

Minute Taking

Why take minutes?

There are many meetings to attend throughout the working week, some will be more formal than others, but all will need the key points noted down in order to:

- remember what actions were agreed;
- remember who agreed to do what;
- remember the timescales involved;
- outline what was discussed for those who were unable to attend;
- explain the reason why a course of action was taken, when looking back later on.

<Meeting Title>				
Logistics				
Time:				
Date:				
Attendees:				
Please Bring/Read:				
Teleconference details:				
Meeting purpose:				
Agenda				
Item	Time	Agenda Item	Presenter	
1.				
2.				
3.				
4.				
Open Actions				
No	Action/Discussion	Who	When	Status or comment
1.				
2.				
3.				
4.				

Meeting notes are essential for managing meeting actions and outcomes. They also cement agreements and clarify confusions. A meeting without notes is mostly pointless: actions go unrecorded and therefore forgotten.

In some cases, the minutes are a record that can be checked in the event that anything goes wrong such as missing money or a decision is questioned later on.

For informal meetings, it is a good idea to check how the minutes are normally taken and if there is a particular template to use.

For more formal meetings, especially governing body/management committee meetings, there should be a set of procedures to ensure good minutes are taken. If you are just starting out, think about what would be the most appropriate template for you, who will take the minutes? Who will write them up after the meeting and send them around? Will they go on your website? Etc.

If you are the minute taker, remember:

- The Chair can help you if you are unsure of anything.
- The Chair will check the minutes before they go out.
- You are NOT expected to record everything that is said.

Preparing properly for the meeting should help you to take more effective minutes. To find out more about meetings see the Community Southwark fact sheet Running Effective Meetings

What type of minutes?

There are several types of minutes and what you use may depend upon the situation.

Verbatim Minutes: Word for word recording of everything done and said in a meeting. Tend to be used for legal and financial meeting.

Advantages: absolute record; if accurate, no disputes

Disadvantages: might miss information while trying to write; time consuming; open to amendments; too long.

Narrative Minutes: Minutes that include accounts and different points of view.

Advantages: records discussion and decision; good for people not in attendance; shorter

Disadvantages: may express views wrongly; bias; too long; argumentative

How to take minutes

When taking minutes of a business meeting, the most important thing to listen for is the **decision**.



A decision is an agreement on action to be taken and covers:

- **Who** – will do it
- **What** – exactly what it is they must do
- **When** – they should have it done by
- **Where** – if it needs to be done in a specific place
- how
- **Resources** – what is needed to get it done

The notes should be brief or people won't read them, but they must still be precise and clear. Include relevant facts, figures, accountabilities, actions and timescales. Any agreed actions must be clearly described, with person or persons named responsible, with a deadline.

Try using SMART (Specific, Measurable, Agreed, Realistic, Timebound) for any agreed action, to ensure the decisions are realistic and manageable.

Although the main things to listen for are decisions, meetings can also be an opportunity for people to air views, offer opinions and express feelings. Just be careful to keep the meeting under control and not to spend too long on topics that may take the meeting away from its agenda. It is up to the Chair to control the meeting, but the minute taker will need to decide what is relevant for the minutes.

As a minute taker, you may want to check if any of these discussions are 'off-the-record' or confidential and therefore not for the minutes or at least not for the public version. If the discussion gets heated or aggressive, try to make sure the minutes remain neutral and concentrate on the facts.

The ABCs of minute-taking

Effective minutes are: **A**ccurate, **B**rief and **C**lear.

Accurate

- time
- place
- duration
- who was present
- apologies
- absences
- what was decided – who, what, when, where, how, resources
- a short summary of the discussion
- who proposed and seconded any motions, and who requested that their dissenting views be noted
- facts are accurate – e. g titles of documents and organisations and any financial figures.

Brief

- Note just the key points
- Use short sentences
- Know what to leave out – i.e. waffle, chit chat, rambling discussion, any information that can be read elsewhere

Clear

- Use plain English
- Avoid or explain acronyms and jargon where needed
- Have a good layout
- Use a consistent style for numbering, spacing, underlining, highlighting, bullet points etc.
- a logical flow from discussion to decision to action



It may helpful for minutes to include a list of actions at the end, summarising who will do what and when. This may be in the form of a table that can be easily referred to between meetings and at the next meeting when checking on action points.

How to set out minute

There are lots of ways to set out minutes and this will depend upon your organisation. Find a suitable layout and style and try to stick with it, to ensure consistency.

Your minutes should match your agenda with extra room for noting down the discussion and decisions.

Your minutes might look something like this:

Organisation Name

Meeting Name

Date:

Location:

Attendance:

In Attendance / Observing:

Apologies:

Agenda Item No. Title

Discussion:

Decision:

Action Point:

Lead:

Any other business:

Date of next meeting:

Here are a couple of examples:

- [Community Southwark Board Minutes](#) (available on our website)
- [Heritage Lottery Fund Board Minutes](#) (available on the website)
- [INGO Accountability Charter Board Meeting](#)
- [Plymouth Safeguarding Children Board Minutes Of The Full Board Meeting \(Web Version\)](#)

Try searching for the minutes a charity you know of and have a look at them. You might find the perfect template!

Remember!

- The Companies Act requires companies to keep records of meetings of their directors and meetings of their members;
- CIOs must keep certain records including records of meetings of their members and meeting of their trustees and any decisions made by trustees outside of meetings;
- For CIOs all records must be kept for at least six years from the date of the meeting, decision etc.
- Always check the provisions set out in the governing document ;
- Keep the minutes safe and check the law – some have to be kept at registered addresses etc.

Useful Resources

- Useful Tips: <http://www.ubiquus.co.uk/transcription/minute-taking-tips/>
- Useful Tips: <http://www.practicallyperfectpa.com/2012/tips-on-good-minute-taking/10/03/>
- A quick fact sheet on taking minutes:
<http://www.effectivemeetings.com/meetingbasics/minutes.asp>

- A 3 minute video explaining minute taking:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0GV_w8nQJpE
- Cecile Gillard 'Charity Checklists' ICSA Publishing (2014). P224.

Support

If you would like any support with meetings and minute taking or any other issues facing your organisation, please contact the Development Team at Community Southwark:
development@communitysouthwark.org.uk or 020 7358 7020.