

Tool 12



What Should Be in the Minutes?

The Book of Forms (Sections 9 and 27–32) provides an outline of what should be in the minutes and how to handle them. Here are a few guidelines to help you take good minutes.

According to the Book of Forms, minutes must contain the date, location, name of body meeting (e.g., the name of the committee) and the names of those in attendance. Official minutes must be numbered using both cardinals and numerals. They record that the meeting opened and closed with prayer and include all the proceedings of the meeting to indicate that the business was conducted “decently and in order.”

Each decision should be recorded in the form of a motion, and the minutes indicate whether the group voted for or against the motion. Consider the decision to allow the youth group to hold a dance in the hall next Friday. At the time, the issue seemed so innocuous no one bothered to make a motion; therefore, there was no vote and no minute. However, a few weeks later, some members of the church were upset because the hall was used for a dance. Others claimed the committee acted inappropriately because proper approval was not given for the use of the hall. Without the decision being recorded in the minutes, how could anyone disagree with the disgruntled members? To protect everyone concerned, all decisions and actions should be recorded in the minutes as motions that have been voted on and have the approval or rejection of each noted. By requiring every decision to be moved and seconded, discussed and voted on, the church helps manage risk. Of course, some risks are greater than others but, if we get into the practice of managing small-risk decisions, then when the bigger ones come along we are already familiar with the process.

Generally speaking, the minutes record the motions of the meeting as they are moved and seconded. There should be no record of the discussion. You should avoid recording things like: “Paula complained that the sound system was inadequate as she has yet to hear a full sermon while Paul thought the sound system was fine and some people should move closer to the front.” While it is common business practice to record only the mover, in church business a motion requires a seconder if it is to be discussed and the name of the seconder is always recorded.

Under some circumstances, a committee may choose to place a summary of the discussion regarding a particular issue in the minutes to provide the context behind the decision or simply as a historical record. It is the right of every group to decide what goes into the minutes but the members may receive instruction from a higher court. When part of a discussion is recorded, it should reflect a summary of the issues raised. An outline such as “The committee was divided between members who felt ... and others who thought ... However, in the end, the committee agreed to ... ” might be used to illustrate the type of summary that will be helpful down the road when you or others review the minutes to see what was decided. Perhaps the most important thing to remember is that we keep minutes to record our decisions so that we have documented proof that we raised a particular issue, discussed it and agreed to a course of action. It is one of the ways we manage risk.

Any questions or comments? Please contact the Elders’ Institute for information.

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