

# PSW Advice for Sessional Records

This document contains some helpful information and tips for clerks of session compiled by the Committee on Sessional Records of the Presbytery of the Southwest. (Last edited: 2012-04-30)

## Abbreviations

FG -- OPC Form of Government

BD -- OPC Book of Discipline

PSWI -- Presbytery of the Southwest Instruments

## Things to include in the minutes of each regular session meeting

1. Date, time, and location of the meeting (PSWI B.2)
2. Session members and visitors present at the meeting, and any absences (PSWI B.2)
3. The moderator of the meeting (PSWI B.10)
4. Opening with prayer and closing with prayer (PSWI B.9)
5. Any official actions done by the session since the last session meeting (PSWI B.3)
6. Observances of the Lord's Supper since the last regular session meeting (FG XIII.8)
7. Any professions/reaffirmations of faith or baptisms since the last session meeting (FG XIII.8; PSWI B.3)
8. Transfers, or any other membership changes, including the church that members are received from or dismissed to. (FG XIII.8; PSWI B.3 & #4)
9. Previous minutes approved by the session (PSWI B.6)

## Things to include at least annually in the minutes

1. Session's review of the Roll of the church (PSWI C.3; FG XIII.8)
2. Pastoral compensation (usually included in a budget summary) (PSWI B.5)
3. Election of the moderator (FG XIII.4)
4. Minutes of any congregational meetings (note: these minutes should be read and approved at the congregational meeting; the session does not approve them) (FG XVI.5; FG XIII.8; PSWI B.5)

## Normal process for the session approving minutes

1. The clerk completes the minutes of the session meeting and distributes the minutes to the session for review, either before the next meeting or at the next meeting, so the session can give the clerk feedback for any corrections.
2. At the next meeting, the session approves the corrected minutes, and the clerk notes it in the minutes of that meeting. If the minutes are not ready for approval, they can be approved at a future meeting.
3. Once the minutes are approved by the session, the clerk prints the minutes in the official minute book and signs them.

## Process for submitting minutes to Presbytery

1. Locate the last set of minutes in the minute book that were previously approved by Presbytery.
2. Make 2 copies of all the following minutes **which have been approved by the session and signed by the clerk.** (PSWI B.6 & #2)
3. Submit the 2 copies to Presbytery when requested, and if any of the minutes included do not indicate that they've been approved (i.e. the minutes to be submitted end with the March meeting minutes, which were approved at the April meeting), include a note indicating that the minutes were approved by the session.
4. At the next meeting, bring your minute book for signature by the moderator.

## Process for handling exceptions taken by the Presbytery

(PSWI B.5)

1. The response to exceptions needs to be an official action of the session; this response should be in the next set of approved minutes you submit to presbytery for review.
2. In your minutes, list the exceptions taken by presbytery, followed by the response of the session. Some sample exceptions and responses:
  - a. **Exception:** Minutes of the 11/14/2008 meeting were not signed.  
**Response:** The clerk has now signed the minutes.
  - b. **Exception:** P. 1138: Member John Doe was received by reaffirmation of faith, but no prior notice was given to the congregation.  
**Response:** The session regrets the oversight, and will make sure proper notice is given in the future.
  - c. **Exception:** Minutes of the special meeting of 3/27/2009 are not included.  
**Response:** We neglected to include these minutes, which have been located and will be inserted as an appendix to the minutes of this meeting.
  - d. **Exception:** Non-communicant member Jane Doe appears on the roll in the minutes of 12/18/2010, but there is no record of her reception.  
**Response:** Jane Doe was received by baptism on 6/12/2010, but the session neglected to include this in the minutes.
3. When the session has approved the minutes containing the responses to the exceptions, send the Stated Clerk of Presbytery a copy of the section of the minutes containing the exceptions and responses.
4. At the next meeting of presbytery, the presbytery will review the responses and either deem them adequate or request further action.

## Common mistakes

These are some common mistakes seen in session minutes.

1. Minutes from one or two meetings not recorded as being approved. (PSWI B.6)
2. Members noted as being received by the session, but steps in the process of becoming members (such as their interview by the session, their public profession of faith, the name of the church they transferred from, or the date of their reception) is not recorded. (BD II.B.2; FG XIII.8; PSWI B.3)
3. A member is received by confession/reaffirmation of faith without the required 1-week notification to the congregation (DPW IV.A.3).
4. Meeting location not specified. (PSWI B.2)
5. The moderator of the meeting is not indicated. (PSWI B.10)
6. Minutes are not signed by the clerk. (PSWI B.2)
7. Congregational meeting minutes not approved by the congregation. (FG XVI.5)
8. Not following all the requirements for removing a member from the roll. (BD II.B.3; BD V.2.a)
9. Not including annually the provisions for pastoral support. (PSWI B.5)
10. The minutes not recording that the session meeting opened or closed in prayer (PSWI B.9)
11. No record of the session appointing commissioners to presbytery (FG XIII.7)
12. Session members present/absent at the meeting. (PSWI B.2)
13. Not including the annual review of the church roll (PSWI C.3; FG XIII.8)