

Information: For the Record: What Should be Included in Minutes

The record of the proceedings of a deliberative assembly is usually called *minutes*. . . In an ordinary society, unless the minutes are to be published [publicly, like in the newspaper or the *Congressional Record*], **they should contain mainly a record of what was *done* at the meeting, not what was *said* by the members.** The minutes should never reflect the secretary's opinion, favorable or otherwise, on anything said or done. (*Roberts Rules, p. 458*).

“Meetings of governing bodies, commissions, and committees shall be conducted in accordance with the most recent editions of Roberts Rules of Order except in those cases where this Constitution provides otherwise. “G-9.0302

“The clerk shall record the transactions of the governing body, keep its rolls of membership and attendance, preserve its records carefully, and furnish extracts from them when required by another governing body of the church. . . The clerk of session shall be an elder elected by the session for such term as it may determine.” G-9.0203b.

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The body of the minutes should contain a *separate paragraph for each subject matter*, giving in the case of all important motions, the name of the mover, and should show:

- all main motions or motions to bring a main question again before the assembly...
- secondary motions that were not lost or withdrawn...
- all points of order and appeals, whether sustained or lost, together with the reasons given by the chair for his or her ruling.
- the name of the seconder of a motion should not be entered in the minutes unless ordered by the assembly.
- when a count has been ordered or the vote is by ballot, the number of votes on each side should be entered, and when the voting is by role call, the names of those voting on each side... should be entered.
- when a question is considered informally, the same information should be recorded as under the regular rules, since the only informality in the proceedings is the debate.
- The name and subject of a guest speaker can be given, but no effort should be made to summarize his remarks. [Roberts Rules, 459-460]

Language for Minutes (The way the PCUSA does it)

“The body approved the following recommendations (from committee)”

“The body approved the following recommendations with amendment (deleted text strike through, added text underlined)”

“*person* recommended, and the body approved, in accordance with, that...”

“The body approved a motion from the floor to...”

“The body approved the following persons for elections”

“The body approved the [recommendation or minutes] with comment.”

Preserving Why an Action was Taken & Process Continuity

As a rule, minutes should contain “what was done, and not what was said.” However, to maintain continuity and consistency of dealing with long term issues or projects, it is helpful if the minutes contain future readers with enough information so that it can be determine *why* an action was taken:

Options:

Include a “**Rationale**”: Often in the GA minutes you will find a paragraph titled "rationale" after a written, approved motion (a written motion is called a resolution, a vocal motion is recorded in the minutes as "the body approved a motion from the floor to. . . ") The "Rationale" is usually published ahead of time with the proposed resolution, but it can be added after the fact so the thread of the argument is preserved. The Clerk adds the paragraph, and everybody reviews it when they read the draft of the minutes, to see that it is a decent summary of the history and logic of the action taken.

Write something into the minutes: A committee itself can direct that something be written into the minutes, or the Clerk might add something he or she believed was important. Again, the committee approves the statement when it approves the minutes. This could be in the form of a historical note or explanation. For example: *Historical Note: As the meeting convened, winds that would eventually reach speeds in excess of 60 miles per hour began to pound the Port Townsend area. The Hood Canal Bridge was closed for most of the day, ferry service around Puget Sound was interrupted, and at times it appeared that the flexing stained glass sanctuary windows would shatter. Ferry service from Keystone, Whidbey Island to Port Townsend was cancelled while many ministers and commissioners from churches in the north portion of the presbytery were waiting in line. Service did not resume until evening, preventing many from attending the meeting.*

Motions can be used to approve concepts or principles: For example: "COM approved _____ in principle . . . , and authorized the following action to be taken. A final vote is scheduled for _____.

It is NOT recommend that approvals be made PENDING the receipt of certain items or information. This is because pending items are often not tracked, and a motion passed pending something is not actually approved until those items are satisfied. It is better to state by motion and in the minutes what requirements must be fulfilled, and then demonstrate fulfillment when the final vote or action is taken.

Use a formal Resolution: A *Resolution* lodges the rationale for an action in the *preamble*, which is a series of statements, each beginning with “whereas:”

*"Whereas, Lake Forest Park has experienced financial difficulties because...., and
Whereas as the usual policy is . . . abc. . ., but in this instance it makes more sense to use . . .
xyz . . ., and*

*Whereas, etc. COM doesn't agree in principle with the reduction, but will concur in this
instance because...*

*Therefore [be it resolved, That], COM approves of the following changes in terms of call
between LFP and the Pastors."*

Robert's Rules Allow Committees to Operate Informally: This extends to the minutes, especially since they are not published. Nevertheless, all motions should be written, for clarity, remembering that "the minutes should contain what was done, not necessarily what was said." This is to protect free and uninhibited discussion and sharing of sometimes opposing viewpoints. But history and/or reasons for acting (or not acting) should be recorded in a way that is succinct and clear, and approved when the minutes are approved.

Process Reports: Reports are never "approved," but are simply *received* (which doesn't require a motion), but it is important to recognize what steps, included in those reports, need to be stated in the form of a motion that is approved and recorded in the minutes. Any of the decisions about process (e.g. CIF circulation) should be motions recorded in the minutes. Whoever is moderating the meeting can do this very quickly and efficiently by using General Consent: "*The report says the church is ready to file its CIF. Is there any objection? Seeing none, the action is approved by general consent.*" As people get more familiar with the processes, those filing reports can also help by listing items that require action at the beginning of the report.

Reports should be included in the minutes as Attachments - This will make for longer minutes, but at least all of the reports will be available.

File all Minutes and Reports with Stated Clerk & Presbytery Office - We have set up subfolder for each church and reports will be saved by date. When this process is fully utilized, COM minutes need include only a reference instead of an attachment. Any person coming onboard midstream can be emailed all of the reports to date

Review the Minutes when preparing the agenda - Items in the midst of a process should continually be listed on the agenda under "Unfinished Business" with the current status, even if no action is to be taken at the next meeting.

DRS