

Chatham House Rule

The Chatham House Rule originated at Chatham House with the aim of providing anonymity to speakers and to encourage openness and the sharing of information. It is now used throughout the world as an aid to free discussion.

The Chatham House Rule reads as follows:

When a meeting, or part thereof, is held under the Chatham House Rule, participants are free to use the information received, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speaker(s), nor that of any other participant, may be revealed.

The world-famous Chatham House Rule may be invoked at meetings to encourage openness and the sharing of information.

Explanation of the Rule

Meetings do not have to take place at Chatham House, or be organized by Chatham House, to be held under the Rule.

Meetings, events and discussions held at Chatham House are normally conducted 'on the record' with the Rule occasionally invoked at the speaker's request. In cases where the Rule is not considered sufficiently strict, an event may be held 'off the record'.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q. When was the Rule devised?

A. In 1927 and refined in 1992 and 2002.

Q. Should one refer to the Chatham House Rule or the Chatham House Rules?

A. There is only one Rule.

Q. What are the benefits of using the Rule?

A. It allows people to speak as individuals, and to express views that may not be those of their organizations, and therefore it encourages free discussion. People usually feel more relaxed if they don't have to worry about their reputation or the implications if they are publicly quoted.

Q. How is the Rule enforced?

A. Chatham House will take disciplinary action against a member or guest who breaks the Rule; this is likely to mean future exclusion from all institute activities including events and conferences. Although such action is rare, the rigorous implementation of the Rule is crucial to its effectiveness and for Chatham House's reputation as a trusted venue for open and free dialogue.

For events held under the Chatham House Rule that are not organized by Chatham House, any actions taken because of a violation of the Rule are entirely at the discretion of the organizer.

Q. Is the Rule used for all meetings at Chatham House?

A. Not often for Members Events; more frequently for smaller research meetings, for example where work in progress is discussed or when subject matter is politically sensitive. Most Chatham House conferences are under the Rule.

Q. Who uses the Rule these days?

A. It is widely used by local government and commercial organizations as well as research organizations.

Q. Can participants in a meeting be named as long as what is said is not attributed?

A. It is important to think about the spirit of the Rule. For example, sometimes speakers need to be named when publicizing the meeting. The Rule is more about the dissemination of the information after the event - nothing should be done to identify, either explicitly or implicitly, who said what.

Q. Can you say within a report what you yourself said at a meeting under the Chatham House Rule?

A. Yes if you wish to do so.

Q. Can a list of attendees at the meeting be published?

A. No - the list of attendees should not be circulated beyond those participating in the meeting.

Q. Can I 'tweet' while at an event under the Chatham House Rule?

A. The Rule can be used effectively on social media sites such as Twitter as long as the person tweeting or messaging reports only what was said at an event and does not identify - directly or indirectly - the speaker or another participant. This consideration should always guide the way in which event information is disseminated - online as well as offline.