



Division of a Question: The Cure for Doing Too Much
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We all love a meeting that runs smoothly and efficiently, one that is considerate of members' time and gets things done. But have you ever been in a meeting in which trying to be too efficient actually winds up being confusing and frustrating? This often happens when you are working with a motion that tries to do too much. Members who are on the ball can help avoid this problem by learning how to use divide the question effectively.

Division of a question seems pretty easy on the surface. You just break up a motion into separate parts. Not so fast! There's more to it than that.

RULES TO TELL WHEN THE MOTION IS IN ORDER

1. Is this motion comprised of two or more completely unrelated actions? If the answer is "yes," it can be divided. And not only can it be divided, but it must be divided on the demand of one member. In this case, we don't even use the motion to divide.
2. Is this motion comprised of two or more actions that are too closely related? If the answer is "yes," the motion cannot be divided because one part depends on the other and is not able to stand alone. They are interdependent.

This is a little like Goldilocks and the Three Bears. Too much and too little means no motion to divide. We're looking for just right.

3. Is this motion comprised of two or more actions that are related but each part can stand alone and does not depend on the other part being adopted? If the answer is "yes," the motion can be divided.

APPLICATION: CAN THESE MOTIONS BE DIVIDED?

1. "To hold the installation banquet on December 23 and to hold it at the Marriott Hotel ballroom."
A member moves to divide the question to consider the first part "holding the installation banquet on December 23: and the second part to hold it at the Marriott Hotel ballroom."
Can this question be divided? Is this a demand situation?
2. "To hold the installation banquet on December 23, with a candidate reception."
A member moves to divide the question into two parts as follows:

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Part 1. To hold the installation banquet on December 23.

Part 2. To hold a candidate reception.

Can the question be divided? Do we need a motion or is this a demand situation?

3. “To honor the board of directors with a banquet, to print a book of the past presidents’ accomplishments, and to present each past president with a plaque.”

A member moves to divide the question into three parts as follows:

Part 1 to honor the board of directors with a banquet.

Part 2 to print of book of the past presidents’ accomplishments.

Part 3 to present each past president with a plaque.

Can this question be divided? Is this a demand situation?

RULES FOR MAKING THE MOTION AND AMENDING IT

1. The maker of the motion to divide must state how the question is to be divided.
2. The motion to divide the question can be amended. For example in application 3 above, the motion to amend could be to amend to consider part 1 and 3 together and part 2 separately.
3. Amendments can be divided.
4. The motion and amendments are not debatable.
5. The motion to divide cannot be reconsidered.

HOW THE CHAIR HANDLES THE MOTION

Once the motion is made and seconded, the chair states the motion. It is not debatable but it can be amended. The chair takes the vote.

If it is adopted, the chair immediately states the motion on part 1 and handles it like a completely independent motion. If it is a main motion, it is open to amendment, referral to committee, postponement, and previous question as well as laying on the table.

When part 1 is disposed of, the chair states the motion on the next part and so on.

Be ready to cut through the fog and confusion of an overly long and complicated motion with multiple parts by using the motion to divide the question.

Reference: RONR (12th ed.) §27. Pages 255-260