

Decorum Summary

These rules encourage an objective and impersonal approach which is especially important when serious divisions of opinion arise (3:9). These rules are often relaxed, “But in large assemblies where there is much work to be done, and especially where there is likelihood of trouble, the only safe course is to require a strict observance of the rules.” (47:19)

Exceptions to these rules exist -- please refer to the RONR citations provided below for all the details.

General Decorum Rules

- 1) Member’s names, and “you” are not used. (3:12, 43:23)
*“The chair must ask **the member** to seek recognition before speaking.*
*“The chair must ask **the member from District 12** to confine his remarks to the merits of the pending question.”*
*“Mr. chairman, may I ask **the member who spoke last** to explain ...”*
- 2) Officers are referred to by their official titles. (3:10, 43:23)

Decorum Rules for the Chair

- 3) The presider always refers to himself as “the chair”. For example: “**The chair** rules that ...” Exception: when assigning the floor or announcing committee members. (3:13)
- 4) The chair must maintain a “position of impartiality”. (3:9, 47:19)
- 5) The chair must not discuss the merits of pending questions. (4:31) Exception: the chair can “relinquish the chair” to engage in debate. (43:29)
- 6) The chair votes only when his vote would affect the outcome. Exception: chair can vote when the vote is by ballot. (4:56, 44:12)
- 7) The chair must recognize any member who seeks the floor while entitled to it. (3:30, 42:2, 62:3)
- 8) The chair must allow members to make motions. (1:4)
- 9) The chair must enforce decorum (43:21). The moment the chair hears such words as “fraud,” “liar,” or “lie” used about a member in debate, he must act immediately and decisively to correct the matter and prevent its repetition.



Decorum Rules for Members

Members must ...

- 10) Obtain the floor before speaking (3:12, 3:30, 42:2)
- 11) Stand up while speaking (3:12, 42:2)
- 12) Address the presider by his official title only, such as “Mr. [or Madam] Chairman” or “chair”. For example: “*Do I understand **the chair** to state...?*” (3:11)
- 13) Confine remarks to the merits of the pending question. (43:20)
- 14) Refrain from attacking a member's motives. (43:21)
- 15) Address only the chair (43:22), or address each other through the chair. For example: “*Mr. Chairman, may I ask the member to explain...,*”
- 16) Refrain from speaking adversely on a prior action not pending. (43:24)
- 17) Refrain from speaking against one's own motion. (43:25)
- 18) Refrain from reading from reports, quotations, etc. without permission. (43:26)
- 19) Be seated during an interruption by the chair. (43:27)
- 20) Refrain from Disturbing the Assembly. (43:28)

Enforcement During a Meeting

General

Censure: A motion of censure does not require disciplinary procedures. (61:2 fn)

Nonmembers

Nonmembers can be excluded from the meeting at any time. (61:7)

Members

61:8 All persons present at a meeting have an obligation to obey the legitimate orders of the presiding officer.

61:9 ... Proper disciplinary proceedings to cope with immediate necessity can be conducted while a disorderly member continues to speak.

61:10 If a member commits only a slight breach of order ... the chair simply raps lightly, points out the fault, and advises the member to avoid it.

61:11 Calling a member to order. If the offense is more serious than in the case above ... the chair **or any other member** can “call the member to order.” Examples:

Chair: *“The member is out of order and will be seated.”*

Member: *“Mr. Chairman, I call the member to order.”*

If the chair agrees, he declares the offender out of order and directs him to be seated. If the member has the floor, the chair clearly states the breach involved and puts the question to the assembly: *“Shall the member be allowed to continue speaking?”*

61:13 Although the chair has no authority to impose a penalty or to order the offending member removed from the hall, the assembly has that power. ... There is no need for a formal trial provided that any penalty is imposed promptly after the breach.

61:15 ... **any member** can move to order a penalty, or the chair can first ask, “What penalty shall be imposed on the member?” A motion offered in a case of this kind can propose, for example, that the offender be required to make an apology, that he be censured, that he be required

to leave the hall during the remainder of the meeting or until he is prepared to apologize, that his rights of membership be suspended for a time, or that he be expelled from the organization.

Removal of a Member from the hall

61:16 The offending member can be required to leave the hall during the consideration of his penalty, but he must be allowed to present his defense briefly first. A motion to require the member's departure during consideration of the penalty—which may be assumed by the chair if he thinks it appropriate—is undebatable, is unamendable, and requires a majority vote.

61:17 ... Expulsion from membership requires a two-thirds vote.

Chair

62:8 “If the chair ignores a point of order that is not dilatory, the member can repeat the point of order a second and third time and if the chair still ignores it, the member, standing in his place, can immediately put the point of order to a vote without debate. The question may be put as, “Is the point of order that... well taken?”

If the point of order was that the chair improperly ignored another motion, the member may, instead of repeating the point of order, repeat the original motion, and if it is seconded and the chair still ignores it, may, standing in his place, put the ignored motion to a vote without debate.”

(Same process applies for appeals, see 62:9)

62:10 Removal of Presiding Officer from Chair for All or Part of a Session. If the chair fails to act in accordance with the assembly's decision on an appeal (or on a point of order submitted to a vote of the assembly) or otherwise culpably fails to perform the duties of the chair properly in a meeting, the assembly may employ measures temporarily to replace the chair with another presiding officer expected to act in accordance with the will of the assembly.” (See 62:12 for the procedure.)

Permanent Removal from Office (see 62:16)

Quotations are from Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised (“RONR”) 12th ed.