

SESSION RECORDS GUIDELINES

Nothing in the *BCO* addresses *the* duties of the Clerk of the Session other than *BCO* 10-4, 12 (specifically 12-6, 7, 8) and 32-18.

I. DUTIES OF THE CLERK [from *BCO* 10-4; *BCO* 12-6,7,8; *BCO* 32-18]

1. A clerk or clerks shall be elected by the Session, Presbytery and General Assembly to serve for a definite period of time as determined by the court. *BCO* 10-4
2. It is the duty of the clerk, besides recording the transactions, to preserve the records carefully, and to grant extracts from them whenever properly required. Such extracts under the hand of the clerk shall be evidence to any ecclesiastical court, and to every part of the court. *BCO* 10-4
3. The Session shall hold stated meetings at least quarterly. *BCO* 12-6
4. Every Session shall keep an accurate record of its proceedings, which record shall be submitted at least once in every year to the inspection of the Presbytery. *BCO* 12-7
5. Every session shall keep an accurate record of baptisms, of communing members, of non-communing members, and of the deaths and dismissals of church members. *BCO* 12-8
6. (In the case of judicial proceedings) Minutes of the trial shall be kept by the clerk, which shall exhibit the charges, the answer, record of testimony, as defined by *BCO* 35-7, and all such acts, orders, and decisions of the court related to the case, as either party may desire, and also the judgement. *BCO* 32-18
7. (In the case of judicial proceedings) The clerk shall without delay assemble the Record of the Case which shall consist of the charges, the answer, the citations and returns thereto, and the minutes herein required to be kept. *BCO* 32-18

II. DUTIES OF THE SECRETARY/CLERK [from *RRO*, 11th Edition, pages 458-9]

1. To keep a record of all the proceedings of the organization--usually called the *minutes*.
2. To keep on file all committee reports.
3. To keep the organization's official membership roll (unless another officer or staff member has this duty); and to call the roll where it is required.
4. To make the minutes and records available to members upon request (see below)
5. To notify officers, committee members, and delegates of their election or appointment, to furnish committees with whatever documents are required for the performance of their duties, and to have on hand at each meeting a list of all existing committees and their members.
6. To furnish delegates with credentials.
7. To sign all certified copies of acts of the society, unless otherwise specified in the bylaws.
8. To maintain record book(s) in which the bylaws, special rules of order, standing rules, and minutes are entered, with any amendments to these documents properly recorded, and to have the current record book(s) on hand at every meeting. [Sessional Record Books can be obtained from the Christian Education Bookstore, 1-800-283-1357, www.cepbookstore.com. They contain acid free paper for archive purposes.]
9. To send out to the membership a notice of each meeting, known as the *call* of the meeting, and to conduct the general correspondence of the organization--that is, correspondence that is not a function proper to other offices or to committees.
10. To prepare, prior to each meeting, an order of business for the use of the presiding officer, showing in their exact order, under the correct headings, all matters known in advance that are due to come up and--if applicable--the times for which they are set.
11. In the absence of the president and vice-president, to call the meeting to order and preside until the immediate election of a chairman pro tem.

III. GUIDELINES FOR KEEPING AND EXAMINING SESSION MINUTES

“Minutes” are a permanent record in an orderly form.

PERMANENT

- All minutes should be typed.
- All minutes, including digital minutes, must be printed and kept in a bound volume for permanent record with the name of the Church appearing on the cover of the volume. Loose-leaf notebook is acceptable.

RECORD

- Include the date of celebration of the Lord’s Supper, record of baptisms, the manner of reception and dismissal of members. If a member is admitted to or dropped from the rolls, the Clerk must state the reason and refer to the appropriate article in the *BCO* (*BCO* 12-5).
- A copy of the annual budget approved by the Session and the PCA Annual Statistical Report should be attached annually (*BCO* 12-5).
- Joint meetings of the Session and Diaconate should be recorded, keeping in mind that no joint actions can be taken (*BCO* 9-4) and that notations should be made when the Session approves the minutes of the Diaconate (*BCO* 9-4; 12-5).
- The minutes should include the names of delegates to Presbytery or General Assembly as well as the report they make to the Session after Presbytery or General Assembly (*BCO* 12-5).

ORDERLY

- Every Session must meet at least once quarterly (*BCO* 12-6) and submit their minutes annually for Presbytery’s review (*BCO* 12-7).
- Follow Parliamentary procedure in accordance with *The Book of Church Order* and *Robert’s Rules of Order* as approved by the General Assembly.
- Each action should be put in the form of a motion, with a second and notation of whether the motion passed or failed. The Clerk should not write his personal opinion in the minutes, but notes may be made for historical purposes.
- The minutes of each meeting should be approved at that meeting or at the following meeting by way of a motion indicating the date of the minutes approved.
- The Clerk must sign each set of Session minutes. Congregational minutes must be included chronologically and signed by the Moderator and the elected Clerk.
- Congregation and or Corporate minutes must be approved at the instant meeting. Alternatively, a motion may authorize the session or other named individuals to approve the minutes following the meeting within a reasonable time (usually not more than a month following the meeting).

FORM

- Opening - At every meeting the Clerk should record the date, time, and place of the meeting, the names of those present, absent, and excused. The names of visitors should be recorded. The Clerk should note whether a given meeting is Stated or Called.
- Pages should be consecutively numbered, leaving no blank pages between meetings and no records left unattached.
- The minutes are to show that the meeting was opened and closed with prayer (*BCO* 12-9).
- Presbytery’s Committee to Examine Session Minutes shall report its findings using the terminology employed by the General Assembly in its *Rules for Assembly Operations (RAO)*, Article 16 (exceptions of form and exceptions of substance), and Sessions shall respond to exceptions of substance Presbytery finds by the same procedure specified in the *RAO*.

IV. PROCEDURES FOR EXAMINATION OF SESSIONAL RECORDS.

1. All sessional records shall be examined by the Minutes Committee annually. The Sessional minutes for the preceding year are usually due at the March meeting of Presbytery.
2. Clerks shall photocopy two (2) sets of the annual minutes which are due and deliver them to Presbytery no later than the annual March meeting. The Clerk of Session shall provide a letter or other certification to the Minutes Committee attesting that the copies are true and accurate copies of the minutes as they appear in the official Minute book of the church.
3. The Minutes Committee shall examine the minutes and record any exceptions, notation and comments. Each set of minutes shall be reviewed by two members of the Minutes Committee.
4. Exceptions are matters of substance wherein the minutes deviate from Scripture or the Constitution of the PCA. Notations are minor infractions of form but not of substance. Comments are just that.
5. Only exceptions identified by the Minutes Committee and approved by Presbytery are to be responded to by the Session. There is no requirement to respond to notations or comments.
6. The Minutes Committee shall report its findings to Presbytery. Presbytery will review the findings and the final adopted report of the committee will be transmitted to each Church. All exceptions of substance require a response by the Session to Presbytery.
7. Sessions may respond:
 - a. By agreeing with the exception and correcting the record (if possible), correcting its actions (if possible) and promising to be more careful in the future.
Or,
 - b. By respectfully disagreeing with the exception, stating its grounds and referring the exception back to the Presbytery.
8. If the Session responds by respectfully disagreeing with the exception and has not corrected or redressed the identified problem, and the Minutes Committee (after reviewing the Session's response and grounds) continues to believe that the Session has persisted in error;
 - a. the Minutes Committee shall report to the Presbytery the continuing exception and shall make a recommendation as to whether Presbytery should seek a more acceptable response. Or,
 - b. the Minutes Committee may request that Presbytery appoint a representative to present its case and refer the matter to a Judicial Commission, citing the Session to appear in accordance with *BCO* 15.
9. If a Session refuses to submit its minutes, or has failed to submit its minutes for two consecutive years, or has habitually failed to submit its minutes for review, the Minutes Committee may request that Presbytery appoint a Judicial Commission, citing the Session to appear in accordance with *BCO* 15.