



## Amendments that are not treated as Amendments

Amendments to an amendable main motion or to an amendable secondary motion are clearly explained in Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised (RONR Section 12). The three forms of the motion to amend (i.e., insert/add; strike; strike and insert) are among the most common and productive motions in every meeting.

The fundamental concept for amendments is that no more than one primary amendment and one secondary amendment are permitted to be pending at a time. The number of times a motion may be amended is endless, as long as a proposed amendment does not raise a question already decided. (RONR p. 135)

Unless an amendment is adopted by unanimous consent or the body's bylaws require otherwise, adoption of an amendment requires a majority of the votes cast. This means that one amendment is proposed, debated (if debate is in order), voted upon, and then business moves on to the next amendment or to the main motion.

There are several situations where motion modifications behave as amendments. However, these modifications appear to violate Robert's limit on the number of pending amendments because numerous modifications are definitely pending at one time. Additionally, the same question may be voted upon numerous times.

RONR refers to these modifications as "suggestion". These suggestions are applied to 2 subsidiary motions and to 3 incidental motions. The Standard Descriptive Characteristics of these suggestions are different from the motions they modify. These suggestions do not require the mover to be recognized (except Previous Question), do not require a Second (except Previous Question), are not debatable (except Fill a Blank and Nominations), are not amendable, and all (except Previous Question) require a majority vote to adopt.

Here are 6 amendments that are not treated as amendments because each proposed modification is actually a series of suggestions:

1. **Fill a blank:** The mover of a main motion (or a primary amendment), or any member, or the chair may move that a blank be created. The blank is inserted so as to contain names of persons or places; amounts; dates; or numbers.

Voting Sequence: Names (same order as proposed); Money to be spent (least amount desirable first); Money to accept (smallest amount first); Places/Dates/Numbers (either

same as proposed, or least popular choice first, or largest/longest first). (RONR p. 162-7)

2. **When completing an incomplete motion to commit**, here are the potential committees that members may suggest to handle a referred motion.
  - a. Committee of the whole
  - b. Quasi committee of the whole
  - c. Consider informally
  - d. Recommit to the same previous Standing Committee or Special Committee
  - e. Standing committee
  - f. Special committee

Voting Sequence: If more than one of these committees is suggested, the vote would follow the sequence as listed above with 2 exceptions. (1) If more than one standing committee is proposed, the first proposed standing committee is voted on first. (2) If more than one special committee is proposed, the one with the greatest number of members is voted on first. (RONR p. 174)

3. **When completing an incomplete motion to commit**, here are the potential methods to appoint committee member to a Special Committee.
  - a. Election by ballot
  - b. Nominations from the floor (with voice vote)
  - c. Nominations by the chair
  - d. Appointment by the chair

Voting Sequence: if more than one appointment method is suggested by the members, the suggestions are voted upon in the sequence listed above. (RONR p. 174)

4. **Previous Question:** This motion cannot be amended, but once moved may be “qualified” with suggestions. Let us assume that 4 motions are pending: (a) main motion, (b) an amendment, (c) refer, and (d) postpone. By default, a call for the previous question would involve only (d), the pending motion. The only qualified suggestions could be either (d) and (c); or (d), (c) and (b); or ALL the pending motions.

Voting Sequence: If more than one qualified suggestion is offered, the suggestion that involves the largest number of motions would be voted on first. (RONR p. 200)

5. **Division of a Question:** A member may wish to deliberate and vote upon the separate stand-alone parts of a single subject motion. A motion to divide a question would be in order and would state the manner in which the member wishes to divide the motion.

Let us assume that a motion has 4 parts – A, B C, and D.

The mover states division into 2 parts – Part 1 (A), and Part 2 (B, C, D).

Member Smith suggests 2 parts – Part 1 (A, B), and Part 2 (C, D).

Member Jones suggests 3 parts – Part 1 (A, B), Part 2 (C), and Part 3 (D).

Voting Sequence: When more than one suggestion is made on how to divide a question, and all the suggestions involve the same number of parts, the suggestions are voted upon according to the order in which they were suggested. Otherwise, the suggestion with the largest number of parts is voted upon first. In the example above, the body would vote on Member Jones' suggestion first, and then the mover's suggestion, and finally Member Smith's suggestion. (RONR p. 272)

6. **Nominations:** If neither the bylaws nor the body has a rule prescribing the method of nominations, members may offer the following suggestions.
  - a. By the chair
  - b. From the floor
  - c. By Committee
  - d. By Ballot
  - e. By Mail
  - f. By Petition (added from page 431 in RONR)

Voting Sequence: If more than one method is suggested, the vote to select the method to nominate an office to be filled follows the list above.

In summary, the vote on a main motion or a secondary motion is more like a True/False question because the body answers with 'Aye' or 'No'. Modifications are not conventional amendments because they offer the body a multiple choice answer to the question "Which shall we select."

Suggestions are not conventional amendments because suggestions permits numerous choices on the same question to be pending at one time. Additionally, with suggestions the body does not vote just one time on the modification and then move on with other business. The body continues to vote on the options until one of the suggestions for a question receives a majority vote.

The concept of suggestions vs. amendments illustrates not only that RONR is abundantly practical, but also quite thorough, persistently consistent, and endlessly resourceful.

Lorenzo R. Cuesta is a Professional Registered Parliamentarian. He is the President of the California State Association of Parliamentarians. He teaches interactive parliamentary workshops without PowerPoint or a shielding lectern. He is convinced that telling is not the same as teaching, and that listening is not the same as learning.