ensure there is more interest in the motion than a single individual. Otherwise, deliberation could be driven by a Jeopardy-style rush to be the first to motion.
- Once a motion is made and seconded, then it has to be voted on or postponed/tabled. If you have a competing motion in mind, then don't second the other person's motion.
  - If someone else seconds, then you should enter into debate in order to convince people to vote no on the motion.
  - As part of your reasoning, share the alternative motion that you would propose if Senate votes down the current motion.

### *Voting*

- It is okay to vote "no."
- Some common reasons to vote no:
  - You disagree with a motion.
  - You think Academic Senate is unnecessarily rushing a decision.
  - You think there hasn't been enough information shared to justify a motion. And you think that with more time, the relevant information could be shared without undermining the proposed motion.
- If a motion is voted down, it isn't dead forever. It can be reconsidered at a later meeting (or even later in the same meeting). For example, a motion might be voted down, but then

a competing motion is subsequently voted down. The ongoing debate might persuade some people to change their views on the first motion, which might then be taken up again.

- “Abstain”
  - You are always welcome to abstain on a vote. When you do so, ***your abstention counts neither as a yes nor a no***. Your abstention only counts toward quorum (we need a majority of voting members to be present in order to take any action).
  - Reasons to abstain:
    - You weren’t present for a previous meeting and the motion is to adopt minutes for that meeting.
    - You are genuinely conflicted about a motion, and you do not think any further information or deliberation would clarify your views.
    - You are completely indifferent to a motion and don’t think it will actually help or harm anything.
    - You didn’t fulfill your duty as a representative to review the available materials related to an action before a meeting and the discussion did not provide the needed understanding to make an informed vote.
  - Bad reasons to abstain:
    - You don’t feel comfortable voting yes/no because it will upset a colleague.
    - You don’t think enough information has been provided to justify a motion, yet more information could be acquired and the motion could be taken up in a later meeting. –If you believe this is true, then vote no!

### ***How We Vote***

- Voice votes
  - When in person, we can use “voice votes.” This process asks for collective “ayes,” then asks for collective “no-es”, then for abstentions.
  - So long as there is an obvious difference in number between ayes and no-es, then the vote is decided.
  - If there is any dissent, then the minutes record the individuals who dissented with the understanding that everyone else voted with the majority or abstained.
  - If someone abstains, then they are always recorded as abstaining.
- Roll call vote
  - Roll call vote means that every individual is separately registered as voting yes, no, or abstain.
  - This doesn’t require reading off everyone’s names. It requires explicit action by every individual, such as using the “yes” and “no” reactions within Zoom or typing “I abstain” into the zoom chat.
  - Roll calls are used when a vote is close, or if we are meeting virtually. (It is necessary with virtual meetings because voice votes cannot be reliably gauged over microphones.)
- General consent votes
  - The chair of the meeting asks, “Is there any objection to this motion?” If there is no objection, then action is taken because the voting members have unanimously consented to the motion.