

MINUTE MANUAL FOR THE 2024 MINUTES

Purpose

This manual is provided for mutual understanding across the board. (See also the video on the Presbytery website.)

- You may not understand a question, and wonder what the Stated Clerk means by it.
- You may wonder if you and your peer review partner are understanding the question the same way.
- You may be on the fence as to whether an exception is appropriate or not, and a “definition” may help.

Frequently Used Abbreviations

RONR: Robert’s Rules of Order Newly Revised

MOO: Manual of Operations (who says we can’t have some fun?)

BOO: Book of Order (see previous comment!)

G: Form of Government

W: Directory for Worship

The Minutes — Page Numbers

Submitted minutes must be in one file for the year, and “year” means January 1 to December 31; “fiscal year” of June to June will not be approved. The minutes shall be consecutively numbered, starting with Page 1 or the first page after the last page number from the previous year (which should be stamped). If you have pre-printed page numbers or it is a longstanding tradition to have consecutive numbers running from year to year, so be it. Otherwise, my recommendation is that each year begin with Page 1. Whether each set of minutes begins at the top of the page or begins on the same page right after the last set ends does not matter, as long as it is clearly marked. **The important thing is that the pages be consecutively numbered, regardless of the number with which you begin.**

If pages are not numbered and provided in order, they will not be approved. If you are having a technical problem, contact Sonja for help.

How should your minutes be presented?

Hard copies

If you are doing a one-on-one peer review (with a fellow clerk of session) or meeting with a regional group, you will want to bring your complete minutes, as well as the complete Minute Review Form. Do not bring a blank form in anticipation of filling it out at the review meeting.

If you cannot scan your minutes for a PDF exchange, you can send or deliver a printed hard copy of the minutes, in the correct order and with page numbers, to Sonja at the Presbytery Office and she will scan the hard copies. ***Each set of minutes should be signed.*** If any part of that is a challenge for you, contact Sonja directly and ask for her help.

Digital copies (Word or PDF)

The entire collection of minutes should be in one, single file. This may mean typing your minutes in one file running throughout the year, or cutting-and-pasting so that you put February after January, and then March after February. The minutes need to be in the correct order, with page numbers, and emailed to Sonja at the Presbytery Office; they can be in Word or PDF. If you are scanning hard copies into PDFs, signing them in advance of scanning is to your advantage (see Question 8 on the Review Form). If any part of that is a challenge for you, contact Sonja directly and ask for her help.

In short:

- Hard copies should be provided to your in-person partner, signed in advance.
- Hard copies can be sent or delivered to Sonja for scanning, signed in advance.
- PDF or Word documents, with page numbers and in one file containing all minutes, can be emailed to Sonja.
- If you have technology questions or need her help or assistance in any way, call Sonja!

What are Exceptions?

Exceptions are not a grade, but an invitation to improve. Question #38 asks if the exceptions from the previous year have been included in the minutes. If you, as the clerk, don't officially report to moderator and the session (thus entered into the minutes), "We got an exception for _____," then no one is going to support the clerk in improving that practice. Exceptions fall on the entire session, not only on the person who fills out the form.

Above all, don't let this overshadow the good work you have done overall with your minutes. Noting exceptions is to help you help your session strengthen any weak points.

You may be wondering, "Why was this item not marked as an exception before?" It is possible that

- your peer reviewer or I missed it previously.
- your peer reviewer or I "just let it go" or understood it differently last year than this year (hence this Manual)
- Or a peer reviewed it last year, and this year the Stated Clerk (often a harder grader) did.

Given I provide advance notice of changes, or give a year to get used to a change, an exception is not because something is a surprise. Clerks are all about not having surprises. Items that were not required in your 2024 minutes are indicated by **highlighting**. In this particular, anti-harassment and anti-racism policies and trainings were hoped for, but not required until 2025.

Minute reviews should be about the spirit of the law at least as much as letter of the law. When someone has put forth a good faith effort but it isn't perfect, weigh out your decision and your comments. Perhaps a note to do better rather than an exception is appropriate. Either way, the purpose of the minute review is to note places for improvement.

Below are the biggest exceptions in recent years:

- 5-Election of commissioners to Presbytery Meeting
- 6-Report to session by the commissioner to Presbytery
- 16-Sessions shall keep a register of baptisms, ruling elders, deacons and installed teaching elders with dates of service.
- 18-Election of a treasurer with length of term noted, or if elected previously note end of term date.
- 19-Election of a clerk with length of term noted, or if elected previously note end of term date.
- 20-Electronic Voting policy
- 24-Annual Review of the membership rolls
- 26-Budget established and approved annually by the session
- 26-annual financial review of all books and records for the church
- 28-Annual review of financial records of all church organizations
- 37-Full annual financial statements are reported to the congregation.
- 41-Session notified of previous exceptions to minutes taken by presbytery.
- 43-Approved Sexual misconduct policy
- 44-Approved Manual of Operations

Some last helpful tips

Clerks often put that something is “attached,” or in the annual report, register or roll. If it is a required matter, you still need to record that you approved or received these items; these are official minutes, so there needs to be some kind of explanation as to how they got there. Your annual meeting minutes are among the documents to be reviewed (the annual report itself is optional, but I think it’s a good idea), so the page on which the pastor’s salary was approved should be available. It really isn’t enough to say “Yes” to annual review of the membership roll; that should be reported to the session, and so in the minutes. And so on and so on.

The practice of putting "ACTION" or "MOTION" in all caps or even **BOLD ALL CAPS**) in the minutes is quite common and helpful, because it draws the eye to an action item one may be looking for.

Deadlines

- Review Forms and accompanying minutes must be in the Presbytery Office’s email inbox by **May 19**.
- Minutes and Review Forms will be exchanged electronically as they are received but they must be **completed and returned by June 1**.
- **All Minutes and Review Forms must be into the Presbytery by June 1.**

EXPLANATION OF THE REVIEW FORM *(Interpretations and comments in italics)*

Number of Elders (G-2.0202, 4.0102)

If a church does not have deacons, the responsibilities of the board of deacons fall upon the session. And unless otherwise noted in the bylaws, elders on session who are eligible under civil law are the trustees of the corporation.

A. Session Minutes

*You only need to provide **two instances** where you have done these things in your minutes. They are important, but routine, and so should appear in all your minutes. Rather than having you put all twelve-plus instances (assuming monthly meetings), and your reviewer check all of them, I will trust that if you show that you have done it twice, you are doing it regularly.*

If you are the reviewer and the minute provider lists twelve instances, you only need to check the first two.

The following items are generally straightforward, with comment only where needed. Otherwise, that the BOO or RONR is reason enough to be required.

1. The meeting is opened with prayer. (G-3.0105)
It is part of the Reformed tradition that we open and close our meetings, meals and other events, in prayer.
2. Date, hour, type, and place of the meeting is recorded. (RONR)
You need each one of these. If you have some but not all, that is an exception. Say “Zoom,” “Hybrid” or “in person” if nothing else.
3. The name of the moderator is recorded. (G-3.0201)
It is necessary to have a moderator for every session and congregational meeting; the signature ensures that occurred.
4. Names of present, absent, and excused are listed and quorums declared. (G-3.0203)
Who is present and who is absent indicates who may call for reconsidering a vote (only someone present and who voted in favor of the motion may call for reconsideration). To be entirely accurate, not only would

you identify who was present or absent at the opening of the meeting, but you should indicate if someone left the meeting early, as they would no longer be a voting member of that meeting after that moment in time.

5. Election of commissioners to Presbytery meeting. (G-3.0202a)
Every November, we vote on parity of ruling elder and teaching elder commissioners, because as those in the PC(USA) understand the Priesthood of All Believers, the Body of Christ known as the Presbytery Meeting is only at its best when every church is represented, and the variety of voices are present. The lack of a commissioner deprives the Presbytery of the fullness of corporate discernment. Your pastor (installed or temporary) may have attended the presbytery meeting. Pastors, however, are members of the Presbytery and not a member of the church, therefore they cannot be considered a commissioner from the Session, as they speak with “a minister members voice” and not that of a ruling elder commissioner.
6. Report to session by the commissioner to Presbytery. (G-3.0202a)
This can be provided orally or in writing. The lack of commissioner’s report deprives the session and congregation of important connection and information. It may seem minor, but the truth is, pastors and elders will have their own understanding and interpretations of what happened, and it is important for the session to hear from its commissioner. Hearing from a pastor is a bonus.
7. The minutes of the prior meeting(s) are approved. (RONR)
Until your minutes are approved at a subsequent meeting, they are not approved at all.
8. Clerk or clerk *pro tem* has signed the minutes. (G-3.0104)
Should a legal matter arise connected to your minutes, unsigned minutes may be challenged for their validity. If you indicate on the review form “Signed Later,” we have little choice but to believe you. But if legally challenged, that “review form approval” means nothing.
9. The meeting is closed with prayer. (G-3.0105)
It is part of the Reformed tradition that we open and close our meetings, meals and other events, in prayer.

B. The following items are to be recorded in the minutes, not necessarily on a monthly basis.

10. Session action to set dates for the celebration of the Lord’s Supper. Can be set annually, quarterly or at each time of celebration, in advance (Must be celebrated at least quarterly). (G-3.0201b; W-2.4009; W-2.4012)
*There must be a record in your minutes of approving the celebration of the Lord’s Supper at least annually. Annual approval for “The first Sunday of every month,” monthly or quarterly approval are all fine — just remember; that doesn’t include Maundy Thursday or other non-Sundays. Approval needs to be given **before** the Sacrament is celebrated. Reporting after the fact does not meet the criteria.*
11. Baptisms authorized by session prior to celebration, and candidates instructed and examined. (G-3.0201bW; -2.3011a; W-2.3012b)
*As with the Lord’s Supper, our only other Sacrament, approval needs to be given **before** it is celebrated. Reporting after the fact does not meet the criteria.*
12. Session shall keep a Baptized Members’ Roll. Paper is highly recommended; electronic is optional. For infant baptisms, record full name of infant, parents’ names, date of birth and names of persons presenting the child; for adult baptisms, record full name of the individual, including the full maiden name of a married woman, parent’s names, and date of birth of those being baptized. (G-1.04; G-3.0204b)
It is a good, if not required, practice to include all of the preceding information in your session minute, as it is a duplicate place that may be easy to track. For the sake of the review, if you include this information, put

the page number. If you do not include it, then write “Yes” or “Y” to indicate the rolls have been updated and the page number of where the decision was made regarding the baptism.

13. Minutes should record full names of those received into membership and how they are received: confession of faith, reaffirmation of faith, or certificate of transfer. If by certificate, the church transferred from should also be recorded. (G-1.0303)
The page number of where the decision was made. Including all of the relevant information in your session minutes is not a bad idea.
14. Record in full names of those transferred to other churches, including the names of any children and whether or not they are baptized. If the member is a ruling elder and/or deacon, a notation to that effect should also be made. The record should also include the name of the church to which they are transferring. (G-1.0303)
The page number of where the decision was made.
15. Session shall keep both an Active Members’ and Affiliate Members’ Roll (an Inactive or Friends of the Church Roll is optional). (G-1.04; G-3.0204a)
Answer “Yes” or “Y” to indicate you keep such a register.
16. Session shall keep a register of baptisms, ruling elders, deacons, and installed teaching elders with dates of service. Paper is highly recommended; electronic is optional. (G-3.0204b)
Answer “Yes” or “Y” to indicate you keep such a register.
17. Regular (preferably at least quarterly) financial reports received by Session. (G-3.0205)
I base this on G-3.0203 Meetings “The session shall hold stated meetings at least quarterly, and G-3.0205 Finances “Financial books and records adequate to reflect all financial transactions shall be kept and shall be open to inspection by authorized church officers at reasonable times...”
18. Election of a treasurer by the session with length of term noted, or if elected previously note end of term date. (G-3.0205)
*G-3.0205 Finances “The session shall elect a treasurer for such term as the session shall decide...”
Election to treasurer is not a lifetime appointment. The session and congregation should know how long a term is, or when the end of their term is set.*
19. Election of a clerk with length of term noted, or if elected previously note end of term date. (G-3.0104)
G-3.0104 Officers “The clerk of the session shall be a ruling elder elected by the session for such term as it may determine.” Election to clerk of session is not a lifetime appointment. The session and congregation should know how long a term is, or when the end of their term is set.
20. Electronic Voting Policy in your bylaws or standing rules (covering voting by email and/or meeting by electronic means). (G-1.0501; 3.0104, 5).
While these requirements are new to the Book of Order, it is in response to pandemic-era necessities, and so churches that have been using electronic means to meet since 2021 must have an electronic voting policy. This policy should be in your Manual of Operations. Write “Yes” and the Page Number, MOO, or “N/A” because the church does not use electronic means.

21. Boundary and Anti-Harassment Training for session members recorded monthly. (G-3.0106)

Desired in 2024 Minutes, Required in 2025 Minutes

While this entered the Book of Order in June 2023, for a variety of reasons the Presbytery was unable to provide a means to complete this item. While it is hoped these are accomplished in 2024, they are not required until 2025.

22. Boundary and Anti-Harassment Training for session members recorded in last stated meeting of the year. (G-3.0106) Desired in 2024 Minutes, Required in 2025 Minutes

While this entered the Book of Order in June 2023, for a variety of reasons the Presbytery was unable to provide a means to complete this item. While it is hoped these are accomplished in 2024, they are not required until 2025.

C. ANNUAL CONSTITUTIONAL REQUIREMENTS

23. Insurance (G-3.0112) Insurance

Each council shall obtain property and liability insurance coverage to protect its facilities, programs, staff, and elected and appointed officers.

The information on your carrier and policy number should be in your Manual of Operations, and I would advise including it annually in the same month's minutes (for instance, every January) so it is easily accessible. Write the Page Number and/or MOO.

24. Annual Review of the membership rolls. (G-1.0304; G-3.0201c)

25. Instruct, examine, ordain, install and welcome new ruling elders and deacons (and if not, why not). (G-2.0104b; G-2.04)

Instruction of all ruling elders and deacons should happen annually, new or not; there are always things we can be learning. The Presbytery offers annual training, and the videos are on its website.

Examining new officers may focus on such things as their faith journey, interest in serving, and what gifts they bring.

Some churches, for specific reasons, seek an exemption from the Committee on Ministry regarding the requirement to elect and install new ruling elders and deacons. Such an exemption must be granted annually; it is not given once and forever. Minutes should reflect both the request and the Committee on Ministry's approval to not elect new officers. Therefore two (2) page numbers are required.

For questions 24-26

G-3.0113 Finances

"Each council shall prepare and adopt a budget to support the church's mission within its area. A full financial review of all financial books and records shall be conducted every year by a public accountant or committee of members versed in accounting procedures. Reviewers should not be related to the treasurer(s). Terminology in this section is meant to provide general guidance and is not intended to require or not require specific audit procedures or practices as understood within the professional accounting community."

You do not need to pay for an expensive audit every year, but you do need to provide a full financial review every year; failure to do so will result in a notice to the Committee on Ministry for its determination. For the sake of transparency and trust, an annual review is imperative and required. See the Presbytery's Financial Management Handbook, found on its website.

26. Budget established and approved annually by the session. (G-3.0113; G-3.0205)
I advise including a copy of your budget in your session minutes.

27. Full annual financial statement included in the session minutes. (G-3.0205c)

28. Annual financial review of all books and records for the church. (G-3.0113)

29. Annual review of terms of call for pastor. (G-3.0108)

For installed pastors, approval comes from the congregation at a Congregational Meeting. For Covenant Pastoral or Supply Pastoral Relationships, this approval comes from the Session. Unlike #35, which is answered only by those with installed pastors, any church with installed or Covenant Pastoral or Supply Pastoral Relationships must answer this question.

30. Annual review of terms of call for pastor. (By congregation for installed pastors, by session for all other pastors) (G-3.0108)

Any pastor in an installed or temporary position has terms of call, with salary, housing, Board of Pensions, etc. listed. If it is an installed position, the congregation votes on these. Otherwise the session does.

D. Congregational Meetings

Both the congregational and corporate business may be done at the same meeting. In most cases the business for each is the same; the corporate meeting can confirm the actions of the congregational.

31. An annual meeting of the congregation is held. (G-1.0501)

You should have notice of the meeting posted outside, two weeks prior to the meeting, according to New Jersey law.

32. Special meetings of the congregation are properly called and the business to be transacted is specified in the call of the meeting. (G-1.0501)

Special meetings can only address the business specified in its call. Therefore it is important to identify in the session minutes what will take place in advance of the meeting.

33. A quorum is attested to. (G-1.0501)

34. A moderator is named. (G-1.0504)

35. The minutes are attested (signed) by the moderator and the clerk/secretary for the meeting. (G-1.0505)

Without a signature attesting to them, your "minutes" are only a record. Both congregational and corporate actions need to be properly attested to, in case someone were to challenge them at a later time.

36. A statement that the congregation **acted** on the terms of the pastoral call (installed pastors only). (G-1.0503c)

37. Full annual financial statements are reported to the congregation. (G-3.0205)

It is the congregation that provides the finances for the church, and so every degree of transparency is important.

38. All minutes of meetings of the congregation are included in the session records. (G-3.0204)

It may take a lot of paper to include the entire annual report in your minute book, but it is a permanent record, and the annual report includes matters important to the church. Not a requirement, but something to think about.

E. PRESBYTERY REQUIREMENTS

39. The General Assembly statistical report is included in the session records. (G-3.0202f)

It is not enough to report that the annual statistical report has been submitted; it must be available to review in the session records, so include it in the session minutes. That it is "attached" does not mean that the Session saw it but including the report in the minutes does.

40. Notice of any official communications to the session from the Presbytery, Synod, or General Assembly, including those by email. (G-3.0202d)

If it is not a mass-mailing, then it is an official communication.

- *Have you gotten a Per Capita invoice? Or a quarterly report of what you've paid?*
- *Has your church been told it can elect an additional commissioner to the Presbytery meeting?*
- *Has any Presbytery committee been in contact with you about a situation specific to your church?*

It is important that these things be shared with the session, and entered into the minutes, along with any response made.

41. Session notified of previous exceptions to minutes taken by presbytery. Exceptions are to be noted in the minutes and correction is to be made where necessary. (G-3.0108)

This is for the Clerk of Session's benefit. It is your task to inform the Session of its responsibilities, but you cannot make the moderator or session act as it should. When you receive word of exceptions, if you do not communicate that to the session and enter the information into the minutes, no one may ever know, and nothing will change. You will get a report each year, and it may feel like "you" got an exception. You have your role to play, to be sure, but it is the session as a whole that is accountable.

F. ONE-TIME CONSTITUTIONAL REQUIREMENTS (indicate if completed)

For an approved document or one being revised, mark "Y."

For no document or one in process, mark "N."

This should not be complicated:

If your session has approved a document — mark "Y."

If your session has an approved document, and you are updating or revising it — mark "Y."

If your session hasn't approved a document— mark "N"

If your session hasn't approved a document, even if you are working on it — mark "N"

There are documents and policies you have to have, even if they will be works-in-progress.

42. Approved Manual of Administrative Operations. (G-3.0106)

Do not make this any harder than it has to be. The Manual of Operations (MOO) is important, but it is not difficult to produce. We have information and videos on the website that give information. At the very least:

- *Get a file folder.*
- *Put in the policies and other materials that should be included (samples on the Presbytery's website).*
- *Present this compilation to the session as a proposed Manual of Operations.*
- *Once approved, put it in a place that is easily accessible, and perhaps provide a copy to every elder.*
- *I recommend putting a list of its contents in your session minutes annually, as a reminder.*
- *Update, with session approval, as old policies are updated and new policies are created.*

43. Approved Sexual Misconduct Policy. (G-3.0106)

Because it is so important, and required by both the Book of Order and by insurers, failure to have this policy will result in reporting to the Committee on Ministry.

44. Approved Child and Youth Protection Policy (G-3.0106)

Because it is so important, and required by both the Book of Order and by insurers, failure to have this policy will result in reporting to the Committee on Ministry.

45. Approved Anti-Racism Policy. (G-3.0106)

Desired in 2024 Minutes, Required in 2025 Minutes

While this entered the Book of Order in June 2023, for a variety of reasons the Presbytery was unable to provide a means to complete this item. While it is hoped these are accomplished in 2024, they are not required until 2025.

46. Approved Anti-Harassment Policy. (G-3.0106)

Desired in 2024 Minutes, Required in 2025 Minutes

While this entered the Book of Order in June 2023, for a variety of reasons the Presbytery was unable to provide a means to complete this item. While it is hoped these are accomplished in 2024, they are not required until 2025.

G. In Conclusion

Signature of the Clerk of Session _____

The minutes of (Church Name) _____

were

(1) ___ Approved without exception. (2) ___ Approved with [___] exceptions (3) ___ Not approved.

Exceptions (include item number), Commendations, and Comments.

Exceptions should be easy to find and understand, so they can be corrected. A suggested format:

18 — Election of treasurer not found on the page cited, (“nor on pages before or after,” if you are nice enough to look around – which isn’t required of you.)

40 — Manual of Operations — marked as “N”

Commendations include positive things you learned or may imitate in your minutes, such as “clearly written,” “easy to read,” “I like how you included this information” or “in this format.”

Comments may include

“ ___ is a good idea! Thanks!”

“This isn’t an exception, but it was difficult to understand. You might try ____.”

*“Your minutes might be easier to read if you ____.” (double-space, different font, bold or capitalize **MOTION**)*

Does this material reflect being sent by "a friend among your colleagues in ministry" (G-4.0404e)? Was it prepared and provided in a way that is helpful or easy to review?

Does this material reflect being sent by "a friend among your colleagues in ministry" (G-4.0404e)?
Was it prepared and provided in a way that is helpful or easy to review?

- Are written entries easy or hard to read?
- Are too blanks where you don't know how to mark the review?
- Are pages not in order on the PDF you were provided, or not in the same place on each page?
- Were you asked to review these minutes at the last minute, because they were not submitted on time?
- Your minutes were traded, and while you did your partner's review, the Presbytery is still waiting for your minutes to be reviewed — and it has been a long time. At that point the Presbytery indicate that the late or negligent reviewer has not been a friend to a colleague in ministry.

This is not to be mean, but to say, "You could have made these minutes easier to review. If I had trouble with them, someone else may have the same problem when looking for important information."

Remember: the Stated Clerk makes the final determination on the review. If your reviewer gives no reason for an extra set of eyes (because things were found to be "decent and in order") rarely does the Stated Clerk double check. But if reason is given for additional review, the Clerk may find exceptions where the original peer reviewer did not.

It is to your advantage to be reviewed by a peer.

Name of Reviewer _____

Church _____

*Is there anything in this Minute Manual that isn't clear? Or with which you disagree?
Contact Steve Shussett at steves@highlandspresbytery.org or 610/295-2930*