

CCBJM Rules for Review of Session Records
According to the Bylaws of the Ohio Presbytery

Note: The OP Bylaws include rules for review of session records but also incorporate portions of the General Assembly's Rules of Assembly Operations. The full rules adopted or incorporated by the OP are restated here to apply to the Presbytery's review of Session minutes. Additionally, other requirements from the BCO are included below.

1. It is the right and duty of the Ohio Presbytery to review, at least once a year, the records of the sessions of the Ohio Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church in America (*BCO* 40-1 and 2). [RAO 16-1]
2. The Ohio Presbytery carries out this review through its Committee on Constitutional Business and Judicial Matters. [RAO 16-2]
3. **Guidelines for Keeping Session Minutes** [RAO 16-3]
 - a. The stated clerk of each session is responsible for the custody of the minutes of session.
 - b. The minutes should be neat and legible. Minutes should be dated, and the pages numbered. An official copy of the minutes should be printed and either bound or kept in a good binder.
 - c. The minutes should contain the following information:
 - i. The kind of meeting: stated, called, adjourned stated, or adjourned called.
 - ii. The name of the congregation.
 - iii. The date, time and place of the meeting.
 - iv. The name of the moderator, and if someone other than the regular stated clerk served as a clerk pro-tem, his name should be indicated.
 - v. That sessions were opened and closed with prayer (*BCO* 10-5).
 - vi. The names of those present at the meeting, indicating whether they were teaching elders or ruling elders, and the names of visitors may be included.
 - vii. Approval of current or previous minutes.
 - d. The minutes should be signed by the clerk.
 - e. Additional guidelines:
 - i. Points of order ruled against by the chair and appeals from the decision of the chair, whether sustained or lost, together with the reason given by the chair for his ruling, should be included for the sake of any case that may be carried to a higher court and for the protection of a minority. The record of the session's actions should be recorded.
 - ii. When a count has been ordered, or the vote is by ballot, the number of votes on each side should be entered.

- iii. The proceedings of a committee of the whole should not be entered in the minutes, but the fact that the assembly went into the committee as a whole. The committee report should be recorded.
 - iv. Minutes of session relating to examinations must list all specific requirements and trials for ordination which have been accomplished (*BCO* 24-1). It should be recorded that each candidate being examined for ordination was required to state the specific instances in which he may differ with the *Confession of Faith* and *Catechisms* in any of their statements and/or propositions. This does not mean that a separate vote on each item must be recorded. Session minutes should record candidates' stated differences with our Standards in their own words. Each session should also record whether:
 - 1. the candidate stated that he had no differences; or
 - 2. the court judged the stated difference(s) to be merely semantic; or
 - 3. the court judged the stated difference(s) to be more than semantic, but not out of accord with any fundamental of our system of doctrine; or
 - 4. the court judged the stated difference(s) to be out of accord, that is, hostile to the system or striking at the vitals of religion.
 - v. Minutes of executive sessions are not exempt from the general requirement that session's actions shall be recorded in the session's minutes and that these minutes (even if kept in a separate section on executive sessions) shall be submitted to the Ohio Presbytery for review (*BCO* 12-7; 13-9.b.; 40-1). Session may ask that the CCBJM deal with these minutes confidentially. However, any exceptions to these minutes must be submitted to the Ohio Presbytery through the normal procedures.
 - vi. Minutes of session dealing with judicial cases shall not be dealt with by CCBJM (*BCO* 40-3) when notice of appeal or complaint has been given the lower court, but still must be submitted for review as part of the record.
- f. The following suggestions are made to clerks and sessions for the keeping of minutes:
- i. The minutes should record the actions of the session, including all motions adopted and business transacted, together with such additional information as the session deems desirable for historical purposes.
 - ii. Ordinarily in church courts, motions that are lost are not included in the record, unless an affirmative vote for the lost motion is recorded, in which case the lost motion must be shown.
 - iii. Each main motion should normally be recorded in a separate paragraph. Subsidiary and procedural motions may be recorded in the same paragraph with the main motion to which it pertains.

- g. The following must be included in or appended to Session minutes or annual records submitted to the Ohio Presbytery:
 - i. Minutes of meetings of the Board of Deacons; [BCO 9-4]
 - ii. Minutes of congregational meetings; [BCO 25-5]
 - iii. Rolls of communing and non-communing members; [BCO 12-8]
 - iv. Records of baptisms, deaths, and dismissions of members; and [BCO 12-8]
 - v. Congregational bylaws and other rules of the local Session. [OP Bylaws 5-7b.]
- 4. **Guidelines for Submitting Session Records:** Sessions shall deliver two copies of their records of the previous calendar year to the committee at the February Stated Meeting of Presbytery or otherwise transmit them in electronic or physical form to the chairman of the committee by the same date. [OP Bylaws 5-7b.(1)]
- 5. The stated clerk of each session, or his representative, should be prepared to meet with the committee to answer questions and to clarify any possible discrepancy. The committee should make every reasonable effort to consult with the clerk of the session (or his designee) on any questions before finalizing the report to the Ohio Presbytery. [RAO 16-5]
- 6. **Guidelines for Examining Session Records:** [RAO 16-6]
 - a. Presbytery minutes shall be examined for conformity to:
 - i. The Scriptures and the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church in America as to the substance of the actions recorded (BCO 40-2), and
 - ii. The Presbytery Guidelines for Keeping Session Minutes, as to form, structure, and minimum content (3, above; see RAO 16-3).
 - b. The findings of the committee with respect to the minutes of each session shall be noted under the following categories as appropriate:
 - i. Exceptions of substance: Apparent violations of the Scripture or serious irregularities from the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church in America or the Bylaws of the Ohio Presbytery, actions out of accord with the deliverances of the General Assembly or Ohio Presbytery, and matters of impropriety and important delinquencies, should be reported under this category.
 - ii. Exceptions of form: Violations of the Ohio Presbytery’s Guidelines for Keeping Session Minutes (3, above), rules of order, etc. should normally be reported under this category. When a minor irregularity from a BCO provision or requirement is noted, it may be treated as an exception of form (BCO 40-3). If subsequent minutes continue to reflect the same particular exception of form, it may become an exception of substance.
 - iii. Notations: The committee may report to the clerk of session any typographical errors, misspellings, improper punctuation and other minor variations in form and clarity. These are to be given as advice for the respective clerks.

- c. All minutes shall be reviewed by at least two members of the Presbytery who do not sit on the Session being reviewed, and the committee shall make the final recommendations to the Presbytery. [OP Bylaws 5-7b.(2)]

7. Guidelines for Reporting on Presbytery Records:

- a. Notations and exceptions of form (see *RAO* 16-6 c.) shall normally be sent to the Clerk of Session by the committee without being read before Presbytery or recorded in its minutes. Exceptions of substance shall be reported to Presbytery as recommendations to take action upon. [OP Bylaws 5-7b.(3)]
- b. Records shall be approved as without exception or with exception of form and/or substance. [OP Bylaws 5-7b.(4)]

8. Guidelines for Responding to Presbytery [RAO 16-10]

- a. Sessions shall be advised of exceptions of form; however, they shall take note in their minutes of exceptions of substance taken by the Ohio Presbytery, together with their responses adopted by the session to these exceptions.
- b. Sessions shall respond to exceptions of substance by the next stated meeting of Presbytery. This committee will also receive these responses and report those to Presbytery with their recommendation. [OP Bylaws 5-7b.(5)]
- c. Sessions shall correspond with the Ohio Presbytery the disposition they have made of the exceptions of substance (including general), with specific reference to session's action as recorded in its minutes. Responses shall be in one of the following forms:
 - i. Session agrees with the exceptions and corrects its record (if possible), corrects its actions (if possible) and promises to be more careful in the future. Or,
 - ii. Session respectfully disagrees with the exception, states its grounds and refers the exception back to the Ohio Presbytery.
- d. If, in responding to an exception of substance, a session reports that it disagrees with the conclusion of the Ohio Presbytery and/or has not corrected or redressed the identified problem; and, the committee (after reviewing the session's response and rationale) continues to believe that the session has persisted in an error that is significant enough to require an Ohio Presbytery response; then, the committee shall notify the Ohio Presbytery of the continuing exception, and shall make recommendation as to whether the Ohio Presbytery should again seek a more acceptable response from the session, or should appoint a representative to present its case and to cite the session to appear for proceedings before the Ohio Presbytery or a commission thereof according to *BCO* 40-5.