

**TAKING
MINUTES OF
MEETINGS**

KoganPage

CREATING SUCCESS

The best-selling series is back and better than ever

MARCH 2013



Because you only have one chance in life to make a good impression.



TAKING MINUTES OF MEETINGS

JOANNA GUTMANN

**CREATING
SUCCESS**



KoganPage

Publisher's note

Every possible effort has been made to ensure that the information contained in this book is accurate at the time of going to press, and the publishers and author cannot accept responsibility for any errors or omissions, however caused. No responsibility for loss or damage occasioned to any person acting, or refraining from action, as a result of the material in this publication can be accepted by the editor, the publisher or the author.

First published in 2001 by Kogan Page Limited

Second edition 2006

Revised second edition 2010

Third edition 2013

Apart from any fair dealing for the purposes of research or private study, or criticism or review, as permitted under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988, this publication may only be reproduced, stored or transmitted, in any form or by any means, with the prior permission in writing of the publishers, or in the case of reprographic reproduction in accordance with the terms and licences issued by the CLA. Enquiries concerning reproduction outside these terms should be sent to the publishers at the undermentioned addresses:

120 Pentonville Road
London N1 9JN
United Kingdom
www.koganpage.com

1518 Walnut Street, Suite 1100
Philadelphia PA 19102
USA

4737/23 Ansari Road
Daryaganj
New Delhi 110002
India

© Joanna Gutmann, 2001, 2006, 2010, 2013

The right of Joanna Gutmann to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted by her in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

ISBN 978 0 7494 6724 1

E-ISBN 978 0 7494 6725 8

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A CIP record for this book is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

Gutmann, Joanna.

Taking minutes of meetings / Joanna Gutmann. – Third edition.

pages cm

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 978-0-7494-6724-1 – ISBN (invalid) 978-0-7494-6725-8 (ebk.) 1. Business meetings. 2. Business communication. 3. Corporate minutes. 4. Business records.

I. Title.

HF5734.5.G88 2013

651.77–dc23

2012045493

Typeset by Graphicraft Limited, Hong Kong

Printed and bound by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon, CR0 4YY

CONTENTS

Introduction 1

1

Background 5

- Cycle of a meeting 7
- The participants 10
- Responsibility for the minutes 13
- The minute-taker's place 16

2

Arranging a meeting 19

- Who will attend 20
- Administration 22

3

Sections of a meeting 27

- Welcome 28
- Apologies 29
- Declarations of interest 30
- Committee business 30
- Minutes of previous meeting 31
- Matters arising 33
- For information 35
- Agenda items 37
- Any other business 38
- Date of next meeting 39

KoosonPage

4	Agenda	41
	Agenda styles	44
5	Personal preparation	57
6	Creating the right environment	63
7	Attending the meeting	67
8	Taking notes	77
	The message, not the words	83
9	Structuring notes	89
	Depth of minutes	92
10	Writing up the minutes	101
11	The minutes	107
	Common questions about minutes	123
	Useful words for minutes	126
12	Recording decisions and actions	129
	The action triangle	130

13 **Layout and numbering** 137

- Layout 137
- Table layout 141
- Look at the picture 143

14 **Minutes for different types of meeting** 145

- Grievance or disciplinary meetings 145
- Case conferences 151
- Team or open meetings 152
- Video/audio conferencing 154
- Board meetings 154

15 **Using technology** 157

- Computer 157
- Editing software 158
- Laptop 158
- Dictating machine 159
- Dictation software 161
- Digital pen 161
- Tablet computers 162

16 **Impact of the Freedom of Information Act on minutes** 163

- Exempt information 164
- Impact on meeting papers 164
- Referencing meeting papers 165
- Writing minutes 167

17

Business English for minutes 171

Sentences 172

Paragraphs 172

Plain English 172

Problem punctuation 173

18

Building confidence 177



Kogan Page

INTRODUCTION

Minutes are vital to the success of the meeting. Participants rely on them for information on subjects they did not understand or to fill in gaps when they lost concentration. The action points act as a reminder to those who agreed in the heat of the moment but have since been overtaken by other priorities and would otherwise forget what they were to do. Those who could not attend need an idea of what was decided in their absence. And finally, minutes are the historical record of the meeting and evidence of the actions/outcomes – an audit trail.

For a role that carries significant responsibility, there is very little support for the minute-taker. There is a common misconception that secretaries can take minutes. This seems to stem from two sources: first, the word ‘secretary’ as in committee secretary; secondly, the idea that taking minutes is about speed and secretaries can write fast, particularly if they have shorthand. This perception broadens to anyone in an administrative role.

In fact, a secretary is only a little more likely to be trained to take minutes than to be a company secretary. The perception that minute taking is all about speed is also wrong. Ask secretaries what they are typing and they are likely to have to look at it before answering – typing does not involve the brain on a conscious level; shorthand is similarly a mechanical skill, and so is scribbling the words that someone says.

The key skill for taking minutes is the ability to listen to the words someone is saying, absorb them, evaluate the manner of the delivery and identify the speaker’s point of view – the message. It is ongoing listening and simultaneous summarizing. Although a good shorthand writer can take down the words and summarize

them back in the office, it is a long drawn-out process and few can afford the time.

Assuming that the minute-taker gets involved in the setting up of the meeting, as many do, there is also the need for good administration skills, particularly in today's world where meetings are often rescheduled, rooms are in short supply, budgets are being cut and time is at a premium for all concerned.

There is a second type of minute-taker: people who attend to contribute but find themselves taking the notes in the absence of an available secretary. Although they have the advantages of higher status within the group and a better understanding, they also suffer from the problems of identifying what is relevant and how to note it effectively. They also find it harder to remain objective as, by definition, they have an interest in the content. In addition, they may not be trained typists and thus find presenting the minutes in a professional style difficult.

The people who attend my courses have a range of problems with the role, mainly to do with the issue of what to write or coping in a badly led meeting. Quite a few report sleepless nights before a meeting and feelings of stress before, during and after it. Few have received any training, and although many have been taking minutes for years, the lack of clear focus and structure for the meetings has made them wonder about the 'theory' behind the practice.

Today, meetings are far less structured than in the past and it is generally felt that there are many more of them, probably far too many. Very few people believe this to be a good thing; the time taken (and often wasted) by meetings is resented by those who attend as well as by those who minute. Meetings that are well run are appreciated by everyone, and the minute-taker plays a large part in achieving this. Although it is the chairperson who 'fronts' and controls the meeting, it is the support of the minute-taker that enables this to be done effectively.

In most organizations, there are no 'rules' for minutes: some want formality, others a more casual style; some want all the detail,

others only a list of action points. Any guidance is usually limited to house style for layout, not content. The minute-taker has to be flexible and responsive to the needs of both the chairperson and the group.

The minute-taker is one of the most important and powerful people in a meeting. Although the task can be daunting, it is the opportunity to develop your knowledge, broaden your horizons and build your credibility within the organization. With a clear idea of your role and responsibilities, knowledge of what you are meant to do and some confidence in yourself, your role of minute-taker can even be enjoyable!

USING THE BOOK

The book is intended to be used as a reference book. It follows the cycle of a meeting from the decision to hold one through to the dispatch of the minutes. You can read it from cover to cover or dip in to find the help you need on any given aspect of the minute-taker's role.

It is assumed that you have little or no knowledge of the 'theory' of minute taking, although you may have plenty of experience. The book is laid out with lots of headings and with short paragraphs. This will help you to skip the information you already know or don't need for your meetings, and focus on the detail you want.

TERMS

A number of terms are used throughout the book as I've tried to avoid repetition, and these may mean different things to different people. The following explains my meaning:

- *Meeting*. An event involving a group of people, getting together to discuss and/or decide.
- *Committee*. The group of people who are meeting, even though it may not be a formally constituted committee. I've also used the terms group, team, panel, etc.
- *Chairperson*. The person who is leading the meeting. Could also be a facilitator, mediator, convener.
- *Secretary/minute-taker*. The person who is responsible for the administration of the meeting: setting it up, preparing the agenda, dealing with the room booking, coffee, etc, taking the minutes and so on. Although I've used the two titles at random throughout the book, some will argue that a secretary does all the tasks above, while a minute-taker simply takes the minutes, types them up and distributes them. Throughout the book, I've assumed that you are responsible for all aspects of the administration – just ignore the bits that don't apply to your work.



Kogan Page

BACKGROUND

Meetings fall into one of two categories – the one-off and the regular. They are generally held to spread information, to discuss issues, to solve problems and/or to decide on future action.

A meeting can be a positive or negative experience, depending on the skill of the chairperson and the attitude of those attending. The most common complaints from those who attend are:

- Participants couldn't have their say.
- Discussion degenerated into argument.
- The meeting was dominated by one or two 'loud voices'.
- The chairperson took over.
- The chairperson did nothing to control the meeting.
- Irrelevant discussion was allowed.
- It was generally a waste of time (and often stressful through anger and frustration).

From the minute-taker's point of view, the first of the above complaints is not relevant, but the others are. A meeting that is badly

structured and uncontrolled will definitely be stressful and frustrating and will waste far more time than just the allotted span. The time taken in sorting the notes and typing up the minutes can add hours to the workload.

On the basis that ‘time is money’, meetings are expensive. Try the exercise in Figure 1.1 for one of your meetings.

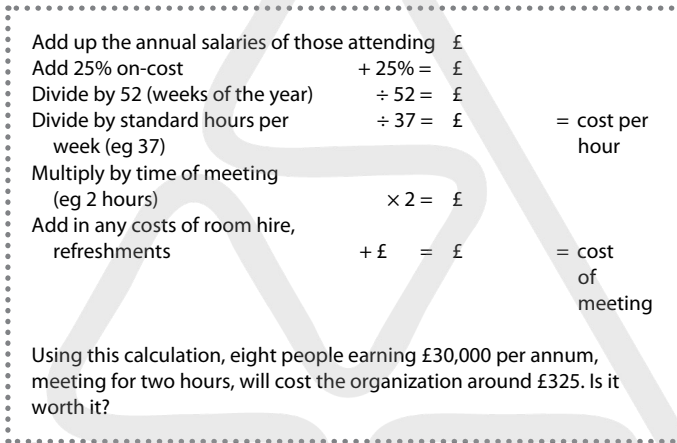


Figure 1.1 Calculating the cost of a meeting

There is far more to the meeting than just the time spent around the table. In order to be successful, everybody must:

- know why they are there;
- recognize what is to be achieved;
- have read all paperwork in advance;
- be prepared (mental and practical preparation);
- contribute positively;
- listen;
- focus and keep to the point;
- leave with a clear understanding of any points they should action.

The minute-taker has a role to play in several of the points above – like so many things, good preparation will make for a good meeting. The agenda should give information as to the purpose of the meeting, the structure it will follow and the preparation that needs to be done. It must be dispatched in time for this to be useful. The minutes will define the action points and serve as a reminder for those who agreed to take responsibility.

CYCLE OF A MEETING

The cycle shown in Figure 1.2 assumes a monthly meeting, held on the 1st of each month. The bracketed number indicates the target date for each action.

For less frequent meetings, the principle of agenda dispatched a week before, minutes despatched within a week should still hold. For weekly meetings, the dates generally change from a week to a couple of days.

For many people, the cycle of the meeting will seem to set impossibly tight deadlines, but:

- If you do not like typing up your minutes, they only get worse with procrastination.
- If you are going to have to ring and ask a participant for guidance on the content, it is better to do it whilst he or she can remember what was said.
- If the minutes are not circulated quickly, the action points are a waste of time; it will be too late for participants to take action.
- You look inefficient if the minutes are not circulated until the next month's meeting.

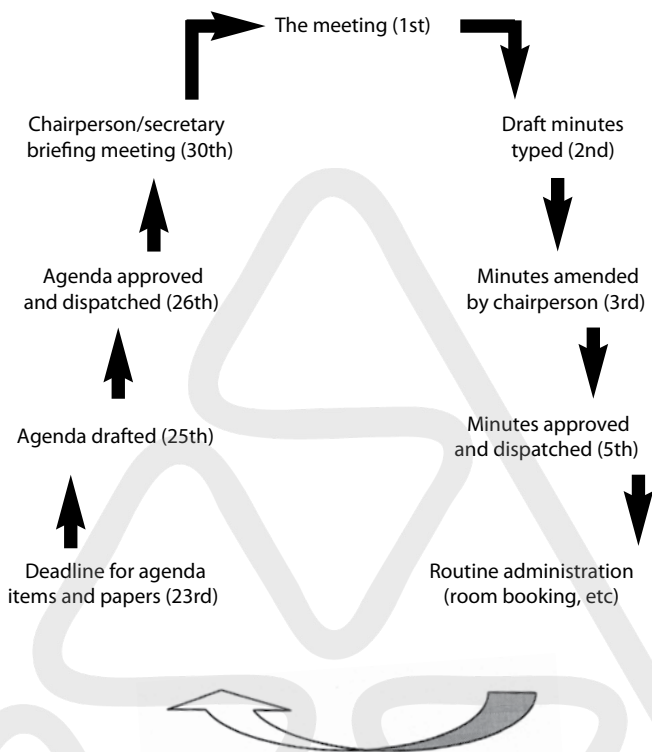


Figure 1.2 Cycle of a meeting

The stages in the cycle

- *First draft of minutes*
(one day after the meeting)
The first draft should be the minutes, typed as the minute-taker perceives the discussion. They may well contain gaps where the chairperson's guidance is needed, but should be as near complete as possible.
- *Chairperson's approval*
(two to three days after meeting)
The chairperson should check the minutes for factual accuracy and 'political correctness' – phrasing that may cause offence or

that does not represent the view of the group. The chairperson should not add any extra information or change the minutes to suit personal views.

- *Minutes dispatched*

(five days after meeting)

The minutes should be sent to all committee members and anyone else who gets a copy. Any papers that were distributed at the meeting should be attached for those who did not attend.

- *Routine administration*

The booking of rooms, coffee, etc usually falls to the minute-taker. Throughout the book you'll find advice and guidance on improving the meeting's effectiveness through these routine tasks.

- *Deadline for agenda items*

(around eight days before next meeting)

Under 'Date of next meeting' in the minutes, a deadline for agenda items should have been given (see Chapter 11). Anything that is received after this can be dealt with under 'Any other business'. All papers for discussion at the meeting must be submitted by this date so they can be included with the agenda. In reality, the secretary is usually left to ring or e-mail to nag participants for agenda items and papers.

- *Draft agenda*

(seven days before next meeting)

The secretary should put together the agenda and pass it to the chairperson for approval.

- *Agenda dispatched*

(one week before next meeting)

Each participant should receive an agenda and all papers that are to be discussed. The agenda should be cross-referenced to indicate which papers relate to each agenda item. Hints as to other preparation may be included (see Chapter 4).

- *Briefing*

(one to two days before next meeting)

The chairperson and minute-taker should meet to discuss the content of the meeting, identify any problem areas and deal with any concerns either party has about the meeting. This is seldom a formal event, but is often a brief chat before, or on the way to, the meeting. The formality will be influenced by the style of the people involved and the importance of the meeting.

- *The meeting*

If the rest of the cycle of the meeting is in place, the event itself should be efficient and successful.

THE PARTICIPANTS

There are four roles in a meeting: to lead it (chairperson), to support it (secretary), to contribute to it or to observe it. Only one person can take each of the first two roles, but they are closely interlinked – the management of the meeting shared by two people. Any number can attend or observe.

The participants are responsible for a certain amount of work before, during and after the meeting.

The chairperson

Before the meeting:

- Decide that the meeting is necessary.
- Identify participants (who needs to attend all/just part of the meeting).
- Approve the agenda.
- Brief the minute-taker.
- Prepare self (content, purpose of each item, participants, where actions are necessary).

During the meeting:

- Introduce newcomers and visitors.
- Inform the delegates of the agreed behaviours (eg how decisions will be reached).
- Control the agenda (content, time, order and outcomes).
- Control delegate contributions.
- Work with and support the minute-taker.

After the meeting:

- Approve the minutes within three days of the meeting.
- Collect and assess any feedback.
- Support participants with their action points where necessary.

The minute-taker

Before the meeting:

- Set up the meeting (advise of date, room booking, refreshments, etc).
- Ensure that everyone knows where and when to attend.
- Prepare a detailed agenda.
- Ensure distribution of information (to participants, and others if necessary).
- Prepare self (read papers and previous minutes, familiarize with names, etc).

During the meeting:

- Take the minutes.

After the meeting:

- Approach the chairperson or participants to clarify any misunderstandings.

- Type up the minutes within a couple of days.
- Ensure the minutes are approved and dispatched.

Those attending the meeting

Contributors

Before the meeting:

- Request a meeting if necessary.
- Respond quickly to the invitation to the meeting.
- Send items for the agenda in good time.
- Read the agenda and accompanying papers.
- Ensure that previous actions are complete.

During the meeting:

- Arrive on time and prepared.
- Contribute appropriately (as to both time and manner).
- Keep contributions relevant to the agenda.
- Show common courtesy and respect for others' opinions.
- Note personal action points.

After the meeting:

- Complete action points within deadlines agreed.
- Read and respond to minutes.

Observers

Before the meeting:

- Ensure their purpose for attending is clear.
- Undertake any necessary preparation.

During the meeting:

- Observe, but don't contribute.

After the meeting:

- Write up any necessary notes.
- If appropriate, give feedback to the chairperson.

If all the participants are aware of what they have to achieve and are well briefed, and the chairperson is focused and effective, the minute-taker's task should not be difficult.

RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE MINUTES

The role of minute-taker is a 'delegated task' from the chairperson. The management of the meeting is divided into people and content management (chairperson) and admin/note-taking (minute-taker). The process should be:

- The minute-taker is responsible for taking notes in the meeting. That means that he or she either understands and writes, or asks for clarification where it is needed. (Note: you are not responsible for knowing and understanding everything that every participant knows!)
- The minute-taker should prepare draft minutes to the best of their ability (using their notes and asking for clarification where necessary).
- The chairperson should approve the draft before it is sent out. This means that, although the minute-taker will still be doing the work or amendments and despatch, the responsibility for the content has moved to the chairperson.
- The group should approve the minutes at the next meeting. At this point the minutes become their responsibility (not the minute-taker's).

Building an effective relationship with the chairperson

Most people who chair meetings have not been in the role of dedicated minute-taker. They may have taken notes at a meeting,

formally or informally, but that is not the same as the slightly ‘outside’ nature of the minute-taker’s role. As a result they have little idea of the meeting from the minute-taker’s perspective.

Ideally, the chairperson will take active steps to work with the minute-taker, both before and during the meeting but as this is seldom done, there are some things that you can do to build that working relationship:

Get involved in the agenda preparation

Although it is another task, involvement at this stage will save time and reduce stress because your knowledge of the content of the meeting will be so much greater. A proactive approach to the chairperson to offer help with the agenda is likely to be appreciated. If this is discouraged, you can still make suggestions when you are given it to type; for example, suggesting the inclusion of objectives. If you are not involved in the preparation, ask the chairperson before the meeting for guidance on which items will result in decision and action.

Ask for the help you need

Don’t comment on a chairperson’s shortcomings at the end of the meeting, ask for the behaviour you need at the start of the next one. For example, don’t complain about the failure to clarify outcomes at the end of the June meeting but before the start of the July meeting, explain that, ‘It would really help me if you could define the decision and action for the minutes today’. Don’t forget to thank the chairperson as appropriate!

Act the part

On arrival at the meeting, try to find something relevant to comment on either in relation to the content or format. For example, ‘It will be good to finally get the decision on the new structure’. Or, ‘I’m

looking forward to hearing what the budget proposals are for the new year'. At the end of the meeting, find a similarly relevant comment.

Make sure you sit next to the chairperson

You are two people managing the meeting, you should be sitting close enough to work together.

Asking the chairperson to check the minutes

Don't put yourself down. Get the minutes done quickly and then hand them over with a clear request for checking. Rather than say, 'You'll need to fill in the detail in item six, I got completely lost', just say, 'I didn't get all the figures for item six, could you fill in the missing ones'. If the minutes are amended, ask for clarification of the reasons for changes so that you can learn for the future. Again, make sure you sound confident, 'I've made the changes you highlighted, could you explain why you wanted X included?'

Formalizing the management of the meeting

Particularly for a more formal meeting, the chair and minute-taker should meet to decide how they will work together. If you ask for, or are offered, this type of discussion you should ask for:

- a clear summary of the discussion
- a definition of the decision and the action (who, what, when)
- support if you need to interrupt (for repetition, clarification or guidance on how to minute something)
- guidance on whether the chair would welcome any problems to be pointed out in the meeting (running over time, a necessary decision not made).

THE MINUTE-TAKER'S PLACE

In most offices you will find a structure similar to that outlined in Figure 1.3 below

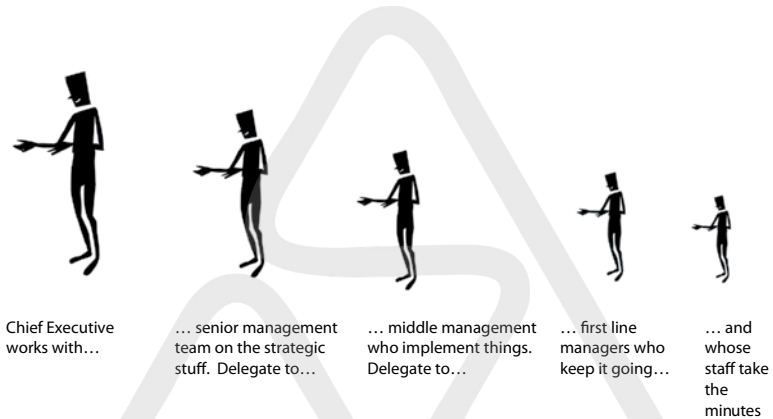


Figure 1.3 The office hierarchy

That hierarchy should be left in the office, not taken into the meeting. See Figure 1.4 below for your place in the meeting.

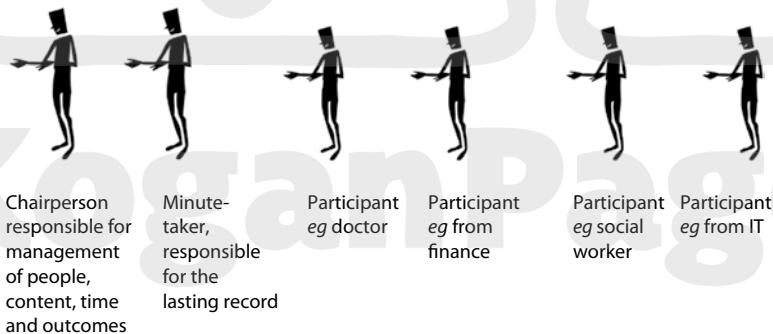


Figure 1.4 The minute-taker's place in the meeting

Leave your salary – your place in the hierarchy – in the office; when you go into the meeting you go in as an equal. Having you there to take the minutes:

- enables the participants to contribute. (If the social worker took them, there would be little social care input because she would be note-taking. Alternatively, the minutes would get forgotten as the participants focus on the discussion.)
- prevents bias (if the doctor took them they'd have a clinical slant, if the IT person took them, they'd have a systems slant)
- means that someone is focused purely on the minutes. You can concentrate on getting what's needed (eg, clear record of who everyone is, or ensuring an update on all actions). You are also more likely to spot potential minute-based problems (eg they are talking about 'next year' without defining what they mean).

The participants want to work with a professional and it is important that you step up to that role. This is easy when you are naturally comfortable and confident with them, but not so easy when you feel out-of-place. See the chapter on appearing confident when you don't feel it for some tips.

Kogan Page



THIS PAGE IS INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

KoganPage



2

ARRANGING A MEETING

In theory setting up a meeting should present no problem: a few e-mails or phone calls, a confirmation note or e-mail and that's it. Anyone who has tried to do it knows the reality: endless attempts to find mutually convenient dates, difficulty in booking rooms, and economies that mean no sandwiches and grumbling participants.

Keep an accurate and well-planned database of those who attend the meetings you set up. Since many will attend more than one meeting, it is generally best to keep one overall meeting database, rather than one for each meeting. This is typically done in Microsoft Access or Excel.

Use separate fields of first and surname (for ease of inserting the greeting), whatever contact details are necessary, and fields for job title and department (for merging into the minutes under 'Present', etc). Keep one field for a code to identify which meetings people attend; for example HS for Health & Safety, BP for Business Planning. Multiple codes can be entered for those who attend more than one meeting.

It is worth having one field called something like 'mark'. This can be used for one-off meetings; just insert a familiar symbol in this field for everyone who is to attend and then use it to merge.

Merge with this database for address labels, circulation lists, attendance list on minutes and any other documents. Set up contact groups in e-mail for each meeting; this speeds up the sending of e-mails and ensures that no one is accidentally left off the circulation list.

Before you begin, make sure you know who must attend, who should attend and what is needed for the meeting. You may be able to find some of this from previous minutes, but it is always best to speak to the chairperson to ensure you have all the information before you start making arrangements.

WHO WILL ATTEND

The regular meeting

For many meetings the dates are set at the beginning of the year. This is much the easiest way to approach it because it avoids taking time negotiating dates at the end of each meeting. It also helps the minute-taker as administration can be structured and entered in the diary or scheduler.

If this is not done, the date of the next meeting should be arranged as the final item on the previous agenda. It may be worth reminding people to bring their diaries or a note of their availability to the meeting. If necessary, prompt the chairperson to finish off each meeting by deciding when and where the next should be held. If this is forgotten in the rush to get out of the room, it is quite acceptable for the minute-taker to ask for the next date 'for the minutes'.

If the date of the meeting is not set, or if it has to be changed, find out whose attendance is essential: that is, their withdrawal would cause the meeting to be cancelled. These are the people

with whom you should agree the date. The other participants can be offered dates at the same time (with less priority given to their choice) or simply told of the date afterwards. It is not necessary to tell them that their importance is secondary and that they have to put up with the date!

It may be that some people are essential for only some of the items to be discussed. If this is the case, these items could be deferred to the next meeting if the relevant individuals cannot attend.

Visitors

For many meetings there will be visitors who need to be invited on a one-off basis. These might be from other organizations or fellow employees, but they are not part of the group that meets regularly. Make sure you know whether visitors are needed for the whole meeting or just part of it. Make sure that visitors know:

- why they are attending;
- what will be asked of them;
- where their involvement fits into the overall objective of the meeting;
- who else will be present.

The one-off meeting

Before you begin to arrange the meeting find out who the ‘priority people’ are – those without whom the meeting cannot go ahead. If booking a room is likely to cause problems, this is also the time to check availability and reserve the room. Select a few dates, spreading them across different days of the week and times of the day and then e-mail everyone with a ‘notice of meeting’, explaining why the meeting is being held and offering dates. You might also wish to insert a personal sentence explaining why each individual’s attendance is requested. Make sure that you give a clear deadline

for confirming attendance. Figure 2.1 gives an example e-mail notice of meeting. Note that the e-mail heading is the subject of the meeting, not ‘Notice of meeting’, so readers can immediately see what it is about.

ADMINISTRATION

Give due warning

If too little notice is given, participants will be ill-prepared. If papers have not been read, this will have to be done at the meeting. This not only wastes time, but comprehension is likely to be poor and readers often latch on to a point they strongly agree or disagree

From <dlatimer@mkthompson.co.uk.>
To: <wsmith@mkthompson.co.uk>
Sent: 12 March 2013 15:23
Subject: Resurfacing of car park

Notice of meeting

Alchemist Tarmac has gone into liquidation. We need to get together to decide what action to take and to start the process of selecting a new contractor from the tender list. I would anticipate that the meeting will last 45 minutes.

Please advise which of the following dates you are able to make:

Monday 18 March, 9.30 am
Monday 18 March, 3.00 pm
Tuesday 19 March, 11.00 am
Friday 22 March, 10.30 am

Please reply by 11.00 am, Friday 15 March and the meeting date will be confirmed by 3.00 pm that same day.

David

Figure 2.1 Example e-mail notice of meeting

with. This leads to argument. If issues have not been thought through, arguing is again likely, as is a resultant poor decision.

If items are not fully discussed, or decisions are poor, the subject is likely to be raised again at the next meeting. This might be intentionally via the agenda or unintentionally because someone goes back to the subject. Inevitably the whole thing is discussed again, wasting considerable time.

There is no fixed rule for the amount of notice you should give, but ensure that it is enough for all preparation to be done, usually 5–7 days.

Get agenda items

For a one-off meeting, the notice of meeting should ask for agenda items and give a deadline for their receipt. Anything arising after that time will be dealt with as ‘Any other business’.

For regular meetings, include a deadline for agenda items under ‘Date of next meeting’. Throughout the meeting, listen for items that are left with a vague, ‘We’ll talk about that next time’, because they will need to appear on the agenda. Some agenda items will follow naturally from previous meetings and the minute-taker will need to keep track of these.

Although it should not be necessary, the minute-taker will often have to ring around, asking for items. This can be lessened by asking the chairperson to finish the next meeting by explaining the deadline and pointing out that anything received after that date won’t be accepted for the agenda. Providing that the rule is enforced, participants soon get the idea that laziness won’t be tolerated. Items that can be shown to have arisen after the agenda was sent out can be taken as ‘Any other business’ as usual.

Allow sufficient time

Few people like long meetings, and the length of time taken is a common complaint. This is sometimes the fault of the chairperson

for allowing non-productive argument and not drawing items to a close, and is sometimes caused by having an unrealistic number of items for discussion.

A meeting must be long enough to allow the business to be discussed completely. When items are sent in for the agenda, ask how long is required and use this to calculate the time necessary. This has the added advantage of developing your understanding of the issues through talking to participants, which will help when taking the minutes. If there is too much to be discussed in the time available, a second meeting should be arranged or some items deferred to the following meeting. This will have to be discussed with the chairperson.

There is no maximum time for a meeting, but one lasting for more than a couple of hours is bound to have periods when concentration slips. If the meeting is scheduled to last for more than an hour and a half, schedule in a five-minute coffee stop so everyone can refresh themselves (including the minute-taker!). This also helps structure the meeting and will usually speed it up, as the break on the agenda means everyone knows that a particular point has to be reached by coffee time.

The right environment

Although there's usually not much choice, wherever possible choose a room that will be comfortable. This will make the meeting easier to chair and to minute, and it is more likely to be productive. The room size and layout should be appropriate, and the room light and airy with minimum distractions. See Chapter 6 for more information.

Refreshments

Make sure that coffee and tea are available at the start of the meeting, and encourage the chairperson to make sure that everyone has some and then have the tray taken out. This should prevent

the one-by-one drift back for refills, which is distracting for all. A short 'coffee stop' should be built into longer meetings (see above). Water should be available throughout.

Equipment

Make sure you know what equipment is required by participants (eg, laptop, whiteboard or flipchart), so this can be booked. It is always a good idea to have a flipchart in a meeting room, as it can be used to list ideas or problems. Listing the latter is a good way of taking the heat out of an argument; focusing on the flipchart stops people focusing on one another and slows the pace.

Tip

Prepare a master checklist of absolutely everything you might need to do. For each meeting you arrange, print off a copy and, as you set up the meeting, cross out the things that are not relevant and then tick off the tasks as you do them.

Receiving apologies

Apologies can be received at three stages:

- When the future date is set at the end of the meeting, someone may say 'I can't make it but you carry on'. This is not minuted or mentioned on the agenda for the next meeting (unless you choose to show a circulation list). However, it should be listed as an apology for the next meeting.
- At any time before the next meeting.
- Via someone else on the day.

You should also include those who know you are aware, for example, of their holiday, even if they do not specifically relate this to the meeting.

When committee members send apologies for a meeting, check whether they were responsible for any item on the agenda. If it is a general item, it can usually be dealt with in their absence but if their input is necessary, the item should be deferred to the next meeting.

It's also a good idea to check whether they had spotted any errors in the previous minutes or had any action points and find out their progress. You or the chairperson can then report on their behalf at the meeting. You might also want to ask whether they have any comments on agenda items which should be given on their behalf, or even whether they wish to put an item on the agenda to be discussed in their absence.



Kogan Page

SECTIONS OF A MEETING

Meetings need to be structured if they are to be effective. That is not to say that the structure has to be overt, seeming to be more important than the content. Compare it to a day in the city with your family. It is likely to be more successful if you know what you want to visit and in what order, but you can present this as either 'It's 3 o'clock, time to move on to the museum; we've been here for an hour', or 'Let's go and have a look at the museum'. One sounds like the timetable ruling the day, the second like a good idea!

Formal meetings are likely to have a more obvious structure. For informal meetings the chairperson might not want to appear so dictatorial. However, it is having an underlying plan that will keep the meeting to time and productive; the skill is to avoid drawing attention to the structure.

Some of the sections of a meeting might sound out of date or too formal to you, and most can be changed to suit specific purposes and styles. The overall process is to:

- sort out the administration;
- confirm the past;
- deal with current issues;
- deal with last-minute issues;
- plan for the future.

The sections of the meeting are outlined below together with suggestions for how to make them seem more modern and/or less formal. You do not need to use every section for every meeting but at least you can make an informed choice and use the ones that are appropriate. However, whichever you use, they are usually kept in this order.

WELCOME

The introduction is the point where the chairperson gets the meeting under control and started.

The chairperson should:

- call the meeting to order on time;
- give any ‘housekeeping’ information;
- explain the purpose of the meeting if it is a one-off;
- give any other ‘introductory’ information.

What to listen for

There is not usually anything to minute at this stage and so, although it should be done by the chairperson, it doesn’t usually appear on the agenda or minutes.

Occasionally the introduction is used for a specific purpose worth minuting and if this is planned it should appear on the agenda.

APOLOGIES

‘Apologies’ is the opportunity to clarify who is, and is not, at the meeting. The names of those who have said they will not attend are usually given by the chairperson or secretary, but others may be added by participants.

The chairperson should:

- ask participants to introduce themselves
- clarify whether those who are not present have given apologies
- re-organize the agenda if a participant’s absence means an item cannot be discussed
- check whether the meeting is quorate, if appropriate (that the necessary number of people are present – as laid down in the terms of reference)

What to listen for

It is essential that you have a complete list of those who attended as well as those who did not attend (and whether they had sent apologies). Make sure you are aware of anyone who has sent a colleague in their place. To ensure your list is complete, have a list of those who should attend and make this your start-point, rather than just noting the names of those who are there and those who are named as apologies. See the section on ‘Finding out who’s who’ in Chapter 7 ‘Attending the Meeting’ for more guidance on how to do this.

Speak out!

It is essential that you get the names at the meeting (don’t rely on others remembering who was there). It is entirely in order for the minute-taker to ask for introductions, but the easiest way is to pass around a signing-in sheet (see the chapter on ‘Attending the Meeting’ for guidance on this).

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There may be an item on the agenda to which a participant cannot contribute because of some conflicting interest. There should be a rule laid down for this (whether the individual should leave the meeting or just cannot contribute to the item), but if it is a one-off situation, the group may need to decide the appropriate approach. This section is common in local government but less so elsewhere.

The chairperson should:

- ask participants for any interests that need to be declared;
- either decide or ask for group decision on the action that should be taken.

What to listen for

You should note who declared an interest, what it was and what was done about it. The options are usually that the person either:

- leaves the meeting for the relevant item;
- that they stay in the room (either silent or contributing) but a vote is taken on the decision and they do not vote (they may be asked to leave the room for the vote);
- joins in all aspects of the discussion and decision.

COMMITTEE BUSINESS

This section is for business that relates to the committee rather than to its purpose in meeting. It is likely to involve changes to the:

- *structure*, for example:
 - discussion on how a committee should be made up;
 - changes to take into account a merger with another organization.

- *function*, for example:
 - changes to the remit of the group;
 - discussion as to whether the group still has a purpose;
 - confirmation that a part of the group’s work is no longer necessary.
- *personnel*, for example:
 - resignations and new members joining;
 - long-term substitutions (to cover maternity or sabbatical periods);
 - confirmation of roles within the group.
- *administration*, for example:
 - a change of chairperson;
 - alteration of frequency of meetings from monthly to quarterly;
 - change of venue from always at head office to a rotation between divisional offices;
 - the possibility of doing without ‘Any other business’.

This is a main business item and should always be minuted in the same style as the rest of the minutes. If there is more than one item you can list them as subheadings under the main heading of ‘Committee business’ or as sequential items with relevant headings.

To make committee business sound more modern, give it a relevant title (eg ‘Administration’, ‘Resignation’, ‘Long-term future of [name] group’).

MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

This is where the minutes actually become ‘Minutes’ where the group take responsibility for them.

Although it can seem that this section is designed solely to humiliate the minute-taker, there are actually two very good reasons for having it. The first is to *confirm that the minutes are accurate*. Time should not be wasted with corrections to grammar and

punctuation; it is the errors of fact that should be noted (eg showing £5,000 as £5,500 may be a typing mistake, but it has the appearance of fact and is worth minuting).

The second reason is to *prevent individuals changing the minutes without the knowledge of the group*. If you take corrections from individuals you may end up with conflicting changes. More importantly, people will be changing the minutes without the knowledge of the rest of the group and the final copy will not be the one that everyone has seen. The chairperson should draw attention to changes already notified and individuals should add any other points. That way, changes can be debated and will be clearly shown in the minutes.

Minutes are seldom signed these days. If they are, it is done by the chairperson at the meeting. The purpose of signing is to demonstrate further that everyone at the meeting signalled their acceptance of the content – the chairperson signs on behalf of the other participants. If the minutes are not bound, they should be signed on the front cover and initialled on every other page.

Time is often wasted on this part of the meeting, either because participants start reading the minutes or because the chairperson guides them through, page by page. With this approach, people are looking for ‘mistakes’ so it is no surprise that they make changes. They will also spot things to talk about and start unnecessary discussion, and may give feedback on actions and other things that have happened since the last meeting. People will also give updates on their actions, causing confusion between this and the next section.

The chairperson should:

- ask at the end of a meeting for minutes to have been read before attending the next;
- ask the group whether they approve the minutes;
- get group agreement to any changes that are suggested;
- ask for final approval after all changes have been agreed.

What to listen for

Take a copy of the previous minutes into the meeting and just note the changes on it. These can then be typed up into the current minutes back in the office.

Speak out!

As this is the section where the minutes actually become *the minutes* it is essential that you are able to record their approval. If the chairperson doesn't actually ask the questions, you will have to interrupt; eg 'Excuse me, do I note that the minutes are now approved?'

The heading for this section seldom changes, but you can use headings like 'Confirmation of minutes' or 'Approval of minutes'; you can change 'previous' to 'last'; or you can include the date: 'Minutes of the meeting held on [date]'.

MATTERS ARISING

'Matters arising' is one of the most misunderstood sections of the meeting. One of the key reasons for having minutes is to provide an audit trail of what was done about the issues discussed and it is this section that meets this essential requirement.

Every action that is due for completion on or before the meeting date should be confirmed as having been done or, if not, what will be done to complete the task (and by when). If someone has encountered problems, these can be discussed and a new or amended action given if necessary. It may also be the case that something has changed and it is no longer feasible to undertake the action at all.

If some of the action points relate to items that are also on the agenda, the relevant 'Matters arising' can be incorporated in those items. Make sure it is clear on the agenda what is an action to be followed up and what is business for discussion at the meeting (see Figure 3.1).

6. Open day
 - 6.1 Matters arising
 - (a) Delivery of equipment for Year 9 classes
 - (b) Availability of sports centre
 - 6.2 Catering
 - 6.3 Musical performances

Figure 3.1 Example incorporating ‘Matters arising’ into agenda item

There may be a general item in previous minutes on which the group needs an update. This can also be included in ‘Matters arising’. As a general rule, if it was agreed at the previous meeting that the person would find out some information and update the group, this should be an action and the update given as a ‘matter arising’. If it is a full-scale presentation or report that is to be given, it may be better to include it in the next section and just noted, ‘see item X’ under ‘Matters arising’ to cross reference it in the minutes.

Occasionally a whole meeting is justifiably ‘Matters arising’. This is usually in project-planning-type events where each member is responsible for a particular aspect of the project. In this situation there should not be a separate section, but each agenda item should start with the matters arising for that subject before moving on to discuss current concerns and finishing with confirmation of the participant’s next action(s). If there is new business it is usually taken after the regular items, and for the next meeting is included in the above process for the relevant person.

The chairperson should:

- directly ask each person whether they have completed their action;
- discourage long explanations of *how* the action was done;
- follow up incomplete actions by defining next stage (with clear deadline);
- confirm that a previously planned action cannot be completed and must be abandoned.

What to listen for

It is essential that every action is clearly followed up in the minutes so you should be listening for whether this has been done either formally, eg ‘Yes, everyone has been told,’ or informally, eg ‘Yup, sorted.’ If an action is incomplete, listen for the next stage, the deadline and whether it remains the responsibility of the same person.

Speak out!

It is essential that the minutes provide a clear audit trail of actions so if you are not clear about whether something has been done, you will have to ask. Use a question like, ‘Excuse me, for the minutes, can you confirm whether the teams have been identified?’ Or, ‘Excuse me, I haven’t got a note of whether the budget was approved’. (In other words, no-one has said!) See the chapter on agenda for help with supporting this through sub-headings on the agenda.

If you don’t like the formal title, try ‘Update on action points’ or similar.

FOR INFORMATION

Information items are those that are not for debate, just to hear (or ‘receive’). It may be that every participant updates on recent work (eg at a team leaders’ meeting); or that just a few members have to report (eg finance report, health and safety report); or it can be a one-off. This latter type is when a member wants to give information to the rest of the group (eg giving feedback from a conference).

If the information is the first part of an item, for example the conference report-back precedes discussion on implementing the best practice learnt, it should be a main agenda item that the individual will start.

For a meeting, the most common problem with reports is their being given out and read on the day. It is difficult to take in detail when reading in a group and time is wasted with an argument often following as individuals focus on one point they have noticed.

If the information is as a result of a previous action

As a general rule, if it was agreed at the previous meeting that the person would find out some information and update the group, this should be an action, the information should be circulated prior to the meeting and this confirmed as a ‘matter arising’.

If it was decided at the previous meeting that a presentation of the information is needed, it should be an ‘information’ item and under ‘Matters arising’ just type, ‘See item x’.

Alternative headings include ‘Reports’, ‘Information only’ or ‘Information items’.

The chairperson should:

- only accept paper reports that have been circulated with the agenda
- assume that the reports have been read and only ask the person giving it if there is anything they wish to add (not to read it out)
- discourage discussion

What to listen for

For paper reports, it is only necessary to report that they were given or received. You can use phrases such as, ‘The group were updated on...’ Verbal reports are usually fast, and sometimes rambling. A summary should be minuted but the information is best obtained from the person before the meeting and then double-checked as it is given.

AGENDA ITEMS

Although there have been several sections before the group gets down to the main business of the day, they should not take long. The main agenda items are the topics that group members have asked to discuss at the meeting.

The chairperson should:

- manage the people;
- manage the content/agenda;
- manage the outcomes;
- manage the time;
- support the minute-taker.

What to listen for

There is plenty on listening and note-taking later in the book but in summary: minutes are a summary of what was discussed, not what was said. They should comprise an explanation of the issue, if appropriate; a summary of the reasons for the decision that was made; the decision and the action that is needed to move the issue forward. See Chapter 9 for more information on the amount of information that is appropriate for minutes.

Speak out

It is entirely acceptable for the minute-taker to interrupt for anything that is needed for the minutes, eg failure to hear, to understand or to keep up. It is *essential* that the minute-taker interrupts if the action is not defined. This means getting a clearly defined 'next step' that tells exactly *what* is to be done, the name of the person responsible for doing it and a deadline date. Sometimes the person taking the action isn't paying attention and will need minutes to tell them what it was they agreed to do so it

will be a problem if the minute-taker hasn't got the information. See Chapter 11 for more information on actions.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

This section allows for last-minute items to be discussed. 'Last minute' means things that happened after the agenda was dispatched that cannot wait for the next meeting. It is not for items that a participant could not be bothered to submit. Sometimes an item may be held for any other business because the person raising it wants to discuss it without the others being prepared. This should be prevented by the chairperson – if the group members are not in a position to discuss something knowledgeably, that item should be deferred to the next meeting.

The chairperson should:

- start the meeting by asking for 'any amendments or additions to the agenda';
- place those items in an appropriate place within the agenda or in 'Any other business';
- reject any items that are not appropriate for discussion by the group;
- reject any items for which the group have not had the necessary preparation (eg not seen a report);
- reject any items that can wait until the next meeting.

What to listen for

Keep a focus on the items that are relevant and ignore any other discussion. Note any items that are 'deferred to next meeting' and add them to the agenda.

Very occasionally, this section is called 'Late items' or 'Last-minute items'.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The chairperson should:

- arrange several months' meetings at a time;
- confirm the date of next meeting and remind them of deadline for agenda items;
- know the essential participants if a meeting has to be set up so a date they can manage can take priority.



Kogan Page



THIS PAGE IS INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

KoganPage



4

AGENDA

There are several reasons for having an agenda:

- to enable participants to prepare for the meeting;
- to ensure that everything important is dealt with;
- to guide through subjects in a logical order;
- to remind the chairperson of what to discuss;
- to make chairing easier through everyone being aware of the structure and order;
- to give structure to the minutes.

The agenda is like a shopping list – without a list you tend to buy things that catch your attention at the expense of the mundane but necessary items. It takes much longer because you browse and have to backtrack when you remember something. And then you have to call in another day for things you have forgotten. A meeting without an agenda is the same: participants discuss the topics that catch their attention but forget to discuss what they are there

for. It takes longer because the order is irrelevant and things that were forgotten or not completed get added to the next agenda.

It isn't easy to fit preparing the agenda into a busy schedule and, as a result, it is often not ready till the morning of the meeting. This means the participants will not be prepared and the result will be ill-thought-out debate, argument and poor decisions.

It is vital to spend time putting together a useful agenda and you should ensure that it is well structured and reasonable for the time available. Your efforts will be rewarded by a shorter, more structured meeting. Taking the minutes becomes easier and the time involved in typing them up is much reduced. The agenda should be circulated a week before the meeting.

The deadline for agenda items should be confirmed in the previous minutes under 'Date of next meeting' and the chairperson encouraged to refuse items that are not received by that date. It is essential that any papers that need to be read before the meeting are received in time to be circulated with the agenda.

Who should prepare the agenda

Although the agenda is the responsibility of the chairperson the work often falls to the minute-taker. Although this means another task to be done, it is considerably easier to minute a meeting if you have been involved in the preparation.

A day or so before the agenda is to be circulated, e-mail the participants to ask if there are any items they would like included. Ask the chairperson for items and look through the previous minutes for anything which should obviously be carried forward. Draft the agenda and get the approval of the chairperson before circulating it to the group. Anything that arises after this is done should be included in 'Any other business' in the meeting.

Who receives the agenda

The agenda should be sent to all participants and, as a general rule, to those who are attending for the one meeting (in part or in

whole) and observers. This is a courtesy and is not essential if there are concerns about confidentiality.

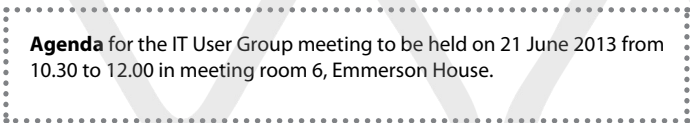
Layout

The basic layout of the agenda does not vary greatly from one organization to another. It is essential that it includes the name of the group that is to meet, the date, time and place of the meeting, and the headings of the different agenda items. It may also be necessary to give a contact name and number for apologies and, if the group is not a regular committee, a list of those invited to attend – a circulation list (this is usually only done for a one-off meeting).

Heading

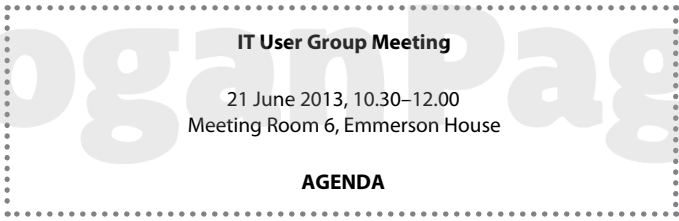
The heading can be either the traditional paragraph style (see Figure 4.1), or the much more common centred style (see Figure 4.2).

Give a closing time so everyone knows how long the meeting should take.



Agenda for the IT User Group meeting to be held on 21 June 2013 from 10.30 to 12.00 in meeting room 6, Emmerson House.

Figure 4.1 Paragraph-style heading



IT User Group Meeting
21 June 2013, 10.30–12.00
Meeting Room 6, Emmerson House

AGENDA

Figure 4.2 Centred heading

AGENDA STYLES

There are three styles of agenda; each has its use and it is worth considering which is best for your meetings.

Basic agenda

The basic agenda is by far the most common style in use today; sadly it is also the least effective. The headings tend to be quite vague and as a result participants could discuss their interests or concerns under more than one heading, so subjects will almost inevitably get discussed twice (or more). The general heading means that people will have different ideas of what needs to be covered under a heading, so the discussion is likely to be muddled and some aspects may be left out altogether. An example of the basic agenda is given in Figure 4.3.

A basic agenda is useful for meetings where everyone is clear exactly what the headings mean and what type of outcome is required for each. This is almost always a project-planning or report-back type of meeting where the same headings are used each month.

Full agenda

A full agenda gives more detailed information, specifically as detailed in the following sections.

Subheadings

- *For matters arising*

As the minute-taker, you are responsible for recording whether actions agreed at the previous meeting have been completed. This is a vitally important part of your role to support the minutes in their purpose as an audit trail. It can however be difficult to achieve as the group tend to work from the previous minutes. The different speeds of reading, people's tendency to look ahead for the items which interest them and the hope of

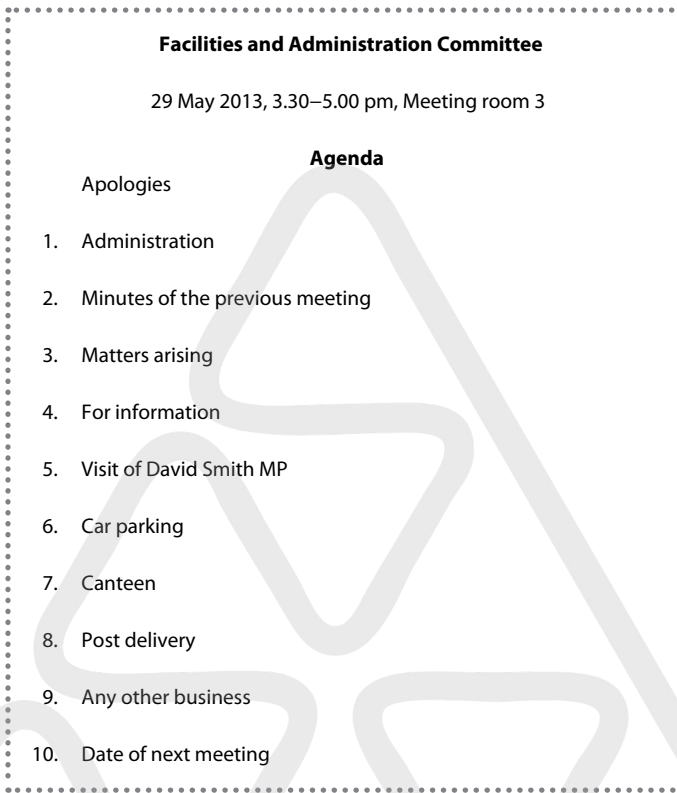


Figure 4.3 Basic agenda

some to avoid admitting they've forgotten to act mean that the feedback is all over the place. On the agenda, list the actions that are due for completion, together with the name of the responsible person. This will enable the chairperson to work through the list and you can easily pick up on any that are missed. There is the bonus that people get an extra reminder that they had an action so may be able to get it done in time.

- *For reports*
Simply number and list the topics for reports and the name or initials of the person reporting.

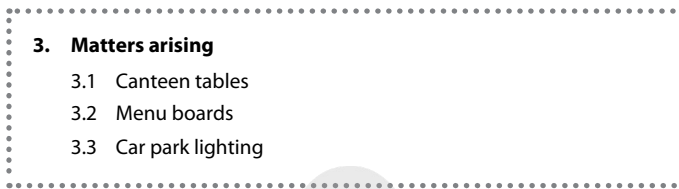
- 
- 3. Matters arising**
 - 3.1 Canteen tables
 - 3.2 Menu boards
 - 3.3 Car park lighting

Figure 4.4 ‘Matters arising’ with subheadings

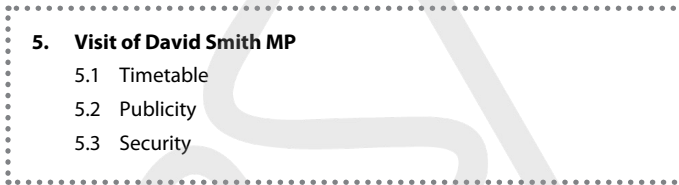
- 
- 5. Visit of David Smith MP**
 - 5.1 Timetable
 - 5.2 Publicity
 - 5.3 Security

Figure 4.5 Heading with subheadings

- *For main agenda items*

If the heading is too general it allows anything and everything to be discussed, and often an important aspect is left out. For example, in Figure 4.3, there is the heading of ‘Visit of David Smith MP’. Figure 4.5 demonstrates this heading with subheadings. By dividing it in this way, everyone can see what is to be discussed and is therefore more likely to wait for the right moment, rather than interrupting with their thoughts throughout the discussion. The subheadings also mean that every necessary aspect of items will be discussed, rather than just those that occur to the participants. If there was only one aspect of the visit to be discussed, say the publicity, change the heading to ‘Publicity for the visit of David Smith MP’.

As minute-taker you will not necessarily be able to prepare the subheadings. It may have to be done in consultation with the chairperson or the individuals who submit items. In fact this is an advantage in many cases and you will be better prepared to take the minutes as a result of such consultation. Figure 4.6 shows an example of a full agenda.

Facilities and Administration Committee

29 May 2013, 3.30–5.00 pm, Meeting room 3

Agenda

Notes

Apologies

1. Administration

2. Minutes of the previous meeting

3. Matters arising

- | | | |
|-----|-------------------|------------|
| 3.1 | Canteen tables | D Simmonds |
| 3.2 | Menu boards | M Daniels |
| 3.3 | Car park lighting | T Young |

4. For information

- | | | |
|-----|----------------------------------|------------|
| 4.1 | Health and safety annual review | R Budgeon |
| 4.2 | Staff forum | D Simmonds |
| 4.3 | Administrative management course | R Davies |

5. Visit of David Smith MP

- | | | | |
|-----|-----------|----------------|-----------|
| 5.1 | Timetable | draft attached | R Davis |
| 5.2 | Publicity | | R Budgeon |
| 5.3 | Security | | T Young |

6. Banner for car park

7. Canteen

- | | | | |
|-----|------------------|-------------------|------------|
| 7.1 | Redecoration | | |
| 7.2 | Chairs | brochure attached | D Simmonds |
| 7.3 | Reading material | | |

8. Post delivery

- | | | | |
|-----|---------------------------|--------------------|--|
| 8.1 | Problems following merger | | |
| 8.2 | Delivery frequency | consult colleagues | |

9. Any other business

10. Date of next meeting

Figure 4.6 Full agenda

Notes of papers that are attached

Any papers that are to be read before the meeting must be sent out with the agenda and should be listed by the relevant agenda items. This column can be headed 'Papers', 'Reports' or 'Attached'.

Instructions/guidance

If participants are required to undertake any action or consultation before the meeting, this can also be listed by the relevant item. This can be in the same column as the papers, in which case the heading is usually 'Notes' (papers are then listed as 'Paper attached').

Lead speakers

Many items will start with specific input from a participant, either a formal report or an informal update or explanation. Where this is the case, show the name on the agenda. This gives the chairperson guidance on who to turn to, and prevents participants making too early a contribution (possibly having misunderstood the subject).

Where the item is for general discussion, do not put a name, even if one person highlighted the need to discuss it. If that person has nothing specific to say, time will be wasted if he or she rambles on.

Names must be placed alongside items in Matters Arising and information items (showing who was responsible for the action and who is to report).

Objectives agenda

In an objectives agenda, the subheadings for main business items are replaced by objectives. This gives clearer guidance as to what has to be achieved (rather than what is to be discussed). Figure 4.7 gives the heading for the MP's visit in this form.

- 5. Visit of David Smith MP**
- 5.1 To confirm timetable for visit
 - 5.2 To agree strategy for maximizing publicity
 - 5.3 To discuss security implications of visit

Figure 4.7 Heading with objectives

Although objectives can be given for the administrative items, this is usually thought to be overly wordy and may appear patronizing. It is clearest to use them for each main business item. If there would be one heading and no subheadings (if it were a full agenda), there will be one objective. Where there would be three subheadings (if it were a full agenda), there will be a heading and three objectives. This will again involve consultation in many cases.

Remember that these objectives will need to be given as subheadings in the minutes and you should bear this in mind when deciding the wording. Figure 4.7 shows an example of an objectives agenda.

Useful words

There are some phrases that come in useful for an objectives agenda, and you will no doubt find more. Choose the word that is most appropriate for the type of discussion or desired outcome necessary:

where the group are to:

- to receive be told (eg a report)
- to decide* decide the outcome at this meeting
- to agree* agree the outcome at this meeting
(ie the same as decide)
- to confirm confirm an earlier choice or the choice of
another group
- to approve approve an earlier choice or the choice of
another group (ie the same as confirm)

to discuss	talk about
to select*	choose between alternatives
to establish	find out
to resolve*	sort out (usually a problem)
to explore	talk about (ie the same as discuss)

*items that use these words are required to result in an action point. However, any other objective may result in an action point if that proves the appropriate outcome.

With an objectives agenda you know where decisions are required, and it is considerably easier to listen for them and, if necessary, remind the chairperson of the necessity to decide. Remember that it is an essential part of your role to get the actions that are agreed, so if you are not clear you will have to ask. It is easier to do this if the agenda shows where actions are expected; just ask 'Is there an action that you'd like me to record?' – a polite way of pointing out they haven't defined it, or maybe have forgotten it altogether.

A logical order for agenda items

A group that jumps from one agenda item to another and back again causes great problems for the minute-taker, but sometimes the fault lies in a poorly designed agenda.

There is no 'right' order, but it is generally preferable to deal with important items first. This is to help achieve useful discussion while everyone is fresh and focused and also in case time runs short at the end. The overriding order should be one of decisions needed. Where a decision on one item will have an impact on the discussion or decision of another, the agenda must be structured to allow for this.

Look out for items that are closely linked and should follow one another or those that are basically the same and can be incorporated as one item, perhaps with subheadings.

Facilities and Administration Committee

29 May 2013, 3.30–5.00 pm, Meeting room 3

Agenda

Apologies

1. Administration

To review arrangements for minute taking

2. Minutes of the previous meeting

3. Matters arising

3.1 Canteen tables

D Simmonds

3.2 Menu boards

M Daniels

3.3 Car park lighting

T Young

4. For information

4.1 Health and safety annual review

R Budgeon

4.2 Staff forum

D Simmonds

4.3 Administrative management course

R Davies

5. Visit of David Smith MP

5.1 To confirm timetable for visit

draft
attached

R Davis

5.2 To agree strategy for maximizing publicity

R Budgeon

5.3 To discuss security implications of visit

T Young

6. Outdoor smoking area

To decide future of outdoor smoking area

7. Canteen

7.1 To draw up plans for redecoration

7.2 To confirm style of chairs

brochure
attached

D Simmonds

7.3 To discuss provision of
reading material

consult
colleagues

8. Post delivery

8.1 To consider problems following merger

8.2 To agree standards for delivery frequency

consult
colleagues

9. Any other business

10. Date of next meeting

Figure 4.8 Example objectives agenda

If some people will have to do a lot of talking, it may help to split their agenda items to give them a rest and to give others a change of voice to listen to.

Timing the agenda

Timing the agenda provides a reminder for the chairperson and empowers the group to self-manage if the chairing is weak. If an item is running over time, it may seem rude for someone to point this out – as though they were simply bored. Having the timings on the agenda make it easier for someone to draw attention to the clock. The times also send a general message of time being important.

Some groups find that including times for items on the agenda is worthwhile. If you do this, use real time (10.15, 10.35) rather than time allowed (20 minutes, 15 minutes), so that it is easy to judge whether the meeting is on time.

Timing the agenda means that everyone can see how much time is allowed and gives an indication of the relative importance of each item. It also enables the chairperson to use the excuse of ‘not much time’ to quieten a dominant group member in a less personal or aggressive way than asking that member to be quiet.

Ask those with agenda items how long they need for the discussion (without giving any guarantee that they will have that time!). This means that you can assess the amount of time needed before the meeting starts and address any problem of shortage of time. This has the added advantage of reminding participants that time is important.

Timing the agenda serves little purpose when ignored by the chairperson and participants, so is only worth the effort if used.

Use descriptive headings and numbering

When you decide on headings for the agenda items, choose wording that will indicate to participants exactly what will be discussed.

Far too many agenda headings are very general, for example 'Car parking'. This could be understood as being to discuss increasing the charges for parking, resurfacing the car park, re-designing the car park, replacing signs, creating a visitors' car park, decreasing the charges for parking, etc. Participants will come to the meeting with different expectations so the discussion will fracture before it's begun. For each item, ask the chairperson or whoever put it on the agenda for some more information and then make the heading more descriptive. For example, 'Car park charges', 'Resurfacing of car park', 'Signs for car park', etc.

The agenda items should be numbered with sub-numbering where appropriate (see the examples above). Keep a copy of the agenda in front of you throughout the meeting so that you can reference in your notes any item taken out of place or duplicated, by its number.

If you plan to present 'Apologies' at the top of the minutes, alongside 'Present', make sure it is not numbered on the agenda or everything will be out of order by one number.

Layout and presentation

The agenda is the advertisement for your meeting. If it looks scruffy and unprofessional, you will discourage those who are to attend. It should be presented so that the page does not look overcrowded, with headings sized in relation to their relative importance, appropriate widths for columns and so on. The examples above give an indication as to the generally preferred layout.

A circulation list

If the same group attend each meeting, there is no point in showing a circulation list. If someone is to attend for a specific item, this can be shown on the agenda (see Figure 4.9). If the meeting is a one-off event, or if there are several visitors, consider whether it is worth indicating who will be attending.

Meeting	Facilities & Administration Group	Date Time	29 May 2013 3.30–5.00pm
Place	Meeting Room 3		Agenda

		Apologies		
	1	Administration		
	2	Minutes of the previous meeting		
	3	Matters arising		
	3.1	Canteen tables		D Simmonds
	3.2	Menu boards		M Daniels
	3.3	Car park lighting		T Young
3.45	4	For information		
	4.1	Health & safety annual review	Attached	R Budgeon
	4.2	Staff forum		D Simmonds
	4.3	Administrative management course		R Davies
3.55	5	Visit of David Smith, MP		
	5.1	Timetable	Attached	R Davies
	5.2	Publicity		R Budgeon
	5.3	Security		T Young
4.15	6	Barrier for car park		
4.25	7	Canteen		
	7.1	Redecoration	Brochure	D Simmonds
	7.2	Chairs		
	7.3	Reading material		
4.40	8	Post delivery		
		Problems following merger		
		Delivery frequency		
4.50	9	Any other urgent business		
	8	Date of next meeting		
		<i>Please bring availability for w/c 29/7/13</i>		

Figure 4.9 Table layout for agenda

8. Post delivery	
<i>Irene Maddox, Post Room Manager, will attend</i>	
8.1	To consider problems following merger
8.2	To agree standards for delivery frequency
	consult colleagues

Figure 4.10 Example showing visitor to meeting

If the agenda is being circulated to external visitors, it may be worth showing who attends for their benefit. If you prefer, this can be done as a separate note.

Chairperson's brief

This is just a more detailed agenda, drawn up to help the chairperson manage the meeting. It will highlight exactly what is required from each section, how long to allow for it and any other information that will help, including background briefing notes if necessary.

The brief is hardly ever used today, apart from for the most formal of meetings, but it could help a less experienced chairperson or one who has little time to prepare.

The minute-taker and chairperson should get together for a few minutes to discuss the meeting, flag any potential problems and agree how the meeting will run. Although this is seldom a formal meeting, it is a valuable aid to minute taking and helps remind the chairperson of the importance of your role.

It is generally best to have a detailed agenda for everyone's use. It helps the chairperson, empowers the group to self-direct if necessary and gives a tool to the minute-taker to support interruptions where clearly-needed information is not given.



THIS PAGE IS INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

KoganPage



5

PERSONAL PREPARATION

It is difficult to find time to prepare for a meeting; it is often a case of finishing the phone call and dashing in. Of course you may not even know that you are to minute the meeting until just beforehand. Plenty of people think 'anyone' or 'any secretary' can take the minutes and you might find yourself called in with no notice. Despite the difficulties, time spent on preparation is usually recouped at the meeting and afterwards when typing the minutes.

Read the agenda

Rather than just skimming over the subjects, read through each item and consider what will be discussed, what terminology will be used and so on. If you identify any problem areas, it is quite acceptable to ring or meet to get background information or any other help you need. Just raising awareness of your concerns may encourage others to be sensitive to your difficulties.

Read the papers

Ideally, you should be able to find the time to read papers in depth so you are familiar with the language and the content. In reality, it is more likely that you will only have time to scan them. At least do this, as you will then know what type of information is there and may pick up details to help you at the meeting.

Talk to the chairperson

Meet with the chairperson, either formally or informally, to discuss what is to be covered, where decisions are expected, what style of minutes is required and how you are required to behave (eg can you interrupt?). This is also your opportunity to ask for any specific help or general guidance you may need.

Talk to the contributors

It is not enough to understand the words on the agenda; you have to know the context. For example, you might understand the words 'Holiday cover for support staff' but you need to know which holiday. Who do people think should provide the cover? What's the budget likely to be? How many are needed? And so on. It may be that the person who has raised the subject has no idea, and that is why it is on the agenda, but often people do have some thoughts and it is useful to be aware of them.

Rather than ask specific questions and find you have misunderstood the words, start with something general (you could ask: could you give me some background? Why is it an issue? Are you looking for a decision at the meeting?). You can always follow up with specific questions if you need to. You will also often pick up useful abbreviations or acronyms at this stage which will help in the meeting.

Talk to others

If there is an 'expert' who can help you with information on any agenda item you particularly fear, take the trouble to ask for help.

Consider who's who

In terms of knowing who you will be working with, meeting participants are likely to fall into three groups:

- 1 Those you know well (you'd recognize them out of context, for example in the supermarket). You don't need to give any further thought to these.
- 2 Those you've met, but would struggle to recognize out of context. Before the meeting, remind yourself of what they look like, consciously putting name to face in your mind. This will enable you to recognize them as soon as you see them and you will find it easier to remember their names when taking the minutes.
- 3 Those you haven't met. Try to find out what they look like by asking colleagues. Even if you cannot get any information, you have narrowed these to a smaller, more manageable group, and can approach them and introduce yourself promptly on the day. If you find it difficult to talk to strangers, plan a couple of open questions (those that start with what, where, when, how or who) to get the person chatting.

Confirm the administrative arrangements

If the arrival of coffee or booking of equipment is a problem in your organization, double-check the arrangements – much less stressful than wondering if something will arrive as planned.

Remind reception of visitors to your meeting

You should meet visitors who are attending the whole meeting – a good chance to establish personal contact. Those who are coming in for one item only can be directed as you wish.

Get the equipment together

Make sure that you have enough paper, suitable pens or pencils, a clipboard if there is no table, the attendance list and your copy

of the agenda and papers. You might also want a copy of the last minutes (or even earlier ones) and spare agenda and minutes for those who have forgotten theirs. It is also worth taking the phone numbers of anyone you might have to call: to tell them that it's time to come in, to locate the coffee, etc.

Signed minutes

If the minutes are to be signed, take a copy to the meeting. This is the 'file' copy, not yours or the chairperson's. Even if minutes are not to be signed, and they seldom are, it may help to take a copy of the minutes to amend if there are changes – it's quicker than writing them out in your notes.

Last-minute minute-taker

Personal preparation is certainly recommended, but is not possible if you are called in at the last minute. Assuming you cannot refuse, say that you are happy to help and immediately ask for the help you will need. This is usually one or all of the following, but you can ask for more if you want:

- sight of the agenda and a verbal explanation of the headings;
- guidance on the depth and style of minutes required;
- introduction to the participants;
- ongoing summarizing.

It is quite acceptable to point out that you do not have a full knowledge of the subject but make your voice tone warm and strong so that it does not sound as though you are incompetent or whinging.

Personal preparation checklist

To save yourself time, prepare a checklist that can be printed off and used for all meetings. You can use the checklist in Figure 5.1 or prepare one that meets your needs.

Meeting checklist

- I have read and thought through the agenda
- I have read/skimmed the papers
- I have spoken to contributors to understand the context of items
- I know where decisions are expected
- I've discussed the meeting with the chairperson
- I know what style of minutes I'm writing
- I've booked tea/coffee/lunch
- I've arranged:
 - flipchart (and paper/pens) or whileboard
 - equipment for presentations
 - extension leads
- Reception knows who's expected
- I know the names of those I haven't met
- I've thought of a couple of subjects for conversations with 'strangers'
- I've double-checked the administrative arrangements
- I've got:
 - paper
 - pens/pencils
 - clipboard
 - the agenda
 - copies of the papers
 - minutes for my reference
 - minutes for signing
 - spare copies of minutes
 - spare copies of the agenda

Figure 5.1 Example meeting checklist

Kogan Page



THIS PAGE IS INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

KoganPage

CREATING THE RIGHT ENVIRONMENT

Having booked a room, it is likely that there will still be some work to do to make it ready for the meeting, to create a business-like impression and to help yourself in the minute-taking role.

Present a businesslike first impression

Make sure that the room is tidy, with chairs neatly arranged, papers ready and so on. Although it is unlikely that anyone will consciously notice, subconsciously it sends a strong message of 'place for business'. If it looks like a coffee lounge, it will be treated as one.

Freshen the room

If possible, open a window for a few minutes so that the room is aired. Turn on the lights so that the room looks like a good place to work.

Layout

There should be an obvious ‘head of table’ position for the chairperson and yourself. This should be at the narrow end of a rectangular table or oval table. If the table is round create a head position by giving a little extra space between you and the chairperson, and the remainder of the chairs. If the table is square, do not place a chair at the front of each side as those people will struggle to catch the chairperson’s eye. Everyone should be able to have eye contact with the chairperson (and you with them to aid your hearing).

Do not allow yourself to be sidelined to a table or chair away from the main group. It is essential for your ability to hear (not to mention your status) that you are at the table. You should also make sure you take your place next to the chairperson. A large part of the discussion is focused in this direction and it is difficult to hear if looking at the backs of heads. If you need eye contact with the chairperson, stay at the front, but at a right angle – the first person along the side.

Make sure that your ‘head of table’ position is not near an air-conditioning unit or other barrier to hearing.

Make sure that there is a chair for everyone and that they are neither too cramped nor too spread out.

Refreshments

If possible, have water on the table. It is preferable to have coffee at a separate table so everyone can help themselves. Try to have space for a brief pre-meeting chat and make sure that you are part of that, getting to know people and presenting yourself as a confident member of the team.

Check equipment

Although there is no reason for you to be expert on the workings of the projection equipment, it is surprising how many people turn

to the minute-taker when the lead won't reach the plug. Make sure that all equipment is working, screens and flipcharts can be seen, there are adequate marker pens, etc. After all, you are the one likely to be sent for help if there is a problem and that makes minuting impossible.

Extra copies of papers

As many minute-takers will testify, a significant percentage of meeting participants turn up without the papers they need. This is even more irritating when they swear they did not receive the copy that you personally delivered. However, although it is much easier to take extra copies than be sent out to the copier this should be balanced by the need to save paper. As an alternative you can project copies of papers. This is acceptable where the group are discussing them – for reference – but not appropriate if people are trying to read them for information.

It should only be necessary to take spare copies of the agenda as this is essential for the meeting. Spare copies of previous minutes should not be necessary: participants should have read them for errors before the meeting and actions should be listed on the agenda for feedback under Matters Arising. Provided you have your reference set, no one else should need a copy.

Be there to greet

It is much more comfortable to be in the room to greet people, rather than rushing in when everyone has arrived, particularly if they are already seated. This will help you put names to faces, meet those who are new to you and generally present yourself as a confident member of the team – the host role. If you fail and have to walk into the room after everyone has sat down, open the door steadily and close it behind you to give yourself time to look around the room and choose your place. You may be feeling embarrassed, but make sure your body language is confident and poised.

Mobiles and pagers

Make sure that all mobiles and pagers are turned off (you may need the chairperson to ask for this). For those who cannot bear to be out of contact, try to find a colleague who sits near the meeting room to 'mind' the machines, field calls and only interrupt for issues of life or death. Ensure that the chairperson asks those taking a call to leave the room.

Less seriously, but equally effectively, have a £1 fine for every interruption, with takings to an appropriate charity!



Kogan Page



7

ATTENDING THE MEETING

Most minute-takers do not like the task. Quite apart from the difficulties of taking notes, they are uncomfortable within the group, often feeling out of place.

If, as minute-taker, you are respected by the group and treated well by them, this chapter is not for you. For a great many people, attending the meeting as a mute or non-contributing minute-taker can be daunting, particularly when working with a new group or one where the participants are very senior.

You would be unlucky to suffer from all the problems below, but most people have encountered one or two. Most of the problems stem from a less-than-competent chairperson, one who lets the meeting leave the agenda, allows the loud to dominate and fails to draw in the quiet. Most difficult of all for the minute-taker is the chairperson who does not summarize the discussion (in fact this can cause problems for all the participants).

Where to sit

Some groups ostracize the minute-taker, even to the point of making him or her sit at a separate table. On other occasions it is the minute-taker who would rather be invisible and hides in the corner. As minute-taker, you are part of the 'management team' for the meeting and your place is next to the chairperson.

Claim your seat

Make sure that you get to the room early to reserve your seat. If you work for an organization where everyone wants to sit by the chairperson, leave something personal in your place – an old purse with a bit of change in it or some car keys. People will move papers, a briefcase and even a handbag, but only the seriously determined will pick up someone's purse or wallet.

Finding out who's who

It is your responsibility to produce an accurate note of who attends the meeting and this can be difficult if you do not know everyone who attends. Although you are unlikely to have to put names or initials in minutes, it will probably help your recall of the meeting to have names in your notes. If you don't know who someone is, there are a number of things to try:

- *Use an attendance sheet*

To avoid people signing illegibly, use a typed 'blank table' rather than a sheet of A4. Divide it into columns for the information you need, typically name (a column each for title, first name and surname) and department or organization. You may also want an e-mail address or phone number. If they still sign their names, add a first column for signature – most people will print after signing. You may find it helps to wait until everyone is seated and then pass the sheet around – you then get the names in order and can refer to someone by his or her seating position in your notes and work out the name

later. For a larger meeting print the sheet on bright paper to prevent its getting stuck as it moves around the table. People will notice it!

- *Use name cards or labels*

If you put out A5 cards, folded in half lengthways, and a few flipchart pens, most people will write their names without thinking about it. If this is not feasible, type a sheet of sticky labels with the names large enough to be read at a distance (unlike most identification badges). These can be given out on arrival or passed around. It is generally not advisable to plan the seating positions by placing name cards. People usually sit with their colleagues but don't think to move the cards. If this is the case for your meetings and you want preprinted cards, just keep them by the door to collect on arrival.

- *Ask someone*

It is always better to ask at the meeting because other people may not remember what someone looked like or what he or she was wearing.

- *Listen for clues*

People will often give clues, saying things like 'How's life in Birmingham?' If you have prepared by reading through your list of likely attendees, you may well be able to work out who is who in this way. Even more obvious, listen for strangers being called by their name and you should be able to work out who each is.

- *Ask the stranger*

It is not easy to approach people to find out who they are – it feels somewhat rude. However, it is a useful thing to do because it gives you a chance to familiarize yourself with their speech pattern. It also gives you the chance to present yourself as a confident professional. For your own comfort, don't leave anything to chance. Just saying 'Hello' does not exactly start a conversation. Trying to probe with questions like 'What's happening in your office?' may not bring the information you

need. Introducing yourself is often met with a simple ‘Hello’, which again does not help. It is up to you to control the situation, and the best way is to introduce yourself and then ask directly for the name: ‘Hello, I’m Sally, the minute-taker today. Please could I have your name?’ Have a pad to take a note of the name and then stay to chat for a few minutes or, if the person obviously does not want this, you can just thank him or her and move on. You are there in an administrative role and people expect you to administrate!

Whatever approach you favour, prepare by reading through the list of names to familiarize yourself and to identify potential problems such as hearing whether it’s Lorraine or Elaine (people tend to say their names very quickly). Also look out for duplicated initials or names like Elizabeth/Liz where you need to decide whether to use E or L.

Remembering the name

Never tell yourself that you are dreadful with names – you’ll come to believe your own negative publicity. Names are a problem because we seldom tie the name and the face together. We talk about people by name when they are not there, and we look at them in conversation but without using their name. We don’t tie the two together. Try two simple techniques to help yourself:

1 Having asked for the name, use it once or at most twice in conversation or in thanking the person:

- ‘How long have you worked there, *Mr Hardacre?*’
- ‘Have you been to these meetings before, *Barbara?*’
- ‘Thank you, *Mrs Ratcliffe.*’

Don’t use the name more than twice or you will sound insincere.

2 When you are not taking notes, either before the meeting or, for example, whilst people are arguing, look at each individual in turn and remind yourself of his or her name. Work round from

one side of the table and, every time you get stuck, check with your attendance sheet and go back to start at the beginning. The important thing is to combine looking at the person whilst saying his or her name (in your head, of course).

For all of these, it will help if you have studied the list of likely attendees and familiarized yourself with their names. It is easy to mishear a name if you are not prepared, and you will need to be alert for those who are substituting. If you hear or are given a name you do not recognize, you can then immediately ask whether that person is taking someone's place.

Not understanding

It is very uncomfortable to sit in a meeting with the subject matter going 'over your head'. In fact, it is not just the minute-taker who suffers from this. The various experts in the room may not understand one another, but no one likes to admit it. This can lead to some strange discussion and often to argument. As your experience with a group develops, understanding becomes less of a problem, but meanwhile there are some things you can do.

Before the meeting

If you spot something that worries you on the agenda, contact the person who wants to discuss it and ask for help. You might want to meet to discuss it, get hold of some background reading or ask for help afterwards – whatever suits you. You will also raise awareness of the potential problem and, it is hoped, the person will make things extra clear for you.

During the meeting

You should interrupt and ask for clarification. Useful questions include, 'Please could you:

- clarify... ?'
- explain... ?'

- put that in layperson's terms?'
- summarize... ?'

If possible, talk to people at the meeting, rather than wait a few days before ringing them. It's best to sort out problems while memories are fresh.

If interrupting is not appropriate, always make a note of what you don't understand. For example, 'He's talking about the IT problem that caused the crash last week', or 'She's explaining the process for the capital planning meetings'.

After the meeting

If your problem is with facts, it is quite acceptable to talk to the relevant individual. However, beware of asking someone approachable for help in understanding an argument or discussion – you will get that person's view and run the risk of bias in the minutes. You should only approach the chairperson in cases like this.

Hearing

Reduce or remove any external noise by shutting windows or closing doors. Make sure that you can see everyone to establish eye contact where necessary and, again, sit by the chairperson because discussion usually slants that way. Try to arrange the table to avoid encouraging subgroups forming. For example, a long boardroom table will often encourage those at the end to start a different conversation, as will a table that is too wide/square, when those on the corners will chat.

Minuting an argument

Many minute-takers panic and scribble furiously as argument breaks out. These notes are then discarded because the personal views and often inappropriate tone of the discussion do not appear in the minutes.

When discussion degenerates into argument, make a careful note of what is being ‘discussed’ and, if you want, add some extra information that you think will be useful; then stop and rest until order is returned.

Figure 7.1 illustrates the notes taken by a minute-taker during a 20-minute argument on whether to merge two departments. The minute-taker resumed taking full notes when the chairperson brought the meeting under control.

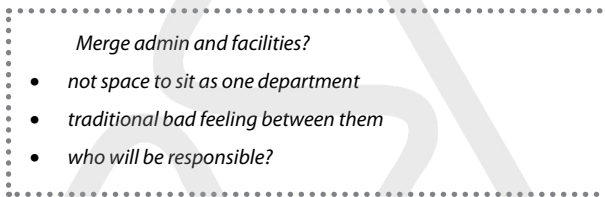


Figure 7.1 Example of notes taken during an argument

Skivvying

One of the most demeaning things to happen to a minute-taker is being sent out to photocopy or chase up the coffee. Quite apart from the negative message this sends, it is impossible to take notes when not in the room. It is difficult to refuse without seeming rude, so the best approach is to pass the minutes to someone else. This should be done warmly but with a clear request ‘Please could you take notes while I’m out of the room?’ The ideal person to pass to is the chairperson because he or she is the one who has the power to send someone else next time.

Coping with numbers/figures

Although it might be risky to say that you should not take notes of figures at all, this is a good general rule. Figures are hard to write accurately and even if you do have them correctly in your notes, you are likely to find a page of numbers and have no idea

what they mean. Figures are like stories: they are given to make a point. Someone may give statistics over the past three years but the point is, for example, that the rise in redundancies is high/slight/tailing-off/increasing. It is better to understand, and note, the point – if you want the figures for the minutes, you can always ask for them later.

Maintaining concentration and focus

Few people mean to daydream; it is more common to ‘come to’ and realize that you have been thinking about something else. This usually happens when you do not understand fully or when the group are repeatedly going over the same points. Sometimes though, the cause is the opposite: getting too involved in the content and forgetting that you are there to take the notes.

Light and air

Make sure that the room is well lit and well ventilated. The latter may conflict with the need to close windows to cut out noise – consider the best balance for you in any particular room.

Temperature

Try not to let the room get too hot. If you think this is likely to be a problem, wear layers of clothes that you can shed with dignity.

Maximize understanding

It is much easier to concentrate when you understand what is being discussed, so make sure that you have read the previous minutes, the agenda and any relevant papers. If necessary, you can ask for guidance at the meeting if you feel out of your depth.

Refreshments

Keep to your normal levels of tea or coffee, but it is cold water that is most helpful in keeping you awake.

Remain part of the meeting

Sit forward, looking at those who are speaking so that you feel involved in what is going on.

Stay focused

Whether you lose focus because of daydreaming or getting involved, help yourself by sitting up with your pen ready to write. Although you must look up when a new person takes over the discussion, and eye contact is useful, generally keep your ears on the discussion, your brain on the meaning and your eyes on what you are writing. When you are not writing, look up but keep your hand ready. Avoid doodling.

Remember your stomach!

Don't eat a big meal before a meeting. Less obviously, avoid chocolate and other fatty sweets. Your body gets a 'chocolate boost' but that is quickly followed by a slump as the sugar is cleaned out of your bloodstream. In addition heavy fats like this take a lot of your body's energy to digest, and most minute-takers would prefer that energy in their brain.

Use a break

If there is a short coffee break and you are getting tired, try to get moving – get the heart rate up a bit. Just walk swiftly up some stairs or along a corridor and back again.

Contributing minute-taker

It is difficult, if not impossible, to minute a meeting and contribute properly to it. Writing and talking are not activities that can be done at the same time. On the other hand, if you are a contributor to the meeting you are likely to have a higher level of knowledge of the subject. You also have the advantage of the status of group member, which makes it easier to interrupt and ask for help or information.

When taking notes you should not be writing down everything that is said by each individual. It is the topics discussed and the points raised that are of concern.

If you contribute to one item

Before the meeting, ask another member of the group to take minutes during your item. Try to remind the member of this before the item starts.

If you contribute throughout

It is simply not possible to take detailed notes and contribute. The group have to accept shorter (but no less accurate) minutes and an action point. You can reduce your notes accordingly. If this is not acceptable to the group, use 'Committee business' to schedule a discussion on how the meeting is run, present it as a problem and let everyone decide what should be done.

Since you have the status of contributor, if the chairperson does not summarize at the end of each item, you can interrupt and do so. Usually this is done by saying 'Excuse me, can I confirm for the minutes... ?' You can even tape this, using a dictating machine, and you have the basis for your minutes. If the chairperson does summarize, this too can be taped (with agreement), but do not try to tape the whole meeting because it is extremely time-consuming to prepare the minutes.

Kogan Page



TAKING NOTES

One of the greatest areas of concern for minute-takers is recognizing what should be noted and sifting out the irrelevant information. This is known as ignoring the drivel and picking out the pearl!

Before you start to take notes, it is important to get the 'mechanics' correct. Handwriting, as such, is seldom taught in schools and as a result we fall prey to bad habits that leave us walking out of the meeting with a stiff arm, sore shoulder and often an unnecessary headache.

The mechanics of writing

- *Sit properly*
Sit back and 'square' in your chair so that your back and legs are supported.
- *Find a good pen or pencil*
Ignore all the advice that pen is better, or pencil is what the experts use. You will write more quickly and legibly with the

instrument that you like best. Experiment and then make sure you always take at least two into the meeting. Try to find one that has a rubber or ridged grip so that your hand does not slip, and that is not so narrow that your hand is pinched in holding it. Some people find it useful to take red or green pens to highlight actions or make other notes. If you can manage this and use the right colour at the right time, then it may be worth trying. Otherwise, use symbols or the layout of your notes to differentiate.

- *Support your arm below your elbow*

Don't take your arm's weight on the wrist; after all, it's the joint that you need to move in order to write. Move in towards the table, so that the weight of your arm is taken just below your elbow. This frees your lower arm to move and will significantly reduce the arm and shoulder ache.

- *Use your non-writing hand to manage the paper*

Don't leave the paper stationary and move your writing hand forward and back. Rather, keep your writing arm static (see the next section) and move the paper away from you as you work down the page.

- *If you don't have the 'luxury' of a table*

Take a good quality clipboard so that the paper is well supported. Use a chair with arms and support your writing arm as above, moving the paper with the clipboard towards and away from you as you write.

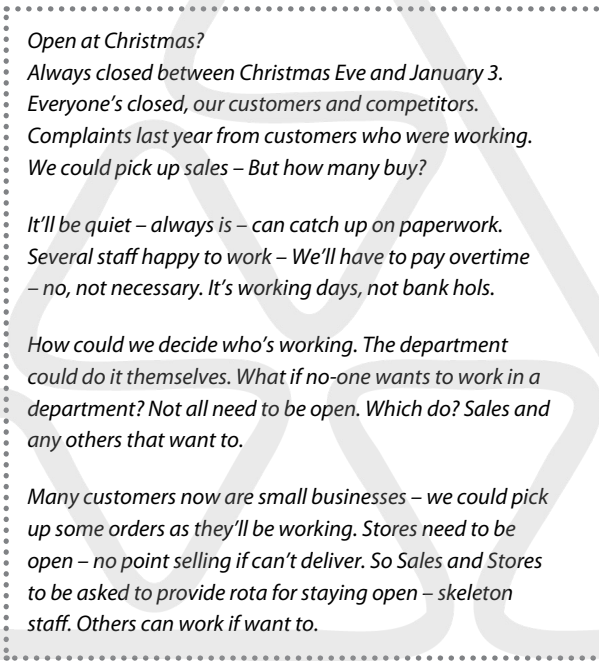
- *Use A4 paper*

Use good-quality paper so that the pen glides over it without catching. Make sure you have a right and left margin and then draw a further vertical line about three-quarters of the way across the page. This will leave you with the approximate width of a shorthand pad. You should use the wider column for taking notes and the narrower one for necessary arrows, asterisks, cross-references, etc.

Taking notes

Use bullet points, not sentences

If you write full sentences, you are likely to take down all the unnecessary ‘filling in’ words, often scribbling down the words that people say (see Figure 8.2). Not only will you have much that is not needed, but it will be harder to make sense of the notes, which will look like a school essay.



*Open at Christmas?
Always closed between Christmas Eve and January 3.
Everyone's closed, our customers and competitors.
Complaints last year from customers who were working.
We could pick up sales – But how many buy?

It'll be quiet – always is – can catch up on paperwork.
Several staff happy to work – We'll have to pay overtime
– no, not necessary. It's working days, not bank hols.

How could we decide who's working. The department
could do it themselves. What if no-one wants to work in a
department? Not all need to be open. Which do? Sales and
any others that want to.

Many customers now are small businesses – we could pick
up some orders as they'll be working. Stores need to be
open – no point selling if can't deliver. So Sales and Stores
to be asked to provide rota for staying open – skeleton
staff. Others can work if want to.*

Figure 8.2 Don't write essay-style notes

Write bullet points, working down the page, not across it (see Figure 8.3). If you write across the page, you are more likely to put in the ‘padding’ words and you will end up scribbling furiously as described above. Figure 8.4 shows an example of working bullet points down the page, and Figure 8.5 of bullet points on paper ruled for structured note taking.

Open at Christmas?
Some customers complained. Could pick up sales – not many, can catch up on paperwork. Staff happy to work. Pay overtime? – no
Who to work? Departments sort themselves.
What if no-one wants to? Not all need to open, sales do + any others, pick up some orders as customers working
Stores open – must deliver sales
Sales and stores provide rota – skeleton staff, others can work if want to.

Figure 8.3 Don't write bullet points across the page

Open at Christmas?
Some customers complained
Could pick up sales – not many
can catch up on paperwork
staff happy to work
pay overtime? – no
who to work?
departments sort themselves
What if no one wants to
Not all need to open
Sales do
+ any others
pick up some orders and customers working
stores open – must deliver sales
sales and stores provide rota – skeleton staff
Others can work if want to

Figure 8.4 Take bullet points, working down the page, with plenty of white space

	<i>Open at Christmas</i>		
S	<i>some customers complained</i>		
T	<i>could pick up sales – not many</i>		
M	<i>can catch up on paperwork</i>		
J	<i>staff happy to work</i>		
T	<i>pay overtime? – no</i>		
S	<i>who to work?</i>		
A	<i>departments sort themselves</i>		
S	<i>What if no one wants to</i>		
A	<i>Not all need to open</i>		
J	<i>Sales do</i>		
A	<i>+ any others?</i>		
T	<i>pick up some orders as</i>		
	<i>customers working</i>		
S	<i>stores open – must deliver sales</i>		
	<i>sales and stores provide rota –</i>		
	<i>skeleton staff.</i>		
	<i>Others can work if want to.</i>		T

Figure 8.5 Bullet points with notes, using the column for arrows, etc

Look as well as listen

Although you will usually be looking at what you are writing, it is important to remember eye contact:

- *Eye contact improves your hearing*

It is easier to hear what someone is saying if you are watching as well as listening.

- *Eye contact reminds speakers of your presence*

If you catch eye contact with speakers, they are reminded of your presence and are more likely to include you in their ‘audience’, which again makes it easier to hear.

- *Achieving eye contact*

Although you need to look at what you are writing, when you hear the voice change, glance up and look properly at the new speaker, if possible catching his or her eye to demonstrate that you are listening. If you recognize that you have already noted a point, stop, look and listen, if necessary nodding encouragingly (a small movement!).

THE MESSAGE, NOT THE WORDS

The key skill that a minute-taker needs is the ability to record the message, not the words. When someone is speaking, words come from the mouth, but the message comes from the brain. For example, the following people are all saying broadly the same thing (extracts from a discussion on the possibility of staying open over the Christmas holiday) – it is only the first one who ties up mouth and brain.

- ‘Staying open between Christmas and New Year is worth considering seriously.’
- ‘When I worked for Amercall, we always opened between Christmas and New Year and often picked up orders from competitors who were closed.’
- ‘Quite a few staff are happy to work over the holiday period and take leave later in the year.’
- ‘Several customers commented that they could not reach us during the Christmas fortnight.’
- ‘Last year we lost several orders by not answering calls in the sales office over the holiday period.’
- ‘Even if sales are quiet, it is one of the few times when we can catch up with the paperwork, reorganize systems and so on.’

- ‘When I worked with the sales team, I used to hate the aftermath of the Christmas holiday. January low spirits combined with a rush of business, and the office was in chaos from a long shutdown after a chaotic Christmas party season. We always started the year with a backlog.’

Beware voice tone/delivery

Another aspect of listening for the message, not the words, is to take note of voice tone and delivery but not to be swept along by them. For example, try saying the following sentence in a variety of tones, staged from neutral through to furious (you might want to add a few extra words): ‘Most of the team don’t know how to work the receiver.’

No matter how the words are said, the message remains the same. Have a look at the example quotes in the box, together with how they appeared informally in the minute-taker’s notes.

‘All the furniture in this office is old; it’s scruffy and much of it is falling apart. We should do something about replacing it. It looks dreadful and one day there’s going to be an accident.’

The office furniture needs replacing

‘The phones must be answered by a human between 9.00 and 5.30; voicemail is only acceptable outside working hours. People don’t like leaving a message and it gives the impression that we’re keeping them at arm’s length.’

Voicemail outside office hours only

‘The goldfish have been a great success; many people commented that they were relaxing. It seemed to stop small children running around – they were more interested in watching the fish.’

goldfish – a good thing

‘The clinic has seen a 30 per cent increase in patient throughput. It’s not surprising that the car park gets full. Sometimes there’s a queue back out on to the road. There’s going to be an accident one day.’

The car park isn’t big enough

‘King Arthur had a point! The shape of the table is vital to the success of the meeting – I think we should consider a round table, or at least a broad oval. These long boardroom tables make sensible discussion impossible. I can’t hear Ken and they’re chatting at the back.’

Change shape of table to round/broad oval

‘I used to work for a hospital in the Midlands, luckily not one of those in Birmingham city centre because parking is a non-starter. All the furniture there was incredibly old, probably from the 50s or even before. But it was strong and solid and outlasted all the newer “cheap” stuff. Quality has to be a prime concern because it’s cheaper in the long run.’

Must buy good quality – long-term saving

‘Staff don’t know how to use the programs or the system. Computer training was offered to all staff in 2006, and 50 courses were run. In 2007 it was 45, in 2004 it was just 20, and in 2009 it was 9, but new programs are coming in all the time and we expect them to learn by magic.’

Need to provide computer training

‘Everyone in this team wants the new system; well, a couple of the administrators aren’t too keen but they’ll come around. Oh, and Tim is anti – but he always is. Everyone else is keen.’

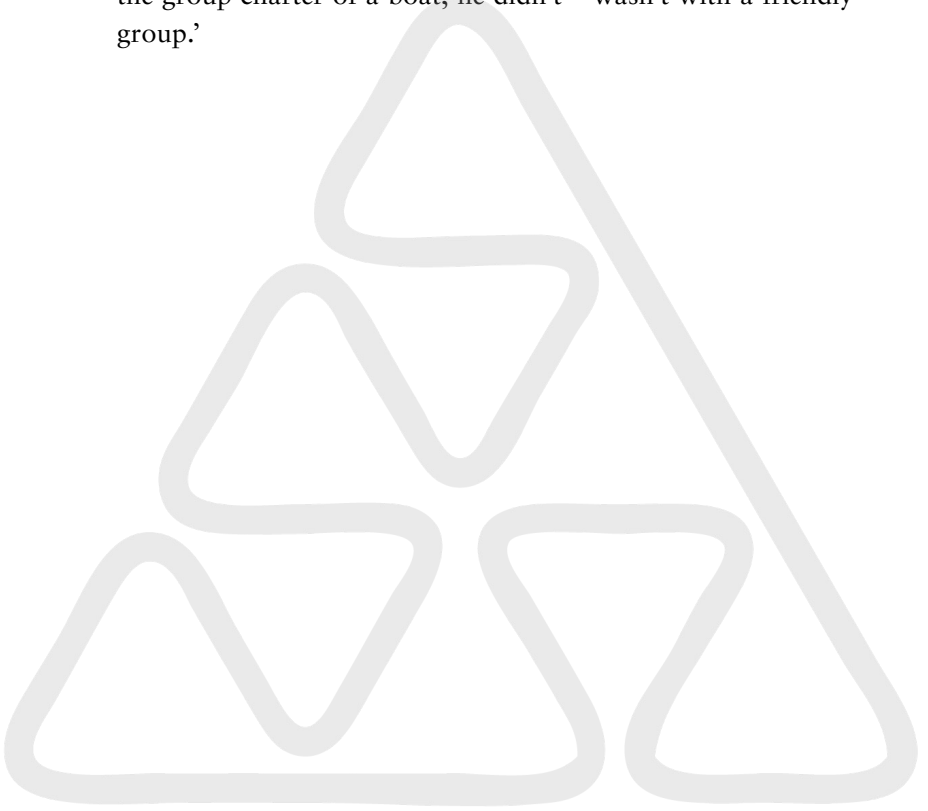
Views are mixed about new system

Developing the skill

As we've seen, the essential skill is not the ability to write fast, but the ability to recognize what someone is talking about and identify the message. There are many everyday opportunities to develop this skill:

- Alone, for example in the car, listen to the news headlines and at the same time say aloud what they are about:
 - inflation figures;
 - riots in the Middle East;
 - bed shortages in the health service;
 - England's cricket victory;
 - bus crash;
 - football violence.
- As soon as you are confident of these, take it a stage forward and add in the crucial message:
 - inflation figures, up by 3 per cent;
 - riots in the Middle East, two deaths and many injured;
 - bed shortages in the health service, worries about A & E patients left on trolleys;
 - England's cricket victory, by eight runs with three overs to play;
 - bus crash, no-one injured;
 - football violence, many arrests.
- Watch television drama or soap operas and, as you watch the scene, define what it is about and the key arguments: 'They're arguing about where to live: he wants to stay with his parents; she wants them to get their own flat.'
- Watch celebrity or sports interviews and do the same thing: 'He played football as a child; he was spotted by a sports coach at his local club.'

- Summarize back or ‘reflect’ what has been said to you: ‘So when the machine didn’t work you checked for paper jam, the paper stock and the toner cartridge.’
- Mentally summarize conversations around you: ‘She enjoyed the group charter of a boat; he didn’t – wasn’t with a friendly group.’



KoganPage



THIS PAGE IS INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

KoganPage

STRUCTURING NOTES

Even with the best chairperson and a well-disciplined committee, you are likely to find that the discussion jumps around within an agenda item. For most minute-takers, making sense of a discussion with many different aspects is a significant problem. Some of the time you can move around your notes as you take them and add information where it is relevant. On other occasions, your notes will follow the order of the discussion and need to be structured at the writing-up stage.

If you are to type the minutes in a time-efficient manner, it is essential that you do not type up your notes and then cut-and-paste them into minutes. Although this can work in the end, it is very time consuming and the information that is not needed tends to obscure the detail that should be included. In order to save time and improve the minutes, an extra stage is needed between the hand-written notes and the draft minutes that result from them.

Follow the agenda

Whatever numbering and headings appear on the agenda must also appear in the minutes.

If the meeting used a 'basic' agenda

If the agenda was very general, the minute-taker will have to take each subject within the agenda item and write it up, presenting the information grouped and in a logical order.

For example, if the committee discussed 're-decoration of canteen', their concerns will range through the amount of money to be spent; the colour scheme to be chosen; whether to replace furniture and, if so, with what; the lighting and so on. They are unlikely to deal with each and move on; rather it will be discussion that touches repeatedly on the different points. Actions will come as and when decided and will often be revisited and changed.

In the minutes, the discussion on 're-decoration of canteen' is likely to be divided into several subheadings, which can be done without affecting the continuity between the agenda and minute numbering.

If the meeting used a full or objectives agenda

By breaking up the discussion into smaller sections, the discussion becomes more structured, but even so, there will be different aspects to consider.

For example, one subsection of the discussion on redecorating the canteen was 'furniture'. Within that, the committee will discuss tables and chairs. The discussion on tables is likely to cover colour, material, shape, size. Again, the numbering and headings on the agenda are likely to be subdivided, either into headings or simply by using paragraphs (whichever is most appropriate).

During the discussion a participant might raise an aspect of the discussion that is relevant to the subject, but not listed on the agenda. For example, your agenda might show the item in Figure 9.1.

- 
- 7. Redecoration of canteen
 - 7.1 Budget
 - 7.2 Colour scheme
 - 7.3 Furniture
 - 7.4 Lights

Figure 9.1 Extract from a full agenda

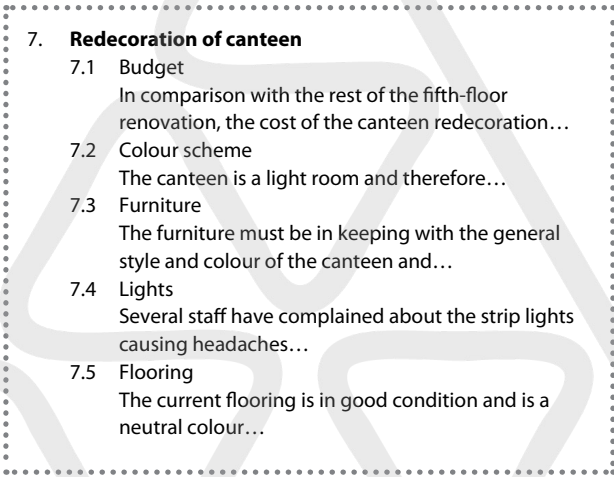
- 
- 7. **Redecoration of canteen**
 - 7.1 Budget
In comparison with the rest of the fifth-floor renovation, the cost of the canteen redecoration...
 - 7.2 Colour scheme
The canteen is a light room and therefore...
 - 7.3 Furniture
The furniture must be in keeping with the general style and colour of the canteen and...
 - 7.4 Lights
Several staff have complained about the strip lights causing headaches...
 - 7.5 Flooring
The current flooring is in good condition and is a neutral colour...

Figure 9.2 Add the new item at the end of the planned and numbered items

If at any time during the discussion on these points the subject of flooring is raised and discussed, it must be minuted because it is relevant. Wherever it is discussed, use the next free number within the main agenda item to minute it (see Figure 9.2).

If the subject is not on the agenda at all

Provided the item is relevant to the work of the group it should be minuted. If there is not a section where it can slot in, include it under 'Any other business'.

DEPTH OF MINUTES

Before you can turn your notes into minutes, you need an idea of how much depth you are to go into (in fact, it is best to know this before you take the notes). The amount of information to be included can be divided into four ‘levels’. Note that all of these will have the same action.

As an example: you are minuting a discussion in the health & safety committee meeting on what to do about the reception flooring which is slippery when wet. The agenda item was headed ‘Reception flooring’ and the action that resulted is, ‘Rink Flooring to be asked to resurface reception with British Standard flooring before end-October.’

Level one

This is simply the decision and the action (see Figure 9.3)

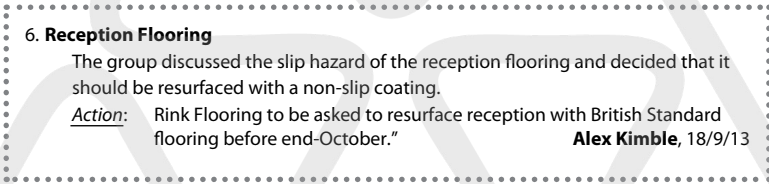


Figure 9.3 Example level one minute

Level two

This gives the reason(s) for the decision and/or more information about it (see Figure 9.4)

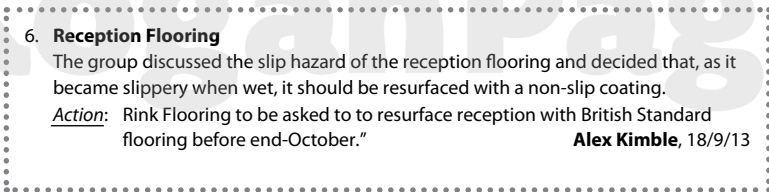


Figure 9.4 Example level two minute

Level three

This includes a mention of any alternatives that were considered (see Figure 9.5)

6. **Reception Flooring**
The group discussed the slip hazard of the reception flooring which becomes slippery when wet. They considered purchasing warning signs to be put out during wet weather but decided that it should be resurfaced with a non-slip coating.
Action: Rink Flooring to be asked to to resurface reception with British Standard flooring before end-October.” **Alex Kimble, 18/9/13**

Figure 9.5 Example level three minute

Level four

This goes into detail on things that are not going to be taken forward (see Figure 9.6)

6. **Reception Flooring**
The group discussed the slip hazard of the reception flooring which becomes slippery when wet. They considered purchasing warning signs to be put out during wet weather; these are easily and cheaply available, complying with current health and safety regulations but the group decided that the floor should be resurfaced with a non-slip coating.
Action: Rink Flooring to be asked to to resurface reception with British Standard flooring before end-October.” **Alex Kimble, 18/9/13**

Figure 9.6 Example level four minute

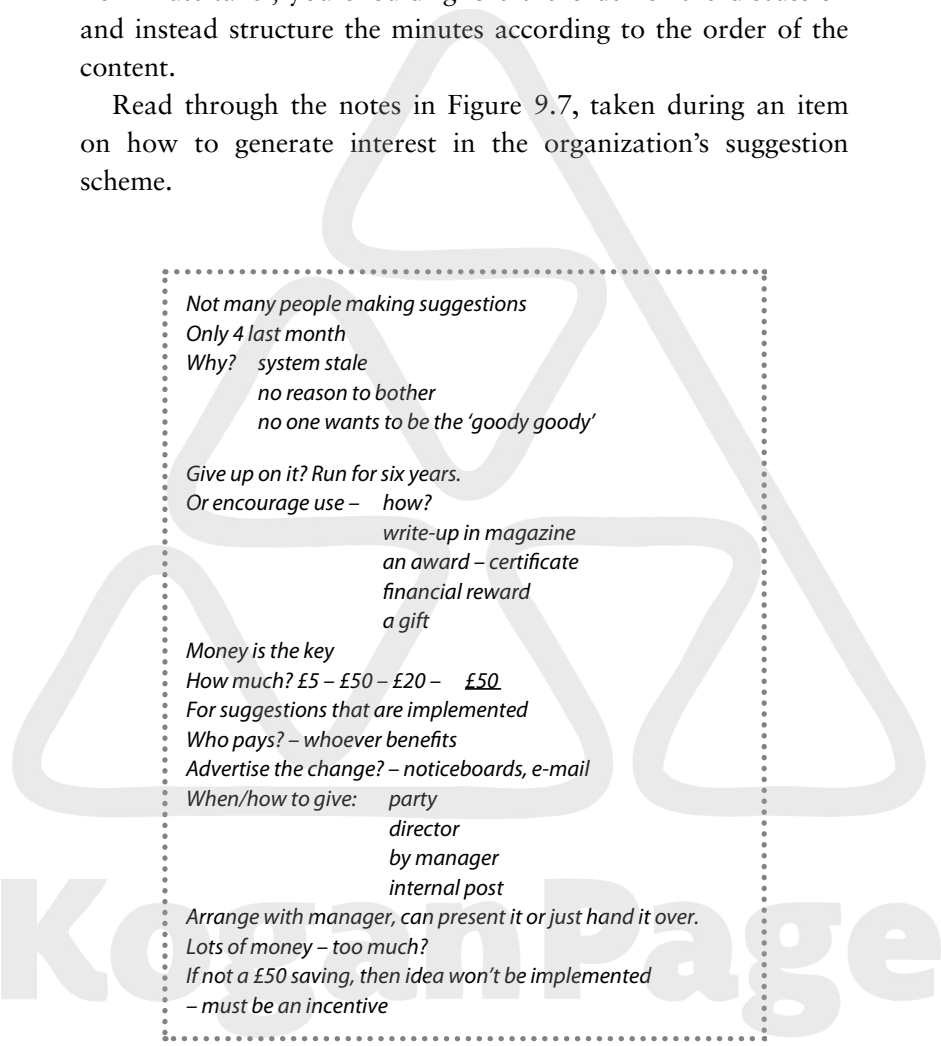
Note that the action and most of the introduction remains unchanged as the depth increases.

There is no rule about which level is most appropriate and you will find that you can seldom be rigidly consistent in the level you choose. The big break point is between levels two and three – it is level three that starts to include mention of things that are not going to be done. Most people seem to prefer level two so it is probably a good idea to prepare your minutes at that level and see what feedback you get.

Structuring your notes

Within an agenda item, the discussion is likely to jump around as individuals reintroduce their personal concerns or views. As minute-taker, you should ignore the order of the discussion and instead structure the minutes according to the order of the content.

Read through the notes in Figure 9.7, taken during an item on how to generate interest in the organization's suggestion scheme.



Not many people making suggestions
Only 4 last month
Why? system stale
no reason to bother
no one wants to be the 'goody goody'

Give up on it? Run for six years.
Or encourage use – how?
write-up in magazine
an award – certificate
financial reward
a gift

Money is the key
How much? £5 – £50 – £20 – £50
For suggestions that are implemented
Who pays? – whoever benefits
Advertise the change? – noticeboards, e-mail
When/how to give: party
director
by manager
internal post

Arrange with manager, can present it or just hand it over.
Lots of money – too much?
If not a £50 saving, then idea won't be implemented
– must be an incentive

Figure 9.7 Notes taken during a discussion on the future of the suggestion scheme

These notes are broadly in the order of:

- loss of interest;
- why it's happened;
- motivating staff to suggest;
- money;
- how to advertise the new system;
- how to hand over the reward;
- money/motivating staff to suggest;
- advertising the new system.

As you can see there is some duplication. The most common way of dealing with this is to type up the notes and then start editing. To save time and improve the quality of the minutes, structure the notes before typing them up. Look at a suggested structure for the notes above (Figure 9.8).

Some minute-takers could produce the structure in Figure 9.8 in the meeting. Most would take notes as in Figure 9.7, then sort out the structure back in the office.

This structure has taken all the notes that could be used – a very detailed minute. If this was what was required, it could be written up as shown in the box on page 97.

Kogan Page

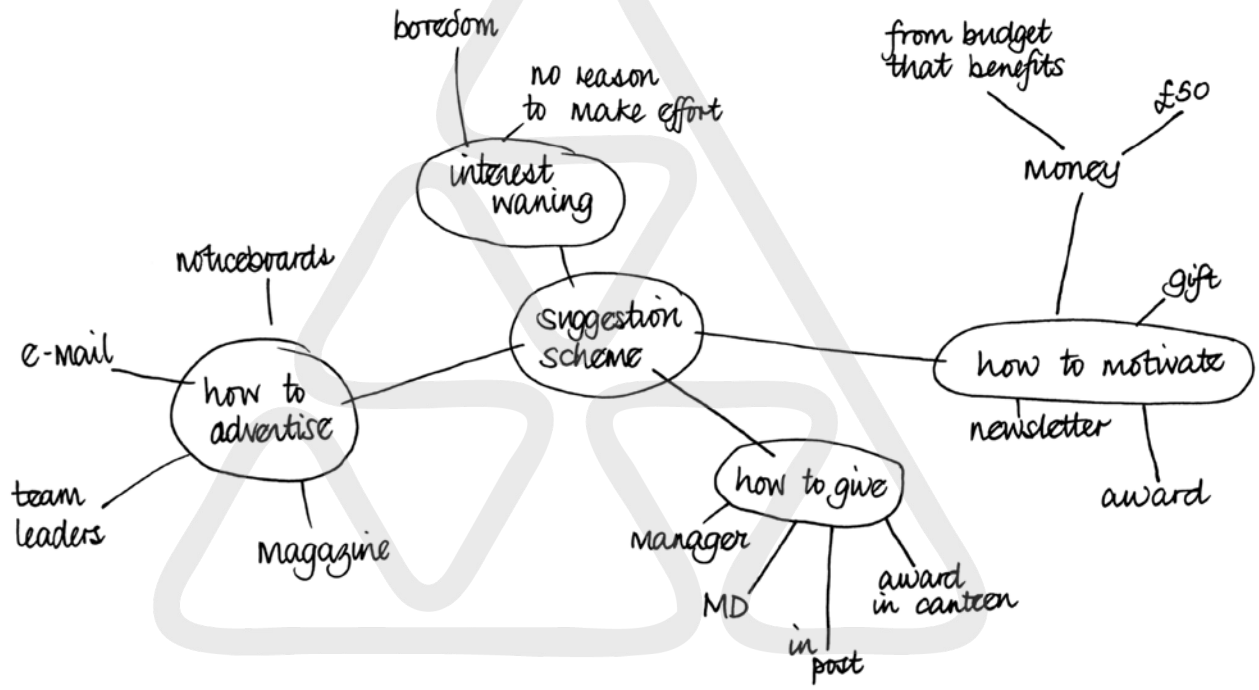


Figure 9.8 Discussion notes, structured into logical groups

Kogan Page

The committee discussed the drop in support for the suggestion scheme. There was support for the system in principle and it was agreed that efforts should be made to generate more interest.

In order to encourage suggestions, it was decided to offer a financial reward for successful ideas, and agreed that £50 was an appropriate figure. This will come from whichever budget benefits from the saving.

The manager of successful staff members could arrange a presentation or simply pass the money on as deemed appropriate. In addition, the managing director would be informed so that a congratulatory note could be sent, and the idea would appear in the magazine.

Staff should be informed of the changes through the newsletter and posters on the noticeboards. Suggestions made after 31 May would be eligible for the payment.

Posters to be put up during w/c 18 May

Article to be inserted in May issue of newsletter

Action: Tom Brind

30 April 2009

This minute is in the structure/order of: interest waning; how to motivate; how to give; telling staff.

For most purposes, only some of the information would be used to write a shorter minute. The structure would then look like the one in Figure 9.9.

A briefer minute would be written up as shown in the following box.

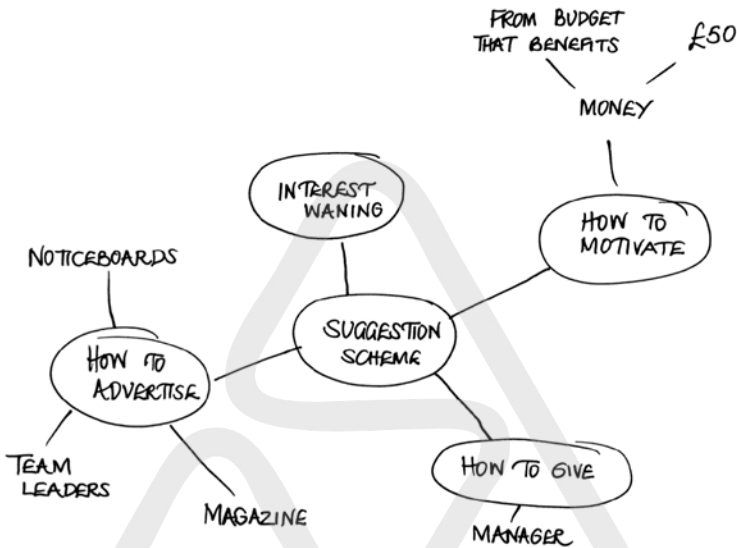


Figure 9.9 Structure for a briefer minute

The committee discussed the drop in support for the suggestion scheme. It was decided to offer a £50 reward for successful ideas, to come from whichever budget would benefit from the saving.

The money will be given by the relevant manager. The managing director would be informed so that a congratulatory note could be sent, and the idea would appear in the magazine.

Suggestions made after 31 May would be eligible for the payment.

Posters to be put up during w/c 20 May

Article to be inserted in May issue of newsletter

Action: Tom Brind

24 May 2013

Using the structure

To use a structure like the one outlined above, note your subject in the centre of the space. Take each point you have noted and decide whether it is relevant. If it is, look to see whether it relates to a point that you already have. If it does, link the two. If it does not, start a new 'area'. This process is illustrated in Figure 9.10.

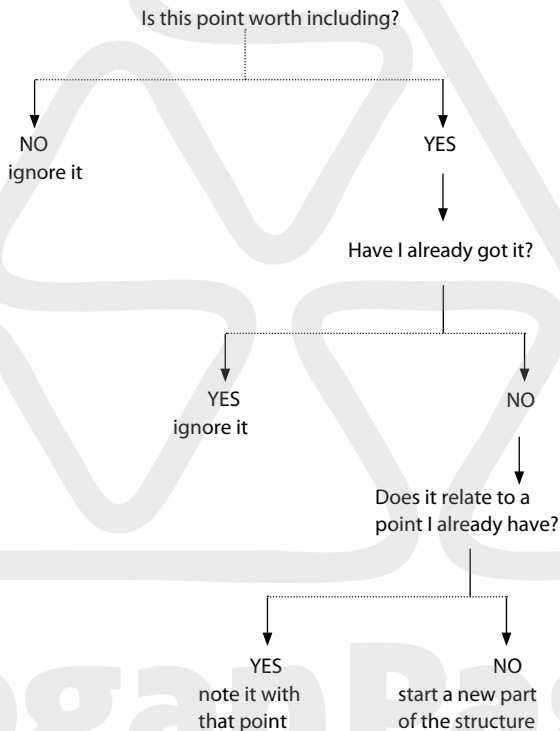


Figure 9.10 Process for structuring notes

Structuring your notes like this will mean that you have the skeleton of the minute before you write, which saves considerable time in writing and editing. Also, interruptions won't cause you to lose your train of thought, as they could do if you are 'translating' your notes into sentences. In addition, as you go through the process you generally move from the wording in your notes (words they may have said) to your phrasing (a summary of their message). Type the minutes from your structure, referring to your notes when you need more detail.



Kogan Page

WRITING UP THE MINUTES

Minutes are not a record of what was said. They are a record of what was discussed.

Your minutes must show:

- who was at the meeting, and who could have been there (apologies/absent)
- that the previous minutes were approved (and amendments if necessary)
- the status of actions from previous meetings
- the decisions that were made
- the actions that resulted from those decisions

Most groups also want a summary of the reasons for the decision that was made.

You can argue endlessly about the difference between the *notes* of a meeting and the *minutes* of a meeting. It is easiest to work on the basis that 'notes' are what you take in the meeting to enable you to write 'minutes' which is the document published to the group.

The minutes can be long or short, formal or informal, etc but if they are the document that is circulated to participants they are 'minutes'. In fact it doesn't matter what you call them so long as you have the distinction clear in your mind: one for your use, the other for the participants' information and ongoing record.

Do you have time to sit back at work and read a magazine? It's very unlikely that you do, but minutes can waste just as much time and probably more. If the meeting finishes at 11.00 and you go back, make a coffee then do the minutes, you will probably have them done by 12.30. If you spend that time on the messages/e-mails then go for lunch before doing the minutes, they will probably take at least two hours. Leave them until the next day or so and the time taken is likely to be three or four hours. Put them off for a week or so and it's probably a day's work. You'd be spending eight hours on a job you could have done in an hour or so ... that's a lot of magazine reading! Or more likely doing other work, taking a proper lunch break or going home on time.

There is the added benefit that a fast turn-around of minutes reflects well on your efficiency and, if you need to ask for help, doing so promptly looks considerably more professional than contacting people after a few weeks (when they won't be able to remember).

Speeding up the process

Prepare templates or master documents

For each meeting set up a master document with the heading, the list of those who attended and so on. All you will then have to do is 'cut and paste' the names to the correct headings, copy across the main agenda headings and fill in the detail.

Inserting variable information

You can save time by setting up your master document with variable information (such as the date) replaced with a symbol:

is an easy one to choose because it is near the return key. Make sure that the # is in the format (size and highlighting) of the text that will replace it. Write a macro to find the # symbol (CTRL # is a simple one to use). This means that every time you type [CTRL #], the cursor will jump to the next # sign and highlight it. You just have to type in the information and it will replace the # with correctly formatted text.

Make sure that your formatting for the action column or any similar requirements are correct and you're ready to go. Just open the master document, save as a new document, copy across the main agenda headings and start typing. Figure 10.1 shows an example master document.

Writing the minutes

Remember that your minutes are not your notes typed up. Your notes are there to inform the minutes but not to be them.

Start with whichever agenda item is going to be easiest to type up. Assuming that there is an action, define this first (see the chapter on recording decisions and actions for more guidance). You should have a clear statement of precisely 'what' is being done by 'whom' and 'when' it must be done by.

Once you have the action defined, ask yourself: What decision led to X having to do that? Type that up, placing it before the action and there is the decision in place.

Ask yourself: Why did they make that decision? That should lead you to the summary of the relevant discussion. If they want more detailed minutes, the next question would be, 'What else did they consider?' and even more detail would lead you to more detail about how those discounted alternatives would work. See Chapter 9 on the depth of minutes for more information on this.

As an example, imagine that the Health and Safety Committee were concerned about a slippery floor in the reception area.

<p>Name of Committee #—# #</p>	<p># symbols formatted as heading to be used with macro to insert information for date, time and place</p>
<p>Present Linda Curzon George Ellaway Nicola Goodenough Robert Hawthorne Sharon Kinning Elias Oswald Gerald Palin Patrick Pau</p>	<p>Apologies All names listed, ready to be 'cut and pasted' to the appropriate heading in the minutes (usually laid out in a table)</p> <p>Absent</p> <p>Copy</p>
<p>In attendance</p> <p>1. Committee business #</p> <p>2. Minutes of the previous meeting The minutes of the meeting held on # were # approved</p> <p>3. Matters arising</p>	<p>The # symbol is in the format of the text and will be replaced with type</p> <p>Corrections should be inserted above this sentence. The first # symbol will be replaced with the date and the second either deleted if there are no corrections or replaced with 'subsequently'</p>
	<p>The agenda can be 'cut and pasted' from here and the detail filled in</p>

Figure 10.1 Example master document, using the # symbol to pre-format text and mark insertion points

Q1 – what was the action?

A1 – that Martha will ask Central Flooring to resurface the reception flooring with British Standard X before the end of October. She will contact them this week.

Q2 – why did they take that decision?

A2 – because the reception floor is slippery when wet

So the minute is:

Following reports of two members of staff falling in reception, it was agreed that the floor can be slippery when wet and would be resurfaced with a non-slip coating.

Action: Central Flooring to be asked to resurface Reception with British Standard X before 31 October.

Martha Corradi
20 September 2013

The structuring process shown in the previous chapter will help you prepare to do this.

Of course some people prefer to work from top to bottom, and if that suits you, then that should be your approach. The point about defining the action before the text still remains, though.

If you can't type the minutes for a few days

Spend a few minutes reading your notes at the end of the meeting

Avoid returning to your desk until you have spent five minutes or so reading your notes, editing and adding bits. Once you return to the phone messages and an overflowing in-tray, your memory will start to fade.

Use a dictating machine

You can go over your notes with a dictating machine. Do not try to dictate as though to a secretary, just add your verbal thoughts and comments to your written notes. The minutes can then be typed up from the mix of notes and audio.

Get the chairperson's approval

The chairperson is responsible for the minutes (even though you have done the work) and must approve them before dispatch. This serves as a double-check on what you have written.

Don't take amendments until the next meeting

Once you send out the minutes you might get corrections phoned or e-mailed to you. These can be noted, but the minutes should not be amended until the next meeting when everyone can be made aware of the corrections and have the opportunity to comment on them.



Kogan Page

THE MINUTES

Minutes, like all business writing, have changed in style over the years. As with letters and reports, the drive is towards plain English with short sentences and paragraphs, and a clear, reader-friendly style.

Minutes have also become shorter. In most cases 2 pages that are read are preferred to 10 pages that are filed. There are, however, still some conventions that are followed when writing them. Generally, these have survived because they are sensible, serving a practical purpose.

Heading

The heading of the minutes should follow the style of the agenda, whether that be the traditional paragraph style or the more modern centred layout (see Figures 11.1 and 11.2).

The agenda showed the planned start and finish times; the minutes should reflect the actual start and finish times.

Minutes of the IT User Group meeting held on 21 June 2013
from 10.30 to 12.15 in meeting room 6, Emmerson House.

Figure 11.1 Example paragraph-style heading

IT User Group Meeting
21 June 2013, 10.30–12.15
Meeting room 6, Emmerson House
MINUTES

Figure 11.2 Example centred layout heading

Who attended

The names at the start of a set of minutes are often thought of as ‘who was there?’ In fact the priority is ‘who are the group?’ They are simply arranged according to whether or not they attended, and in what capacity.

For a regular group, there are seven headings that can be used. Few need all seven but the order of those used should remain the same.

Present

The names of those who attended are shown in one or two columns at the start of the minutes. The chairperson is usually listed first with the others following in alphabetical order. Avoid any order of hierarchy, or differentiation like clinical/managerial or uniformed/civilian, as this highlights differences between members of the group that are usually discouraged.

It is preferable to put the people in context by giving their job title, and the department or organization represented. For example Helen Graham might be attending the meeting to represent the

finance department, the Manchester office, the organization, the union, women returners to work, etc. Just giving her name under 'present' is not really enough to be useful to future readers.

Usually names are listed as first name and surname. It is not necessary to show the initials in brackets unless they are not obvious; even then it is better to use full names for action points and no names in the minutes.

Where someone has sent a representative or substitute, the name of the intended participant should be listed under 'present' but it should be noted that they were represented by X (see Figure 11.3).

Present	
Charles Evans	Finance
Sue Graham	A & E
Alan Harris	Day Care Unit
Andrew Marks	Communications
<i>Represented by Ann Jakes</i>	
Amanda Watts	Elderly Care

Figure 11.3 Show where a member sent a substitute

For a one-off or general meeting, those who attended are generally listed under 'Attendees' or 'Attended'. This indicates a one-off meeting, whereas 'Present' is used to describe a core group.

In attendance

For those who are attending on a one-off basis, generally the name and department or organization are shown. You can also choose to show when they attended. This is done by noting the item number after the name. If you do this, those with no number are assumed to have attended the whole meeting. An example is shown in Figure 11.4.

The minute-taker is listed under 'In attendance' with either 'minute-taker' or 'secretary' after the name. Although it is a minor difference, minute-taker implies that you took the notes and typed

In attendance		
Desmond Barnham	Communications	
Sandy McPherson	J M Albany Ltd	item 9
Andy Morris	Secretariat	to item 6
Corinne Thorney	IT, Head Office	from item 3
Mel Wilson	Newman & Co.	items 4–8

Figure 11.4 Information that should be included under ‘In attendance’

them up, whereas secretary indicates that you organized the agenda, booked the room, etc.

The key difference between ‘Present’ and ‘In attendance’ comes historically from the days when decisions were proposed, seconded and voted upon. Those listed in ‘Present’ could vote and thus were responsible for the outcomes. This is why the minute-taker is listed in ‘In attendance’. If you are a member of the group who also takes minutes, your name should be in ‘Present’ but put minutes after your name to indicate your dual role.

Observer

Observers are those who are only there to watch. They are usually learning or shadowing a participant. Occasionally they may be there for audit purposes. In the case of a public meeting, members of the public are listed here because they do not take an active part in the decision-making process. They do not have to be named, but can be listed as ‘Members of the public (27)’. If there are reporters present they can be listed as either ‘The press (3)’ or with the publications detailed.

Apologies

For a regular meeting or one where specific people have been invited, people who do not attend the meeting fall into two groups: 1) those who have apologized; and 2) those who do not turn up.

Apologies can be made:

- when the date of the meeting is set during the previous meeting (nothing to record on that meeting's minutes; include under 'Apologies' on the minutes of the meeting that is missed);
- during the intervening period;
- on the day via a message from a colleague who is attending.

These members are listed under 'Apologies'.

Absent

Anyone you expect, but who does not turn up, should be listed under 'Absent'. It is important not just to leave off the names of those who don't attend. You are providing a record of who attended a meeting and a broader record of who was involved in that group at that time. Using 'Absent' gives you a complete list for administrative purposes and means the record is complete (and makes a comment about those whose commitment is questionable). Alternative headings are 'Did not attend' or 'Not present'.

Invited but did not attend

This is for those who were invited to the meeting as a one-off (would have been shown under 'In attendance'), but did not attend.

Copy

If the minutes are circulated to any individual or group other than those involved in the meeting (and listed above), they should be detailed in this section. This might mean giving names or general groups (eg 'All team leaders') or perhaps the most general of all, 'Noticeboards'. Other headings for this could be 'For information', 'Circulation', 'Distribution', or similar.

Layout

Although the heading 'Apologies' is used on the agenda, the names are often included in a list at the start of the minutes, after those

Present			In attendance	
Helen Pratt	Finance	(chair)	Frank Moss	Security item 8
Mark Delby	Marketing		Tina Parker	Minute-taker
Marion Fowkes	Finance			
Susannah Lewis	Sales		Apologies	
Roger Oswald	Marketing		Sulima Begg	Administration
Brian Winner	Finance			
Nick Wordsley	Administration		Absent	
Lizzie Young	Sales		Mary King	Sales

Figure 11.5 Example layout for including ‘Apologies’ as part of the listing at the top of the minutes

who are present (see Figure 11.5). If you plan to do this, do not number ‘Apologies’ on the agenda or your numbering will be one place awry.

If you would rather number ‘Apologies’ on the agenda, start your minutes with this as the first item and include the names as two separate sentences (or paragraphs, if necessary), one for ‘Apologies’ and one for ‘Absent’ (see Figure 11.6).

<p>1. Apologies</p> <p>Apologies were received from Sulima Begg, Anthony Edler and Clive Roberts. Mary King and Robin Lyle were absent.</p>
--

Figure 11.6 Example of layout including ‘Apologies’ as part of the text

For a meeting that is open to a wide group of people, for example all nursing staff within the hospital, only note those who have apologized. The others can be left off.

Introduction

It is unusual to see any introduction in the minutes. This is usually just the chairperson getting the meeting off to a businesslike start. If it is planned to use this as a more significant section, it should

be on the agenda and should be minuted. If there is no intention to minute it, but something relevant is said that cannot go elsewhere, start the minutes with a paragraph to cover it, using no numbering or heading. That way the numbering and headings will remain correct.

Declarations of interest

Note any that are made, and what happened as a result.

The alternatives are usually that the person:

- left the meeting for that item
- stayed in the room but did not contribute
- contributed but left the room for the decision
- contributed to the discussion and decision.

This would be minuted on the lines of

- Toby Ralph is part of the consortium that will be bidding for the supply of the filtration equipment; it was agreed he would leave the meeting for item six
- Toby Ralph is part of the consortium that will be bidding for the supply of the filtration equipment; it was agreed he would not contribute to item six
- Toby Ralph is part of the consortium that will be bidding for the supply of the filtration equipment; it was agreed he would contribute to the discussion, but would leave the meeting for the decision.
- Toby Ralph is part of the consortium that will be bidding for the supply of the filtration equipment; it was agreed this would cause no conflict of interest

Committee business

Any items raised under 'Committee business' should be minuted in the same style and layout as main agenda items.

Minutes of the previous meeting

It is important to confirm that the minutes of the previous meeting were accepted as this is where they become ‘the minutes’, or that the group wanted particular changes. Because of the importance of this, if the chairperson forgets to ask the group if they approve the minutes, the minute-taker should interrupt to ask, ‘Should I record that the minutes are approved?’

If the minutes are correct

There are a number of variations that are acceptable:

- The minutes of the meeting held on [date] were approved.
- The minutes of the meeting held on [date] were accepted.
- The minutes of the meeting held on [date] were accepted as an accurate record.
- The minutes of the meeting held on [date] were signed.

If you have given the date of the last meeting in the heading (‘Minutes of the meeting held on [date]’) the wording shown will change to ‘The minutes of the previous meeting were...’

If there are errors

You can use a subheading of ‘Amendments’ and put any changes after this, or merely start with the first heading that contained an error (see Figure 11.7). Avoid putting ‘changed from ... to ...’ as this tends to muddle the reader. When all changes have been noted, type ‘The minutes of the meeting held on [date] were subsequently approved...’

There is no need to send out a corrected set of minutes – most people file both or the wrong one! Make sure that the file copy shows both how the minutes were circulated and the corrections. This can be done by:

- correcting the minutes from the last meeting but attaching a copy of ‘Minutes of the previous meeting’ to the current one so that the changes can be seen;

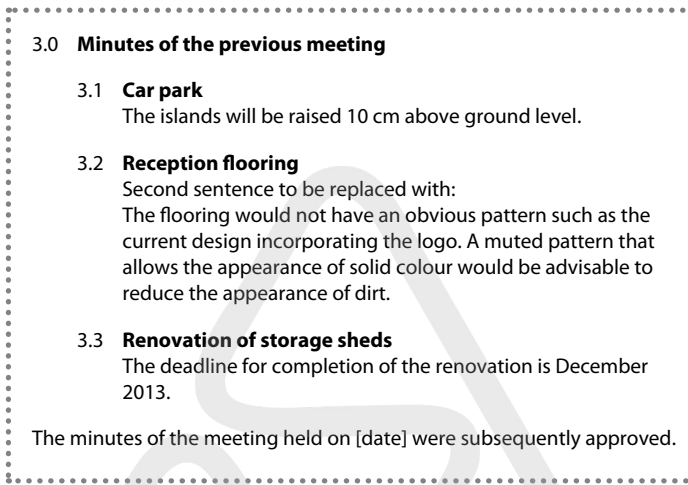


Figure 11.7 Example layout for correcting previous minutes

- leaving handwritten corrections on the set of minutes;
- not correcting the minutes from the last meeting, but just attaching a copy of ‘Minutes of the previous meeting’, again, so changes can be seen.

Signing minutes

Minutes are signed as extra proof that everyone at the table agreed to their accuracy. Although seldom done these days, it is worth considering in case of future dispute. The chairperson should sign them on the front cover or last page, and every other page should be initialled. The minutes of the meeting will say that the ‘Minutes of the meeting held on [date] were signed as an accurate record.’

Matters arising

As discussed earlier, ‘Matters arising’ is often taken up with participants arguing over something already decided in a previous meeting or by individuals going into great detail of *how* they completed the action. Neither is required for the minutes.

Text is acceptable under ‘Matters arising’, but only when it is worthy of inclusion in its own right: for example, when an aspect of an action point needs consideration but was not discussed during the original meeting. Most of the time you should minute the true purpose of ‘Matters arising’ – to confirm that actions that were agreed have been taken or if not, what is to be done about it (see Figure 11.8).

Where actions relate to items which are already on the agenda

There are often agenda items which are carried forward from one meeting to the next, often involving actions. If you are minuting these, leave the relevant actions out of matters arising (or include them with a note that they are ‘included in item x below’). For each main agenda item, start off with the outstanding actions before moving on to the current discussion.

4. **Matters arising**

4.1 **Car park barrier** (3.4/03.13)
The car park barrier has been repaired and painted, using reflective paint.

4.2 **Publicity for David Smith's visit** (5.2)
The press releases have been sent to all local papers. Publication is not expected until the week of the visit.

4.3 **Outdoor smoking area** (6)
Because of the lack of people using the area in favour of the car park, it was agreed to clean the area and then leave it for storage for six months before decoration.

H Wheatley
22 November 2013

4.5 **Canteen chairs** (7.2)
No action taken due to announcement of merger and uncertainty about the future of the site.

4.6 **Delivery standards** (8.2)
Meeting with post room to be arranged to confirm standards*.

D Simmonds
30 August 2013

*this will repeat the action point from the earlier minutes

Figure 11.8 Example layout for ‘Matters arising’, giving minimal text

Some meetings, typically project planning, will have every item done in this way and not separate ‘matters arising’.

By using an agenda with the actions listed and these options in the minutes, every action that is agreed will be checked up on, confirmed or if necessary taken forward in a managed way, and this is recorded in the minutes. The minutes will fulfil their role as an ‘audit trail’.

Where the whole meeting is matters arising

A whole meeting can be matters arising, usually for project-planning types of meetings. The minutes for these are likely to be in sections that relate to the project (see Figure 11.9), and each participant will confirm actions and raise current concerns.

11. Launch Party

Guest List
The guest list has been drawn up and invitations sent.

Press coverage
Invitations have been sent to local papers and trade press.

11.1 Invitations to staff from other offices
The committee discussed extending invitations to senior management from all regional offices. In the interests of maximizing communications throughout the group, it was suggested that seniority was not a factor and that although one senior manager should be invited, a number of other invitations should be sent to each office.

It was agreed to invite each regional manager and two other staff from each office. A letter to the manager to suggest colleagues from different departments would be preferred.

Ceri Jones
25 October 2013

Figure 11.9 Example matters arising incorporated in minutes

These concerns will be discussed and new actions may arise. If this is the case, for each heading start with the relevant actions and confirm their status before moving on to new discussion.

Information items

These are the items that are to be received only – not for discussion. A report or update that precedes a discussion will be dealt with as a main agenda item, but the guidelines for minuting it are the same.

Written reports should always be circulated with the agenda so that participants can read them beforehand. It is not only the minute-taker who will struggle with a report – only those with a good understanding of the subject will be able to follow, and many participants just switch off.

Where the report is circulated with the agenda

There is no need to summarize what is said, as everyone will have a copy. It can be worded along the lines of:

- The committee received the finance director's report.
- The committee received the finance report.
- The finance director gave a report on the third quarter.

Make sure that you keep a file copy.

Where the report is tabled (given out on the day)

The minutes should read as above. A copy can be attached for non-attenders or, to save paper, simply add, 'Copy/information available from...' If the minutes are published on the internet or an intranet and readers will not have access to the papers, include a brief summary in the minutes.

Where the report is verbal

Unless you have excellent shorthand there is not much chance of keeping up with reports because they tend to be fast and factual, often delivered in the rather flat style of reading aloud. You should either: ask the person to give you a copy and attach it to the minutes; or ask the person to give you a few-line summary for the minutes.

If you have to note the report

If there is no option but to minute the report, cover only the briefest detail, usually what was talked about. For example, the minutes of a 10-minute report are shown in the following box.

The team received a report on the experimental use of temporary sales staff, detailing the cost of the programme (£8,400), the benefits of short-term staff and the problems that resulted. The use of temporary staff will not be continued.

Main agenda items

Minutes must follow the order, numbering and headings of the agenda, but extra headings can be used providing the numbering remains the same. See the chapter on structuring notes for more information. If you have numbered objectives on your agenda, these should be presented as headings on the minutes, with the same number. For example:

Agenda:	8.3	To agree format of advertisement
Minutes:	8.3	Advertisement

Where decisions have been made, the minutes should comprise an action, the decision that led to that action and the reasons for that decision (level two minute). There may also be an explanation of the issue/situation/problem.

The style of minutes has changed, and continues to do so. Along with the drive towards shorter, plain English writing has come a preference for a slightly less formal style. That is not the

same as saying that minutes should be casual. The writing is still businesslike, but many minute-takers prefer to focus on what is being discussed (factual minutes) rather than on what the committee did (traditional style). Both styles are ‘correct’; the choice should be based on the preference of the chairperson and the committee (and, of course, the minute-taker).

Traditional style

Traditional minutes report what the committee did (see Figure 11.10). They are written in the past tense, looking back to what happened at the meeting. The phrasing depends on what happened. Consider these examples:

- The Training Manager explained that the second ‘Investors in People’ visit had been postponed.
- It was reported that the second ‘Investors in People’ visit had been postponed.
- The committee heard that the second ‘Investors in People’ visit had been postponed.
- The committee discussed the postponement of the second ‘Investors in People’ visit.
- It was suggested that the commitment to ‘Investors in People’ may be weakening.
- The committee agreed that the commitment to ‘Investors in People’ was as strong as ever.

The committee discussed the possibility of a branch falling on the temporary building. It was suggested that the building should not be sited so near the boundary, but no other location could be found. It was agreed to ask a tree surgeon to advise on the state of the trees and then discuss the location in the light of his comments.

*Advice on condition of trees and risk to building
to be discussed with Ark Woodland Care*

Nigel Hamlyn
18 October 2013

Figure 11.10 Example minute in traditional style

Factual style

Factual minutes report on the situation as it was discussed (see Figure 11.11). They are written in the appropriate tense and, again, the phrasing depends on what was discussed. Consider these examples:

- The second ‘Investors in People’ visit has been postponed.
- Commitment to ‘Investors in People’ may be weakening.
- Commitment to ‘Investors in People’ is as strong as ever.

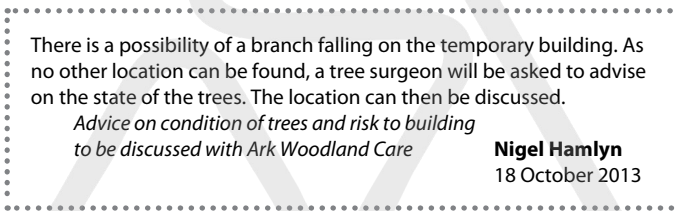


Figure 11.11 Example minute in factual style

Any other business

Items taken under ‘Any other business’ should be minuted in the same style and format as the main agenda items. Give each a number and subheading under the main heading of ‘Any other business’.

Beware irrelevant items

People will often take the chance of a captive audience to give out information or discuss things that are relevant to the individuals concerned, but not to the reason they are meeting at that time; in other words, issues that are outside the terms of reference or objectives for the group. These should not form part of the minutes. If it is necessary to circulate the information, it should be done as a separate note.

Items deferred to next meeting

Where the group do not have the time or necessary information to discuss an item, it will usually be put on the agenda for the next meeting. If this is a one-off, just minute the heading and note that it was deferred. If there are several items, you can use a heading of ‘Items deferred to next meeting’ and list them.

Items referred to another group

This should be dealt with in the same way as items deferred to the next meeting.

Date of next meeting

The date, time and place of the next meeting should be noted. If the meetings are set some time in advance, list the next few meetings.

It is also helpful to give a deadline for the receipt of agenda items (usually about eight days before the meeting) and a contact name and phone number/e-mail for agenda items, apologies, etc (see Figure 11.12).

Date of next meeting
The next meeting will be held at 11.15 am on 21 June 2013 in Room 7. Agenda items to be received by 14 June (Sue Thomas, x-2458, sue.thomas@marshalls.co.uk).

Figure 11.12 Example wording for ‘Date of next meeting’

Close of meeting

If you have not shown the closing time as part of the heading, close the minutes with ‘The meeting closed at [time].’

COMMON QUESTIONS ABOUT MINUTES

Do I include historical or background information?

At the start of a discussion, someone may begin by explaining the history of an issue. Quite often this is uninvited and, although relevant to the subject, is not necessarily of great interest. This should not be minuted. However, if that information is given because a large part of the group are not aware of it and need to know in order to discuss the subject, it can be minuted if you wish. Make sure it is a separate paragraph so that those who know already can easily skip it.

Do not fall into the trap of putting information in minutes because they will be read by those not at the meeting. If outsiders need information to understand the minutes, they should ask the chairperson. Once you start making the minutes full and complete for every reader you will have a small book for each meeting.

Do I name names?

No! Minutes are not a record of what was said, they are a record of what was discussed – they are subject-based, not speech-based. If you name names you will find that:

- some people won't stop talking because they want their names in the minutes
- some people won't contribute because they don't want people to see that they expressed a particular view
- someone will say, 'I didn't say that' when they see the minutes
- someone else will say, 'you haven't got my point about x'.
- several people will make the same point in a meeting – the decision about who to allocate it to is highly subjective
- (most importantly) it makes the minutes difficult to understand!
(See Figure 11.13)

*Almost a transcript, not minutes
(speech-based)*

Minutes (subject-based)

Clinic staffing	Clinic staffing
<p>SM raised the issue of staffing for the new clinic and suggested a maximum of three nurses would be required for each session. BP suggested that a full-time secretary/receptionist would also be needed. SM suggested that in order to be as 'family friendly' as possible the nursing posts should be flexible hours, RS disagreed, saying this would have an impact on the continuity of the patient/nurse relationship. DI felt that as the clinic times would fall within normal working hours the administrative post could be one full-time person. SM suggested this was not necessary and a 25 hour week would cover the workload. She added there would also not be a problem with holidays and sickness cover as this could be arranged through other health centre staff. DI detailed the level of the workload and SM accepted that a full-time post was required. RS returned to the question of the nurses' hours, Sally Munro explained the importance of adhering to the 'family friendly' policy. BP suggested that the existing arrangements work well and DI confirmed that there has been no problem in switching shifts where necessary. SM accepted this was in line with the policy.</p>	<p>The group discussed staffing for the new clinic. It was agreed that three nurses were required for each session. It was decided that the current arrangements for nursing hours would be carried over from the existing clinic and this was in line with the 'family friendly' policy. There would be one full-time administrative/reception post.</p>

Figure 11.13 Writing subject-based minutes

What 'person' do I use?

Minutes must always be written in the third person, that is, no reference to 'I', 'we' or 'you', 'your', etc. The common problem is with 'our' and vague references. In the examples in the following box, the reader would not know whether it was the committee,

the department, the site or the whole organization that has problems or concerns.

Our problems stem from the introduction of flexitime.
Our concerns centre around the announcement of redundancies.

Other related problems come with phrases like ‘in this area’ (which area?) or ‘next year’ (calendar, academic or financial?).

How do I avoid an inappropriate tone and words?

Minutes must be written from a neutral position, representing the discussion in terms of what was discussed (rather than the style or manner of discussion). Beware of latching on to words that are said in the meeting and then using them. You are likely to follow the clearest speakers (or those you agree with) and the minutes will almost certainly be biased. Listen for the point of view and note this in your own words – minuting is a skill involving interpretation, not fast writing. Avoid words which describe the discussion and will be subjective. These include describing discussion as lively, heated, brief, lengthy, at length, etc.

What is a confidential minute?

In general, minutes are freely available to be read so if there is an item which would be inappropriate for others to see, you will need to create a ‘confidential minute’. The chairperson should specifically ask the minute-taker to do this but you may feel it appropriate to ask for guidance in the meeting.

This should be a separate document, headed in the same way as the main minutes but titled ‘confidential minute’ and should again

list those who were there. Type the minutes in the same style and format as the main set, using the appropriate number. In the main set of minutes, show the item number but just type 'confidential item' under the item heading.

USEFUL WORDS FOR MINUTES

Although an accurate overview of the discussion should lead the minute-taker to the words that are necessary, there are occasions when it seems that the same word is used over and over again. In many cases this is the result of writing script-style minutes (the 'he said, she said' type), and simply removing the 'he said, she said' will reduce the problem, not to mention making the minutes easier to read:

Mr Heyford explained that there are problems with the system and it is in danger of crashing at any time.

Replace with: There are problems with the system and it is in danger of crashing at any time.

The following are loosely grouped in no particular order. They cannot be used as synonyms; instead think of what you are trying to say and find the nearest alternative:

- discussed/debated/deliberated/considered/examined/analysed
- said/stated/reported/established/confirmed/verified/declared
- pointed out/explained/suggested/drew attention to/raised/informed/understood
- were reminded that/recalled/clarified/illustrated/defined/demonstrated/emphasized
- agreed/concurred
- disagreed/disputed/not the case
- planned/intended/meant/hoped/proposed

- existence of/issue of/reality of/topic of/problem of/question of
- benefits of/merits of/advantages of/worth/value of
- problems/drawbacks/dangers/uncertainty/disadvantages
- chose/opted/selected/picked/named/preferred
- potential/possibility/likelihood/prospect/chance/probability
- options/alternatives/choice/preference/opportunity
- decided/resolved/approved/concluded/determined
- worried/concerned/troubled/uneasy/anxious/apprehensive



Kogan Page



THIS PAGE IS INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

KoganPage

RECORDING DECISIONS AND ACTIONS

A significant reason for having minutes is to provide an audit trail and, particularly in the public sector, this is taken increasingly seriously. The actions have to be presented in a way which is clear to the outsider and trackable through subsequent minutes (via Matters Arising).

Sometimes, there are areas where individual group members are unsure of what was discussed and rely on the minutes for an explanation. In many cases, people rely on the minutes to remind, if not inform, them of the actions they agreed to!

Noting the outcome of discussions does not sound particularly difficult. However, many groups conclude discussion with phrases like 'Right, we'll go with that' or 'Margot, you can take that forward' and the minute-taker is left unsure of what is going to happen.

It is essential that you leave the meeting knowing exactly what the outcomes, the action points, are – the action triangle.

THE ACTION TRIANGLE

There are three aspects of an action point (see Figure 12.1):

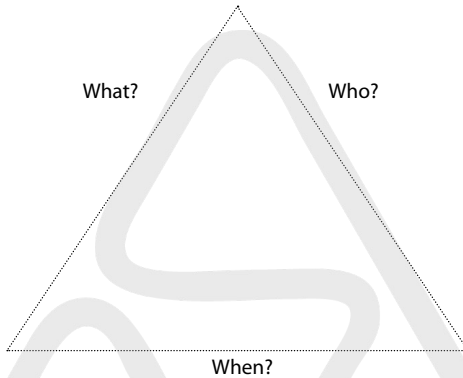


Figure 12.1 The action triangle

- precisely what is going to be done;
- who will take responsibility;
- when the action should be completed.

The ‘who’ must always be a member of the group. If actions are allocated to someone outside the group, there is no mechanism for feedback. The committee member might do no more than give an instruction to someone, but the responsibility still lies within the group.

An example

Consider this unusually clear summary of a discussion on security given by the chairperson: ‘Right, so we’re agreed that Reception will not allow anyone in after 5.00 from 4 October. Chris, you’ll sort it?’ The minute-taker wrote the following:

Reception not to allow anyone in after 5.00pm.

Chris Francis
4 October 2013

This is not quite accurate as Reception's system needs to change from 4 October (not the deadline for Chris to take the action) and there is no clear link between Chris and Reception.

When clarifying the action in your mind, it is best to start with 'who?'

answer: Chris

Then ask what is he doing?

answer: telling Reception not to allow anyone in after 5.00 from 4 October

Finally, when is that person doing that action?

answer: we don't know, no one said how much notice they would need

The minute-taker should have interrupted to ask, 'When will that need to be done by?' Or, 'How much notice will they need?' It is possible to ask Chris, 'When will you do that?' However, in reality this sounds too much like taking over the job of the chairperson. Once the minute-taker knows the date, the action becomes:

Reception to be told not to allow anyone in after 5.00 from 4 October.

Chris Francis
27 September 2013

If you are not sure of any aspect of the action (or side of the triangle), you must ask. Interrupt with questions like:

- 'Please could you confirm the action for the minutes?'
- 'Could you give me a precise action for the minutes?'
- 'Please could you define the action for the minutes?'
- 'Who is responsible for that?'
- 'Whose action is that?'
- 'What is the deadline?'
- 'When is that to be completed?'

In fact these are some of the easiest interruptions to make because they are so factual. When you interrupt to ask, you will often find that others don't know either.

When there is no outcome

Ideally each minute should be 'closed', that is, a confirmation of how the discussion ended. Although it may be obvious now, this will make the minutes clearer for future readers. This is usually an action point, but often there is nothing more to be done or the group did not or could not reach agreement.

If the group agreed there was no need for them to take any action, replace the action with 'No action necessary', using the same layout as the action points. This will usually follow items for discussion only (although sometimes these will result in an action).

If the group did not get as far as taking an action (when one was required), the term is 'No decision taken' or 'No decision made'. You will probably need to ask the chairperson whether to put it on the agenda for a future meeting.

If the group were arguing and could not reach a decision, use 'No consensus reached'. Again, ask whether to include the item on the next agenda.

If it was agreed to discuss the item at a future meeting, the phrasing is 'Deferred to next meeting' or 'Deferred to meeting on [date]'. If the item had to be passed to another group, the action point should be replaced with 'Referred to...'. This latter alternative is likely also to have a reason, for example 'Referred to Health and Safety Committee for advice' or 'Referred to Board for approval'.

Layout of action points

Most people do not read minutes in any great depth. Most just skim them and many just look for their action points. These readers are likely to miss actions that are buried within a paragraph, so the action must be a separate paragraph, even if it is just a few words.

In terms of the layout, there are many ways of presenting an action in minutes. The clearest is an action column, but anything that achieves the aim of clear presentation is acceptable. All the variations in Figure 12.2 would be a separate paragraph and usually indented from the left margin. The first is clearest, followed by the final version. See Figure 13.3 for instructions on creating an

The team decided that the Christmas party would be open to all staff and their partners. There would be no charge for staff members but partners would be asked to contribute £38 to cover food and wine at the table.

Details to be included in November e-news

Sue Taylor

16 November

2013

The team decided that the Christmas party would be open to all staff and their partners. There would be no charge for staff members but partners would be asked to contribute £38 to cover food and wine at the table.

Details to be included in November e-news

Sue Taylor (16 November 2013)

The team decided that the Christmas party would be open to all staff and their partners. There would be no charge for staff members but partners would be asked to contribute £38 to cover food and wine at the table.

Sue Taylor to submit details for inclusion in November e-news
(16 November 2013)

The team decided that the Christmas party would be open to all staff and their partners. There would be no charge for staff members but partners would be asked to contribute £38 to cover food and wine at the table.

ACTION: *Details to be included in November e-news*

Sue Taylor (16 November 2013)

The team decided that the Christmas party would be open to all staff and their partners. There would be no charge for staff members but partners would be asked to contribute £38 to cover food and wine at the table.

Details to be included in November e-news

Sue Taylor

16 November

2013

Figure 12.2 Example layouts for action points

action column. Avoid typing the action point in bold as it is likely to be followed by a heading, also in bold, and the action will be visually tied to the wrong heading. The text can be in italics or in a contrasting font.

When there are several actions for one minute

Where possible the minute should be split with subheadings and the resulting action in the appropriate place. This is not always possible, usually because the actions are so interwoven that they cannot be split, but different people may take on aspects of the action. Where this happens, show each aspect of the action separately with the name and deadline. Example layouts are shown as Figure 12.3.



Kogan Page

The team decided that the Christmas party would be held at The Rainbow and be open to all staff and their partners. There would be no charge for staff members but partners would be asked to contribute £38 to cover food and wine at the table.

Provisional booking to be made at The Rainbow for 120 people

Ami Chi
18 October
2013

Details to be included in November e-news

Sue Taylor
16 November
2013

The team decided that the Christmas party would be held at The Rainbow and be open to all staff and their partners. There would be no charge for staff members but partners would be asked to contribute £38 to cover food and wine at the table.

Provisional booking to be made at The Rainbow for 120 people

Ami Chi (18 October 2013)

Details to be included in November e-news

Sue Taylor (16 November 2013)

The team decided that the Christmas party would be held at The Rainbow and be open to all staff and their partners. There would be no charge for staff members but partners would be asked to contribute £38 to cover food and wine at the table.

Ami Chi to make provisional booking at The Rainbow for 120 people (18 October 2013)

Sue Taylor to submit details for inclusion in November e-news (16 November 2013)

The team decided that the Christmas party would be held at The Rainbow and be open to all staff and their partners. There would be no charge for staff members but partners would be asked to contribute £38 to cover food and wine at the table.

ACTION: *Provisional booking to be made at The Rainbow for 120 people*

Ami Chi (18 October 2013)

Details to be included in November e-news

Sue Taylor (16 November 2013)

The team decided that the Christmas party would be held at The Rainbow and be open to all staff and their partners. There would be no charge for staff members but partners would be asked to contribute £38 to cover food and wine at the table.

Provisional booking to be made at The Rainbow for 120 people

Ami Chi
18 October
2013

Details to be included in November e-news

Sue Taylor
16 November
2013

Figure 12.3 Example layouts for multiple actions



THIS PAGE IS INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

KoganPage

LAYOUT AND NUMBERING

LAYOUT

The layout of your minutes is vital. People are generally not that interested in them anyway, so make them look readable and interesting to tempt them to at least skim through. There is also the concern that people judge the content by the appearance, so if they look a mess, the reader won't trust the content.

The layout for minutes broadly follows the layout for a report but with the important addition of the action points.

Page layout

Minutes can be blocked or indented. Blocked is slightly quicker and easier to type, and may save a few lines (see Figure 13.1).

Indented is the more commonly preferred style because it is easier to read and the layout reinforces the relative importance of the information (see Figure 13.2).

Text should not be justified, that is set out with straight left and right margins, since this is often harder to read because of the ‘stretching’ of the text to meet the margin. Minutes with a ‘ragged’ right margin are easier to read.

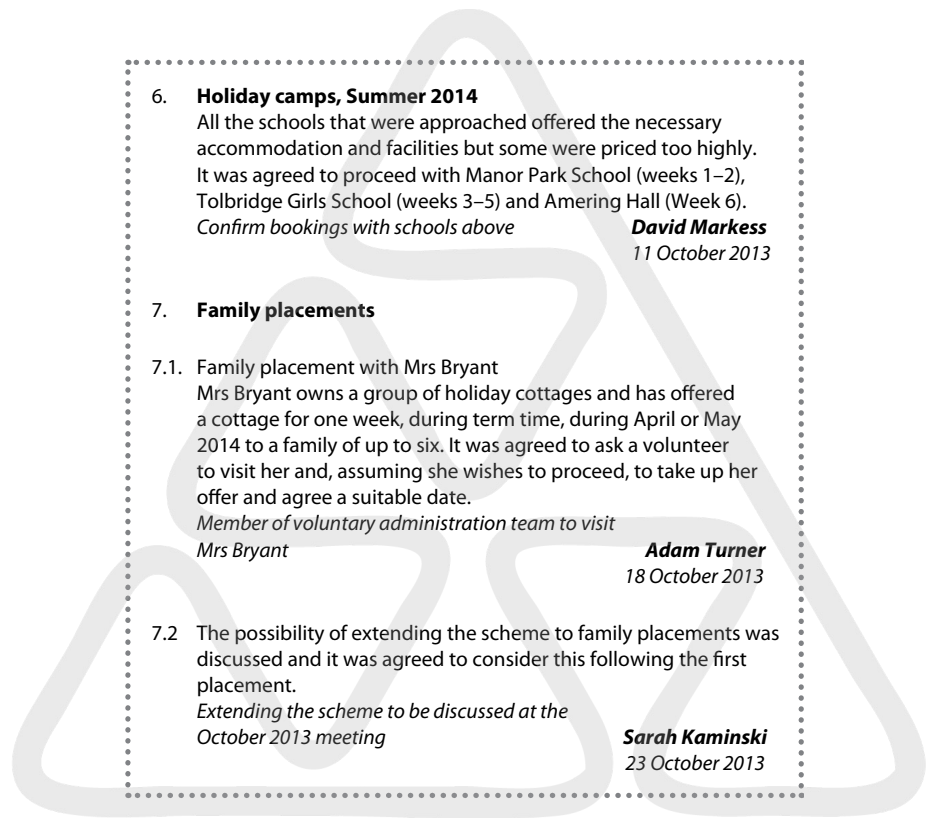
- 
6. **Holiday camps, Summer 2014**
All the schools that were approached offered the necessary accommodation and facilities but some were priced too highly. It was agreed to proceed with Manor Park School (weeks 1–2), Tolbridge Girls School (weeks 3–5) and Amering Hall (Week 6).
Confirm bookings with schools above
David Markess
11 October 2013
7. **Family placements**
- 7.1. Family placement with Mrs Bryant
Mrs Bryant owns a group of holiday cottages and has offered a cottage for one week, during term time, during April or May 2014 to a family of up to six. It was agreed to ask a volunteer to visit her and, assuming she wishes to proceed, to take up her offer and agree a suitable date.
Member of voluntary administration team to visit Mrs Bryant
Adam Turner
18 October 2013
- 7.2 The possibility of extending the scheme to family placements was discussed and it was agreed to consider this following the first placement.
Extending the scheme to be discussed at the October 2013 meeting
Sarah Kaminski
23 October 2013

Figure 13.1 Example blocked layout

Using an action column

An action column is the easiest style to read, but few minute-takers use it because of the difficulty caused in typing. It is generally set up in a table in order to get the column but this causes problems in lining up the actions against the text, particularly if frequent edits are made. There is an easier way that is seldom

shown in any manual – see Figure 13.3 for guidance on how to do this in Microsoft® Word.

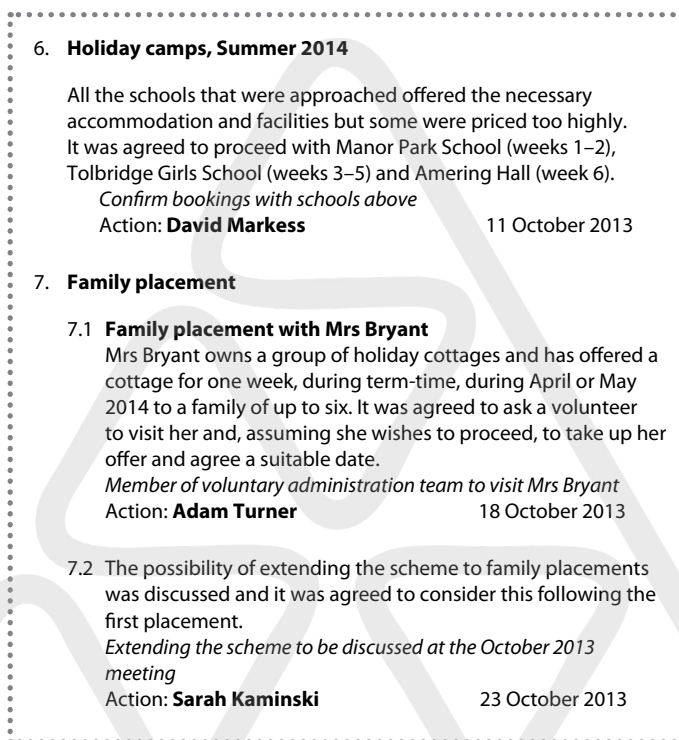


Figure 13.2 Example indented layout

Headings

The layout of headings should represent their relative importance. So, for example, the heading of item 9 is larger than the heading of item 9.1.

Assuming 12-point text, headings should be 14-point bold. The most common style for professional-looking minutes is shown as Figure 13.4.

- Place the cursor where you want the action column to start.
- At the top of the screen there is a 'ruler' (where you click to insert tabs). To the right of the ruler is a triangle, which marks the right margin. *Click on the right margin triangle and drag it to where you want the action column to be (you can change the placing later if you need to).*
- Insert tab stops for indents (don't rely on default stops) as required including one just to the right of the right margin triangle (outside your new margin).
- At the top of the screen there may be an icon for a text box – a square with dotted intersecting lines and an inverted triangle to the right. *Click on the inverted triangle. Choose the option for right border only (all lines dotted except the right border). If you do not have the text box icon, select the Format menu, and then Borders and Shading. On the diagram on the right, click on the right margin and OK it.*
- The action column should appear! It is only one line long, so hit the 'Enter' key a few times to give yourself some formatted space.

To use the format:

Type your minutes, using the 'tab' key to move to the tab stop outside the right margin and type the name.

If you need to move the action column:

Highlight the text and drag the right margin icon to a new location. You will also need to move the tab stop to the right of the action column.

Figure 13.3 Simple method for layout of an action column

<p>5. Heading 14-point bold</p> <p>Text 12-point <i>Action</i>, 12-point italic</p> <p>5.1 Subheading 13-point bold</p> <p>Text 12-point <i>Action</i>, 12-point, italic</p>	<p>Name 10-point bold Date 10-point</p> <p>Name 10-point bold Date 10-point</p>
--	---

Figure 13.4 Example text sizing

Typing rules

All the usual rules of typing, summarized below, apply to minutes:

One space	between words
Two spaces	after a full stop, exclamation mark or question mark
One blank line	between paragraphs after a heading
Two blank lines	between sections

Layout for 'Present', etc

If you have not numbered 'Apologies' on the agenda, it can be included with the other names in columns at the start of the minutes. If you prefer to number it, leave it as number 1 in the minutes and omit it from the names at the start of the minutes. The arrangement of names in columns can depend on the numbers.

See Chapter 11 for more information on 'Present', 'Apologies', etc.

TABLE LAYOUT

It is increasingly common for minutes to be presented in a table. There is no problem with this, but the default layout for tables is usually not helpful for those who are reading them: the lines are too dark and the text is too cramped within the boxes.

Make your tables more reader-friendly by using grey lines and increasing the cell padding/margins. The following will help (assuming use of Microsoft Word):

To make the lines grey

Select or highlight the table

Click on 'borders and shading' and then on 'borders'

Click on 'none' (to remove the borders) then change the colour to grey (usually choose about 40 per cent)

Click on 'grid' to replace the borders which should now be grey

To increase cell margins

Select the cells to be edited

On the 'layout' tab, click on 'cell margins'

Left and right will be set at 0.19, top and bottom at zero

Make the top and bottom margins 0.2 (or to suit)

The examples below show 'before' and 'after'

Text in cell one	Text in cell two
Text in cell three	Text in cell four

Text in cell one	Text in cell two
Text in cell three	Text in cell four

Numbering

Most minutes are numbered from '1' for each meeting. This is probably the simplest method, and if reference is made to old minutes it can be done as 4.3/7.09 (item 4.3 of the July 2009 meeting).

Continuous numbering

If items are frequently carried forward, you might want to give an item a number that it will keep throughout its life. This system usually reverts to '1' for the first item of the first meeting each year. Again, items from a previous year can be referenced as 258/09 (item 258 in 2009).

As the agenda headings and numbering form the basis for the minutes, it is worth giving some thought to the numbering at the early stages of the meeting.

Numbering for subheadings

The simplest system is to use the standard report style, illustrated in Figure 13.5.

If you need to use a fourth level of numbering for an item, this can be done as illustrated in Figure 13.6. If this is necessary for any item in the minutes, it should be done throughout. For example, if item 9 needs a fourth level of numbering, the third level will be '9.1.1'. The third level of all items should then be 'X.1.1' even if there is no fourth level.

6. Heading

6.1 Subheading

(a) Sub-subheading

Figure 13.5 Example three-level numbering

6. Heading

6.1 Subheading

6.1.1. Sub-subheading

(a) Sub-sub-subheading

Figure 13.6 Example four-level numbering

LOOK AT THE PICTURE

Before you dispatch the minutes, look at them from too far away to read. Do they look professional and invite the reader to read?



THIS PAGE IS INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

KoganPage

MINUTES FOR DIFFERENT TYPES OF MEETING

GRIEVANCE OR DISCIPLINARY MEETINGS

The minutes of these meetings are taken as a record for the employer; they should show that the correct process was followed and give the reasons for the ultimate decision. They do not have to be shown to the person with a grievance or under the disciplinary process but it is likely to show the employer in a poor light if they are not shared.

It is important that the minute-taker interrupts if there is a problem in understanding or keeping up. To ask someone afterwards risks an unreliable memory or individual bias (even manipulation) and there is no 'next meeting' where corrections can be made by the group. Although it is uncomfortable to interrupt it gives confidence to all parties that the notes are being well taken as issues are clarified as they happen. It is perfectly acceptable for

the minute-taker to say, 'As I understand it, XYZ – is that correct for the minutes?'

The minutes are the ultimate responsibility of the person who ran the meeting and the draft should be typed-up immediately and passed to that person for checking.

Once the minutes are circulated, changes cannot be made by any one party so any requested amendments should be shown as a post-meeting note or an addendum.

Structure of the meeting

The meeting may not have a formal agenda, but it should have a clear, planned structure (an agenda can be provided if required and the process must be explained by the chairperson at the start).

Welcome and introductions

This usually involves the chairperson calling the meeting to order. The names of those attending and any who have sent apologies are given/confirmed.

Purpose and process

The purpose of the meeting should be stated. The chair should outline the process that will be followed, when questions will be allowed, etc.

Situation / current position / presentations

For a grievance, investigation or disciplinary meeting, the person 'making the case' will explain the situation and answer questions; the person under investigation will then have the opportunity to question, comment and state their case. That person can then be questioned. The chairperson should summarize and guide throughout. A final opportunity for questions or comments should be given. It may be appropriate for each party to summarize their argument before the close. The chairperson should then close this stage of the meeting while the panel make their decision.

Panel discussion

This will not necessarily happen for every panel meeting. The panel will discuss the merits of the various arguments they have heard and make their decision. Although this is minuted, it is unlikely to be made generally available.

Decision/outcome

This is the statement of the decision made and the formal reason for it. It is likely to include next action or actions to be taken as a result of the meeting and may state the process for follow-up or future meeting.

The agenda

A panel meeting may have an agenda or it may be that there is a *chairperson's brief*, available to the chair and minute-taker. This is broadly the same as an agenda, listing the people involved, purpose, structure, timings and other reminders. If an agenda is not to be circulated, it is useful to advise members prior to the meeting of the process that will be followed or it is essential that the process is outlined at the start.

List the people who will be attending, using full names to help the participants refer to each other correctly. It is useful to note roles, job title, and/or employing organization as appropriate (see Figure 14.1).

Papers

There are likely to be papers and other supporting documents and these should be circulated to members before the meeting. They must be clearly referenced and numbered (pages, sections and possibly even paragraphs) so that the panel can find relevant information quickly. It may be helpful to provide ring binders to keep everything in order.

Disciplinary meeting: Mr Jonathan Turner

12 January 2013, 9.30am

Committee Room 1, Capstone Building

Welcome and introductions

Chair: Nigel Barnes, Asst Director HR
Invited: Jonathan Turner, Financial Analyst
Mary Dean, HR Manager, Investigating Officer
Damian Brookes, HR Staff Support
Minutes: Alex Brodie, HR Administrator

Purpose & Process

This meeting has been called in response to concerns about Mr Turner's timekeeping and attendance over the first three months of 2013.

Marion Daneski

Jonathan Turner

General comments and questions

The meeting will adjourn for panel discussion

Decision/outcome

The outcome will be advised in writing within 24 hours.

Papers

- *Timesheets, clock-in records*
- *Witness statement: Steven Marks, Finance Manager*

Figure 14.1 Agenda for disciplinary meeting

Consultation

It is essential that the chair and minute-taker consult before the meeting so the minute-taker knows exactly what is going on, what is expected and can prepare some parts of the minutes before the meeting (eg the statement of purpose, process). All papers should be available to the minute-taker.

Taking notes

Remember that the minutes are there to record the decision, the reasons it was made and that due process was followed; they are not to provide a script of everything that was said. Listen for the points that are made but don't write everything that was said (try saying under your breath: 'and your point is...')

The minutes

Welcome and introductions

List those who attended, showing organization, department or job title as appropriate. This is usually done under the heading of 'attended' or 'present'. If there are any apologies, these should also be shown.

Purpose

This should summarize the purpose of the meeting as given by the chairperson.

Process

Although not essential to minute the chairperson's explanation of the process, it is important to show that due process was followed. A clear explanation of the process that was intended is likely to be relevant.

The meeting

The relevant points should be summarized. Although panel minutes generally follow the structure of what was said at the meeting, it is important that they do not become a transcript (see Figure 14.2).

Panel discussion

The key points made should be minuted. They should be written up so they make sense as a document, not necessarily following the order of the discussion (which is likely to be all over the place!) (see Figure 14.3).

Decision/outcome

Minute a clear statement of the decision and any actions that arise from it.

<p>Poor practice</p> <p>GM So Tina, it is clear that you are consistently 10–15 minutes late each morning.</p> <p>TM Yes, it's because the bus times have changed. I've explained it all to Sally... there is nothing I can do about it.</p> <p>DS Why can't you get an earlier bus?</p> <p>TM I have to drop my little boy at school and they don't open until 8.40.</p> <p>GM Can a neighbour or friend not take him?</p> <p>TM There's no-one who lives near me</p> <p>VG So why has this suddenly become a problem</p> <p>TM The first year was fine because the bus left at 8.45 and I could just get here on time, but now it leaves at 8.35 and the next one is 8.55</p> <p>GM Could you drop your son off a little earlier?</p> <p>TM We're not allowed to – the gates are locked and I'm not going to leave him standing on the street while I get on a bus and drive away</p> <p>VG Could you not walk down to the main road and the other buses</p> <p>TM Ever since I fell in the snow, I can't walk far or fast, my knee is too sore.</p>	<p>Good practice</p> <p>Tina accepted that she is regularly late and explained that, following a change to the bus times, she is unable to drop her son at school and get a bus in time for a 9.00am start.</p>
---	--

Figure 14.2

<p>'Tina's good, she works hard and fits in well with the team'</p> <p>'She seemed quite stropky'</p> <p>'She's under a lot of pressure, she's gone from wife with part time job in happy families situation to full-time responsibility for all of it... she didn't see it coming'</p> <p>'She'd struggle to get another job like the one she's got here'</p> <p>'But we can't just keep her in County Hall as a one-woman satellite accounts department'</p> <p>'If we give in to her, everyone will want to stay here'</p> <p>'Not quite everyone!'</p> <p>'But we should do what we can to keep her – she's good and we've invested quite a bit in her training so far.'</p> <p><i>General agreement</i></p>	<p>The panel considered Tina's case and agreed they would like her to remain within the accounts department</p>
--	---

Figure 14.3 Example summary of discussion

Date of next meeting/review

This is not necessarily needed, but if some follow-up is planned include it with an appropriate heading.

Corrections to minutes

Whereas changes to business minutes can be made at the next meeting, this is not usually the case for panel meetings. It is therefore best to include a statement along the lines of:

Any amendments to the minutes to be notified to (name/e-mail) by (date). The minutes will then be deemed an accurate record

If any changes are made, they should be included as an addendum or post-meeting note but the minutes should not be changed.

Preparation

A lot of the minutes can be pre-prepared: the names, purpose and process (in consultation with the chairperson) and the case being made by the employer (from HR notes). It is important to listen carefully in the meeting to ensure that when the case is made it is the same as was in the notes – you will need to amend what you've prepared if it differs.

CASE CONFERENCES

These are the meetings held to discuss the current or future care of a sick or vulnerable person. They may comprise staff from one organization or can bring together people from a range of organizations.

Although a typical structure is listed below, it is essential that the minute-taker is properly briefed about the case, the current situation and who will be involved. Guidance should also be given about what is needed from the minutes and the chairperson should guide the minute-taker as appropriate during the meeting.

Structure

A typical case conference will start in the same way as a grievance/disciplinary with introductions, purpose and process. From there it can follow one of two possible structures:

Discipline-based

For example, each discipline will comment from their involvement with the vulnerable person. This may include clinical staff, social services, education, police, etc. The minute-taker should summarize the input of each. This can take the form of an ordinary summary or bullet-points under each heading. The minutes should include updates on previous actions, and future actions as appropriate.

Service-user centred

This focuses on the service-user's situations and includes the input of the professionals at each stage. For example, a child's behaviour at school, medical condition, involvement with police, communication with social worker. Although the relevant professional is likely to have the greatest input, all there discuss each aspect. Again there should be monitoring of past actions and definition of future ones. The discussion should be minuted as subject-based, not speech based. So record that, 'The police are aware of increased drug use on the estate,' not, 'PC Eunson reported an increase of drug use on the the estate.'

It is often helpful to produce a summary of actions, included at the end of the minutes or sent as a separate document.

TEAM OR OPEN MEETINGS

The key difference in these types of meetings is that it is not such a tightly-defined group who attend, they are usually for those who are in the workplace on the day, or (for open meetings) who want to attend.

The minutes of most meetings are broadly the same in terms of structure and the purpose of the minutes remains the same. There are, however, a few differences, usually in terms of the style of the minutes.

The team meeting

If the meeting is quite formal and well-structured with participants expected to attend, the minutes should follow the good practice outlined throughout the book. If the meeting is more casual and attended by those who are in the workplace that day, there are a few changes:

- The language is often less formal, for example using *isn't* instead of *is not*.
- The job titles are often not shown but it is worth considering whether it would be useful for future readers to show these.
- Those who were there are listed under 'Attended'.
- 'Absent' is not used for those who didn't turn up.

Make sure that relative informality doesn't result in failure to approve the minutes and check up on the actions. The audit trail is just as important at this level so actions need to be clearly defined and trackable through Matters Arising (although you might prefer a less formal heading such as Update on Actions).

The open meeting

The heading 'attended' is usually used to show those who were there, and 'apologies' is only used if anyone specifically advised of their non-attendance.

The language is likely to be more formal than a team meeting but otherwise the discussion is minuted following the good practice outline throughout the book.

VIDEO/AUDIO CONFERENCING

These meetings are generally disliked by minute-takers, usually because of the difficulties of knowing who is speaking and hearing what is said. Once a minute-taker is aware of the need to minute what is discussed rather than what individuals say these problems are reduced.

As it is essential to get a name for an action, the minute-taker should interrupt if it is not clear who is responsible. A simple, 'Excuse me, who is that who's responsible for X?' should get the necessary name.

Make sure you know who is expected and ask the chairperson to arrange introductions. Actively listen to the voices, perhaps making notes of any specific traits to help you identify who is who (eg Andy = Scottish; Mary = echo on line).

If possible, ensure you are seated in the same room as the chairperson and have eye contact so you can quickly and quietly ask for information that's needed. Make sure that you have a clear idea of the agenda items and know where decisions are expected. If you miss one (or if it isn't made) you should interrupt and ask what is being done (eg 'Excuse me, what is the action for item 6?' or 'Excuse me, what is the decision on funding for X?').

BOARD MEETINGS

In some ways a board meeting is easier to minute than an everyday one because, although they are more 'high powered', they are generally much more structured and formally run.

There is no standard level of detail or format for the minutes of board meetings. They should give enough information to demonstrate how the board came to their decision. They are usually formal in style, language and layout and the good practice outlined in this book is applicable throughout.

In general, boards tend to have fewer actions, their purpose often being to approve or ratify reports or the decision of sub-committees or other groups. This means that the decision is often to 'approve', 'confirm', 'accept' or 'note' but with no resulting action.

Ensure that all papers that are submitted to the board have a consistent layout and all should have a cover sheet giving

- the name of the board
- the date of the meeting
- the title of the paper, its author and any other administrative information
- a one-paragraph summary
- the recommendation(s), written in a form that is ready for approval.

The last two points can be copied direct to the minutes, saving the need for note-taking *in* the meeting.

Some board meetings still have 'proposers' and 'seconders' and a vote taken on decisions. In this case, the decisions should be recorded on the lines of:

- Rashif Rai proposed that the budget be cut by 4 per cent; seconded by Sarah Martin and carried by 10 votes to two.
- Motion: that the budget be cut by 4 per cent. Proposed by Rashif Rai, seconded by Sarah Martin; carried 10:2

Kogan Page



THIS PAGE IS INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

KoganPage



15

USING TECHNOLOGY

COMPUTER

Whilst few people do not now use a computer for typing minutes, many do not make the most of the power of the programs available.

Set up a template for minutes for each group

Create one master document with the name of the group, the usual location (if that is the case), the details of the participants filled in and all the regular headings created and appropriately sized. Set up whatever layout you wish to use and prepare regularly-used wording (eg ‘The minutes of the meeting held on # were approved). See pp 102–04 for information and guidance on the use of the hash key to complete information.

Set up a template for the agenda

Although there is less standard information, this will still save some time. If you create the headings and numbering with the

exact layout that will be used in the minutes, the items can be copy-and-pasted across to the minutes.

Use layout to make the minutes reader-friendly

Ensure the headings reflect their relevant importance (see pp 139–40 for more information); set up tables with grey lines and appropriate cell margins (see pp 141–42 for more information); if you are using a table with blank lines (to give structure without an obvious table layout) make the lines white rather than blanking them out (which still show when read on a screen).

Turn off features which work again the typist

The most common feature which causes upset is the automatic numbering and layout. For example, it is good practice to leave two lines between items but this will reset the automatic numbering.

EDITING SOFTWARE

Programs such as PerfectIt will pick up on the mistakes that your spelling and grammar checkers don't highlight. Most usefully, it checks for inconsistent capitalization in text and across headings, bullet points, international spelling variations and abbreviation definitions. It can be adapted to your house style. The program runs alongside Microsoft Word or you can upload a document for an online check.

LAPTOP

There are advantages and disadvantages of taking a laptop into a meeting. The advantages include:

- the minutes are already on the computer so there isn't the transfer from written notes to typed
- if you can touch-type, you can maintain better eye contact with the participants
- getting the minutes nearly finished during the meeting, particularly if you are using a good template.

However, there are disadvantages:

- you can probably type faster than you can write which will simply result in more notes, not necessarily better ones;
- some people find watching a typist fascinating, so you might find yourself being watched;
- typing can be a distraction.

If you want to use a laptop, always take a mains cable and ensure you are near a power point. Set the 'autosave' to one minute and develop the habit of saving the document at the end of every point/paragraph ([ctrl s] is the quickest way if you are typing anyway).

If you are a contributing minute-taker, particularly if you are chairing the meeting as well, you might want to have a laptop projecting the agenda and at the end of each item, agree the decision and the action with the group. It might be uncomfortable to type in the view of others (best to only do the decision/action, not any discussion) but it is a collaborative way of working and encourages the group to wait whilst you prepare the minutes.

DICTATING MACHINE

Recording a meeting often sounds like the answer to a minute-taker's prayer but it is seldom the case:

- it is often difficult to hear what is being said when people talk over or are softly spoken;

- 'hard noise' such as mugs being put down, pens tapped, tends to be loud;
- you double the time by being in the meeting and then listening to it again;
- there is a tendency to go over the recording trying to hear what was said, rather than listening to the more general discussion;
- equipment can fail.

If you want to record the meeting, you must get the permission of the participants and it should be clear what will happen to the recording (and when). Always take notes as well! Make sure the recording equipment is near you and at any stage where you think you will need to refer to it, note the counter-number.

A dictation machine can be invaluable when you have to go on to something else straight after a meeting. Whilst you can go through your notes and tidy them, this can take time and may not be possible. Before you leave the room, or certainly before you go on to the next engagement, work through the agenda items and dictate the action, the decision and any points you need to highlight. For example, 'Item six, secure bicycle storage. Action: to ask facilities about the feasibility of locked cycle shed, number-pad operated – Toby, this week, Decision: to provide secure storage for 40 bikes. I need to ask Sandy for the costings he gave.'

If you are chairing the meeting you should be giving a clear summary of the decision and action at the end of every item. If you dictate this, you do not have to take notes as well. You might feel awkward doing so, but you do not have to hold the machine right by your mouth, just turn it on and leave it on the desk.

If you are attending the meeting as well as minuting, use the additional power you have as a participant and interrupt to confirm the decision and action at the end of every item. Again, this can be recorded.

DICTATION SOFTWARE

When programs such as Dragon first came out, many minute-takers thought they would be spared the role within months. This has not been the case because the software cannot record accurately when many people are speaking at the same time. However, 'speech to text' programs can certainly help the minute-taker. The most widely used are Bighand and Winscribe where the minutes can be dictated into a dictating machine or direct into the computer. Smartphone apps mean that the dictation can be sent straight to your computer to be edited.

If you are used to dictating, you will probably be happy to dictate the full minutes. For many people, the program will be of most use to get the key parts of the minutes onto the computer and then organize them afterwards. For example, to dictate the item number or heading, the action, the decision and the reason for that decision. This is easily transferred to Microsoft Word for editing into minutes.

These systems are particularly useful because it is usually quite easy to get five minutes to dictate these key points immediately after the meeting while the memory is fresh and then edit them back in the office.

DIGITAL PEN

Digital pens such as Livescribe are 'a computer in a pen'. Designed for note-taking, you write on its specially designed paper which photographs everything you write. Tap on the 'record' box at the bottom of each sheet and it creates an audio recording. Later, you can tap on a note you took and it will play back the audio recording from the time that you wrote it.

The audio facility can have the same drawbacks as simply recording the meeting but the ability to link written notes with an audio recording can focus on the information you need to hear.

The notes are easily sent to a computer but appear as your notes. A handwriting recognition program such as MyScript can turn 'legible' handwriting into typed notes in a form which can be ported to your Windows program.

Using the Livescribe pen with its dedicated paper, whatever you write will be stored for later transfer to your computer. Although the pen only works with its own paper, it is now possible to print this yourself on a 600dpt printer.

TABLET COMPUTERS

The iPad and the Sony Tablet, together with other brands are often used for taking notes in meetings, particularly using apps like Note Taker HD. Rather like the digital pens, the notes are transferred to the computer as a PDF and are generally more suitable for taking individual notes rather than for the preparation of minutes.

Kogan Page

IMPACT OF THE FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT ON MINUTES

Anyone who works in the public sector should be aware of the Freedom of Information Act. This includes NHS trusts and independent practitioners (GPs, pharmacists, dentists and opticians); local and central government, schools and the police. The Act is regulated by the Information Commissioner, who has powers which can result in a fine, or even imprisonment, for non-compliance.

Any member of staff can receive a request for information. Be sure that you know the procedure for dealing with such a request as, in most cases, information must be provided within 20 days.

The Act relates to all documents within the organization, and in most public bodies. Many of these will be meeting papers. It is not concerned with the style and content of minutes, or of any document. Organizations in the public sector will need to ensure that minutes are written in a way that is appropriate for anyone to read. The concerns fall into three areas:

- Information can be found. This means that filing systems have to be accurate and easy to use and, on a minor level, that headings are accurate and descriptive.
- Information is appropriate for disclosure. Unless it can be withheld under the terms of the Act, it may be shown to the public.
- Documents must look professional. Layout, grammar, punctuation and plain English all have a part to play in sending the right message to readers.

EXEMPT INFORMATION

There are several exemptions, but the ones most likely to relate to minutes are information that:

- would contravene the Data Protection Act 1998;
- may endanger the safety or physical/mental health of an individual;
- may affect the commercial interests of an organization or person;
- was given in confidence;
- is intended for publication in the future;
- is available to the applicant by another means.

IMPACT ON MEETING PAPERS

All meeting papers are covered by the Act: agenda, briefing papers and minutes. The organization should have a clear policy that covers all aspects from drafting to destruction.

If there is exempt information in meeting papers, it is only that information that does not need to be disclosed. The remainder of the document must be made available.

REFERENCING MEETING PAPERS

It is essential that you are able to find the information requested. In order to do this effectively, thought must be given to designing a system that is not only usable by the present staff, but will continue on into the future.

Make sure that all documents carry the name of the group and the date of the meeting.

For most situations it is enough to head the agenda and minutes with the name of the group and date of meeting. Briefing papers should also carry this information, together with the agenda item number.

If you use an alpha/numeric referencing system, it must be on every document. A typical example is:

HSC/2009.3 (Health & Safety Committee/year/month)

Briefing papers would then carry the reference:

*HSC/2009.3/6 (Health & Safety Committee/year/month/
agenda item)*

A paper-based system

For each meeting, file a copy of the agenda, papers and minutes. You might also wish to indicate information that is confidential and would be excluded from any request. This will save time in checking later on.

If the minutes are changed in Minutes of the previous meeting, it has previously been accepted as good practice to leave the 'master' set of minutes as they stood and attach a note of changes made. This meant that anyone looking at the master set would see that different information had originally been circulated and what was finally agreed. However, it is now important to have the master set correct so that it can be copied easily. If you feel it is important that colleagues can see what was originally circulated for administrative reasons, keep a separate note.

An electronic system

It will be necessary to set up a clear system of folders and sub-folders so that meeting papers can easily be found. This is likely to be in a form such as:

Health & Safety Committee

2013

- October agenda
- October minutes
- October paper 4 (paper for item 4)

If you wish, you could have a further sub-folder for October and then just the documents of agenda, minutes and papers. A system such as this will mean that you only have to ‘search’ particular folders for information that is requested.

Health & Safety Committee

2013

October

- agenda
- minutes
- paper 4 (paper for item 4)

To keep records in monthly order, number the meeting as well as date it. (Remember to number January as ‘01’ not ‘1’ etc.)

Health & Safety Committee

2013

- 10 October agenda
- 10 October minutes
- 10 October paper 4 (paper for item 4)

WRITING MINUTES

Following the good practice outlined in this book will ensure that minutes can be disclosed, but the essentials are as follows.

Minute what was discussed: summary not script

- Note the points that were made, rather than the words used to make them (see below).

Not appropriate for disclosure	Appropriate for disclosure
It was suggested that asking staff to park in the north car park was a ridiculous idea and there was no chance that people would walk that far when they could park on a side street near the main entrance.	It was suggested that staff would park on the streets near the main entrance rather than walk the long distance from the north car park.

- Listen to the group as a whole and keep your focus on what it discussed, rather than what individuals said. Don't attribute: the group members are unlikely to want their views recorded in a 'he said, she said' style (see below).

Not appropriate for disclosure	Appropriate for disclosure
AB suggested a charge of £2 for up to four hours and £6 for up to 12 hours. CD agreed that long-term parking should be discouraged but pointed out that people would simply pay two lots of £2. EF suggested that a flat rate of £4 a day would be simpler.	The group discussed the amount to be charged for parking ...

Group confidential information

- Where possible, group items that cannot be disclosed to make it easier to remove the information at a later date. Remember, a confidential item does not mean the remainder of the minutes cannot be disclosed.

Define action points

- Ensure that the action is shown as being the responsibility of a defined member of the group.
- State precisely what that person is to do.
- Give a clear deadline for the action (see below).

Not appropriate for disclosure	Appropriate for disclosure
<p>The group discussed the location of the temporary offices in the light of problems with car parking. Their use will mean the loss of parking spaces and it was agreed that siting them on the southern boundary would minimize this. Rentablock to be advised in time for delivery and Facilities Department to be asked to cone off the southern boundary.</p> <p><i>It was agreed that the Portakabins would be sited along the southern boundary of the public car park.</i></p> <p><i>Desrene Bibi 25 October 2013</i></p>	<p>The group discussed the loss of parking spaces caused by the use of temporary offices. It was agreed to site the cabins on the southern boundary to minimize this.</p> <p><i>Facilities Department to be asked to cone off the southern boundary on evening of 25 October.</i></p> <p><i>Desrene Bibi 11 October 2013</i></p> <p><i>Rentablock to be advised in time for delivery on 25 October.</i></p> <p><i>Desrene Bibi 18 October 2013</i></p>

- Under ‘Matters arising’ for the meeting following that deadline, record that the action was completed or, if it was not, give a new deadline so that it can be tracked in the future.

Avoid personal attack

- Again, listen for the point being made, rather than the style.
- Be careful about contentious words (see below).

Not appropriate for disclosure	Appropriate for disclosure
Patients' failure to advise of cancellation was blamed for backlog.	It was suggested that the the backlog was caused by patients not cancelling appointments they could not attend.

Don't show the mood

- Avoid phrases like 'after heated debate'.

Don't judge

- Your opinion should not come through in the tone of the minutes with phrases like 'the committee eventually decided to...' or 'after lengthy/brief discussion'.

Don't name names unless essential

- Unless unavoidable, don't name people (see below).

Not appropriate for disclosure	Appropriate for disclosure
This was the result of Mary Smith's report.	This was the result of the report into non-attendance at ...

Be accurate with your use of English

- It is important to choose words that reflect the views expressed by the group (compare the statements in the box below).

The team agreed that overtime could be paid (it's possible)
The team agreed that overtime should be paid (it ought to happen)
The team agreed that overtime would be paid (it will happen)

Use a businesslike style (unless a particularly informal meeting)

- Avoid slang or jargon.
- Use business terms.
- Don't run words together (eg it's, didn't) (see the following example).

Not appropriate for disclosure	Appropriate for disclosure
The DMT had said it would be OK to use their rest-room providing it wasn't for more than a week.	The Divisional Maintenance Team had agreed that their rest-room could be used for up to a week.

Be accurate with spelling and punctuation and careful with presentation

- Although these do not have a 'freedom of information' impact (apart from clarity), the fact that your minutes may be read by a member of the public or the press means that a professional impression is important.

BUSINESS ENGLISH FOR MINUTES

Most people do not read minutes particularly carefully. Those who were at the meeting ‘know it’ already; those who were not there are probably not that interested. It is therefore essential that your minutes are clearly written so that even someone who is skimming them will understand the contents.

Clear writing involves well-constructed sentences and paragraphs, use of plain English and punctuation. An added benefit is that well-written minutes reflect well on the minute-taker – a boost to professional pride! The problem is that many minute-takers were not taught the ‘mechanics’ of writing at school, and this practical aspect of being a minute-taker causes considerable worry.

There are many books on English (plain English, grammar and punctuation), and it is far too large a subject to cover in depth in a book on minutes. However, here are some essentials.

SENTENCES

- Keep to a maximum length of 18 words. If you have better things to do than count words, just do a couple of sentences and see how many lines they take on your computer (usually about 1.5–1.75 lines). After that it can be a visual check.
- Be aware of what the sentence is about; it should appear in the first few words. Where the subject changes, start a new sentence.
- Change sentence where you change tense/time.

PARAGRAPHS

- Paragraphs should be a maximum of eight lines. Where there is more to say on the subject look for logical breaks according to content rather than just split a long paragraph in the middle.
- The subject of the paragraph must appear in the first line, preferably near the start.
- Try to avoid several one-sentence paragraphs; the reader loses the flow.

PLAIN ENGLISH

- Be precise with numbers, quantity and so on (avoid words like few, several, plenty). Use dates rather than ‘as soon as possible’ or ‘sometime next month’.
- Use everyday words that would be understandable to a member of the public.
- Avoid jargon (technical terms, abbreviations, acronyms).
- Write in the positive: what has happened/will happen (rather than what has not). For example, do not write ‘The scheme is

not suitable for staff aged under 45,' but instead write 'The scheme is suitable for staff aged 45 or over.'

- Avoid wordy phrases (not 'came to a decision to' but 'decided').

PROBLEM PUNCTUATION

There are four punctuation items that cause particular problems: apostrophes, capital letters, hyphens and semi-colons. In addition, punctuating bullet points also causes concern.

Apostrophe

- Few apostrophes that join words cause problems, the exception being its/it's. Only use an apostrophe if you can replace it's with it is.
- To place the apostrophe for possession correctly, circle the owner and put the apostrophe on the circle:

Mr Jackson's letter

Mr Jackson's letter

The department's hours

The department's hours

The manager's explanation

The manager's explanation

A GP's training

A GP's training

Director's car park

Director's car park

Secretary's experience

Secretary's experience

GP's training

GP's training

Women's refuge

Women's refuge

Children's toys

Children's toys

Figure 17.1

Capital letter

- Use capital letters when a full title is given. Just because a word appears in that title doesn't mean it gets a capital when it is used in place of the title.

The Health and Safety Committee	The committee
Intensive Care Unit	The unit
Dr James Carlton	A doctor must be present
Director of IT	The director attended
The Fraud Prevention Strategy	The strategy

Hyphen

Use a hyphen to join two or three words that need to be 'glued together' to have the meaning you intend.

An in-depth study
A half-kilo weight
Super low floor bus (super, low-floor? super-low floor?)
No-smoking area
Walk-in centre

Hyphenate words like co-operate, co-ordinate, re-emphasize, pre-authorize.

Semi-colon

A semi-colon is like a large comma – a bigger pause. If you want to join two simple sentences but need a pause between the two parts, use a semi-colon:

The sub-committees meet every half term; the full committee meets once a term.

If a list comprises wordy items, one or more might need a comma. In this case use semi-colons to break up the items:

The team are a blend of experience and new ideas: Tom Sargeant was there at the start in 2005; Saleena Ahmed and Rob Dunning joined from other councils in 2007, just before the merger; Mary Swann, Isham Drabez and Rosanna Curtis are graduate entrants this year.

In contrast, a colon is only used to introduce a phrase. (Always use one before a displayed list; only use one when the list is in a sentence if a pause is essential before the list.)

Punctuating with bullets

Bullet points are not punctuation in themselves – they simply guide the reader as to the number of items in the list. They can break up a long sentence or be made up of separate sentences.

If the items in the bulleted list are very short, the only punctuation needed is the introductory colon; only use capital letters if the items are names. If there is more ink in the bullet point than the words, you don't need the 'blob' (although you can put it if you wish).

The concerns raised were:

- *cost*
- *public perception*
- *security*

Once there is more ink in the words, it's probably worth the 'blob', but if the items are under one line in length, and have no other punctuation, the colon is all that is needed.

The concerns raised were the:

- *costs that would be incurred*
- *public perception of the accessibility of the service*
- *security of the staff*

If the items are wordier, they are likely to need some punctuation. The bullets themselves should then have semicolons with a final full stop.

The concerns raised were the:

- *costs that would be incurred, particularly at a time where the organization is looking for economies;*
- *public perception of the accessibility of the service;*
- *security of the staff (there have been five verbal and two physical assaults in the last six months).*

If the text is a series of complete sentences, it should be punctuated accordingly (with capital letters and full stops).

Three concerns were raised:

- *The plan will incur considerable costs at a time where the organization is looking for economies.*
- *The public's perception of the accessibility of the service may be adversely affected.*
- *The security of the staff (there have been five verbal and two physical assaults in the last six months).*

Kogan Page



18

BUILDING CONFIDENCE

In most cases, the minute-taker is the lowest member of the hierarchy present in the room. If the group are professional in attitude and recognize the importance of the role, this presents no problem. Sadly, there are many groups that are patronizing, demand copying or coffee in the middle of the meeting or simply ignore the minute-taker.

Sometimes though, it is the minute-taker's lack of confidence that adds to or causes the problems. It is not easy to be the 'generalist' in a room full of 'specialists', but there are some things you can do to help yourself.

Creating the right impression

Dress

Wear clothes to blend in with the group. This is not necessarily your interview suit. If they wear pin-stripes, a jacket is in order. If they're dressed in sweatshirts, you can dress down.

Of course it is important to be comfortable, to wear something that makes you feel good about yourself and to wear 'layers' so you can shed with dignity if the room temperature rises!

Movement

Most people scuttle when they're nervous, often hiding behind or cuddling their notepad. To give an impression of confidence:

- Lengthen and slow your stride a little so you walk with a purpose, but not as though you have a bus to catch.
- If you are carrying something, don't hide behind it.
- Look at people as you pass.
- Open a door fully before walking in.
- Close the door behind you to give yourself time to decide where to sit.
- Place your papers calmly, taking time to arrange them if necessary.
- If you are pouring tea or coffee, do so calmly and slowly.

Voice

Some people's voices rise with nerves, others go quiet and shaky; almost everyone gabbles. Very few think about how they sound until something has gone wrong and then they look back regretfully. Learn to speak clearly through a simple, three-stage approach:

Stage one

- In private try speaking in a higher voice than usual, taking it as high as you can without squeaking, and then practise speaking lower than usual.
- Practise speaking louder than usual, without shouting, and then quieter.
- Try speaking faster than usual (think what you're going to say and then say it very fast), then try speaking slower.

Just spend two or three minutes doing this, getting your voice under your control. It doesn't matter if you feel foolish as long as no one is listening!

Stage two

In a shop or a situation where you are not known, try whichever of the following is relevant:

- If your voice rises with nerves, drop it just a little as you speak.
- If you tend to go quiet/shaky, speak just a little louder.
- Almost everyone should practise speaking slower. Say each word clearly and completely before saying the next; it may feel odd, but people understand you first time! Make sure you breathe in before you speak.

Stage three

In your office or workplace, repeat stage two above. You shouldn't be so extreme that people notice; just moderate your normal speech a little.

By now you should have some confidence that you have control over your voice, so try the technique in more stressful situations. Before you know it you will be able to 'breathe/take control' in any situation, and you'll find you have more presence and influence as a result.

Conversation

Greet people as you see them or as they arrive, using their names if possible. Before you attend the meeting, identify a couple of areas of 'small talk' you can use to start a conversation. Open questions (starting with what, where, when, how and who) will help get people talking.

If the group are talking before the meeting starts, go and join them. You don't have to contribute, but look at the speaker, smile and nod as appropriate.

Eye contact

Look directly at people as you listen or talk to them. During the meeting, watch the speaker when you are not taking notes.

Expression

Make sure you do not frown in concentration or worry. Smile when you catch someone's eye, and develop a calm and interested expression that you can call upon when required (smile with your eyes, not just your mouth – practise in private!).

Seating

As discussed earlier, you should sit next to the chairperson. Apart from the practical benefits this brings, it also emphasizes your status as part of the 'management team' of the group.

Get to know everyone

Use opportunities to chat

At the start of the meeting and during any breaks, join the group who are chatting even if you do not contribute. If you meet participants outside the meeting, remember that they are fellow members of the group and chat accordingly.

Remember personal details

Remember who has had a baby, new job, house move and so on. If necessary make a few notes in the address book. It gives you a personal conversation opener and is very impressive to those on the receiving end.

Coping with put-downs

Some put-downs are real; others are imagined. It is easy to assume someone has ignored you when in fact he or she was engrossed in thought and didn't see you. Always assume the best intention and best behaviour and react accordingly. Often this was the intention, and even if it wasn't your dignity remains intact. A few examples are given below to illustrate this:

- Someone looks at you, and then pointedly at the tray, saying 'Coffee?' The answer is 'Yes, please.'
- You are sent out to copy something, make coffee or perform some task. Clearly hand the minutes to someone, asking him or her to take notes in your absence. The notes may not be much good, but you'll have made the point.
- Greet first, rather than waiting for someone to say hello to you. Use the person's name, and 'Hello' or 'Good morning' rather than 'Hi'.
- If you are passed by when papers are handed out, ask for a copy immediately. Try to prevent this in the first place by looking expectant and reaching out in anticipation of your copy.
- If you ask for help, for example an explanation, and get a response like 'I suppose this is a bit beyond a secretary', smile sweetly and respond politely but firmly (eg 'I wasn't cut out to be an accountant'). You'll usually find the group sides with you and that there are a few smiles of support around the table.

No matter how you feel, never put yourself down or apologize for existing.

Kogan Page



THIS PAGE IS INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

KoganPage

Creating Success series

Dealing with Difficult People by Roy Lilley

Decision Making & Problem Solving by John Adair

Develop Your Assertiveness by Sue Bishop

Develop Your Leadership Skills by John Adair

Develop Your Presentation Skills by Theo Theobald

Effective NLP Skills by Richard Youell and Christina Youell

How to Deal with Stress by Stephen Palmer and Cary Cooper

How to Manage People by Michael Armstrong

How to Organize Yourself by John Caunt

How to Write a Business Plan by Brian Finch

How to Write a Marketing Plan by John Westwood

How to Write Reports & Proposals by Patrick Forsyth

Improve Your Communication Skills by Alan Barker

Successful Project Management by Trevor Young

Successful Time Management by Patrick Forsyth

Taking Minutes of Meetings by Joanna Gutmann

The above titles are available from all good bookshops.

For further information on these and other Kogan Page titles,

or to order online, visit the Kogan Page website at

www.koganpage.com

Kogan Page



THIS PAGE IS INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

KoganPage