

Subject: Task Forces for 2009

From: Janet Carlson <jfcarlson57@AOL.COM>

Reply-To: STP Extended Executive Committee <TOPEC@LIST.KENNESAW.EDU>

Date: Mon, 15 Dec 2008 14:28:01 -0500

Greetings all,

I am writing to request Executive Committee approval to form six task forces, four of which derive directly from the presidential initiatives outlined in my vision statement delivered at APA and articulated in the Fall 2008 STP Newsletter. The need for the other two task forces became apparent over the last few months, arising primarily from conversations I have had with various EC members.

The task forces, if approved for appointment, will address: Targeted Membership Recruitment, Member Involvement, Interdivisional Relationships, Communication, STP Awards, and Electronic Rules of Order. I appreciate your consideration of this proposal and ask for your support.

Please consider the floor open for discussion and feel free to post comments to the TOPEC list or to email me privately (jfcarlson57@aol.com).

Descriptions of the proposed task forces follow below:

(1) Task Force on Targeted Membership Recruitment

CHARGE: Review membership trends over the last several years to ascertain which membership category would be best suited (i.e., has the highest yield potential) for a targeted recruitment effort; work collaboratively with the Chair of the Recruitment, Retention, and Public Relations Committee to develop strategies to pursue members in this category.

(2) Task Force on Member Involvement

CHARGE: Examine the level of STP member involvement in activities of the Society and recommend actions to increase involvement. Further, the task force is charged with offering suggestions that foster greater involvement of members of ethnically and culturally diverse groups and historically underrepresented groups.

(3) Task Force on Interdivisional Relationships

CHARGE: Assess the nature of STP's relationship with other APA divisions and identify ways in which these relationships may be strengthened. Among the assessments to include: (1) comparison of divisions' procedures for current Fellows to become a Fellow in other respective divisions, and (2) elucidation of other divisions' use of teaching/mentoring awards.

(4) Task Force on Communication

CHARGE: Examine the means through which STP members may receive information about the Society and assess the effectiveness of communication strategies. Recommend ways to: (1) expand transparency of STP procedures and processes to the general membership, and (2) improve communication with the general membership.

(5) Task Force on STP Awards

CHARGE: Review the various award programs within STP and make recommendations concerning the number and dollar amounts associated with the awards. Consider, for example, whether fewer awards of more substantial amounts or more awards of lesser amounts would make more sense. For the sake of this discussion, assume revenue neutrality (i.e., assume there will be no cuts and no additions to respective budget lines).

Included under this charge are the following award programs: (1) IRA, (2) Small Grants, (3) Faculty Development Awards, (4) Teaching Awards, and (5) Poster Awards at Regional Teaching Conferences.

(6) Task Force on Electronic Rules of Order

CHARGE: Develop recommendations for conducting business by email and other electronic means, referencing principles of orderly conduct (e.g., Roberts' Rules of Order) and examining practices of other organizations similar to STP (e.g., other divisions of APA).

Sincerely,  
JCarlson

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SOCIETY FOR THE TEACHING OF PSYCHOLOGY  
Extended Executive Committee Discussion List

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This list is hosted by Kennesaw State University, Kennesaw GA

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Subject: Voting Results  
From: Maureen McCarthy <mmccar10@KENNESAW.EDU>  
Reply-To: STP Extended Executive Committee <TOPEC@LIST.KENNESAW.EDU>  
Date: Tue, 23 Dec 2008 10:24:37 -0500

Greetings:

I do hope everyone is safely traveling and celebrating the holidays. I want to report that we approved Janet's task forces for her Presidential year. We also approved the 2009 operating budget.

Happy Holidays!  
Maureen

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STP Task Force on Electronic Rules of Order  
Chair: Dr. Loreto Prieto  
Members: Dr. Neil Lutsky; Dr. Julie Penley  
07/15/09

STP President Carlson:

We approached the work in a two fold manner; one was to determine the extent to which APA Divisions utilized on-line voting (the typical deliberation necessitating an adoption of on-line rules of order) and two, we provided a brief list of recommendations to guide such activities based on the most recognized parliamentary approaches concerning electronic business.

We surveyed all 56 sitting Division Presidents and asked them the several questions concerning on-line business. A total of 18 Presidents responded (32%). A summary of their responses appears below.

#### *Summary of Survey*

About 2/3rds of the respondents indicated that they use on-line voting. The governance entity having the authority to employ on-line business was without exception the Division Executive Committee/Board, with a few Divisions allowing only the President to call for the electronic handling of business. Most Divisions use electronic voting only when the EC needs to hold an emergency vote on an issue, or to handle specific business in between in-person meetings (e.g., APA Convention, mid-year meetings). Almost all electronic business and voting takes place via email. Rarely, voting takes place during conference calls or by using an on-line service (Survey Monkey) when confidentiality is necessary. A quorum for business is most frequently determined by ensuring a majority of eligible voters are involved or casting votes, with the majority of voters determining the outcome. So, for example, with an EC of 12 people, 7 must cast votes for the vote to be valid, and the majority decision of those 7 would determine the outcome of the vote. Some Divisions use return receipt emails and count non-responders as abstains to establish a quorum (provided electronic evidence suggests the email was received and displayed on members' screens). Finally, two Divisions stated that they use a pre-established and announced time that polls would open and close. Most Divisions (8 out of the 11 responding) did not use on-line voting to handle business with the entire Division membership; electronic business was conducted only among EC members.

Central to the question at hand, most Divisions did not employ parliamentary rules in their on-line business or voting procedures. Those few that did, used Roberts Rules of Order, but only very informally. A few Divisions used Keesey's rules, published by APA.

#### *Recommendations for Electronic Rules of Order*

Currently, the proposed 2008 bylaws do not contain any reference to a parliamentary procedure to be followed during Society business. However, a number of clauses do lay out the voting rights and procedures for various members of the Society constituency under certain circumstances. Prima facia, these clauses resemble, but are not wholly in accordance with,

Roberts Rules of Order (RROR).

As a standard, RROR is a highly respected and recognized code of procedure, and is more detailed than Keesey's rules, which are a simplified version of parliamentary process.

Concerning on-line rules of order, RROR (newly revised 10th edition, 2000) does not recognize electronic means of conducting business as an optimal method to employ, as the timing, nuance, and substance of oral/aural communication is missing from this forum.

Regardless, this task force recognizes the need of the Society to efficiently and effectively handle business in between formal meetings. Therefore, below, we will suggest a few aspects of procedure from RROR and other sources that might serve the Society well.

First, however, there are a few points we believe important to clarify and recommend. We do not believe the Society should try to conduct business with the entire membership via electronic means, especially bylaw revisions, regardless of the procedures chosen. Such an endeavor would necessitate a need for an electronic service that could verify membership status and can be costly to employ. Obviously, notifications to the membership about bylaw revisions (or other Society-wide business) via electronic listservs, electronic newsletters, and other such venues are appropriate. Voting or other deliberative procedures are not.

We also recommend that electronic business continue to be restricted only to the TOPEC listserv or some other relevant listserv that has only EC personnel with voting rights subscribed. This ensures that only the voting members of the STP Executive Committee have voices and votes in issues.

### *Procedures*

With respect to general rules of order procedures, some people have offered guidelines predicated on RROR (Berliant & Liu, 1995; see accompanying article). In addition to suggestions therein, we also recommend the following:

*Agenda setting* -- although the setting and distribution of a formal agenda (covering any length of time) is not likely an efficient way to conduct asynchronous on-line business, an attempt to notify the EC ahead of time of an upcoming piece of business to be discussed or a vote to take place (versus simply emailing on the issue or calling for a vote) is most preferable, so that those who are traveling or may be absent might know to chime in early, or request that the closing of polls be extended. This may be even more helpful during summer months when EC members may be out of pocket or a quorum may be hard to establish.

*Establishing a quorum* - we recommend that for all on-line business, the full number of the eligible voters on the STP EC be used as the benchmark in obtaining a quorum. The 2008 bylaw revisions indicate that the STP EC shall have 10 persons with voting rights (the ED should not count toward a quorum). This number is already quite small, so that if only a majority of the eligible voters were needed to establish a quorum, six vote-eligible EC members would suffice.

Further, as the 2008 bylaws also state that "The EC shall make decisions by majority vote", this means that motions entertained by this six person quorum could be passed by as few as 4 like-minded people on the EC. If the quorum for on-line business is set at all 10 persons on the EC, this would facilitate a full complement of voices on all issues, and necessitate a true majority of 6 persons to pass any motion or action.

We also recommend that return receipt email be used. This feature is available on most email client software. Basically, the command prompts the home and other servers to send you email "receipts" that indicate when a message was sent, by whom, the content of the message, the route it took from sender to recipients, and when the sender received the email. The receipt will also indicate when the receiver opened the email and displayed it on her screen. This latter indication is counted as a "reception" of the email and counts for the quorum of an electronic "meeting" on an issue. Accordingly, non-response (reception of email but no response or vote) is treated as consent to majority decision (silence is affirmation under RROR), or during voting is counted as an abstain; allowable to count in the vote totals, for validity of the vote.

*Motions and voting* - Two major violations of RROR procedure that can occur in STP electronic or in-person business are: 1) a call for a motion *after* discussion has already taken place; and, 2) suspension of the rules or bylaws. Both of these should be strongly avoided during either electronic or in-person business.

As to motions and discussion, a motion and second are formally required *before* any discussion on an issue takes place. In contrast, often during STP EC business meetings, a lengthy discussion takes place among EC members on a point until a clear preference in the group is established and *then* the President will call for a motion, second, and vote to formalize what has already been decided. The danger in the above process, especially in electronic business, is that the desires of the minority (especially a strong minority) can easily be ignored or thwarted during this process. Recall, one of the main purposes of a parliamentary process is to ensure that the minority has an opportunity to be heard, to weight in, and if necessary, to change or block current discussion from resulting in an outcome that will leave a significant chunk of the constituency unhappy, disenfranchised, or without power. In parliamentary terms, the minority are those not in agreement with the majority at any point in time; a strong minority is defined as 1/3 to 49% of the eligible voters.

Thus, if a motion is made, the group, if in general not agreeing with it, can simply not second the motion and it will die and cannot be brought up again. If a second is made, this allows only discussion to take place on the motion. It does not ensure a vote or a particular outcome of a vote on that specific motion (for example, a motion to table the initial motion can be passed, which effectively ends discussion until such time that the initial motion is formally brought off the table). Once seconded, then during discussion, motions can be amended according to a majority opinion of those voting on each amendment. Control by all in the group is exercised and each change or amendment is voted on to ensure a majority agrees with it. Thus, in this way, if a motion ultimately comes to a vote, it might be substantively different than the original motion posed, but the likelihood of most of the constituency supporting it is much higher.

In contrast, under current practice, an idea is often thrown out for consideration (usually by the

President), some pro and con discussion occurs, and if enough members pipe up in support of the original idea a formal vote is called and it is passed. However, there is no method in this process to reliably amend or alter the original motion of the motion maker. Following correct procedure keeps the power of the motion maker (often the President) in check.

These same procedures work for the protection of the majority as well. There are times when a wish of the majority of the EC has been blocked by a few and sometimes even one (very powerful) voice on the EC. If proper procedure is used, no one person, and no group of people lesser in number than a strong minority, can hamper business from proceeding according to the wishes of the majority.

As to suspension of the rules, in reference to the ideas above, a strong minority (1/3 to 49%) can ensure that major diversions from the bylaws or suspension of the procedural rules cannot happen without their approval. Without this protection, a simple majority (51%) can do what they wish without attention to minority concerns. When such diversions away from procedure or bylaws occur they essentially beg the question "why follow rules at all if we frequently suspend them to do what the majority wishes at any given time?"

Hence, during electronic (and in-person) business, we recommend the proper format of motion making, seconding, discussion, and action (if any). We also recommend that only in dire cases of extreme need of the Society that rules or bylaws are suspended during business. In actual practice, suspension of the rules should virtually never happen. This is critical because literally thousands of the Society members already have no voice in daily STP governance matters (other than election of officers and bylaws revisions) and count on the protections of the bylaws and procedural rules to ensure good business and process. To whittle down voices in governance further by suspending rules that may impair due process or hamper the protection of a minority view is a risky action to take. Finally, we recommend that any vote taken by the EC, that does not have an electronic quorum present, be declared invalid and not stand on the record as passed (or failed).

*Tallies and poll times* - Typically, the secretary should be the tally person for voting, and has the responsibility for announcing when the polls open and close. Time stamps on emails stand as their own evidence regarding actual vote time (time sent, of course, not time received; adjusted for US time zones). Because personnel on the STP EC live across the nation, poll times should always be anchored in a particular time zone (e.g., "Voting will begin at Monday at 1PM EST and close Friday at 5PM EST). The Secretary should then announce to the EC at large the findings of the vote. As noted above under quorum, return receipts can be used to send out ballot emails so that non-responders can be counted as abstains.

*Confidentiality* - According to RROR, some issues (e.g., personnel matters) are always handled by secret ballot. During in-person meetings of the STP EC this practice is typically followed. However, during on-line business it is often not. We recommend the use of an initial formal nomination process (again handled by the secretary); this includes a formal opening and closing of the "floor" for nominations. This stands in contrast to the frequently used method of announcing an a priori slate and then asking for additions or calling for a vote on a pre-

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established slate. Then, we recommend a method like the use of Survey Monkey or other site where IP addresses can be restricted (so voters cannot be matched to their votes), so that EC members can vote their conscience without undue influence by the President or other EC members. This method is easy, free, and offers a convenient way to handle confidential votes.

This is a very important matter -- literally for decades, STP has been accused of being a "Mafia"; that is, keeping power to a select few insiders. Unless transparent, non-influenced nominations and private personnel votes are taken, any other process (e.g. suggestions for who might fill an office versus a neutral call for nominations *sans* a priori chosen persons) this perceptual legacy will continue on and the Society will be unable to disabuse its membership of this idea. The EC may even want to consider making more public calls (e.g., on Psychteacher) for nominations to appointed or elected offices.

*Records & Minutes* - We recommend that the Secretary keep copies of all email or electronic business (in archived electronic form for storage ease) in case an appeal or questioning of a decision is made at a later date. We also recommend that the records and minutes of any electronic business conducted be reviewed and approved by the EC for entry into the permanent record at in-person meetings where a quorum is present.

*Bylaws changes* - We recommend that if the EC wishes to adopt a formal procedural code, that it adopt RROR (latest edition). This should then be added to the STP bylaws; that is, a statement that "all business will be guided by the parliamentary procedures in RROR unless otherwise stipulated in these bylaws." However, if the Society is unsure as to a commitment to truly adhere to the procedural rules (for on-line or in-person business), we recommend against any formal declaration of an adoption of a parliamentary code. This is simply because if the adoption is formalized in the bylaws, and the Society does not follow its bylaws faithfully, liability issues can arise.

Our Task Force recommends that the LRPC and President's Cabinet review the findings of our report, obtain a copy of RROR 10th edition and review its contents related to electronic and in-person business, and then make a considered decision as to the viability of a commitment to those rules.

The data from our survey suggests that most APA Divisions do not adhere to strict parliamentary procedure in conducting on-line business; this may be persuasive to the STP EC. The downside is that without the structure of rules, grievances may ensue or some matters may be difficult to adjudicate. On the other hand, not sticking to policies or procedures, once adopted, is almost always a recipe for trouble.

We thank you for the opportunity to be of service to the Society; we hope you find our ideas helpful.

## Robert's Rules of Order for e-mail meetings

Daniel Berleant and Byron Liu  
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**E**-mail—the Cinderella of cyberspace. In the excitement of the World Wide Web of hyperlinked multimedia spanning the globe, it's easy to lose sight of ordinary e-mail, which, like the Web, is built on the enabling infrastructure of the Internet. Yet the average person undoubtedly conducts more business—and more important business—by e-mail than by any other Internet service. Surely, e-mail will continue to play a major role in our daily business.

Considering the importance and ubiquity of e-mail, it's surprising that it is not more widely used for group decision making—that is, structured business meetings, or more formally, “deliberative assemblies.” Below, in the hope of providing basic guidelines and motivating further work, we offer some considerations regarding rules of order for conducting e-mail meetings.

### A neglected area

While much has been written on rules of etiquette for e-mail, bulletin board postings, and other forms of electronic communication,<sup>1,2</sup> little attention has been focused on rules of order for e-mail meetings, analogous to the traditional rules of order for face-to-face meetings. The need for electronically mediated group work has led to impor-

tant results in group decision support software, electronic conferencing, and software for storing and accessing institutional knowledge.<sup>3</sup> An obvious example is Lotus Notes. Nevertheless, there is still a need for rules of order to guide groups in conducting decision-making meetings using nothing more than ordinary e-mail.

Traditionally, meetings have been guided by smaller or larger subsets of *Robert's Rules of Order* since the book first appeared over a century ago. E-mail, however, is obviously a unique medium with its own distinctive characteristics (see sidebar). We're proposing updates to the latest edition of *Robert's Rules*<sup>4</sup> that are needed to hold meetings by e-mail. We specify only some of the more important updates; a complete exposition is beyond the scope of this brief discussion. However, computer-literate professionals familiar enough with the rudiments of *Robert's Rules* to conduct an ordinary face-to-face meeting should find the following sufficient for successfully conducting a meeting by e-mail.

### Rules of order for e-mail meetings

Admittedly limited, the following material should be supplemented by related material in the current edition of *Robert's Rules*, as indicated by the relevant section headings.

#### DISTINCTIVE CHARACTERISTICS OF E-MAIL MEETINGS

Significant differences between electronic mail and face-to-face communication affect interaction and impact the rules of order for e-mail meetings. These differences result in both advantages and disadvantages for e-mail meetings.

##### Advantages

- People can meet without being at the same location. Thus, for example, it is no longer necessary for people to fly great distances, at considerable expense, just to be clustered in the same room.
- Scheduling a meeting is much easier because participants need not be available at exactly the same time.
- An e-mail meeting can last longer than the relatively short time periods during which people can stay in physical proximity. With a more flexible time frame, participants can take longer to think over issues and arrive at more considered decisions (see disadvantages).
- An e-mail meeting can proceed concurrently with other activities, as long as participants regularly read their e-mail and respond when appropriate. Participants' other activities can continue uninterrupted.
- Caucusing during an e-mail meeting is easy: Just send

e-mail to the desired subset of the participants at any time.

- Full, exact minutes are generated automatically and consist of all e-mail messages that are part of the meeting.
- The chair cannot stop participants from communicating with each other, whether that communication is part of the meeting or not (see disadvantages).

##### Disadvantages

- Voting can be more cumbersome.
- Confidentiality of the proceedings is impossible to enforce, since any participant can save e-mail indefinitely and forward it to a third party at any time.
- Information normally carried by nonverbal cues such as tone of voice, gestures, and expressions is less easily communicated. The less spontaneous nature of e-mail can inhibit communication.
- The chair cannot stop participants from communicating with each other, whether that communication is part of the meeting or not (see advantages).
- An e-mail meeting can last longer than a conventional meeting, so that decisions are not made and announced as quickly (see advantages).

**Quorum [Robert's (S3, S39)].** For an e-mail message to be part of a meeting, it must be sent to *all* members (returned ballots are an exception). Other messages may be sent for caucusing or other off-line discussion, but these are not officially part of the meeting.

For a vote to be valid in the context of an e-mail meeting, a quorum of ballots must be returned. Unless otherwise provided for, this quorum is one half. This need for a vote quorum results from the fact that it is harder to know who is following an e-mail meeting than who is attending a face-to-face meeting; hence, the concept of a quorum based on attendance is less applicable to e-mail meetings.

An equipment malfunction among the membership that significantly interferes with reading, writing, or delivering e-mail requires the chair to recess or adjourn the meeting without a vote. E-mail meetings shall not be held when equipment malfunction is a significant hindrance.

**Call to order [Robert's (S3)].** An e-mail meeting is called to order with a message from the chair containing a "subject" (or equivalent) line stating "Call to order" and a body beginning with "The e-mail meeting will come to order."

The call-to-order message should explain which meeting has been called to order, because unlike attendees at ordinary meetings, members may be participating in several e-mail meetings simultaneously.

**Minutes [Robert's (S3)].** Minutes consist of the full transcript of the meeting, comprising all of the e-mail messages that were part of it. Their accuracy can usually be assumed, so minutes need not be read or approved in e-mail meetings.

**Floor [Robert's (S3)].** In face-to-face meetings, obtaining the floor prevents more than one person from speaking at the same time and gives various members a chance to be heard. Obtaining the floor is typically an arbitration process and is unnecessary in e-mail meetings because messages can be sent simultaneously by different members. In an e-mail meeting, the floor is trivially and implicitly obtained simply by sending an e-mail message to the membership, and rules of order for obtaining the floor are generally unnecessary.

**Voting [Robert's (S4)].** When issues are decided by a vote, all voters may have to be present in the same room at the same time, as when secret ballots must be counted in the presence of the membership. However, a vote by e-mail shall be acceptable unless disallowed. To conduct an e-mail vote, a ballot is sent to the voting membership stating exactly what is to be voted on and containing at the beginning a clearly designated place for the member to mark a vote. The subject line (or equivalent) should state "ballot."

The simplest kind of vote is the *consensus vote*. The ballot specifies that only nay votes need be returned. No nay votes means the measure is approved, so obviously no vote quorum applies.

If a vote is to be counted, the ballot should clearly designate the choices. Here are two hypothetical examples:

I vote \_\_\_\_\_ (fill in "yes," "no," or leave blank).

I vote for \_\_\_\_\_ (fill in "Jones," "Miller," "Wang," or leave blank).

In a *verbose public vote*, each voter e-mails a completed ballot to all members. In a *terse public vote*, completed ballots are returned to the sender. Voting may be conducted by the chair, the secretary, or the voting commissioner. The votes for each option are tabulated to produce a report that accompanies the announcement of the result. This report is sent after a deadline (by default, one full business day after ballot distribution). Ballots returned after the deadline but received before the report is sent are valid votes and must be included in the report.

Secret balloting may be conducted by the voting commissioner, who must be trusted to maintain the confidentiality of the ballots and to count them reliably. Alternatively, special software can be used for balloting, or a brief, appropriately scheduled face-to-face balloting session may be needed.

**Voting commissioner [Robert's (S46)].** Voting in e-mail meetings can be more complex than in face-to-face meetings, so it may be desirable to establish the office of voting commissioner. This person distributes ballots, receives and counts returned ballots, and announces results. The voting commissioner's integrity must be trusted if the office is to be a help rather than a hindrance in voting.

ELECTRONIC MAIL USE IS INCREASING, and decision-making meetings conducted by e-mail have significant advantages over meetings that require assembling the membership at the same time and in the same place. We have presented some of the essential modifications for applying *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised* to e-mail meetings, and we invite those interested in completing this process to participate in an e-mail meeting for this purpose by sending e-mail to [djb@enr.uark.edu](mailto:djb@enr.uark.edu).

#### References

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3. J.D. Palmer and N.A. Fields, guest eds., special issue on computer-supported cooperative work, *Computer*, Vol. 27, No. 5, May 1994.
4. H. Robert et al., *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised*, Scott, Foresman, and Co., (a division of Harper Collins Publishers), 1990.

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