

**Slaughter, Jim, Gaut Ragsdale, and Jon Ericson. 2012. *Notes and Comments on Robert's Rules, 4th Edition*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.** Donald Fishman

This is a revised edition of a book first published in 1982. The new edition calls attention to important, substantive changes in the latest revision of *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised (RONR)* with updated references and page numbers geared to the 11th edition of *RONR*. *Notes and Comments*, originally written by Jon Ericson, a former provost and a professor emeritus at Drake University, has added two new authors. Jim Slaughter, an attorney, author, and professional parliamentarian, is one of the most talented and versatile younger parliamentarians in the field while Gaut Ragsdale, the associate dean in the College of Informatics at Northern Kentucky University, has had a distinguished career for three decades as a teacher and highly respected practitioner of parliamentary procedure. Both of the new authors have been very active in parliamentary associations during the past decade.

This book retains its basic framework, but the authors have added clarity and depth to issues likely to confuse or intimidate readers of *Robert's Rules*. In fact, the book provides an interpretation of important issues in parliamentary procedure, and it applies *RONR 11<sup>th</sup> edition* to common situations that recur in meetings. The organizational scheme of the book is similar to earlier editions. After a brief discussion of the order of precedence, the authors develop a question-and-answer format to handle a wide range of motions, and they then discuss topics such as what constitutes a quorum, types of meetings, boards, minutes, voting, nominations and elections, bylaws, the role of the chair, and the duties of a parliamentarian.

This is a book designed to solve problems. The authors are willing to share their extensive experiences as parliamentarians in the context of reviewing the basic principles in *RONR 11*. In 156 pages of text devoted to explaining *RONR 11*, the authors take readers behind-the-scenes to identify possible scenarios where problems arise.

One of the changes from earlier editions of the book is that there is more emphasis on strategic thinking. The authors not only describe a motion, but they also explain in detail strategic applications and various possible outcomes. For instance, the authors analyze the advantages of the "motion to postpone indefinitely" where an organization does not want to appear to be voting down a particular program or to go on record with an embarrassing main motion. In this context, the "motion to postpone indefinitely" makes organizational sense. The authors also recommend not using co-chairs to head a committee. If the workload of the committee is onerous, they recommend instead having a chair and vice chair. This makes the task of presiding less ambiguous and problematic. Like other parliamentarians before them, they believe that the "motion to lay on the table" should be retired, but their discussion of the word "majority" in a

voting situation, and their analysis of the complexities with the "motion to close debate" are analytically brilliant, and they offer the reader several astute observations.

There are two other important changes from the earlier editions of the book. First, there is more scripting of motions, and the scripts illustrate typical conversations likely to occur at a meeting. For instance, in discussing the motion to refer to committee, the authors provide an instructive example: "I move to refer the main motion to a committee consisting of Ms. X, Mr. Y, and Ms. Z, with instructions to interview each department supervisor and report at the June meeting." Useful scripts and easy-to-grasp examples appear throughout the book.

Second, this edition makes extensive comparisons to how authorities other than Robert would handle particular issues. As a result, there are more references to Sturgis, Demeter, Keeseey, and the Opinions Committee of the American Institute of Parliamentarians than the reader initially would expect. This is a very ecumenical approach.

This book is useful for several different audiences. For the beginning parliamentarian, the logical progression of the motions, the clear scripting, and the easy-to-follow examples should make this book a reliable companion to *RONR 11*. For the sometimes parliamentarian, this book's overriding virtue is that it focuses on problematic situations that arise in a meeting, and it provides behind-the-scenes advice based on the distillation of many years of experience as parliamentarians in a variety of venues. For the veteran parliamentarian and the academic scholar, this book also is very useful. Its discussion of the role of the parliamentarian and the preparation of a parliamentarian in working with a presiding officer offers several sound recommendations. In addition, the twenty-five pages of notes and references in the book are a model of first-rate scholarship and sources seldom presented in practical parliamentary manuals.

Overall, this is a well-written and thoughtful book. It is likely to be an authoritative parliamentary resource for understanding *RONR 11*. It offers more than a fair quota of insights for the beginning, moderately active, and veteran parliamentarian. While it can be used as a reference work, more likely, it will be a practical and constant companion to the improved but still intimidating eleventh edition of *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised*.

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