



WMCA Minutes Brochure

(Converted to flyer format for website)
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WHAT SHOULD MINUTES CONTAIN?

Minutes should be a record that is assumed **to be true, that a meeting was held**, and a record of the **proceedings** of that meeting.

“To be true”

Tapes, notes, and memories may be presented to rebut the degree of truth of the minutes by those who think the minutes are not a true record.

“That a meeting was held”

The kind of meeting: regular, special, adjourned regular, or adjourned special. Details of the happening: 1) who, 2) when, and 3) where.

The name of the body and/or sub-body; the fact that the regular chairperson and secretary were present or, in their absence, the names of the persons who substituted for them; the number and names of individuals present and absent; the names of individuals arriving and leaving during the meeting.

The date, including the year and time (a.m. or p.m.) with the times recorded for starting and ending.

The address, room, city, and state.

“The proceedings”

The substance of a succession or events taking place at a specific place or occasion. An official record of every official action taken by the body and/or sub-body.

Section 985.01(6) of the Wisconsin Statutes defines *substance* as “an intelligible abstract or synopsis of the essential elements of the official action taken by a local governing body, including the subject matter of a motion, the person making and seconding the motion, and the roll call on the motion.”

It would appear then that the minimum requirement of recording proceedings is to indicate topics discussed and to show motions and votes taken. Minutes are not required to be overly detailed and do not have to be a complete report of the entire discussion or debate of the body and/or sub-body.

Proceedings consist of items announced, reported, or discussed, ordered or decided affairs (motions, makers, seconders, votes) but not a complete report or entire documentation of the deliberation. Proceedings should include whether the minutes of the previous meeting were read and approved, as read or as corrected, the date of the meeting being given if it was other than a regular business meeting.

HELPFUL HINTS FOR RECORDING ISSUES AND SIMPLE MINUTES PREPARATION

Use a tape recorder.

Refer to the meeting’s agenda.

Use a notation system that works for you.

Interrupt when necessary—you can’t record truthfully if you don’t know what is going on!

Record more than you will need for your final minutes.

One of the most difficult tasks of minute writing is “weeding out” those statements that are not relevant.

Relevant is defined by Webster as “related to the matter at hand.” We can edit most of our non-relevant statements by asking ourselves the following:

Would this statement be beneficial if the minutes were read in court?

Will this statement distinguish issue from another similar one?

Will this statement draw together this issue and previous action already taken on it?

Will this statement educate the reader on a difficult issue?

Is this statement relevant to the history of the municipality?

Will this statement contribute to the accuracy or clarity of the minutes?

Will anyone care what this statement says tens years or even five years from now?

You may need to reorganize the happenings to make the minutes more clear.

Encourage the use of written reports by members that can be filed with you for future reference.

Encourage the group, especially the chairperson, to conduct the meeting in a responsible manner that will be conducive to good minutes.

Use brief standardizations as much as possible.

Eliminate repetitious phrases, unnecessary adjectives, unnecessary prepositional phrases, and unnecessary detail and embellishment.

Remove any editorializing.

If you are unsure about something reported in the minutes, ask for clarification when you present the minutes for approval.

MINUTES FOR CLOSED MEETING

There is very little written on the subject of closed meeting minutes. However, the minutes of closed meetings, like open session action, should include who, what, and where just as in open meeting minutes and must record the decisions of governing bodies made in closed sessions and should be limited to only an identification of the topic of the closed meeting.

The minutes of the open meeting in which it is decided to go into a closed meeting must show the motion to close the meeting (if there is no other business to be discussed the body must still convene in open session to consider a motion to enter into a closed meeting).

The motion to be recorded in the open meeting minutes should state the specific statute which permits closing the session (see Section 19.85(1) of Wisconsin Statutes) and a reference to the subject to be discussed. The open meeting minutes should also contain the results of a roll call vote on the motion to close the meeting.

Once the underlying purpose for a closed meeting ceases, the records must be released to persons requesting them.

Much has been said as to what should and should not be included in minutes. The answers are easy, adhering to the rules may be more difficult. Your minutes do not need to be a transcription of the proceedings nor an interpretation of what a person says. You should not allow your minutes to include statements that record personal opinions and editorialize irrelevant issues. Minutes need only be accurate and truthful.

This brochure is intended to provide guidelines for good minutes. Please consult your local policies, ordinances, and your municipal attorney for specific questions.

ADDITIONAL REFERENCES

- Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised
- Larry E. Larmer, Professor of Communications in the Department of Professional Development and Applied Studies at UW-Madison, 608/262-1176
- Handbook for Wisconsin Municipal Officials, League of Wisconsin Municipalities, 1-800-991-5502
- WMCA Clerks Manual
- Understanding Wisconsin's Open Meeting Law, Burt Natkins and James Schneider, Local Government Services, 608/835-3944
- Wisconsin Open Meetings Law Compliance Guide, Department of Justice, Attorney General, 608/266-1221

HELPFUL CONTACTS

WMCA's Web Page: www.wisclerks.org
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W7686 County Rd. MMM, Shawano, WI 54166-6086;
phone 715/526-3157; fax 715/524-3917;
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