

Incidental Motions

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The purpose of Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised (RONR), is to facilitate a governing body's ability during its meeting to get things done. In the past three months, we've addressed the main motion (that starts consideration), subsidiary motions (related to the main motion), and privileged motions (related to the meeting).

Now we review incidental motions¹ – meeting procedures that help the body decide which or how rules shall be strictly followed, relaxed, or handled in a specific way, relating to the meeting's pending business. The most common use for an incidental motion is a pending main motion, a main motion about to be introduced or that has just been pending.² There is no discussion for incidental motions (except Appeal a Decision of the Chair), and they take precedence over all other motions.

Incidental motions address questions of meeting procedure, including Point of Order, which is a formal request to the chair noting a meeting rules violation. Appeal a Decision of the Chair is used when a member believes the chair has incorrectly ruled on the Point of Order. Requests, Parliamentary Inquiry, and Suspend the Rules address areas where a

member may question a pending motion or a motion just pending, including:

- a) Parliamentary Inquiry – an informal request to the chair regarding a parliamentary procedure opinion relating to the current business.
- b) Request for Information (Point of Information) – an inquiry into facts that affect current business directed to the chair or, through the chair, to a member.
- c) Request for Permission to Withdraw or Modify a Motion after the Chair states the Motion – usually a minor or clarifying change.
- d) Request for Any Other Privilege.

A member can use incidental motions to simplify the discussion, such as Division of a Question, Split the Main Motion, and Decide Amendments to Complex Main Motions in Separate Parts, each of which aid the discussion by separating a motion or amendment into separate distinguishable parts. Where a motion is long and contains many paragraphs, the Consideration by Paragraph or Seriatim motion allows the body to discuss each paragraph separately before voting on the entire main motion. Use this approach to decide a motion with many complex

parts. One can use both the Division of a Question and Considerations by Paragraph to minimize confusion, aid discussion, and improve a member's understanding.

Finally, incidental motions that affect consideration of the main motion include Withdraw a Motion, made after the main motion is seconded, introduced to the body, and discussion starts. The Objection to Consideration of a Question can stop the discussion before it can begin. For example, an objectionable main motion is made, seconded, and introduced by the chair. A member may object if the discussion has not started, and a two-thirds majority is needed to pass. However, if the discussion does start, a member could use one of the subsidiary motions, including a motion to Amend, Postpone Indefinitely, or Postpone to a Future Meeting to stop considering an objectionable main motion.

The following incidental motion chart notes the typical types for a local governing body and how to handle each. The chair should refer to this chart to determine how s/he will handle an incidental motion.

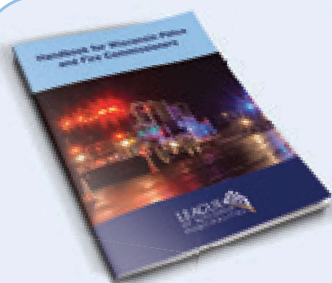
RONR §	Purpose	You Say:	Interrupt?	2nd?	Discuss?	Amend?	Vote?
§23	Enforce rules	Point of Order	Yes	No	No	No	None
§24	Submit matter to the Body	I appeal from the decision of the Chair	Yes	Yes	Varies	No	Majority
§25	Suspend rules	I move to suspend the rules	No	Yes	No	No	2/3rd
§26	Avoid main motion altogether	I object to the consideration of the question	Yes	No	No	No	2/3rd
§27	Divide motion	I move to divide the question	No	Yes	No	Yes	Majority
§33	Parliamentary requests and inquiries	Parliamentary inquiry	Yes, if urgent	No	No	No	None
§33	Request for information	Point of information	Yes, if urgent	No	No	No	None

Finally, what happens if a member wants to make an incidental motion, but there is no main motion before the body? The member can make an incidental main motion. For example, a member wants to suspend the rules for the entire meeting. S/he can make an incidental main motion, and a two-thirds majority is needed to pass. There are similarities between the incidental main motions and subsidiary motions.³ So, do not be surprised if a member uses them interchangeably.

1. RONR (12th ed.), PP 62-67.

2. RONR (12th ed.), p 62.

3. RONR (12th ed.), p 59.



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