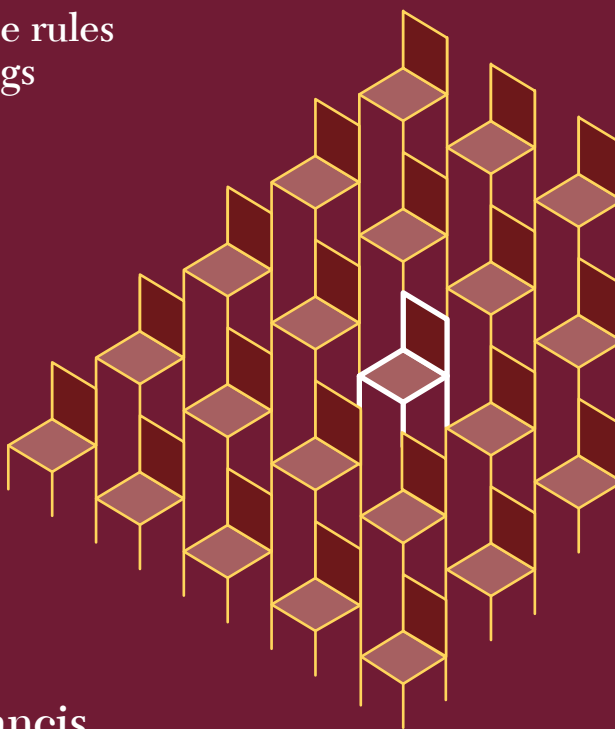


Democratic Rules of Order

9th
EDITION

Easy-to-use rules
for meetings
of any size



Fred Francis
Peg Francis

A Review by Douglas Leiterman, (former parliamentary correspondent)

Fred and Peg Francis have done an amazing job. Their book is absolutely indispensable for anyone who conducts meetings or participates in democratic discussion at any level from parliamentary assemblies to condominium annual meetings. What the Francis' have succeeded in doing is cutting through the forbidding complexities of running a meeting and reducing them to a simple set of common-sense rules which anyone can follow. The disappointments which accompany many meetings can be sharply reduced and democratic participation improved.

Over the years I have chaired or attended hundreds of meetings at the governmental, business, church and social levels and have often been frustrated by the difficulties of properly presiding over such meetings so that everyone can understand the process, and the will of the majority can be formulated and prevail. Much of the difficulty arises from the fact that few have the time or inclination to study the old-style rule books, and are therefore easily intimidated, even tyrannized sometimes, by the very few who know them.

The Francis' book is making an important contribution to democracy. It can be readily adopted by any group, council, union or corporation and will be of lasting benefit. Speaking personally, I have sat through years of parliamentary debate and appreciate the value, and necessity, of achieving consensus in a democratic proceeding by having rules and following them. Up until now, the rules have been exceedingly complex, often confusing, and unsatisfactory at many levels. From here on in, those groups who adopt *Democratic Rules of Order* will find significant improvement in both the tenor of their meetings and the validity of the results.

(Signed) Douglas Leiterman
Toronto, Canada

(Douglas Leiterman was Parliamentary Correspondent for Southam Newspapers, Executive Producer of CBC's "This Hour has Seven Days", chairman of various communications companies and CEO of Motion Picture Bond Company.)

Democratic Rules of Order

NINTH EDITION



Democratic Rules of Order

Easy-to-use rules for
meetings of any size

Fred Francis
Peg Francis

 **Cool Heads**
PUBLISHING

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*Dedicated to
democracy*

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Preface

Are you tired of meetings that lack efficiency... fail to move smoothly through an agenda... lose order and professionalism due to emotional outbursts... or do not foster constructive decision-making that truly represents the wishes of the membership?

You're not alone. But, it doesn't have to be that way!

After years of volunteering their time for community groups - including attending hundreds of professional and non-profit meetings - Peg and Fred Francis recognized the need for a concise, authoritative resource to assist boards of directors, committees, and other organized groups seeking to fairly represent their memberships through hosting efficient, effective meetings.

When they could not find such a resource, they created one. It took several years of refining and input from many executives, parliamentarians and users to perfect the rules, to be sure that each point was crystal clear, and that not a single necessary rule was missing. Introduced in 1994 as *Distinctly Democratic Rules of Order* (changed to *Democratic Rules of Order* in later printings), the easy-to-use book has become a respected and valued reference for thousands of organizations, large and small, and for students being taught the democratic process in

classrooms around the world.

Used by diverse groups

From unions and professional associations to strata councils, churches and non-governmental organizations, *Democratic Rules of Order* is a “pocket guide” setting out a step-by-step process that allows all members to participate in the exchange of ideas and group decision making.

The book can be read in less than an hour and is intentionally small so it is easy to carry to meetings for on-the-spot reference when a question arises.

Easy-to-use format

To make it easy to follow, the book is divided into two parts. The first part consists of organizational structure, member roles, and a step-by-step description for handling the most critical part of any meeting - the decision-making process. It helps the reader navigate through the democratic process of:

- introducing ideas,
- making motions and amendments,
- handling points of order and disturbances,
- managing the voting process, and
- governing committees.

The second part of the book provides additional reference information, including:

- frequently asked questions,
- a scripted example of a meeting that uses all the key elements of *Democratic Rules of Order*,

- a flow-chart that illustrates the rules of order and
- a summary of the Rules of Order for quick reference during a meeting.

We hope this book helps to bring understanding and peace to our communities.

Cool Heads Publishing

“Seeding grassroots democracy”



PART 1

The Rules

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Introduction

Fairness and orderliness

These parliamentary rules of order help people to deliberate and consider ideas together, and then make decisions as wisely, fairly, and easily as possible. They are made for meetings of any size that are undivided by organized political parties. Ideally, decisions are based on objective consideration of facts, unaffected by emotions, group pressures, or unnecessary protocols. The purpose of this book is to help your organization reach this ideal.

Democratic principles

This book is not an abridged version of other books. It is a complete set of rules determined by common practice and the natural laws of democracy, “rule by the ruled,” as Webster’s dictionary puts it. These self-evident principles, when applied to decision-making meetings, include

- **the right of each individual member** to participate equally and fully in orderly meetings that are free from intimidation, filibustering, and other disturbances and in which all members follow the same easily-understood rules, and the right to be equally and fully informed of all events, whether the member is present or not; and
- **the right of the majority of members** to make the decisions.

A democratic ideal

We should remember that we all belong to the same organization, with a common purpose. We can have widely differing views and still work together for a common good without dividing into opposing sides, each trying to get its own way. The best decisions are made when we listen thoughtfully to the information being presented and then make our own decisions privately.

Another democratic ideal

Must we accept a legal decision if it is a bad one? Yes and no. Yes, to practice democracy we must accept the decision and do what it requires us to do. No, we don't have to change our opinion. At some later date the opportunity may occur for a review of the decision, or we may even find that the decision was good after all!

Degrees of formality

In small or close-knit groups, decisions can often be made by consensus or general agreement, provided that the chair or secretary recording each decision is sure that most members agree (see pages [16](#) and [32](#)).

Large groups, too, often make decisions informally. The mover's privilege (see page [19](#)) allows cooperative members to work out decisions quickly and easily. A more formal amending process is automatically required if opinions are divided. The degree of formality is usually determined by custom, agreement, or a law as defined in the next paragraph.

Higher laws

Rules of order are automatically overruled when a law of the land, a constitution, a bylaw, or an existing standing rule applies. Throughout this book we refer to any of these as a law.

Rules of order apply to the conduct of meetings only. They do not interpret laws or make up for deficiencies in bylaws or standing rules.

Minority rights

While a democratic majority rule system may appear to be in conflict with minority rights, remember that there are higher laws that protect minority and individual rights. Nearly all nations have laws that protect the natural rights of all individuals, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. No group may make a decision that would violate universally recognized human rights and fundamental freedoms.

For maximum efficiency

Sharing the decision-making process in meetings is like driving a car. There are rules to be learned and skills to be attained. Once this has been done, group decision-making is second nature, like driving. If each member reads this book thoughtfully at least once, and if the chair does the same at least twice, and if members agree to follow these rules, your meetings should move as easily as the car of an experienced driver who enjoys driving without wondering which pedal to press.

The ninth edition

The ninth edition, like each previous edition, has been revised to make the book clearer, more useful, and easier to work with. However, the rules of all editions are so similar that organizations can use earlier editions along with the latest edition without conflicts.

Electronic meetings

These rules, modified if necessary, can be used for telephone or video conference meetings and for computer connected meetings in which discussions and voting are done electronically.

To adopt or modify these rules of order

Add to the standing rules or bylaws a statement such as “This organization’s meetings shall be governed by *Democratic Rules of Order*.” You could also add “Members’ general meetings shall be conducted by a formal chair, and the executive board’s meetings shall be conducted by an informal chair” (see page [16](#)). Similarly, modifications can be made to these rules to make them conform to an organization's special needs.

An impersonal referee

These rules are complete. When adopted, they form the official rules of order for your organization’s meetings. This book is your parliamentarian, or referee, when needed.

Governing Elements

Good government has structure.

GOVERNMENT CONTROL

The governments of some jurisdictions require that the constitution and bylaws of incorporated societies be approved and that reports be submitted annually.

CONSTITUTION

A constitution is a short document stating the name and purpose of the organization. To change the constitution may require advance notice, a large majority of votes (e.g., two-thirds or three-quarters), a secret ballot, and government approval. Indeed, some clauses may be unalterable, so the organization would have to be disbanded and reformed to change them. Many organizations today are formed without constitutions and place all governing rules in their bylaws.

BYLAWS

The governing rules of the organization, covering topics such as membership, officers, elections, duties, finances, meetings, quorum, discipline, amendments, and the seal. To change the bylaws may require advance notice, a large majority of

votes (e.g., two-thirds or three-quarters), a secret ballot, and government approval.

STANDING RULES

Decisions that have been recorded in a list because they will be useful for future guidance. Standing rules can be changed by a majority of votes at any regular meeting, provided a quorum (see page [17](#)) is present.

Unless all members are present and none object, changes to an existing standing rule governing the conduct of members' meetings apply only to future meetings. Some organizations require advance notice before a decision listed in the standing rules can be changed (see page 42, [Q17](#)).

RULES OF ORDER

A set of rules, established by the standing rules or bylaws, by which the members agree to govern their meetings. Rules of order are subject always to the laws of the land, the constitution, the bylaws and existing standing rules, any of which we call a law in this book.

EXECUTIVE BOARD

A group of members elected for a limited time to conduct the organization's business in accordance with the members' wishes. Their responsibilities and limitations are specified in the bylaws. Their authority lies only with the whole board, and no single member should assume any special authority or responsibility unless such powers have been delegated to that individual by the board. A title such

as “Board of Directors,” “Trustees,” “Governors,” or “Strata Council” does not reduce the need for their complete compliance with the will of the members.

OFFICERS

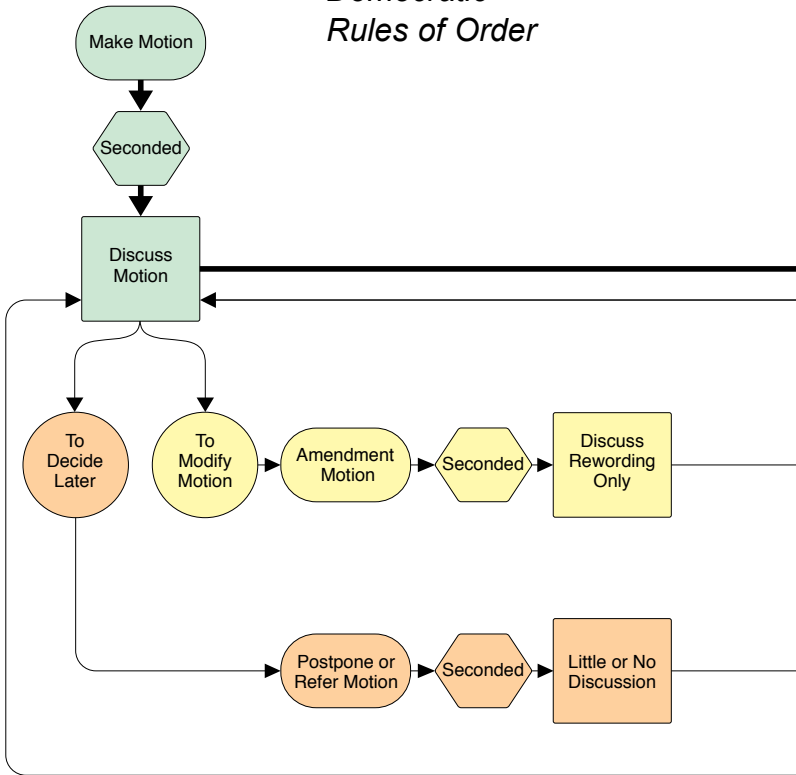
President, vice president, secretary, treasurer, etc., who have been elected by the members or appointed by the executive board for a limited time. Their responsibilities and limitations are specified in the bylaws. In some organizations, the officers form part or all of the executive board.

ELECTION PROCEDURES

Usually found in the bylaws and stating when elections are to be held, requirements and term of office, nominating and voting procedures, balloting, and number and appointment of vote counters.

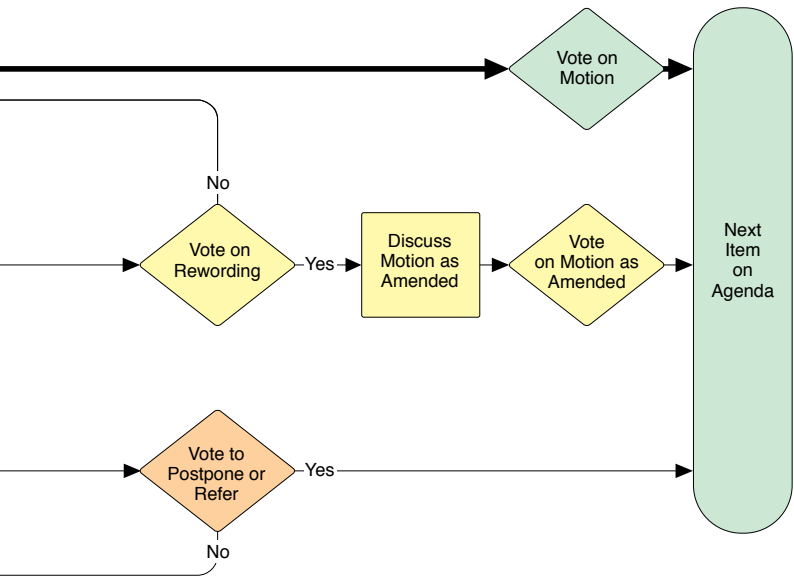
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Flow Chart Using *Democratic Rules of Order*



GOOD ORDER

- Stay on topic
- One speaker at a time, acknowledged by chair
- No interrupting



POINT OF ORDER

- Member explains how a law or good order is being breached
- Chair rules on point of order
- Vote if necessary

Summary of the Rules

Fairness (equal rights of members) and good order are the underlying principles (page [8](#)).

The final authority is the majority of voting members, provided a quorum is present, subject always to any applicable higher law (a law of the land, a constitution, a bylaw, or an existing standing rule) (page [15](#)).

In formal meetings, the chair guides impartially without taking part in discussion. In informal meetings, the chair participates as an equal member (page [16](#)).

A motion should be worded affirmatively and must not conflict with any higher law. Each motion requires a seconder (page [18](#)).

The mover's privilege allows the mover to reword or withdraw the motion provided there is a seconder and not more than one member objects (page [19](#)).

Amendments can delete, substitute, or add words to a motion on the floor but must not negate it or change its topic. An amendment cannot be amended (page [20](#)).

Postpone, refer: A motion can be postponed to an indefinite or a specific future occasion or referred to a committee for further study (page [21](#)).

Voting: Common voting methods include voting by ballot, standing, show of hands, show of voting cards, and voice. For a motion to pass, a quorum must be present and more than half the votes cast must be affirmative (pages [21-24](#)).

Informal discussion: A motion to informally discuss some topic, if passed, allows members to consider an idea without the formality of a motion (page [24](#)).

Rescind, reconsider: A previous decision can be rescinded or reconsidered by the members at any appropriate time (pages [24](#) and [25](#)).

Ratify a previous decision: A decision exceeding the authority of a member, committee or meeting can be ratified at a later meeting (page [27](#)).

Good order: Members should discuss only one motion at a time. A member must not take more than a fair share of floor time nor interrupt another member except as allowed with a point of order (pages [28-30](#)).

Point of order: A member who believes that a law or the meeting's good order is being breached may rise immediately and say "point of order." The chair should allow the member to explain and, if necessary, should call for a vote for a decision (page [29](#)).

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The Authors

Fred and Peg Francis have had decades of experience with meetings in school, college, business, church and community organizations as members and as officers. After attending university together, Peg taught elementary school. Fred taught mathematics in high schools and college. They have also designed several commercial products including clean-burning wood stoves, rodent-proof composters and children's building sets. They live in Victoria, Canada, and have four wonderful children and six equally wonderful grandchildren.

This book has been a very satisfying project for Fred and Peg, who see the urgent need for more justice and stronger democracies in our world. For a democracy to work successfully the populace itself must understand and want to obey the democratic principles. Citizens need practice in making the individual rights of each member and the rights of the majority work together. People using this book are practicing and learning these laws, and helping the world at the grass-roots level.

"May this book help you and your organization to have productive and distinctly democratic meetings!"

Fred and Peg Francis
Victoria, British Columbia
Canada

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These rules of order

- are a complete set of laws for governing meetings
- are written in plain language, free of complex protocol and jargon, to enable people to participate in meetings equally and efficiently
- can be adopted as the official rules of order for meetings of any size.

This book includes an example of a meeting governed by these rules of order.

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