“Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty”
—Thomas Jefferson

Some rules of parliamentary procedure go back hundreds of years. Here are a few that have stood the test of time (RONR [11th ed., pp. xxxiii–iv]):

- **One subject at a time** (1581)
  In the interest of focusing discussion and saving time, business is conducted by means of motions, only one of which may be on the floor at a time.

- **Alternation between opposite points of view in assignment of the floor** (1592)
  In order to give opposing views a fair hearing, when several people wish to speak to a motion, the chair tries to let the floor alternate between those favoring and those opposing it. (“The last speaker opposed the motion; does anyone wish to support it?”)

- **Requirement that the chair always call for the negative vote** (1604)
  So as to preserve the right to dissent, the chair always calls for “those opposed,” even in cases of apparent unanimity.

- **Decorum and avoidance of personalities in debate** (1604)
  To foster order and impartiality, members discuss motions, not motives or personalities, and address each other formally (“Mr. Chairman,” “The previous speaker,” “My esteemed colleague from Philosophy”).

- **Confinement of debate to the merits of the pending question** (1610)
  To keep discussion on track, a speaker’s remarks must be germane to the motion on the floor.

- **Division of a question** (1640)
  To cover cases in which the assembly may favor one part of a motion but oppose another, a motion with separable parts may be divided into distinct motions for subsequent debate and vote.