




Mastering meetings using Robert's Rules

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Detailed minutes put your board at risk

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(<https://jurassicparliament.com/detailed-minutes-put-your-board-at-risk/#comments>)

(<https://jurassicparliament.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Warning-Danger-Zone.jpg>) **Do you include what directors say** in the minutes of your nonprofit board meetings? Jurassic Parliament strongly recommends that you **stop immediately**.

Detailed accounts of “who said what to whom” in your minutes are **dangerous**. In the worst case, they provide fodder for your opponents should your board ever be involved in a lawsuit. In addition, individual arguments, given in good faith, could create liability for the individuals involved. (Note that I am not an attorney and this does not constitute legal advice.)

In the ordinary way, **detailed minutes tend to personalize and politicize your discussions**, moving the focus from WHAT the board decides to WHO said WHAT. This has a chilling effect and **corrodes your decision-making process**.

In fact, WHO said WHAT is irrelevant. It is the decisions of the board AS A WHOLE that are important. **Discussion is merely a means to an end, not an end in itself.**



More reasons why detailed minutes are a bad idea

- Robert's Rules of Order (<http://www.robertsrules.com/>) states clearly that minutes should include what is done and not what is said (*Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised, 11th edition*, 468, ll. 16-18).
- The purpose of minutes is to create an official record of the body's actions. This purpose becomes clouded over and obscured when irrelevant material is included.
- Detailed minutes make it hard to sort out the actions taken from the verbiage.
- If records are kept of people's arguments, participants can become intimidated and guarded. They may fail to express their true opinion, which is essential for good decision-making.
- The result is mere posturing, rather than true expression of genuine concerns. We see this effect all the time on the national scene.
- Detailed minutes absorb a lot of staff time and can result in the body's taking too much time to correct the record – "that's not what I said!"

What should you do instead of keeping detailed minutes?

- If you wish to create a record of the reasons for a decision, write a preamble to your motion. This section starts with "Whereas" and explains the thinking behind the decision.
- For nonprofit boards, we recommend "summary minutes." You can read about them here. (<https://jurassicparliament.com/summary-minutes/>)
- For civic and public bodies, we believe that action minutes are best. Read our posting here. (<https://jurassicparliament.com/action-minutes-serve-the-city-best/>)

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