



What's a Snippet? Glad you asked! A Snippet is short article about meetings or parliamentary procedure. New snippets are released on the first day of every month at www.agreatmeeting.com.



Snippet #101 "Current" Robert's Rules?

Many associations' bylaws state that the "current" edition of *Robert's Rules of Order* shall serve as the parliamentary authority for the association. There have been eleven editions produced. The first three were titled *Robert's Rules of Order*, the next three were titled *Robert's Rules of Order Revised*, and since 1970 the book has been called *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised* (RONR). The intent of the word "current" (according to the authors of RONR) is to supersede all previous editions. We do *not* recommend this wording because we do not believe any organization should be bound by rules they haven't even had the chance to read. But if this is in your bylaws, then your rules changed on September 6, 2011, when the newest edition of *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised* was released. And you may have no idea what changed.

This "current" edition is the 11th edition of the work. Henry M. Robert published the first edition in 1876. He lived to see the 4th edition published in 1921. Subsequent editions have been published in 1943, 1951, and starting in 1970 have been published approximately every ten years. Because of the age of the original works, the original copyrights have expired. Looking for an online version? No problem – that is, if you are willing to accept the 1876 or the 1915 edition. It's now in the public domain, so anyone can take the content and repackage it – like perhaps calling it "the modern edition" or adding the publisher's name like Merriam Webster, for example. When the tensions get high and people start grabbing for the rule book, wouldn't it be nice if they all grabbed the *same* rule book? Specifying the edition number will make that much easier.

Why should you adopt a parliamentary authority? A parliamentary authority such as RONR provides procedural guidance and basic rules that apply in most situations. This framework helps prevent confusion and maintain fairness in deliberations. The risk of confusion increases with the number of people who share the responsibility to make a decision. The rules in RONR balance the right of the majority to make the ultimate decision, the right of the minority to have an opportunity to convince the majority of their point of view, the rights of absentees, individual rights, and a combination of all of these together. By deferring to an independent source whose principles have been tested over time, the focus can be on issues instead of the procedures.

What should you do if your bylaws already contain the "current" reference? Consider amending your bylaws to insert the numbered edition, so that all members can be absolutely certain they are referencing the correct manual. We usually recommend that our clients wait approximately one year after a new edition comes out, so that we can study its content and advise them about the changes and possible special rules to adopt.

If your organization uses *The Standard Code of Parliamentary Procedure*, also known as *Sturgis*, you are by no means immune – it has now been replaced by *American Institute of Parliamentarians Standard Code* (AIPSC). This book is still based on the philosophy and works of Alice Sturgis, but has been written as a new work, not as a fifth edition of *The Standard Code*. If your bylaws include a reference to the earlier title and you want to adopt the new book, your bylaws will have to be amended.