

# Robert's Rules Quick Reference Guide

prepared for WOU Faculty Senate

## Why Robert's Rules?

Correct use of Robert's Rules allows large groups to make decisions based on the opinion of the majority. Robert's Rules are designed to give due regard to all members' opinions in an efficient way. When using Robert's Rules, follow these best practices:

- Critique ideas, not people
- Assume positive intent
- Listen for understanding
- Keep comments focused on the current issue
- Speak only when you have the floor

## How do they work?

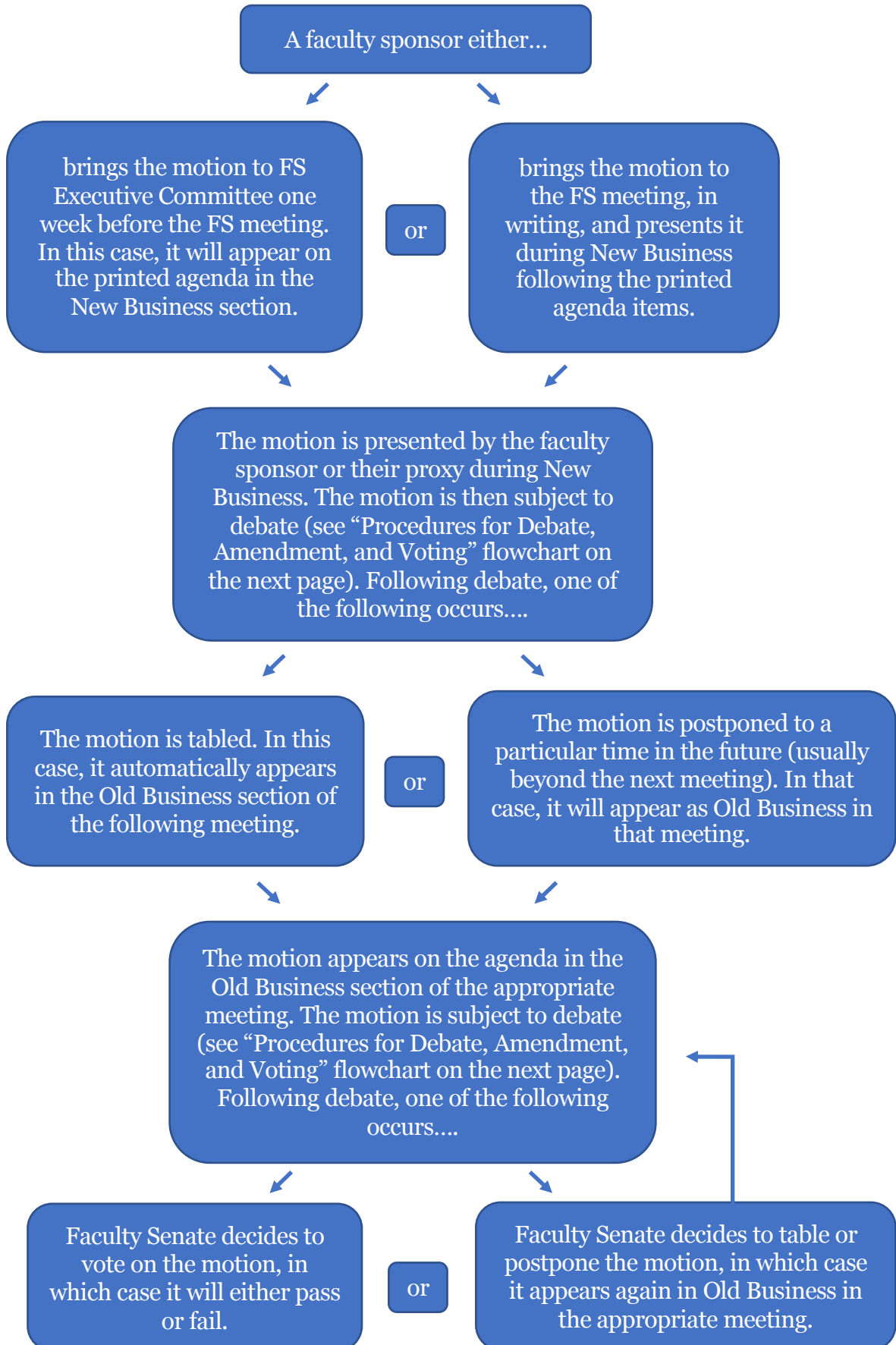
Any faculty member may bring a proposal, called a *main motion*, to Faculty Senate. It is then subject to debate, amendment, and voting by the Faculty Senate. Robert's Rules govern how these procedures take place. See the next two pages for flowcharts that outline the typical procedures that will be followed.

In addition to these procedures, there are some special types of actions that a faculty senator can make. These, along with the verbiage for more typical actions, is summarized in the table below. You can also find this table on the back of your name tag.

### Common Motions During Debate

Motion	You say:	Debatable?	Amendable?	Vote Needed
Amend Item X	"I move to amend item X to read...."	Yes	Yes	Majority
Table (next mtg.)	"I move to table item X"	No	No	Majority
Postpone (other length of time)	"I move to postpone item X until (insert time/date)"	Yes	Yes	Majority
End debate & vote	"I move the previous question"	No	No	2/3
Kill Item X	"I move to postpone item X indefinitely"	Yes	No	Majority
Reconsider an action	"I move to reconsider our vote on (insert issue)"	Yes	No	Majority
Refer to a Committee	"I move to refer the motion to X committee"	Yes	Yes	Majority
Ask for information	"Point of information" followed by question	n/a	n/a	n/a
Ask about procedure	"Point of Parliamentary Inquiry" followed by question	n/a	n/a	n/a
Remark on noise, etc.	"Point of Privilege" followed by remark	n/a	n/a	Chair decides
Recess Briefly	"I move to recess for (insert amount of time)"	No	Yes	Majority
Adjourn	"I move to adjourn."	No	No	Majority

# How do main motions proceed through Faculty Senate?



# Procedures for Debate, Amendment, and Voting

**Step 1:** Main motion is brought to the floor



**Step 2:** Sponsor of the main motion makes their presentation (this can be skipped if the item is in Old Business)



**Step 3:** Members of the Senate debate the motion. Remember that each senator may only speak twice on each motion, and may only use their second opportunity after everyone who wishes to has spoken once. To speak, you must secure recognition from the Senate President.

During this step, you may want to amend the motion. The same motion can be amended several times, and each amendment must be considered separately.



**Step 4:** After debate on the main motion and any amendments has concluded, senators either.....

Vote to table or postpone, if the motion is in New Business

or

Vote on the motion itself, or to table or postpone, if the motion is in Old Business

## Amendment Loop (optional):

**Step 3a:** If a senator would like to change the motion, they say "I move to amend the motion to read...." followed by their proposed change. Another senator must second the amendment to continue.



**Step 3b:** The senators now debate *the amendment*. During this time, no other amendments to the original motion can be proposed, but senators can make "friendly amendments" to the amendment currently on the floor. (For example, a wording clarification or other small change.)



**Step 3c:** After debate on the amendment is concluded, senators vote on the amendment. Passing the amendment is not the same as passing the main motion.

## Who decides *when* to vote?

There are two ways a vote can be initiated:

- If debate is clearly over, the President may say, "we will now vote on the previous question."
- Alternatively, any senator may use their time on the floor to say, "I move the previous question." This is a *motion to vote*. It must be seconded and receive a 2/3 vote to pass. If it passes, a vote occurs.

This applies to voting on all debatable motions.

# Robert's Rules Quick Reference Guide

prepared for WOU Faculty Senate

## Vocabulary

**Abstention:** An abstention is a decision NOT to vote, and is not counted as a vote. When calculating whether a motion passes or fails, the number of “yeas” are compared to the number of “nays” – abstentions are not included.

**Motion:** A formal proposal by any member of the faculty subject to action by the Faculty Senate. Most motions are one of two types:

- **Main Motions:** Any business brought before the faculty for action. Typically, they concern academic policies or curricular decisions, but are not limited to these topics.
- **Subsidiary Motions:** Motions that address or modify the main motion. Such motions include motions to amend the main motion, table or postpone the main motion, vote on the motion, or refer the main motion to a committee.

There are other types of motions (privileged, incidental, and bring-back) but they are rarely used.

**Postpone:** This is a motion that ends debate on a main motion, delaying it to a specific time in the future (other than the next meeting). This can be used to delay something beyond the next meeting if there is a particular reason to do so (i.e. the passage of the motion is dependent upon some other future, known event) or to delay it briefly (i.e. a 15-minute delay so that information can be obtained). It requires a second, and then a majority vote to pass.

**Postpone Indefinitely (or “kill”):** This motion should only be used to permanently disregard something. It is a way of dismissing business inappropriate to the mission or scope of the Faculty Senate. It is not a way of saying “no” to something – that would be accomplished by voting negatively on the main motion in question.

**Quorum:** The percentage of faculty senators needed to officially vote on business. Technically, no business can happen without a quorum present. Our By-Laws define quorum as the majority of the total number of senators (i.e. greater than 50%).

**Table:** This is a motion that ends debate on a main motion, delaying it until the next meeting, at which point it will appear on the agenda in Old Business. It requires a second, and then a majority vote to pass.

## Sources/Want to Learn More?

All of the information above can be found in Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised, 2011 Edition, which is available on permanent reserve in the library. The Faculty Senate By-Laws state that we use a slightly modified version, so you will find some differences between the book's procedures and ours.

In addition, you may find some online sources helpful. The website [rulesonline.com](http://rulesonline.com) has a digital copy of a slightly older edition of Robert's Rules, and [robertsrules.org](http://robertsrules.org) has several easily-readable charts of motions and meeting order.

Prepared by Leanne Merrill, Summer 2018.