

Meeting Minutes According to Robert's Rules

By **C. Alan Jennings, PRP** from **Robert's Rules For Dummies, 2nd Edition**

Minutes are important because they're the only surviving record of what was said and done at the meeting. They can be dry and boring. In fact, it's probably a good sign if they are! Most importantly, they need to be informative and easy to navigate for whatever the reader needs to know six months from now.

When you call a parliamentarian and ask for help, he's going to want to see the minutes, and he's going to need to find something important — maybe the exact words of a bylaw amendment that was officially adopted, or a tellers' report that furnishes details on the vote tally. Simple organization of the facts and use of unpretentious language are the best attributes you can give your minutes.

You want your minutes to be readable, but you must be precise in the information you give. Your minutes provide the record of the action taken at the meeting, so they need to clearly memorialize the facts.

Composing your meeting's minutes

To save you time and unnecessary work, Robert's Rules spells out exactly what needs to go into your minutes.

The first paragraph needs to include this information:

- The kind of meeting (regular, special, annual, adjourned regular, adjourned special, and so forth)
- The name of the organization
- The date, time, and location of the meeting (don't list the location if it's always the same)
- A statement confirming that your organization's regular presiding officer and secretary are present (or giving the names of the persons substituting for them)
- A mention of whether the previous meeting's minutes were read and approved (and the date of that meeting, if it wasn't a regular meeting)

Corrections to minutes are noted in the minutes being corrected; they're not detailed in the minutes of the meeting at which the corrections were adopted. (The minutes of the meeting at which corrections were made should merely state that minutes of the previous meeting were approved as corrected.)

The body portion of the minutes needs to include this info:

- All main motions (except ones that are withdrawn), along with the name of the member making the motion (but not the name of the person who seconded the motion).
- Motions bringing a question again before the body (except for ones that are withdrawn).
- The final wording of the motions, either as adopted or as disposed of. If it's appropriate to include mention of debate or amendment, you can note these items parenthetically.
- The disposition of the motion — including any adhering amendments — if it's only temporarily disposed of.
- Information about the vote.
 - **Counted vote.**
 - **Roll-call vote.**
 - **Ballot vote.**
- Secondary motions not lost or withdrawn, where necessary for clarity (example motions include *Recess*, *Fix Time to Which to Adjourn*, *Suspend the Rules*, *Postpone to a Particular Time*, *Ballot Vote Ordered*, and so on). Allude to the adoption of secondary motions by saying, "A ballot vote having been ordered, the tellers. . . ."
- Notices of motions.
- The fact that an assembly went into quasi-committee or committee of the whole, and the committee's report.

- All points of order and appeals and their subsequent dispositions, with reasons given by the chair for the ruling. (Rulings often establish precedent, so a careful record here is important.)
- The full text of any report that the assembly orders to be entered into the minutes. This situation doesn't happen often because a reference to a written report is usually sufficient for the record.
- Any of the juicy and disorderly words that a member has said that get him "named" by the chair for being disorderly.

The last paragraph of your minutes needs to include the hour of adjournment. And that's it! Well, except for the following additional notes to keep in mind when finalizing your minutes:

- The proceedings of a committee of the whole aren't included in the minutes, but you do need to include the fact that the move into committee occurred and also include the report of the committee.
- When a question is considered informally, the same information should be recorded as in regular rules. Informality is permitted only in allowing additional opportunities to debate.
- The full text of any report is included in the minutes only if the assembly so orders.
- Record the name of any guest speaker and the subject of presentation, but make no summary of the speaker's remarks.

Signing the minutes

Minutes are to be signed by the secretary and, if customary, may also be signed by the president. Minutes are your group's legal record of its proceedings, and the secretary's signature establishes evidence of the original document's authenticity.

Approving the minutes

The minutes of one meeting are normally approved at the next regular meeting, following the call to order and opening ceremonies.

If the meeting is an adjourned meeting, you approve the minutes of your previous meeting (the meeting that established the adjourned meeting) before taking up business where you left off in that meeting. Also, the minutes of the adjourned meeting need to be approved at the next adjourned or regular meeting.

Minutes drafted ahead of time aren't the official minutes *until the members approve them*. Because changes may be made in the minutes before they're approved, it's good practice for the secretary to note somewhere on the distribution copy that it's a "draft for approval."

When minutes are approved, the secretary annotates the original file copy with any corrections in the margin or retypes the minutes to include the corrections. The secretary then writes "Approved" on the minutes and adds both his initials and the date to the record.



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