

Preserving the Record



By Colleen Duris, PRP, 2009-2011 Altrusa International Parliamentarian



The Secretary of an organization has an important place in the business and history of the organization. No meeting can officially start unless the presiding officer and secretary are present. The secretary can have numerous duties, but of primary importance is record of the proceedings of a meeting of the organization. They serve a number of purposes, including: inform absent members what transpired, refresh memory of those that attended and maintain a historical record of the organization.

The minutes of a meeting should be as *concise and brief as possible* while containing the information necessary to maintain a complete and accurate record. One primary rule under *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised, 10th edition (RONR)*, is that minutes should reflect mainly what was DONE not what was SAID by the members.

The records of organizations may vary, but certain facts should be recorded by every secretary; those are:

First paragraph.

- Kind of meeting – regular, program, business, board, etc.
- Name of the organization
- Date and time of the meeting and place (if not always the same)
- Notation of the regular presiding officer and secretary, or their substitutes if applicable
- Action taken on the minutes of the previous meeting, approved as read or corrected.

Body of the minutes (separate paragraph for each subject).

Reports of officers, boards and standing committees.

- Reports, and who presented them, should be noted even if no action is taken.
- Treasurer's report should be entered in the minutes showing balance on hand at the end of the previous reporting period, revenue and expenses since last report and ending balance.
- The report is filed for audit, no motion to accept or adopt is appropriate.

- When action is taken based on an officer's or committee's report, it is recorded in the minutes.

Main Motions

All main motions are reflected in the minutes.

- The final wording of the motion as stated by the presiding officer before the vote was taken (with any amendments incorporated) and whether each was adopted, defeated, postponed, referred to a committee, or disposed of in some other manner.
- Generally, motions withdrawn are not recorded.
- Actual terms of discussion on the motion are not reflected in the minutes, nor the actual vote in number or by name unless called for or requested by the assembly.
- The name of the maker of the motion is included, but not the seconder.

Last Paragraph

- Reflects the hour of adjournment.

The minutes are closed with the signature and title of the person writing the minutes. The words *Respectfully submitted* are no longer used before the signature.

After the meeting, the minutes may be reviewed by a designated committee or at least the presiding officer before being submitted to the membership. After the membership has reviewed the minutes, the presiding officer asks if there are "any corrections". If none are provided the minutes are approved as submitted (or read if the Secretary actually reads the minutes). If corrections are noted, then the presiding officer notes that the minutes are approved "as corrected". A formal motion is not necessary to approve minutes.

Tips to help the Secretary

1. Be aware of bylaws, policies and procedures of the organization and the previous minutes adopted.
2. Be as brief and concise as possible, avoid grandiose language, personal opinion or anecdotes.
3. Ask that all motions be made in writing.
4. Notate action on all motions reflected in the minutes.
5. Record main motions exactly as adopted.
6. When a count has been ordered or a ballot vote taken, record the number of votes on each side unless a motion is adopted dispensing with this requirement.

7. Record only the name of the maker of the motion, unless the assembly orders the name of the seconder to be entered in the minutes.
8. The name and subject of a guest speaker can be included in the minutes, but not a summary of the remarks.
9. No mention should be made in the minutes of what did not occur in the meeting (i.e. no unfinished business, no report of a committee or no announcements).
10. When the minutes are approved, the word *Approved*, with the secretary's initials and the date, should be written below the minutes.
11. The secretary should sit near the presiding officer.