

# How to write minutes

A guide to writing minutes in a  
small voluntary organisation

# Writing minutes



Minutes are a record of what happened at a meeting and almost no-one enjoys doing them! They are written by the Secretary or by a specially appointed minute secretary and record decisions and actions taken. Writing minutes is much easier if the meeting is well structured, well chaired, and one at which the members are not allowed to stray from the point being discussed.

The minutes should make complete sense when being read many years after the meeting took place. It should give a clear picture of when and where it took place, who was present, their status at the meeting, the range of the discussion, and the decisions taken. The style of the minutes should be consistent and should satisfy the requirements of the committee. Each organisation has its own view of how detailed or how brief their minutes should be.

A verbatim minute records every word that is said, such as in Parliament or a court, others record only the subject title and the decision made. Organisations commonly opt for a minute which records a short statement about what is being discussed (the facts), a summary of the discussion (people's views), any formal proposals and who made and seconded them, and the decision taken, including any vote result. Decisions should be clearly marked as "agreed". The minutes should be written following the order of the agenda.

Whoever is recording the minutes should do so in a clear, unbiased and completely objective manner. They should never appear to be part of the proceedings. For example, never use the words, we, I, us, our. Minutes should be written in a past tense and the future perfect tense. "It was reported that the Chairperson would attend the next conference". If the writer of the minutes finds it necessary to mention themselves they should refer to themselves by name or as the secretary. If office titles, such as chairman, secretary, are used in the text of the minute, then these individuals need to be identified in the list of those present.

**If action is to be taken by members before the next meeting it is useful to have an action column showing who is to take action and by when.**

Any formal motions or resolutions should be recorded in full with the name of the proposer and seconder. The result of any vote should be recorded as announced by the Chairperson.

It is better for the minute taker to record as many notes as possible during the meeting and later to summarise discussions and decide which are the important points and which points can be safely left out.

## The minute should include



- Name of the organisation and committee title
- The date, including the year
- The place where the meeting took place
- If it was an AGM or EGM
- Members present, who entered or left during the meeting
- Others present, guests, observers, advisers, staff
- Who acted as chairperson, who took minutes
- Apologies for absence
- Corrections, if any, to the previous minutes
- Who proposed and seconded the adoption of the previous minutes
- Matters arising from the previous minutes. This should consist of very brief update remarks and should not involve going over every item from the last meeting.
- A separate record of all other items discussed at the meeting.
- Date and time of next meeting
- Actions to be followed and by whom

Minutes should be impartial and factual. Minutes should not be judgmental and should not include remarks on people's emotions. Initials, first names, or jargon should not be used unless it is certain that everyone who reads the minutes will understand them. The chairperson of a particular meeting has the final say on what is recorded in the minutes.

# Preparing to take minutes



Prepare several large sheets of paper and space out each agenda item in the correct order, leaving plenty of room between each one for notes. Write in advance on the sheet any reports or facts which you will be expected to give, e.g. apologies.

If you have any papers or correspondence, arrange them in the order in which they will be required corresponding to the agenda items.

# At the meeting



If, during the meeting you are unsure about what was decided or what to record in the minutes, ask the chairperson there and then to clarify the decision taken.

# After the meeting



Minutes should be written up as soon as possible after the meeting when recollections are still fresh in the memory. Unless shorthand is used it is impossible to write everything down and therefore memory often helps to add to the notes taken.

The secretary often has to take certain action following a meeting, write letters, contact people, make phone calls, organise more meetings or events.

It is the chairperson who has to approve the minutes before they are released or circulated. Committee members have the opportunity to amend the minutes at the next meeting.