



*What's a Snippet?* Glad you asked! A Snippet is short article about meetings or parliamentary procedure. New snippets are released on the first day of every month at [www.agreatmeeting.com](http://www.agreatmeeting.com).



## Snippet #116 Minutes or Minutiae?

No matter what type of group is meeting, it has a purpose. That purpose might be short term (to fight construction of a road through a certain area) or long term (to provide resources and educational opportunities for its members). If the association is incorporated, the minutes are the official corporate record of the actions taken and decisions made on behalf of the association. The secretary is the officer responsible for the production and accuracy of the minutes, whether or not there is a paid staff doing most of the physical production. *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised* (RONR) states that only two officers are necessary for a meeting: a presiding officer and a scribe. If either of these officers is absent, someone serves temporarily, or pro tem. In such a case, the minutes reflect who assumed the responsibility.

Minutes are a record – not a story. The biggest mistake most secretaries make is to write the minutes for the short term. Minutes must stand the test of time. They will become most important not at the next meeting, when they are approved, but at some future time when they are searched for the record of a particular action. If the style of the minutes makes it hard to find specific motions, if the language in the motions is incomplete or careless because everyone knew what they meant then anyway, or if there is more emphasis on what people said than what the assembly did, the minutes are virtually useless. Choose a minutes template such as those found in *A Great Meeting Needs a Great Secretary* and use it consistently to make searches easier.

Every template should contain a placeholder for the name of the association, the kind of meeting (regular, annual or special), the date and time of the meeting, and the names of the chair and secretary. In addition, it might help to note the time the meeting was called to order and adjourned, the location of the meeting, and a roll call report if attendance at meetings is mandatory. Numerical results of elections – not just a list of who won – must also be included to show the official result. If the election is by mail ballot, a report containing the results should be given at the next meeting and include full information.

Start a new paragraph for each motion and its outcome, such as whether it was adopted, failed, or postponed. Parliamentary authorities differ on the way the text of a motion is recorded. Under RONR, the motion as stated by the chair just before the vote is taken is the official version, under *American Institute of Parliamentarians Standard Code of Parliamentary Procedure* (AIPSC), the motion as stated by the member is the official action.

RONR recommends that the name of the maker of the motion be put in the minutes. AIPSC states that if the name of the maker is put in the minutes, the motion *as originally made and the motion as finally adopted* should be included. Both agree that the name of the seconder is not put in the minutes unless directed by the assembly. We at A Great Meeting, Inc. have seen lots of wasted time trying to log and spell names that, since the action taken is the action of the whole assembly, are irrelevant. We recommend that names of the maker and the seconder not be put in the minutes.

Amendments to motions are not recorded separately in the minutes, unless necessary for a complete record. For example, if a motion and an amendment are postponed to the next meeting, both are recorded so that the chair and members will know where to resume. If a motion is amended and then is adopted or fails during the meeting, only the motion as if it was finally acted on goes into the minutes. The amendments are extraneous information that clutters the record.

It is usually advisable to include only the level of detail that is necessary to comply with legal requirements. If more detail is desired, an executive summary can be prepared as a separate document that is not adopted by the board or membership. It is written in a narrative style and might include more information on reports or additional points made in the discussion. An example of an executive summary is found in *A Great Meeting Needs a Great Secretary*.