

# **Secretary 101**



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As recording secretary, you have one of the most important jobs on your PTA board. You see, many financial records can legally be destroyed after a period of time, but minutes from your meetings must be kept PERMANENTLY. Additionally, the minutes of your meetings are the official record of what has been done by your PTA; regardless of what may have actually transpired, if it isn't in the minutes, it did not happen.

## Definitions

**General Membership** - Consists of anyone who has purchased a membership in your PTA this "year."

**Executive Board** - Defined in your bylaws and typically consists of your elected officers, the principal, AND chairs of your standing committees.

**Executive Committee** - Defined in your bylaws and typically consists of your elected officers; can only meet between board meetings to act in an emergency, or as directed by the board or membership.

**Quorum** - The number of members who must be present at a given meeting in order for business to be transacted. This has nothing to do with needing a majority to pass a motion ... it is the **number who must be at the meeting in order for any business to be transacted**. Your quorum for each meeting type will be specified in your bylaws, but is typically a set number (minimum of 10) for general meetings and a majority for your board and committees.

## Binders You Will Need

You will need at least 2 binders. The first is for your procedure book (which will be handed down to your successor) and the second is for your minutes (which should be kept by your PTA forever).

### Procedure Binder

In this binder, you should keep all training materials, contact information for board members, correspondence sent or received, and any other materials used in performing your duties, other than the minutes from meetings.

### Minutes Binder(s)

In this binder, you should keep all original minutes for the year, separated by meeting type (board, general, executive committee), and in date order. Make sure they are signed.

With each set of minutes you should keep:

- ▶ a copy of the agenda
- ▶ all written reports that were submitted
- ▶ the attendance record
- ▶ written motions whether passed or failed

**Note: You should not keep your handwritten notes in the official binder.**

You should clearly label the binder on the outside with “Meeting Minutes - DO NOT DESTROY; RETAIN PERMANENTLY” and the school year. This is important so that years from now when people you don’t know are cleaning out the PTA storage, they don’t see your binder and say, “Gee, these are 10 years old, let’s throw them out.” **Minutes must be kept permanently.**

## Types of Meetings

**General Membership** - These are meetings of your General Membership (all your members). Your bylaws will specify how many of these meetings you must have (at a minimum) each year. Typical items handled at general meetings are adoption of the annual audit, budget approval (or amendment), election of the nominating committee, and election of officers. The quorum, or number that must be present for you to hold the meeting, is specified in your bylaws as a number.

**Executive Board** - Your Executive Board consists of your elected officers, the principal, **AND all of the chairs of your standing committees.** It is subordinate to the general membership. A quorum is typically a majority of these members, but you should refer to your bylaws to make sure. So, if you have a president, 3 vice presidents, a treasurer, a recording secretary, your principal, and 6 committee chairs for a total of 13, you would need to have 7 present to have a quorum as your board has 13 members. The more committee chairs you add, the higher your quorum will be. Bylaws typically require that board meetings are held monthly.

**Executive Committee** - The Executive Committee consists solely of your elected officers. It is subordinate to the Executive Board (and General Membership) and is only able to meet in the event of an emergency between board meetings, or as directed by the Board or General Membership. As such, Executive Committee meetings are held as needed. As secretary, should the Executive Committee meet in an emergency, you should prepare a report to be presented at the next board meeting of the action taken. (Note: you do not bring the minutes from the meeting, nor should they be approved by the Executive Board, but you do need to report to the board any action taken by the Executive Committee ... if no action was taken, then there probably was not a reason for the meeting in the first place.)

**Special-Called Meetings** - These are general or board meetings that were not previously scheduled but are necessary in order to deal with a particular item or items of business. Note: special-called meetings must be specifically provided for in your bylaws; if there is no such provision, you cannot hold one. Notice is required for any special-called meeting and your bylaws will specify how many days notice are required. (This could be different for general meetings and board meetings.)

The call (or notice) of a special-called meeting must **specifically** state what business will be conducted and **that is the only business that can be brought up at this type of meeting.** {RONR p 93}

You do not approve the minutes of the last general (or board) meeting at a special-called meeting. At the next regularly-scheduled meeting, you would approve both the minutes from the last regular meeting and the minutes from the special-called meeting. Minutes of special-called meetings should be filed in the binder with the minutes from the other, regularly-scheduled meetings, i.e., a special general meeting should be filed with general meeting minutes; a special board meeting should be filed with board meeting minutes. Do not make a separate place for them in the binder.

## **Order of Business (Agenda)**

In most PTAs, the president will prepare the draft agenda for each meeting, but as secretary, you need to assist, or the president may delegate this responsibility to you.

The standard order of business is as follows:

- Opening Ceremonies (Optional)
- Approval of Minutes
- Officer Reports
- Standing Committee Reports
- Special Committee Reports (if any)
- Special Orders (items the bylaws require be done at a specific meeting)
- Unfinished Business (only if there is any)
- New Business
- Announcements (Optional)
- Program/Speaker (Optional)

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As secretary, you need to track certain things and alert the president when those things need to be on an agenda.

First, items in your bylaws that should occur at a specific meeting should be on the agenda under Special Orders. This includes electing the nominating committee and electing officers as the times when these must take place will probably be specified in your bylaws. Anything in your bylaws that must be done in a particular month or in a particular time-frame should be included here.

Next, if a special committee has been created for a particular purpose, they will typically be given instructions on when they are to report back to the appointing body. As secretary you need to keep track of this so that (a) you can remind the chair of the special committee that they need to have a report and (b) you can inform the president that it should be on the agenda for the appropriate meeting.

Last, you need to track unfinished ("old") business. If at the last meeting a motion was postponed definitely, it should be placed on the Agenda under unfinished business. If at the last meeting, a motion to adjourn was made and passed while a motion was being debated (yes, this is allowed), that motion should be placed on the Agenda under unfinished business.

Note an exception to this: if a motion was laid on the table at one meeting (and not taken from the table at that meeting), you do not place it on the agenda for the next meeting. This is because it is up to the assembly to take the matter from the table to continue debate.

## **How Do I Keep Minutes**

First of all, know that for most things all you record is what was done and not what was said. The exceptions to this are verbal reports from officers or committee chairs, notices, and announcements.

Minutes are a business record. They should be professional and matter-of-fact. Keep personal opinions or cutesy symbols :- ) (like that) out of them. If you are ever audited or have to file an insurance claim, your minutes will be among the first documents they will want to review. You want them professional and business-like.

Robert's Rules governs how your minutes should be written. They are to be in paragraph form with a separate paragraph for each topic. You can optionally use headings for sections (like Officer Reports or New Business) but each topic under the heading should be done in a separate paragraph.

The first paragraph should contain the name of your PTA, the date, time and location of the meeting, whether the president and secretary were present (and if not, who acted in their place), and whether the minutes of the prior meeting were approved as read or as corrected.

Note that minutes do not become the official record of your PTA until they are approved.

### **Approving Minutes**

The first business item on every agenda should be to approve the minutes from the last meeting. These are apples to apples approvals. In other words, the minutes from a general meeting should be approved at a general meeting; the minutes from an executive board meeting should be approved at an executive board meeting, etc.

Minutes can either be approved as read/written or as corrected. You should have a place at the bottom to note the date and how they were approved:

Approved as:

\_\_\_\_\_Read \_\_\_\_\_Corrected on \_\_\_\_\_

You can then initial how they were approved and write in the date. Do this on the **original** set in your binder. If corrections were made, mark them on the original set in your binder during the meeting when they are being approved/corrected. (If you choose to retype the minutes with the corrections, maintain the original with the handwritten corrections in the binder with the corrected version.)

In the minutes of the current meeting, you simply note that "The minutes of the meeting of [date] were approved as [read or corrected]." You do not specify what corrections were made, you simply make them on the set being corrected.

If you have more than one set of minutes to be approved at a single meeting, which can occur in the event of a special-called meeting or if you did not have a quorum at the prior meeting, they should be done chronologically.

### **Last Meeting of the Year**

The minutes from your last meeting of the year are not held to be approved at the first meeting of the next year. They should be reviewed and approved via committee. The best method for this is for the chair to appoint two attendees at the meeting to serve as reviewers. Then once you have typed up the minutes, you need to have them review them, make any necessary corrections, and then they should sign them as follows:

Approved via Committee on \_\_\_\_\_[date]

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

At the first meeting of the next year, you simply report (and record in those minutes) that the minutes from the prior meeting were reviewed and approved via committee.

(If the president forgets to appoint the members of this committee, the minutes can be reviewed by the executive committee, or the executive committee could meet to appoint the two members to complete the review.)

## Recording Motions

Robert's Rules provides that only one question (main motion) can be pending at any given time. This is not to say, however, that only one motion can be pending at the same time. During debate, a variety of secondary motions may be made. Most motions require a second, but you do not record the name of the seconder in your minutes; you only record the maker of the motion.

As secretary, you must track every motion and the outcome of them, but when recording motions in your minutes, you typically only need to record the motion as it was ultimately voted on.

In other words, if there was a motion by Jane Smith to purchase books for the media center for a cost not to exceed \$300.00, but during debate, the amount was amended to be \$500.00 (the secondary motion to amend), all you would need to record is the following:

After debate and amendment, the motion by Jane Smith to purchase books for the media center for a cost not to exceed \$500.00 was adopted.

If the motion to amend had failed, then the motion would simply remain as it was originally stated:

After debate, the motion by Jane Smith to purchase books for the media center for a cost not to exceed \$300.00 was adopted.

During debate on motions, you do not record what people say; **all you care about is the final wording on the motion and whether it passed or failed** (or was otherwise disposed of).

## Other Ways to Dispose of a Motion

In addition to taking a vote, a **motion may be postponed** until the next meeting or it might be referred to a committee.

If during debate, someone moves to postpone the motion until the next meeting, you would reflect this in your minutes as follows:

Upon motion of John Doe, the motion by Jane Smith to purchase books for the media center for a cost not to exceed \$300.00 was postponed until the next meeting.

If during debate, it is moved that the **matter be referred to a committee**, your minutes would show the following:

Upon motion of John Doe, the motion by Jane Smith to purchase books for the media center for a cost not to exceed \$300.00 was referred to the finance committee to evaluate and report at the next meeting.

If either the motion to postpone or refer to committee failed, debate would simply continue during the meeting on the original motion and you would not need to record it in your minutes.

## **Recording Votes**

In the normal course of voting, you will simply record if the motion was adopted (carried) or if it was not adopted (failed). The exceptions to this are in the event of a counted vote or a ballot vote.

### **Counted Vote**

If for any reason a counted vote is conducted, you must record the exact number for and against. Using the same motion as above:

After debate and amendment, the motion by Jane Smith to purchase books for the media center for a cost not to exceed \$500.00 was adopted by a counted vote of 13 for and 8 against.

### **Ballot Vote**

In the event of a ballot vote, the chair will appoint tellers (usually 2 or 3) to count the votes. They must then prepare a report, which you will need to enter in its entirety into the minutes as follows:

The election for the office of president was then held. Jane Smith was nominated by the nominating committee and John Doe was nominated from the floor. A ballot vote was conducted and the tellers' report is as follows:

#### Tellers' Report

# Votes Cast	25
# Votes Needed to Elect	13
# Votes for Jane Smith	18
# Votes for John Doe	6
# Illegal Votes	1

The chair declared Jane Smith as the newly-elected president.

## **Other Things that Must be Recorded**

If you have a guest speaker or program, you should record the name of the speaker and the subject matter, but no details.

If anyone raises a point of order (or if it is subsequently appealed), you should record the point of order, the chair's ruling on the point of order, as well as the chair's stated reasons for his/her ruling.

Some motions require previous notice. If anyone provides verbal notice of a motion to be made at the next meeting, it must be recorded.

If a motion is made to adjourn or recess, it should be recorded like any other motion, even though these motions can be made while other motions are pending. (After a recess, you would pick up right where you left off; if a motion to adjourn is passed while other motions are pending, you would need to keep track of that to ensure it was on the agenda for the next meeting under unfinished business.)



## **What Not to Record**

Do not record any of the following:

Discussion on motions - only the final wording of the motion and the result are recorded

The name of the seconder of a motion

Secondary motions (unless needed for clarity)

Motion for the previous question (call the question) - this motion is simply acted upon by the chair; if it passes, a vote on the pending motion is immediately taken (and that you record); if it fails, debate simply continues.

Calls for division - if anyone disagrees with the chair's determination of whether a motion passed or failed, they may call for division, which requires the chair take a rising or counted vote. You would not record the call for division, but if a counted vote was taken, you would record that, in place of the original voice vote.

## **Getting Motions in Writing**

As secretary, it is within your discretion to require that motions be submitted in writing. (See sample form at the end of this document.) This is especially helpful with long motions to ensure that you get the wording exactly as the maker intended. (It is not necessary with very simple motions like a motion for the previous question or a motion to recess.)

## **Signing the Minutes**

As secretary, it is your responsibility to sign all original minutes (not the president). If you are unable to attend a meeting, then the secretary pro tem (temporary) should be the one to prepare and sign those minutes.

## **What if I am Going to Miss a Meeting?**

While it is ultimately up to the meeting assembly to appoint your replacement, it is always a good idea to make arrangements with someone ahead of time ... and then tell the president you will not be able to attend and the name of the person you have asked to take your place.

Make sure you get the minutes that need to be approved at this meeting to either your replacement or the president so that they will be able to complete that item of business.

Then, at the meeting, the president can simply announce that you were unable to be there and ask if there is any objection to your replacement serving as secretary pro tem. (No one ever objects at this point because they don't want to end up having to take the minutes!) The secretary pro tem should record this in the minutes.

After the meeting, make sure you get the original minutes (signed by the secretary pro tem), attendance records, written reports, and the agenda for placement in your permanent binder. If the minutes from the prior meeting were approved with corrections, make sure you get those corrections from the secretary

pro tem for inclusion in your permanent minute book as well.

### Helpful Hints

Type up the minutes from each meeting as soon as possible after the meeting while everything is still fresh in your mind. (Trust me, if you wait there will be things in your notes that will make no sense to you.) Send the draft to the president to review and incorporate any corrections. If there was any unfinished business, or a committee was instructed to report back at a certain meeting, put that in your calendar now so you cannot forget when the appropriate meeting rolls around.

Record the meetings on a tape recorder to assist with preparing the minutes. NOTE: unless you have a standing rule granting this authority, at the beginning of each meeting, the attendees must be asked if anyone objects to being recorded - if a single person objects, then you cannot record that particular meeting. Recordings should not be retained permanently, but should be erased after the minutes are approved.

Keep a list of things that must be done at specific meetings in the front of your binder to assist with preparing agendas. If anything occurs at a meeting that will need to be followed up on at a future meeting, add it to this list right away so it won't fall through the cracks.

Always have your Bylaws, Standing Rules, and prior meeting minutes with you at every meeting.

### Sample Motion Form

<b>ABC PTA Motion Form</b>				No.: _____
___ General	___ Executive Board	___ Executive Committee	Date: _____	
Adopted: ___ Yes    ___ No    ___ Other: _____				
Moved that: _____				
_____				
_____				
_____				
Motion by: _____		Seconded By: _____		

# Sample Agenda

Opening Ceremonies (Optional)  
Minutes  
Reports of Officers and Standing Committees  
Reports of Special Committees (if any)  
Special Orders (if any)  
Unfinished Business/General Orders (if any)  
New Business  
Announcements (Optional)  
Program (Optional)

**Note: There is no  
'Call to Order' on  
an agenda!**

# Sample Minutes

PTA Name  
General Meeting  
September 10, 2012

A general meeting of the \_\_\_\_\_ PTA was held on Thursday, September 10, 2012 at 6:30 pm in the cafeteria. The president and secretary were present.

## Minutes

The minutes from the general meeting held on August 13, 2009 were approved as corrected.

## Officer Reports

The President provided a written report.

The Treasurer provided a written report and budget update, noting that income from the first fund-raiser was less than anticipated. Total income so far has been \$8,360.00 and expenses paid have totaled \$5,890.00. The current bank balance is \$4,219.12.

The Vice President of Ways & Means verbally reported that the first fund-raiser brought in approximately \$3,000.00 less than expected and that it may be necessary to look at other ways to raise these funds.

## Standing Committee Reports

The chair of the membership committee reported that the PTA has sold 302 memberships so far, which is 20 more than the total sold last year. Written reports were received from the following committees: Ways & Means, Volunteer, and Student Support.

## New Business

Motion by Jane Smith that the PTA add a candy bar fund-raiser to make up the shortfall in the first fund-raiser. After debate, motion failed.

After debate and amendment, the motion by John Doe that the PTA sponsor a student walk-a-thon on Friday, October 30, 2010 during school hours was adopted.

## Announcements

It was announced that the next general meeting would be held on Thursday, November 19, 2010 at 6:30 pm.

## Program

Officer Jones from the sheriff's office then spoke about safety issues with students walking and riding their bikes to and from school.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:32 pm.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Mary Jones, Recording Secretary

Approved As:

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Read: \_\_\_\_\_  
Corrected: \_\_\_\_\_

**More information may be found on our website:  
[www.hccptaptsa.org](http://www.hccptaptsa.org).**