

# **HOW TO HOLD A GOOD MEETING**



## **RUSTY'S RULES OF ORDER**

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# **WHY SHOULD MEETINGS HAVE STRUCTURE?**

Have you ever found yourself two hours into a meeting, with no decisions having been made? A poorly run meeting can easily find itself derailed, or dominated by a handful of voices.

Good meetings, however, have relatively lively participation from most people present. They get a lot of work done and move along quickly. They are well-organized and democratic, and everyone's voice has equal weight. They don't wander off into subjects that don't concern the organization at that time or get derailed by irrelevant arguments. They have enough formal structure that disagreements can be settled smoothly and actionable decisions can be made.

This pamphlet covers the basics of a good meeting and then teaches "Rusty's Rules of Order," a simplified version of Robert's Rules of Order that prepares us for the moment when we may have hundreds of active members in the room, all ready to democratically take collective action.

## **BUILDING OUR FOUNDATION**

The purpose of a meeting is decision-making. There are a few building blocks that a good meeting will have in place to smoothly facilitate making decisions. To that end, let's start with our foundation: agenda, voice, vote, chair, and notetaker.

## **Agenda**

A good meeting starts with a good plan, otherwise known as an **Agenda**. A clear agenda lets everyone in attendance know what is going to be discussed and when, and a well-structured agenda keeps the meeting flowing smoothly and naturally.

The first few items of business on an agenda should set the stage for the meeting: take a roll of who is present, decide who will chair the meeting, who will take notes, review the notes from the last meeting, and approve the agenda for this meeting. Doing this allows everyone to review the previous meeting's minutes for accuracy, and gives an opportunity for people who want to add items onto the agenda that may have been overlooked.

Once an agenda has been approved, we move into **Old Business**. Old Business is where we report on the progress of previous decisions: any previous decisions that have not been resolved should be reported on during this section.

Following that we reach **New Business**: the heart of the decision-making process. Any decisions that need to be made during this process are brought as a series of **Motions**: succinct descriptions of who, what, where, when, why, and how a decision should be made. Each motion is dealt with in turn, and the agenda does not move on to the next item until a motion is voted upon or tabled.

Finally, when everything in New Business is completed, we close out the meeting with the time-honored wobbly tradition of **Good & Welfare**. Organizing the working class can be both rewarding and exhausting in equal measure, and the last few minutes of the meeting should allow for anyone to make announcements, or to just check in on what they've been doing. This can occur either before or after

**Adjourning**, although we recommend doing it before adjourning so that this time can help build solidarity and community between workers, and serves as a good communal exhale after the business of the meeting.

## **Voice/Vote**

One of the most important things that should be outlined from the beginning of the meeting is **who has voice, and who has vote**. Voice is the right to speak on matters in the meeting; a member without Voice should be a silent observer. Vote is the right to vote on motions in the meeting; a member without vote does not cast a vote, and does not count towards the total number of voters.

By default, people at a meeting should have both voice and vote, but exceptions do exist. While there should never be a situation where a member has vote but no voice, there are times when a person present has **voice but no vote**. This is usually when someone is a guest: external organizers in workplace committees may have voice, but they should not have the right to vote in a committee of workers from one workplace. Sometimes committees will say that the chair has voice but no vote; this is in deference to the outsized influence a chair can have over the course of a meeting. If this is the case, the chair should limit themselves to the role of smoothly facilitating a meeting, and avoid weighing in on the business of the day. Occasionally a meeting may allow a guest or observer to be present with **no vote or voice**; this person should observe silently, but otherwise not interact with the business of the meeting in any way.

## **Chair**

The Chair of a meeting is its facilitator and guide, helping to facilitate good conversation and knowing when to move things along. Chairing a meeting may seem intimidating to many members at first, but most of the work of being a good chair is just following the flow of the agenda. If you think of a meeting as a car in motion, the chair is the driver, and the agenda is your GPS navigation guide.

A committee should regularly rotate and train the meeting chairs, giving every worker the opportunity, and the responsibility, or chairing a meeting in turn. The more familiar everyone becomes with the act of chairing, the more comfortable and familiar they each will be with how to participate in the business of the meeting. What you want is a whole room full of trained chairs, all keeping an eye on the process and the big picture as well as taking part as members.

One way to prepare chairs is for a trainee to take on the role, with the backup of an experienced chair. Another is to offer training before the meeting or between meetings. It's also a good idea to use committee meetings as practice. Even if there are only three people, always conduct your meeting as if you were chairing a hundred people--so that one day you can.

One of the most important, and most intimidating, parts of being a chair is knowing when to steer the conversation away from what is being discussed. A member may bring up something unrelated to the current business being discussed, the conversation may have naturally meandered onto a different topic, or perhaps a civil debate has started getting personal. In these instances, it is the chair's responsibility to rule something **out of order**, and bring the discussion back to the business at hand. Declaring something out of order should

not be seen as a judgment on the speaker, and a chair must not use this power to silence people they disagree with personally. To return to our driving metaphor: when a detour has taken you off-track, the chair declares something out of order to bring the car back to the agreed-upon road.

## **Notetaker**

Perhaps even more important than a chair, every meeting should have a notetaker who records the business of the meeting. This should not be a one-for-one transcript, but rather a succinct summary of the discussion and decisions. These notes become the minutes of the meeting, and should be freely available to everyone who attends so that they can easily reference what decisions were made, by whom, and what work needs to be done. A Chair should always be mindful of the notetaker's speed in taking notes, and should gently pause conversation to allow them to get caught up whenever needed. Even the most impeccable memory benefits from clear meeting minutes. It is really bad to rely on memory alone.

## **HOW TO MAKE A DECISION**

The key to making a decision is for the group to clarify what that decision is. We do that by crafting a motion that is clear, complete, and accessible.

### **How to Craft a Motion**

A well-crafted motion should explain six things: WHO is going to do something, WHAT they are going to do, WHERE it will be done, WHEN it will be done, WHY it needs to be done, and HOW it will be

completed. Answering all of these questions in your motion makes it clear what the benchmarks are for successfully executing the motion, the accountability structure, as well as explaining clearly and concisely why the mover of the motion feels this motion is necessary. Let's look at a pair of motions to see this in action:

WHEREAS, the Literature Committee has reviewed the previous edition of Rusty's Rules of Order, and

WHEREAS Rusty's Rules of Order is an official piece of IWW Literature that is integral to holding smooth and efficient business meetings for the Union, and

WHEREAS the Literature Committee has made changes to this document with the goal of making the document more clear and concise,

BE IT RESOLVED that the Literature Committee Chair post the revised edition of Rusty's Rules of Order to the GEB on the InterWob forums for ratification as publication as official IWW Literature within two weeks.

We can see all six questions answered in the above motion. Who needs to take action (the NARA Literature Committee Chair), What needs to be done (submit the revised Rusty's Rules of Order for approval), Where it will be done (the InterWob forums), When it will be done (within two weeks), Why it should be done (all of the Whereas clauses), and How it will be done (via making a forum post).

Next, let's look at a motion that may look nice on paper, but misses some of these questions:

WHEREAS the workers at Wal\*Mart have been fired by their boss,

BE IT RESOLVED that the Greater Chicago GMB issue a statement of support for the fired Wal\*Mart workers.

This is a clear and concise motion, but it leaves our key questions unanswered. Who specifically is going to make the statement? Where and when will the statement be made? What specifically is the statement being made? Why does this matter to the Greater Chicago GMB? How will the statement be made public?

Adding additional Whereas clauses to provide more context (the Why of the motion) would be helpful. Explain that the workers were organizing with the IWW and were fired because of their organizing. This will help speed up discussion on the main motion. Likewise, the motion should specify who is going to issue the statement and when, or else there's nobody to hold accountable for completion. Specificity prevents headaches, and allows everyone to clearly tell if something has or has not been done.

## **ROBERT'S RULES REDUCED**

A few basic rules need to be in place to carry out the making and passing of a motion. Robert's Rules of Order are complex and impractical for use in small group meetings, though the basic ideas are sound.

A **motion** can be made by anyone with both voice and vote, whenever there is not an active motion being considered, and when the Chair has recognized them to speak. Exceptions to this are a motion to table, or a motion to amend the current main motion.

**Once a motion is on the floor, anything that doesn't pertain directly to that motion is out of order**, and must be cut off promptly before discussion is derailed. You can come back to it later.

If an **amendment** is suggested, the original mover of the motion may say that they are “friendly” to the amendment. If so, the amendment is immediately adopted. If not, discussion shifts to the amendment, and the amendment only. The previous list of speakers waiting to speak should be put on pause, a new list started, and the chair should make sure that discussion pertains to the amendment on the floor. Once discussion on the amendment ends, a vote is held. If the motion fails, the amendment is defeated; if it passes, the main motion should be adjusted immediately, read back out, and then discussion resumes where it left off.

A Chair can rule an amendment out of order if it is not relevant to the main motion, de-rails the motion, or is such a big change that it should be made as its own motion. For instance, if the main motion deals with supporting strikers in one workplace, and someone amends to also give funding to a separate campaign on an unrelated issue, the chair should note that this is best handled as its own motion and rule it out of order. Likewise, if a main motion calls for \$500 in funding and someone moves to amend it to \$25,000, the chair should note that the difference in funds dramatically changes the purpose of the motion and rule it out of order.

A “**point of order**” is always in order. In other words, it can be made at any time. You just say “point of order” and make your point. It should either be for clarification of the motion at hand or clarification of the process. Use it to point out that the speaker is not addressing the business at hand, that the chair has overlooked some part of the

process, something directly related to the process, not the content, of the meeting.

“**Call the question**” is a common point of procedure. This means that this discussion is going on too long, the ground has been covered, that people are repeating themselves, and let’s vote on it now.

## **A SAMPLE MEETING**

You have to set a time and place and frequency for your meetings. Call the first one, and put this on the first agenda. No time is good for everybody. Do the best you can, and remember it can always be changed. Get a place that’s quiet, private, and doesn’t belong to one of the members. That’s a possible power problem, and could make people feel uncomfortable to speak candidly on the business at hand.

The first part of an **agenda** is the order of business. Take the one from the IWW constitution for starters, and modify it if need be. It’s a good one, tried and true. The chair prepares a proposed agenda, leaving space for additions. The agenda has to be approved by vote of the group.

### **The Agenda, One Item at A Time**

The chair should be selected or ratified at the start of the meeting. Some groups will select a chair at the close of the previous meeting. If this is the case, the chair should arrive early, set up chairs for the membership, prepare a proposed agenda big enough to be easily read by all, and greet people as they arrive.

## Sample agenda:

- Call to order
- Choose recording secretary
- Read and approve minutes from previous meeting
- Agenda review and approval
- Brief announcements and communications
- Reports
- Old business
- New business
- Good and Welfare

When it's time to start the chair **calls the meeting to order**. We recommend doing this at the exact moment the meeting was scheduled for and let the latecomers be late. One of the most important things in a good meeting is to avoid wasting people's precious time. Let the late ones be late and miss out (they can read the minutes), and reward the prompt ones by not wasting their time.

**Choose a recording secretary.** This person takes the minutes. The minutes should be clear, legible, and brief. They must include motions made and whether or not they carried, how they are to be implemented, by when and by whom. That's the meat of it. Also include time and place of the meeting, who chaired and recorded, who was present. You can leave out the discussion on questions usually. Get the bones and keep it clear and brief.

**Read the minutes from the previous meeting.** The decisions made at the previous meeting should be read, along with how the motion was to be implemented, by whom, and so on. This way everybody has it clear what has been decided and who said they would do what by when. That's your jumping-off point for the current meeting. It

keeps you honest. It's necessary for making the next agenda. Don't shortchange the minutes.

**Approve the agenda or amend and approve.** Make sure people know they have a say in this. It's more important than the average newcomer realizes.

**Brief announcements and communications.** The key word here is brief. These items require no discussion. If they generate agenda items for new business, get them on the agenda and move on. The chair should take efforts to keep things moving quickly. Announcements should be relevant to the group, and if they are lengthy either have them in written form for interested parties to read later or have people who want details talk to the person later. Keep it rolling.

**Reports** also require no discussion, except for possible clarification. If they generate business to be discussed and acted upon, they go to new business or are sent to the appropriate committee. Reports should be kept brief, be provided in writing, and if they are long and do not pertain to any Old or New Business, can be left for members to read on their own time. It is really important to have reports submitted in writing, to allow for members to review them at their own speed or to reference when needed, and to get them into the minutes in full; your group may prefer to put them in an appendix. "I've got a report here from the Education & Outreach committee about our new website design. It's long, so folks can read it after the meeting if you're interested." Reports include those of officers, standing or special committees, delegates, attendees of events or activities.

Also report on the implementation of previously made decisions of the group. "Last meeting, we resolved to provide food to striking workers.

Mei and Jordan were in charge of completing this; can they report how that is going?”

Now that the reports and announcements are done, we're into the decision-making part of the meeting. We have hopefully resolved all of that swiftly, leaving time for the main Business of the meeting.

**Business is anything that requires a decision and/or implementation by the group, and must involve a motion.**

**Old business** was once new business, but we're not done with it quite yet. Maybe it got tabled until we got more information. Maybe we ran out of time to deal with it last meeting. Whatever business wasn't satisfactorily completed last meeting is now old business. Since old business is something unresolved from a previous meeting, we address them before moving into New Business.

A **new business** item is best presented as a motion. The maker of the motion should have taken the time to think it out pretty well, maybe workshopped it with others, and should have a pretty clear idea of what needs to happen, thus saving us all a lot of time. We went over how to craft a motion earlier in this document, but to recap: the motion should clearly explain who is doing an action, what and where they will do it, by when it will be completed, why it needs to be done, and how it is to be done. “I move that we authorize our treasurer to spend up to \$200 on a new printer.”

Once a motion has been made, the chair should repeat the motion, both for the sake of the membership and to help the recording secretary get it right in the minutes. The chair says: “Is there a second?” If nobody seconds it then that's that. It's not much of an idea and we can get on with the business. If one more person wants to discuss or support it, they second it to indicate that it's not totally out

of left field, and worthy of our time. Then the chair asks, “Is there any opposition to the motion?”

We don't really need to hear three people say why they think it's a good idea if nobody disagrees. The chair should direct the discussion with this in mind. Ask if anybody wants to speak against the motion. Ask if anybody is unclear on it or has hesitations or reservations about it. Draw them out, to be sure it's adequately discussed, but ride hard on it to avoid waste of time. Keep the discussion to the topic. The chair has to tactfully interrupt if somebody is wandering off the track. Membership should also do this as needed. It's a bit tricky, but very learnable.

If conversation is dragging on and people are starting to repeat themselves, the chair or any member can **call the question**, which is a request to end discussion and head straight to a vote. Discussion is paused, and everyone votes on whether or not they're ready to vote. This saves time by empowering the group to decide when further discussion is unneeded. If the vote passes, discussion is ended and the group then votes on the motion. If it fails, discussion resumes.

Often you'll need a **break (or recess)** to get through a two-hour meeting with a clearheaded group. Five to ten minutes is often enough to allow people to focus back in on the meeting once business resumes. Someone can make a motion for a break, if it isn't already scheduled in the agenda.

**Tabling** is another common term; a tabled motion is postponed until a future time. This can be done if the group is missing vital information, or if the meeting is going on for too long. The group should quickly decide whether tabling is needed; discussion on this motion defeats the point of the motion.

The last item is **good and welfare**. This is a more general discussion of things pertaining to the good and welfare of the group and its members. It's less structured, more free-form. It includes feedback for the meeting and the chair, if somebody needs a place to live or a part for their car, or talk about how the group is doing and the direction it's moving. Stuff that matters, but doesn't really fit into the motion-making-and-implementation mode. It's the community part and deserves time and attention.

Some groups then elect the next chair, to be ratified at the start of the next meeting. This gives chairs the chance to prepare an agenda and train. Agree on the next meeting time and place and somebody can move to adjourn. No matter how good your meetings get, you'll rarely hear anyone speak against a motion to adjourn.

# **RUSTY'S RULES OF ORDER**

These are rules and procedures for meetings, adapted from the previous edition written by the Portland General Membership Branch of the IWW.

Decisions are made by a majority vote of branch members present in good standing. Dues cards will be checked at the beginning of each meeting. Nonmembers may be seated by decision of the group, with voice but no vote.

Meetings should be businesslike and efficient, lasting, in most cases, no more than two hours. The tone should be one of mutual respect. Personal attacks and Safer Spaces violations will not be tolerated; we debate ideas, not people.

Members may speak only when recognized by the chair. When speaking in the meeting, address the group as a whole. Private conversations disrupt meetings and deprive members of information.

# **AGENDA**

The agenda follows this format:

- Call to order
- Card check report
- Choose chair and recording secretary
- Read and approve minutes of previous meeting
- Review, amend, and approve agenda
- Brief announcements and communications
- Reports
- Old business
- New business
- Good and Welfare
- Adjournment

Announcements, Communications, and Reports must be brief, or submitted in writing. There is no discussion, beyond brief clarification. No decisions are made, unless they are so obvious as to require no discussion. If any discussion is required, it should be brought as New Business.

Items under Old and New Business begin with the statement (or restatement) of a main motion.

## **MAKING A MAIN MOTION**

A Main Motion concerns business to be carried out by the group. There may be only one main motion on the floor at a given time.

The motion is stated, beginning with: "I move that" The motion should be clear and concise.

If the motion is not seconded it fails.

If the motion is seconded, it is repeated by the chair, to establish the exact wording. The maker of the motion either agrees to the wording or corrects it. Once it has been entered into the minutes, the chair calls for discussion.

The chair begins discussion by asking if there is discussion. If not, the vote is taken. If so, discussion begins with opposition.

Discussion goes back and forth between favor and opposition until all relevant opinions have been heard. No member may speak twice on a motion until each member that wishes to speak has been heard. Possible exception to this rule would be to allow the maker of the motion to explain and clarify. Members may not repeat a point that has already been made. If someone else makes your point before you get your turn, just say, "I pass," when called upon, or that you agree with the previous speaker's point.

A member may offer an Amendment during discussion. It should be stated in exact wording. The chair asks the maker if she accepts that amendment. If yes, the amendment is "Friendly", and is adopted. If not, and the chair says the amendment is germane, the group discusses and votes on the amendment just as they would if it were a motion. If an amendment passes or is deemed friendly, then the motion is updated and read back to the group. If it fails, it is abandoned. Then the discussion continues on the main motion.

The maker of the motion may Withdraw the motion at any time before the vote.

The vote is taken when discussion is completed. If discussion is dragging on, a member may Call the Question, requesting to end discussion and move straight to a vote. Call the Question is a Procedural Motion (see below).

The chair should again ask if there is any opposition. If there is none, a motion passes by acclaim. If there is opposition, the chair calls roll, and the notetaker records the votes in the minutes. Once the votes are tallied, the notetaker announces the final tally, and the chair announces whether the motion has passed or failed.

Before moving on, double-check that it is clear how the motion will be implemented. Ideally, this should be specified in the motion itself.

## **PROCEDURAL POINTS AND MOTIONS**

Points of Procedure and Procedural Motions speak to the process of the meeting. They are in order at any time and must be dealt with right away, before going on with the meeting.

### **Procedural Motions:**

A **Procedural Motion** must be seconded and voted on by the group. This should be done quickly, so as not to distract from the main business at hand.

The chair may make a point of procedure, or suggest (entertain) a procedural motion.

- To Table (includes when it is to be dealt with)
- To Refer (to committee or wherever)
- To Adjourn
- To Recess (take a break)
- To Overrule the Chair
- To Replace the Chair
- To Call the Question (call for a vote)

- To Censure (the group tells an individual member that her behavior in the meeting is unacceptable and will not be tolerated)
- To Expel (must be preceded by a motion to censure, except in case of immediate danger. This motion expels the individual from the meeting, not the organization.)

## **Points of Procedure:**

The maker raises her hand and speaks out: "**Point of Procedure**" (or "**Point of Order**"). The chair must recognize the member immediately, and they do not need a second.

The chair may rule on a point of procedure. The ruling of the chair may be challenged by a member and put to a vote.

Point of Personal Privilege: It's too hot, too stuffy, can't hear the speaker, etc.

Point of Procedure (or Order): This is a suggestion as to how to carry out the business better. It is ruled on by the chair. The ruling can be challenged and the point made into a motion. Don't get too carried away here, please.

## **The Chair**

The Chair is elected by the group and has a mandate to carry out the will of the group as regards the procedure of the meeting. The chair speaks with the authority of the group, for the group.

The chair should get to the meeting early to prepare for the meeting, set up chairs, etc. She should make up a proposed agenda that is legible and visible to the whole room.

The chair cannot vote, make motions nor discuss motions. If the chair really needs to do these things, she must pass the chair on to another member for the duration of that item of business. This shouldn't happen very often.

The chair is to oversee the process of the meeting to ensure that the following criteria are met:

That the business moves along quickly. The chair must keep track of the time. A timekeeper may be appointed by the chair if needed. A meeting should take no more than two hours unless agreed upon by the group. Time limits may be set on discussion as needed.

That the Agenda is followed. That each item of business is taken care of.

That each member who wishes to participate is encouraged and given that opportunity. That none dominates the meeting and speaks excessively at the expense of the others.

That the meeting is carried out in accordance with the rules and procedures agreed upon by the group.

That the process is clear, understandable, accessible and transparent to the members.

That an atmosphere and tone of mutual respect is maintained. The chair, in the name of the group, does not allow disrespect, insult or personal attack in the meeting.

The chair may not take part in the business of the meeting. They can and should offer suggestions for the sake of clarity and to move the business along. The chair may suggest (entertain) a motion or procedure.

The duties of the Chair should be rotated, but a member should chair several times in succession, in order to learn and refine the skill of chairing. The group critiques the chair at the end of each meeting in order to improve that skill. The ability to chair a meeting well is considered to be a basic skill and necessity, to be learned and perfected by each member, over time, as a part of the work of the organization.

## **Minutes**

Minutes are to be taken by the recording secretary, elected at the beginning of each meeting. The minutes are to be clear and legible, following the standard format. Minutes should be accessible to, and only to, all members in good standing, and must be present at each meeting. Minutes from the previous meeting are to be accessible to the chair in order to make up the proposed agenda.

## **This is the Minutes Format:**

- Date and place of meeting.
- Type of meeting (monthly branch meeting, for instance).
- Number of members present. Name of chair and secretary.
- Called to order- at what time.
- Cards checked.
- Minutes read and approved or amended.
- Agenda approved.
- Synopsis of reports. This must be brief. Longer reports may be submitted in written form, for inclusion in the minutes.
- Old Business, then New Business, to be recorded as follows:
  - Name of member (maker of motion)
  - M/S (moved and seconded): That we... (Motion stated in exact wording)
  - Carried or Failed (tally of votes - number Yes, number No, number Abstained)
  - Withdrawn, Amended to... (exact wording)
  - Tabled or Referred (to when or whom).
  - To be implemented how, by whom, by what time, and reported back by whom, when. Example: James M/S: That we send \$100 to the striking tap-dancers. Carried 23Y,5N, 6A. Mike will write a check and mail it this week, and report back to the next branch meeting.
- Synopsis of Good and Welfare. Next chair. Next meeting time and place.
- Adjourned - at what time.

*These rules and procedures are to be made available to all members. They will be amended and updated as needed, by decision of the Body.*

# **GLOSSARY**

Agenda:	The plan for the meeting
Chair:	Facilitator and guide, following the agenda and keeping the meeting on track
Good & Welfare:	A time to build solidarity and community
Minutes:	Meeting notes taken by the recording secretary and made accessible to members in good standing
Motion:	A formal proposal for the group to vote on, including who, what, where, when, why, and how
New Business:	Any decisions that need to be made, brought as a series of motions
Recording secretary:	Notetaker who records the business of the meeting
Old Business:	Any unresolved business from the previous meeting
Point of Order:	Clarification of the motion or the process, must be addressed immediately
Procedural Motion:	A motion from the body or chair regarding procedure, must be addressed immediately
Tabling:	Postponing a motion until a future time
Voice:	The right to speak on matters in the meeting
Vote:	The right to vote on motions in a meeting